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Lundi
15 mai 2023

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CONTENTS / TABLE DES MATIÈRES

Monday 15 May 2023 / Lundi 15 mai 2023

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS / DÉCLARATIONS DES DÉPUTÉES ET DÉPUTÉS

Ruby Kerr	
Mr. Ross Romano	4253
Dementia	
Mr. Tom Rakocevic	4253
Amateur hockey	
Mr. Brian Saunderson	4253
Youth services	
Ms. Peggy Sattler	4254
Public transit	
Mr. Todd J. McCarthy.....	4254
Affordable housing	
Mrs. Jennifer (Jennie) Stevens	4254
Vaisakhi	
Mr. Graham McGregor	4254
Ferry service	
Mr. Ted Hsu	4255
Women's Multicultural Resource and Counselling Centre of Durham Region	
Mr. Lorne Coe.....	4255
Public safety	
Mr. Hardeep Singh Grewal	4255

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS / PRÉSENTATION DES VISITEUSES ET VISITEURS

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott)	4255
Hon. Jill Dunlop	4255
Ms. Marit Stiles.....	4255
Mr. Dave Smith.....	4255
Mrs. Robin Martin	4256
Ms. Sandy Shaw.....	4256
Mr. Wayne Gates	4256
Mr. Brian Riddell	4256
Ms. Jennifer K. French.....	4256
Ms. Natalie Pierre	4256
Mr. Trevor Jones	4256
Mr. Sam Oosterhoff	4256
Mr. Ric Bresee	4256
Hon. Stephen Lecce	4256
Hon. Paul Calandra	4256

QUESTION PERIOD / PÉRIODE DE QUESTIONS

Government accountability	
Ms. Marit Stiles	4256
Hon. Paul Calandra	4257
Emergency services / Doctor shortage	
Mr. Jeff Burch	4257
Hon. Sylvia Jones	4257
Mr. Wayne Gates	4258
Mrs. Jennifer (Jennie) Stevens	4258
First Nations consultation	
Mr. Sol Mamakwa.....	4258
Hon. Greg Rickford.....	4258
Hon. George Pirie.....	4259
Economic development	
Mr. Brian Riddell	4259
Hon. Victor Fedeli.....	4259
Automotive industry	
Mrs. Lisa Gretzky.....	4259
Hon. Victor Fedeli.....	4260
GO Transit	
Mr. David Smith.....	4260
Hon. Caroline Mulroney	4260
Landlord and Tenant Board	
MPP Kristyn Wong-Tam	4261
Hon. Doug Downey	4261
Ms. Jessica Bell.....	4261
Electricity supply	
Mr. Ted Hsu.....	4261
Hon. Todd Smith	4262
Forest firefighting	
Ms. Goldie Ghamari.....	4262
Hon. Graydon Smith	4262
Housing	
Ms. Doly Begum	4263
Hon. Steve Clark	4263
Electricity supply	
Mr. Trevor Jones	4263
Hon. Todd Smith	4263
Autism treatment	
Miss Monique Taylor.....	4264
Hon. Michael Parsa	4264
Red tape reduction	
Ms. Goldie Ghamari.....	4265
Mr. Sam Oosterhoff.....	4265

Sexual assault crisis centres

Ms. Catherine Fife.....	4265
Hon. Michael Parsa.....	4265

Services en français

Mme Goldie Ghamari	4266
L'hon. Caroline Mulroney	4266

Reception

Mr. Dave Smith.....	4266
---------------------	------

Member's birthday

Hon. Parm Gill	4267
----------------------	------

Reception

Mr. Sam Oosterhoff	4267
--------------------------	------

Member's birthday

Hon. Doug Ford	4267
----------------------	------

House sittings

Hon. Monte McNaughton	4267
-----------------------------	------

**REPORTS BY COMMITTEES /
RAPPORTS DE COMITÉS**

Standing Committee on Heritage, Infrastructure and Cultural Policy

Mr. Graham McGregor	4267
Report presented	4267

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

**9-1-1 Everywhere in Ontario Act, 2023, Bill 107,
Mme Gélinas; Mr. Mamakwa; Mr. Vanthof;
MPP Vaugeois / Loi de 2023 sur le 9-1-1 partout en
Ontario, projet de loi 107, Mme Gélinas;
M. Mamakwa; M. Vanthof; MPP Vaugeois**

First reading agreed to.....	4267
Mme France Gélinas	4267

Visitor

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott)	4267
-------------------------------------	------

**STATEMENTS BY THE MINISTRY
AND RESPONSES / DÉCLARATIONS
MINISTÉRIELLES ET RÉPONSES**

Police Week / Semaine de la police

Hon. Michael S. Kerzner.....	4268
Mr. John Vanthof.....	4269

PETITIONS / PÉTITIONS

Land using planning

Mr. Terence Kernaghan	4269
-----------------------------	------

Services for children and youth

Ms. Christine Hogarth.....	4270
----------------------------	------

Hospital services

Ms. Catherine Fife.....	4270
-------------------------	------

Social assistance

Mr. Ted Hsu.....	4270
------------------	------

Seniors

Mr. Brian Saunderson	4270
----------------------------	------

Affordable housing

Ms. Doly Begum	4271
----------------------	------

Animal protection

Ms. Peggy Sattler	4271
-------------------------	------

Hospital services

Ms. Jennifer K. French.....	4271
-----------------------------	------

Alzheimer's disease

Mr. Terence Kernaghan.....	4271
----------------------------	------

Health care workers

Ms. Doly Begum	4272
----------------------	------

Hospital services

Ms. Peggy Sattler	4272
-------------------------	------

Consideration of Bill Pr25

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Bhutla Karpoche).....	4272
---	------

ORDERS OF THE DAY / ORDRE DU JOUR

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

Hon. George Pirie.....	4272
Mr. Rick Byers.....	4272
Mr. Stephen Crawford.....	4276
Ms. Jennifer K. French.....	4280
Ms. Christine Hogarth.....	4280
Mr. Terence Kernaghan.....	4280
Hon. Jill Dunlop.....	4280
Ms. Doly Begum	4281
Mr. Matthew Rae	4281
Ms. Catherine Fife.....	4281
Mr. Matthew Rae	4289
Mr. Terence Kernaghan.....	4289
Mr. Stephen Crawford.....	4289
MPP Jamie West	4290
Mr. Ross Romano.....	4290
Mr. Sam Oosterhoff.....	4290
Mr. Billy Pang.....	4292
Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong	4293
Mr. Brian Saunderson	4293
Mrs. Lisa Gretzky.....	4294
Mr. Matthew Rae	4294
Ms. Sandy Shaw	4294
Mr. Wayne Gates	4294
Mr. Sam Oosterhoff.....	4297
Ms. Sandy Shaw	4298
Mr. Sam Oosterhoff.....	4298
MPP Jamie West	4298
Mr. Stephen Crawford.....	4299
Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong	4299

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
OF ONTARIO

Monday 15 May 2023

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE
DE L'ONTARIO

Lundi 15 mai 2023

The House met at 1015.

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

Prayers.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

RUBY KERR

Mr. Ross Romano: This weekend, we had a very, very significant scare in Sault Ste. Marie. On Friday, May 12, a grade 6 class from Holy Cross Catholic School in Sault Ste. Marie had a day planned at St. Kateri Outdoor Learning Centre. St. Kateri is located on the outskirts of Sault Ste. Marie near Nettleton Lake. Myself, my kids and just about every single kid in Sault Ste. Marie has visited St. Kateri. It used to be called Camp Korah. It's a place where all classes go for field trips in those younger elementary school ages.

Eleven-year-old Ruby Kerr was one of those grade 6 students on Friday. At 11 a.m. that day, she went missing from St. Kateri. An intense search effort began immediately. I even had occasion to deal with it in some capacity as a result of having coached against her in soccer. I was involved with family and coaches with respect to—there was just a massive search, Mr. Speaker. I don't have a lot of time to go through it but to say that it impacted us all in our community greatly.

I was on the sidelines of the soccer field coaching my oldest son and middle son when her coach came to me and stopped me on the sidelines at half-time to tell me, thankfully, that Ruby had just been found. I really want to place a huge thank you to Sault Ste. Marie Police and the Ontario Provincial Police, especially their aerial helicopter pilots, who helped discover Ruby by just the miraculous finding of a footprint, which became the lead that located her almost 10 kilometres away from Camp Kateri, where she walked through the night.

Beyond the blisters on her feet and scrapes all over her legs and a very, very long, scary night, she was able to be reunited with her mom and dad almost 24 hours after going missing.

DEMENTIA

Mr. Tom Rakocevic: Let me begin this short statement by wishing all mothers here and everywhere a happy belated Mother's Day. I hope yesterday was a wonderful day for you and the special mothers in your life.

But, Speaker, just as I proclaim these well wishes today, I draw attention to a serious matter affecting our parents and grandparents everywhere. It is a disease called dementia, which captures the set of symptoms associated with cognitive decline. This disease affects over 600,000 Canadians today. A dementia diagnosis is life-altering for both the person affected and their families, and we must do more to help them.

1020

Here in Ontario, we need a better strategy, a better plan. We must spread better dementia awareness and test for it early, because earlier detection can help the rate of decline and help families better prepare. We must create more dementia support programs and better support the ones that exist so more people can participate sooner. We must do more to support their caregivers—the vast majority are their own adult children and spouses—and we must make outside support much more affordable.

A new era of dementia drugs is on the horizon—which seek to finally address root causes rather than just the symptoms of dementia. When these drugs are shown to work, we must make them available here as fast as possible.

And finally, we must fix long-term care in this province once and for all. We owe it to our grandparents and parents. We owe it to ourselves, and we owe it to our children, who we wish will long outlive us, hopefully in a better world where this disease is finally eradicated.

AMATEUR HOCKEY

Mr. Brian Saunderson: It is certainly a pleasure today to rise in the House and talk about two championship hockey teams in Simcoe–Grey. First off, congratulations to the Mike Jackson Collingwood Junior A Blues for winning the Ontario junior league title and the Buckland Cup last week. They are now in Portage la Prairie, Manitoba, for the Centennial Cup playdowns. After two games in that championship series, they have a record of 2 and 0, beating the Steinbach Pistons and the Battlefords North Stars.

Mr. Speaker, there's another championship junior team in the riding that I'd like to talk about, and that's the Stayner Siskins, who are the winners of the North Conference final of the Junior C hockey series. The Siskins defeated the Midland Flyers, Orillia Terriers, Alliston Hornets and the Mount Forest Patriots to win the North Conference finals and earn a spot to compete in the Schmalz Cup Final Four tournament in Woodstock. And on Saturday, they lost in a very close semifinal game to the Clarington Eagles. The Siskins and the Alliston Hornets

have a very proud and long successful history of winning for decades in Simcoe–Grey.

But before I sit down, Mr. Speaker, I'd like to mention the character of these boys both off and on the ice. The Collingwood Junior A Blues went grocery shopping in Portage la Prairie and gave \$700 to the food drive that was matched by the grocery store for a total of \$1,400 to the local food bank. Speaker, this speaks to the character of the players and their franchises and shows they're champions both on and off the ice.

YOUTH SERVICES

Ms. Peggy Sattler: Speaker, at a time when kids are struggling more than ever before, I want to recognize some dedicated organizations, teachers, business owners and families who are supporting London West youth:

—organizations like Western University and its faculty, students and staff, who this weekend welcomed thousands of London-area families to campus to experience the joy and fun of discovery during the sixth annual Science Rendezvous;

—teachers like Michelle Massaro at the London District Catholic School Board, who this year launched Ontario's first secondary school competitive robotics league, developing students' skills, teamwork and confidence that were spotlighted this month at the Robotics World Championships in Texas and with gold and silver medals at Skills Ontario;

—businesses like Code Ninjas in Hyde Park, owned by Ammar Sokhon and his wife Amani, which this month celebrated the awarding of seven black belts to youth who had created a video game from concept to delivery, including the first black belt in Canada and the first female black belt; and

—families like the parents of a multiple World Karate champion, 13-year-old Kaleb "The Hype" Boyle, who helped pump up the crowd at the Kids Help Phone walk on May 7 and spoke about his own experiences with bullying and the importance of finding someone who will have your back and cheer you on.

Deepest thanks, Speaker, to all those who are helping young people find their passions and soar.

PUBLIC TRANSIT

Mr. Todd J. McCarthy: This past Friday, May 12, I was very honoured to welcome Premier Doug Ford to Durham region. I was joined, as a member of the Durham four, by the Minister of Finance, the member for Pickering–Uxbridge, the member for Ajax and the member for Whitby—also with the Minister of Transportation and the Minister of Energy present—for the announcement of new electric double-decker GO buses for our GO system. And I can proudly say that it is warmly welcomed within Durham region, of course, and across this great province.

We are making new investments, record investments, in public transit across Ontario and in Durham region. The future is bright and the future is electric, and that is

because we are charging forward with a great plan for clean energy and for record investments in public transit. I thank the Premier for joining me this past Friday.

AFFORDABLE HOUSING

Mrs. Jennifer (Jennie) Stevens: I stand here today, shoulder to shoulder, with the good people of St. Catharines. In fact, I'm going to hand you a letter after question period. There's an elephant in the room that we cannot ignore: affordable housing and mental health resources. Our dedicated mayor has sounded the alarm for emergency support. I stand with him. We must protect and celebrate our vibrant community.

Premier, when asked about this support last week, the response was that we need more rehabilitation facilities. That misunderstands the problem. Homelessness is not just about addiction; it is more a mental health and housing issue. It is complex and we need to face it with a comprehensive solution. We cannot stigmatize our people by oversimplifying the issue. They need our help, not our judgment. You cannot rehabilitate a person if they do not have a roof over their head.

St. Catharines's downtown is a hub for Niagara's large festivals and sporting events. Take a stroll down our lively streets rich with culture and history. From the charming boutiques on James Street to the culinary delights of St. Paul Street, St. Catharines is a gem that must be supported. This is why we fight.

Our community stands united, calling for immediate funding to protect our region, our city, our people. When we stand together, we serve our constituents the best. I ask you to stand with us.

VAISAKHI

Mr. Graham McGregor: It's a privilege to rise in the House today and stand with my Sikh brothers and sisters as they continue to celebrate Vaisakhi, with Nagar Kirtans being held across the GTA. The Sikh community is one that is proud, strong, humble and selfless. In my riding of Brampton North, and even having grown up in Brampton, this is something that I see first-hand every single day.

We have parades and festivals across Canada, and at many of these, a bottle of water costs you \$3, a pop might be even more, and a hot dog might run you well over five bucks. But at a Nagar Kirtan, everything is given freely. The only money you can spend is actually donating back to the community and donating back to your gurdwara. You can get water, pop, pizza, chai, freezies—you name it. These are donated for the Nagar Kirtan out of the goodness of one's heart and with the key Sikh principle of "seva" in mind.

Seva in Sikhism means selfless and voluntary service for the benefit of humanity, without any personal gain. At every Nagar Kirtan, you will see this on full display. The community will offer so much to their neighbours, all are welcome, and after the parade, you won't see any garbage

or mess left behind because the community gets together to clean up the neighbourhood.

I think we can all learn these important values from the Sikh community. I hope everyone had or takes the opportunity to attend a Nagar Kirtan this year. If you need a recommendation, the Guru Nanak Mission Centre in my riding will be hosting on Sunday, June 4. Hope to see you there.

FERRY SERVICE

Mr. Ted Hsu: Yesterday afternoon, the Wolfe Island ferry announced that they couldn't find workers and that the ferry would shut down from 8 p.m. to 6 a.m. yet again. That shutdown included emergency services, because last night a coast guard ship was needed to bring paramedics to the island. And this morning, there are long lineups on both the mainland and the island docks. There were engine issues that prevented the ferry from running until just about an hour ago. Add to that all the people who had to stay overnight on the wrong side of the water and all the people that are waiting to start their day and it's a total mess.

Under this government, we have a new ferry which arrived one and a half years ago and still isn't in use and new docks whose construction has been delayed by years. The government has paid two to three times the regular cost to hire temporary workers, but still, the lives of those who live or work on Wolfe Island and Kingston are being continually disrupted.

1030

I call on this government to realize that workers have choices, to pay competitive salaries and to expedite the training of more licensed ferry operators, and I call on the minister to give her personal attention and to take personal responsibility for managing the Wolfe Island ferry situation until it stabilizes.

WOMEN'S MULTICULTURAL RESOURCE AND COUNSELLING CENTRE OF DURHAM REGION

Mr. Lorne Coe: The Women's Multicultural Resource and Counselling Centre of Durham celebrated its 30th anniversary this past Saturday at its inspiring hope and rebuilding lives gala. I was joined at the gala by MPP Patrice Barnes from Ajax and the Honourable Charmaine Williams, Associate Minister of Women's Social and Economic Opportunity.

Speaker, over the years, the counselling centre has served thousands of women across the region of Durham. Our government is pleased to be able to fund the Women's Multicultural Resource and Counselling Centre of Durham so that executive director Esther Enyolu, the board of directors and staff are able to assist women in the Durham region who have experienced social and economic barriers to access services and develop the skills needed to gain financial security and live safely with a greater sense of security.

Congratulations to the counselling centre on 30 years of service to Durham region, lifting up women and their families in Durham region. Thank you for your dedication to supporting women in crisis.

PUBLIC SAFETY

Mr. Hardeep Singh Grewal: I've heard loud and clear from families in my riding of Brampton East and across the province about their concerns regarding the rise in violence and criminal activity over the last year. To better serve our constituents, our government has implemented several new measures to reassure Ontarians and safeguard families.

Our government is taking bold action to address this matter with our recent announcement of investing \$51 million to crack down on auto theft and organized crime. A few short weeks ago, we moved a motion calling on the federal government to reform the Criminal Code of Canada and implement meaningful bail reform. Last July, we announced \$75 million in funding for police forces to crack down on guns, gangs and violence. Since then, we've seen significant arrests, like the \$10 million of stolen vehicles seized in Peel or the \$3.1 million of drugs seized in Sarnia by the OPP and the RCMP.

I'd like to thank police officers across the province for the commendable work they do putting their lives on the line to serve and protect our communities and our families. I would like to commend the Peel Regional Police for working diligently in collaboration with the OPP to combat auto theft, which has been a growing concern for many residents, especially mine, those in Brampton.

Speaker, our government has heard from the residents, and we are taking bold action. We'll always do whatever it takes to ensure the safety and protection of all families across Ontario.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): We have a special guest with us in the members' gallery today, a former member who was the representative of the riding of St. Catharines from the 31st to the 41st provincial Parliament and is now the chair of the regional municipality of Niagara. Jim Bradley is with us today. Welcome back.

Hon. Jill Dunlop: I would like to introduce two guests from my riding today: Jenna Craig and Anniston Deleary. They are grade 12 students from Chippewas of Rama First Nation and youth council members. Thank you for being here today and joining me.

Ms. Marit Stiles: It is Niagara Week, and I want to extend a warm welcome to Jim Bradley, chair of the Niagara region, and all my friends who are here with us today from the region. I know that you'll be having great discussions about how we can work together to better grow Ontario and Niagara. Welcome to Queen's Park.

Mr. Dave Smith: Today is Peterborough Day at Queen's Park, so I have the entire contingency up in the

public gallery. I won't name everyone, but I will name a few: Warden Bonnie Clark, Mayor Sherry Senis, Deputy Mayor Ron Black, Mayor Heather Watson, Mayor Jim Martin, Mayor Terry Lamshead, former member and mayor of the city of Peterborough Jeff Leal and Deputy Mayor Gary Baldwin. From my office I also have, in the Speaker's gallery, Andrea Dodsworth, Jenna DePaiva, Sally Carson and Halle Kunjal.

Mrs. Robin Martin: I want to wish a warm welcome to my executive assistant from my constituency office, who is here today in the members' gallery, Idan Yakobovitch, with his family visiting from Israel: Zvi and Orit, and his sister Anat Yakobovitch. Thank you very much for coming.

Ms. Sandy Shaw: It's my pleasure to introduce members from my staff team in Hamilton West—Ancaster—Dundas: Nick Higgins and, on her very first day, Micaela Krawczuk. Welcome to Queen's Park.

Mr. Wayne Gates: It's Niagara Week, and we're very excited. I'd like to give a warm welcome to some of our elected representatives from Niagara who are here today. We've already met Regional Chair Jim Bradley, who I was looking for on this side; he's over there, so I apologize for that. Also, I'd like to welcome the mayor of the town of Fort Erie, Wayne Redekop, the Lord Mayor—and the only Lord Mayor in the province of Ontario—from the town of Niagara-on-the-Lake, Gary Zalepa, and the mayor of the city Niagara Falls, Jim Diodati.

I'd also like to welcome my two staff members who are here today, Quinn and Gillian. Gillian is a student who has been working in our office for the last six weeks, and she's now going on to university. Welcome to Queen's Park.

Mr. Brian Riddell: It's my pleasure today to introduce Lisa, Brian and Brayden Vermet sitting over here. They're family members of legislative page Olivia from St. Brigid Catholic school in Cambridge.

Ms. Jennifer K. French: As we've heard, it is Peterborough Day here at Queen's Park. I wanted to remind everyone to visit the receptions in rooms 228 and 230 for lunch today. As someone who is fairly near to Peterborough, and Peterborough is near and dear to my heart—I remember skating on the canal as a child—I hope everyone comes to join us. Welcome, today.

Ms. Natalie Pierre: I'd like to introduce the executive director of Flowers Canada, Andrew Morse. Welcome to Queen's Park.

Mr. Trevor Jones: It's my pleasure to welcome members of the Ontario Greenhouse Alliance to the Legislature today. Please join us, our advocates for fresh floral and fresh Ontario-grown produce, tonight in the legislative dining room at 5 p.m.

Mr. Sam Oosterhoff: As we've all heard, it is Niagara Week here at Queen's Park. So, in addition to welcoming those who have already been mentioned, I want to also note that we have the regional councillor for Lincoln, Rob Foster, in the House, and we also have Diana Huson, the regional councillor for the town of Pelham. I also want to acknowledge CAO Ron Tripp and Daryl Barnhart, who are here today. Welcome to Queen's Park.

Mr. Ric Bresee: It's my pleasure today to introduce some of my constituency staff, some of whom have never been here before. I'll start with Tiffany Lloyd, Jamie-Lynn McGarvey, Lixy Rolston and my long-suffering constituency manager Anita Ramski. Welcome to the House.

Hon. Stephen Lecce: I'm very honoured to introduce Maya Valente, her family and all the educators from St. John Bosco Catholic School. You may have heard that Maya faced a medical emergency while in school. Her educators were on the scene, really helping to support her through that difficulty. I want to thank her for her leadership and thank the staff and the families at the Hospital for Sick Children for supporting her. She's back in school and she's safe today. Thank you so much.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Unless there are objections, I'd like to continue with introduction of visitors.

Government House leader.

Hon. Paul Calandra: Thank you, Speaker. I didn't think there would be any objections.

Let me welcome Rafael Morales, Julie Reaume and Rosemary Chalmers, who are the parents and grandmother of page Maya from Markham—Stouffville.

1040

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): That concludes our introduction of visitors for this morning.

I understand the member for Ottawa—Vanier has a point of order.

M^{me} Lucille Collard: Yes, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I do.

I am seeking unanimous consent that, notwithstanding standing order 40(e), five minutes be allotted to the independent members as a group to respond during statements by the ministry and responses today.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The member for Ottawa—Vanier is seeking unanimous consent of the House that, notwithstanding standing order 40(e), five minutes be allotted to the independent members as a group to respond during statements by the ministry and responses today. Agreed? I heard a no.

QUESTION PERIOD

GOVERNMENT ACCOUNTABILITY

Ms. Marit Stiles: Good morning, Speaker. This question is for the Premier.

Ontario's greenbelt includes over two million acres of protected land, including some of the most fertile agricultural land in the country. The greenbelt generates nearly \$9.6 billion in annual economic activity, and supports over 177,000 jobs. It also provides \$3.2 billion a year in services like flood protection, water purification and storm-water management.

Speaker, does the Premier really think this is all a big scam?

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

Hon. Paul Calandra: In fact, no, Mr. Speaker. In fact, it was a Progressive Conservative government, you will recall, that brought in the Oak Ridges Moraine Green Planning Act back in 2000. It was a federal Conservative government that brought in the Rouge National Urban Park back in 2014, despite the fact that the NDP voted against that. It was a Progressive Conservative government here at Queen's Park that expanded the greenbelt. It was a Liberal government, supported by the NDP, that reopened the greenbelt 17 times without expanding the greenbelt. That is the record of Progressive Conservative government when it comes to protecting the greenbelt, when it comes to protecting the environment.

But at the same time, Mr. Speaker, we understand that it is very, very important right now, the fact that there is a housing crisis—we have to do everything in our power to remove obstacles so that we can build more homes for the people of the province of Ontario. There are over 500,000 people coming to Ontario to participate in what is the economic revival of this province. They need a place to live and to call home, and we're going to do that.

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

Ms. Marit Stiles: Speaker, the minister is clearly taking a different perspective on this than his Premier, and you can't really blame the Premier for trying out some new lines to try to change the channel on a topic that has become a very sore point for him. As the questions and the evidence pile up, he is now calling into question the whole premise of the greenbelt.

Speaker, let's talk about scams. How about the one where developers with close ties to the Conservatives somehow knew to buy protected land in the greenbelt long before the change was made? To the Premier: How did these developers get advance notice of his government's intentions to carve up the greenbelt?

Hon. Paul Calandra: We talked about this last week, right? It is no secret to any of us sitting in this House today—it's clearly no secret to Progressive Conservatives—that the NDP have an ideological disdain for building homes for the people of the province of Ontario.

It's not just them here; it's their federal cousins in Ottawa. They held the balance of power in Ottawa, like they did here, and they're not talking in Ottawa about removing obstacles to build more homes, just like the NDP didn't when they held the balance of power here.

So, Mr. Speaker, let me be clear to the Leader of the Opposition: We on this side of the House, Progressive Conservatives, don't believe that the people of the province of Ontario should be reliant only on the government. We believe that the people should be given the tools to succeed, because when they are given the tools to succeed, that is when Ontario prospers most. In order to do that, we are bringing more jobs and opportunity to the province of Ontario.

But it is also completely unacceptable that young Canadians, young Ontarians, should be offering 10, 15, 21 times in one instance to buy a home and not be successful. That's not Ontario, and we're going to rectify that.

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

Ms. Marit Stiles: Speaker, we all know that ripping up the greenbelt for the benefit of a few wealthy insiders is not a housing plan.

Let's get this straight: They won't tell us who shared information about the greenbelt carve-up in advance of the November 2022 announcement. They won't acknowledge that developers who benefited from this were at private family fundraisers of the Premier. They won't release the records of who in the Premier's office was sharing this information. And now, they're trying to distract by saying that the greenbelt is not a thing.

Speaker, the Premier owes Ontarians a straight answer: Is he planning to open up more sections of the greenbelt for his developer friends, yes or no?

Hon. Paul Calandra: We've been very clear, right from the beginning, that we intend to remove obstacles. We intend to remove obstacles that are in the way of building new homes for the people of the province of Ontario. It is no secret that since we got elected, jobs and opportunity are coming back to the province of Ontario. It's no secret we've added 300,000 jobs.

But the job isn't done, Mr. Speaker. We have to continue to do more. As I said in my first answer, it is unacceptable that we have young Ontarians offering 16, 17, and in one instance, 21 times—a grandparent called me and said 21 times—for a home that they didn't get. That is unacceptable. So we're going to remove obstacles. We know that they like obstacles, but you know what that has resulted in, Mr. Speaker? In April 2023, this past April, we reached an annual rate of housing starts of over 110,664. That is one of the highest levels in decades. And do you know how we're doing that? We're doing it by removing obstacles so that we can get more homes in the ground, so that people have the opportunity and so that all Ontarians can share in the same dream that all of us here have, Mr. Speaker—

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

EMERGENCY SERVICES

DOCTOR SHORTAGE

Mr. Jeff Burch: Speaker, through you, to the Minister of Health: Between 2021 and 2022, Niagara experienced a 55% increase in EMS off-load delays, and in the latter half of 2022, a total of over \$1.7 million of the regional levy was spent to address the record number of EMS calls. In 2022, Niagara EMS incurred almost 34,000 off-load delay hours, which is equivalent to 24 paramedics for 365 days. Will the minister commit to reimbursing the over \$1.7 million spent on additional off-load delays and ensure that Niagara is funded for an additional health team to help address the underlying causes of our EMS crisis, as requested by Niagara's municipal leaders?

Hon. Sylvia Jones: Thank you to the member opposite for the question, because it is an important one. We know

that the status quo is not acceptable. Having said that, of course, our government does fund ambulance partnerships with our municipal partners. But I want to go specifically to what we have done, because we know the status quo is not acceptable.

We're returning ambulances to communities faster through the Dedicated Offload Nurses Program, and through that program, we've actually increased ambulance availability by over 600,000 hours. These are individuals whose patients are being directly passed over and looked after by the local hospitals and, equally important, we're having paramedics who can now go back into community faster to make sure that we deal with these wait times and off-load delays. We're providing timely and appropriate care in the community through the expansion of a patient care model that allows paramedics to actually provide community-based care to some 911 patients. These are concrete, specific examples of what we have done as a government to assist and make sure that status quo—

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Thank you. The supplementary question? The member for Niagara Falls.

Mr. Wayne Gates: Back to the Premier: Those stats should be concerning to any government, and it's the result of a health care crisis. This crisis, fuelled by the government's disrespect of front-line health care workers, has created those significant off-load delays in our hospital. Niagara deserves to be refunded the \$1.7 million of taxpayer dollars that have gone into the off-load delays. We can't continue to go down this road. Three of Niagara's hospitals consistently rank in the bottom quarter of off-load times.

Speaker, with the local leaders from Niagara here today, will the Premier listen to their solutions and commit to ensuring long-term solutions to EMS off-load delays immediately?

Hon. Sylvia Jones: Mr. Speaker, a couple more examples of what we have been doing to ensure that our paramedic partners in community have the resources and services they need: We're investing in new technologies across central ambulance communications centres, including, of course, in Niagara, to lower wait times and modernize dispatch services. That program in place in Niagara and Peel is making sure that people are triaged appropriately and getting the services they need as quickly as possible.

1050

We've also increased non-ambulance transportation for medically stable patients. All of these things together are ensuring that we continue to train and hire more paramedics in community, because, of course, the Learn and Stay program also has a component for our ambulance operators and our paramedics. So we're doing this work and we're getting the job done because it has been sorely ignored for too long.

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

Mrs. Jennifer (Jennie) Stevens: To the Premier: After the passing of a beloved physician, countless seniors, like Debbie Clark's 89-year-old mother, are struggling to find

care amid a shortage of 100 family doctors in Niagara. Despite reaching out to 50 clinics, the Clark family have found no relief. Our overworked, aging doctors cannot bear this burden alone. To alleviate this strain on hospitals and EMS, we urgently need increased support for doctor recruitment in Niagara region.

Speaker, to the Premier: Will you commit to reviewing and enhancing this crucial aid, ensuring our seniors have access to essential care when they need it the most?

Hon. Sylvia Jones: The member opposite is completely acknowledging that the status quo is not appropriate. With the passage of Bill 60, we now have as-of-right in the province of Ontario. What does as-of-right mean? It means that if you are a practising physician or clinician in any other Canadian jurisdiction and you have a job in Ontario, you can practise immediately and not have to delay.

It is our government, Speaker, that has now put in place two new medical schools in Brampton and in Scarborough. What does that mean? It means that we are planning ahead unlike, respectfully, the members from the NDP and the Liberals who actually cut residency spots. We now are facing 250 less physicians who are practising in the province of Ontario because of the previous work of the NDP and the Liberal government.

We're getting it done. We're making those changes.

FIRST NATIONS CONSULTATION

Mr. Sol Mamakwa: Last week, the Premier made very concerning statements about mining projects in the north, specifically the Ring of Fire. We know these projects cannot proceed without the free, prior and informed consent of First Nations. When the Premier says the Ring of Fire is going to get built without that consent, it will lead to conflict.

Why does the Premier think this is the right way to move forward?

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Minister of Northern Development and Minister of Indigenous Affairs.

Hon. Greg Rickford: What the Premier and this government believe in is building consensus, Mr. Speaker, and shared and common interests around legacy infrastructure that will help develop northern Ontario. This has been something that we have said time and time again. We're not dividing and conquering, pitting one community against the other like the member opposite appears to be. Instead, we want to have open and frank discussions about the kind of legacy infrastructure—energy, road access, all of those communities on diesel generation. We have a rare opportunity here to move forward on legacy infrastructure for this region; bring communities a better opportunity economically and socially; bring them access to health and services programs; and build a world-class mining system that will serve the world over in the electric vehicle battery supply chain.

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

Mr. Sol Mamakwa: The Premier needs to stop getting bad advice from this minister. First Nations are opposed to decisions that are being made on their treaty territories without their consent. First Nations are not going to stand up for this approach. We've been unequal partners for far too long. Besides, it's very colonial.

Speaker, if First Nations come to a consensus that they do not want mining in their territories, then that needs to be respected. If this government gets told "no" by First Nations, will they respect that?

Interjections.

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

To reply, the Minister of Mines.

Hon. George Pirie: Thank you very much for that question. In an article in Wawatay News, MPP Sol Mamakwa stated, "I think TKG is an example of what working together can look like. We can prosper together on some of the spinoffs happening in the work in northern Ontario."

John Glover, the CEO of Minodahmun Development LP: "It's all about three First Nations who have shared territory coming together to create a business that benefits all three communities. We're very involved in the mining sector and the heavy construction sector."

We couldn't agree more, Mr. Speaker, and that is why we're so disappointed the NDP and the Liberals did not support our bill. This is exactly what the Building More Mines Act is about: It's about government working more efficiently so mining companies can create lasting partnerships with Indigenous communities and economic development for entire regions in the north.

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

Once again, I'm going to remind members to refer to each other by their riding name or their ministerial title, as applicable, not by their personal name.

Start the clock. The next question.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Mr. Brian Riddell: My question is for the Minister of Economic Development, Job Creation and Trade. Entrepreneurs and companies choose to plant their roots in communities in southwestern Ontario for many reasons. With a talented workforce and ample opportunities, there's no shortage of reasons why it's one of the best places to operate and grow a business.

With billions of dollars in investment that the government has been attracting across the province, my constituents want to know that they're also getting a fair deal and that the government is there to help their business stay competitive. Speaker, can the minister explain what our government is doing to support businesses, namely manufacturers, in Ontario communities?

Hon. Victor Fedeli: Speaker, we all know that Ontario communities are the most competitive places to invest and grow. By lowering the cost of business by \$8 billion every

year, we have attracted record investments here into Ontario.

Just last week, Trusscore in Palmerston announced a \$10-million investment in a manufacturing facility. They make a unique, sustainable PVC-based wall and ceiling panel, which is a really modern replacement for traditional drywall. With a \$1.5-million investment from the province, they're adding 68 good-paying jobs. Speaker, Ontario has attracted \$1 billion in new investments like that one from Trusscore through our Regional Development Program. This is the commitment we make to the people of southwestern Ontario.

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

Mr. Brian Riddell: Thank you to the minister for that answer. It's great to hear the people of southwestern Ontario have not been forgotten by this government, and it's no question that programs like the Regional Development Program help businesses power our province's economy.

Beyond attracting the world's investments, we need to ensure conditions are right for our own local businesses and entrepreneurs to succeed here at home. Speaker, can the minister further elaborate on how our government is supporting local businesses and entrepreneurs to start and grow?

Hon. Victor Fedeli: For years, the Liberals and their NDP partners stifled economic growth by making it too expensive to do business here in Ontario. They sent hundreds of thousands of jobs fleeing the province.

But our government has reversed all of that. We've eliminated red tape, lowered hydro rates and reduced the taxes that the Liberals and NDP piled on, sending those businesses running. We've attracted record levels of investments and jobs—\$25 billion in auto investments, \$3 billion in life sciences, and billions more in the tech sector. And we're also helping entrepreneurs with support from our regional innovation centres, found all through Ontario, and our small business centres, found in most Ontario communities. Speaker, this is exactly what businesses and entrepreneurs needed to turn their dream into jobs.

AUTOMOTIVE INDUSTRY

Mrs. Lisa Gretzky: My question is to the Premier. Stellantis is now reconsidering their battery plant deal in Windsor. Thousands of new jobs are on the line. They've actually stopped construction.

1100

The impact that this will have on my community is significant. The union representing these workers has successfully bargained in these investments, but they need all levels of government to use every tool they have to secure this investment. We can't sit by idly and watch more good-paying auto jobs leave this province or, more specifically, my area.

What is the Premier doing to ensure that this deal does not fall through?

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Minister of Economic Development, Job Creation and Trade.

Hon. Victor Fedeli: Speaker, we've been back in this Legislature for almost a year, and we've not had one question asked of us—not a peep—about how we landed \$25 billion in auto investments here in Ontario, not one question on how we landed that \$5-billion deal with Stellantis and what our commitment was.

Well, I will tell you, we have a signed agreement with Stellantis which we are honouring to the letter. It's the same deal we made with Volkswagen, for your information. But now it's up to the federal government to honour their commitment to Stellantis and the workers in Windsor.

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

Mrs. Lisa Gretzky: I've actually stood in this Legislature several times as the wife of an auto worker and told this government you need to give credit to the workers instead of taking it all for yourselves—

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Stop the clock. The member for Essex will come to order.

Start the clock. I recognize the member for Windsor West.

Mrs. Lisa Gretzky: Thank you, Speaker. I've stood in this Legislature many, many times as the wife of an auto worker and told this government you need to give credit to the workers and not just—

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The member for Essex is warned.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The House will come to order.

Start the clock. The member for Windsor West.

Mrs. Lisa Gretzky: The member for Essex can try and shout me down all he wants, but I'm the wife of an auto worker and I've been on the picket lines with these workers. I know they bargain in these deals, and you keep taking credit for all of it instead of giving it to the workers—

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): I'm going to interrupt the member to remind the member to make her comments through the Chair.

The member for Windsor West has the floor.

Mrs. Lisa Gretzky: Speaker, this Premier has a track record of not acting when auto jobs were leaving this province or Windsor specifically. We saw this in Windsor with Nemaq, the third shift at Windsor Assembly Plant—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Government side, come to order.

Mrs. Lisa Gretzky: —and with General Motors in Oshawa.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Stop the clock. The member for Brampton North will come to order. The Minister of Education will come to order.

The member for Windsor West has the floor. She has the right to ask her question, and I need to be able to hear it.

Start the clock. The member for Windsor West.

Mrs. Lisa Gretzky: Thank you, Speaker. They can shout me down all they want, and I'll continue to raise the voice of my community. This Premier has a track record of not acting when auto jobs were leaving this province. We saw this in Windsor with Nemaq, the third shift at Windsor Assembly Plant and with General Motors in Oshawa. My community deserves a government that will do everything in its power to not only protect current auto jobs but secure new ones. These are good-paying auto jobs with benefits and pensions. Stellantis deserves the same consideration and government support as any other automaker in the province, and so do these workers.

What specifically is the Premier going to do to support Windsor workers and ensure we don't lose this investment?

Hon. Victor Fedeli: Again, it's great to be able to rise for the very first time to a question from the NDP—in the last year, they did not ask about the fact that Bloomberg has now said that Canada is ranked second in the global EV battery supply chain. We went from zero to \$25 billion without one question or comment from the NDP. They did not ask us the details back in March of 2022, when we did the \$5 billion, they did not ask a question about the \$7-billion Volkswagen deal, and I can tell you my signature is on that contract. I can tell you, as well, they did not ask a question about the deal we did with Ford, Honda, GM, Umicore, Magna, anything.

But I will tell you, Speaker: We have a signed agreement with Stellantis which we are honouring to the letter, and we encourage the federal government to live up to the commitment they made to—

Interjections.

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

GO TRANSIT

Mr. David Smith: My question is to the Minister of Transportation. GO Transit is a part of Ontario's vital transportation network. In my riding of Scarborough Centre, many people rely on GO buses for easy, reliable travel across the GTA and beyond.

With over 70 million riders using the GO service every year, that is why our province must keep pace with technology that will reduce emissions. Our government must continue to make investments in transportation technology that helps the environment and is good for people.

Mr. Speaker, can the minister please explain how our government is expanding clean, green transit options for Ontario?

Hon. Caroline Mulroney: I thank my colleague for the question. Zero-emission technology is the way of the future, and that's why last week I joined the Premier and my colleagues from Durham to announce the addition of two brand-new electric buses. This is a first for GO Transit.

Speaker, these new electric buses are a significant step forward for our government's plan to be a global leader in clean transportation. Starting May 15, these buses will hit

the roads on four routes in my colleague's riding of Scarborough Centre. The buses will be identifiable by their unique exterior, which features a lightning bolt. Once on board, commuters will experience a quieter ride and will have access to USB chargers.

Thanks to the leadership of the Premier, we're making it easier and greener to travel on GO Transit.

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

Mr. David Smith: I thank the minister for giving the update to the House so they can be aware of what we're doing. It's good the government is taking steps to help the environment while also making travel easier for riders. People in my community are eager to be part of the eco-friendly transit that will lower greenhouse gas emissions.

Unlike the Liberals, who failed to invest in transit for Ontario's hard-working people and families, our government must be focused on a better plan. These new electric buses are a good step forward as we build a cleaner province.

Mr. Speaker, can the minister please explain what our government is doing to build clean-energy transportation that works?

Hon. Caroline Mulroney: Speaker, our plan for GO expansion will change the way that you travel on GO Transit. GO expansion will convert trains from diesel to electric-powered. They will be faster, quieter and greener. On top of that, thanks to the work of the Premier, we're going to see thousands of Ontario-made electric vehicles on our roads in the next few years.

Despite the lack of interest or the opposition from the members opposite, our strong EV manufacturing sector that our government has been building, access to critical minerals that we have been spearheading and all-electric GO buses signal to the world that Ontario is a leader in electric vehicle technology. A clean transportation network is the future, and our government is at the forefront of this revolution every step of the way.

LANDLORD AND TENANT BOARD

MPP Kristyn Wong-Tam: All of Ontario's tribunals are in crisis. Since the Conservatives formed government in 2018, the Landlord and Tenant Board backlog has grown threefold to 38,000 people, the Human Rights Tribunal's has grown twofold to 9,000 people and the Licence Appeal Tribunal's has grown fourfold to over 16,204 persons.

How many more scathing Ombudsman's reports does the Premier need to have on his desk before he takes immediate action to reduce the horrendous backlog by depoliticizing the appointment process and reinstating in-person hearings, as recommended by legal experts?

1110

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): To reply, the Attorney General.

Hon. Doug Downey: I'd like to thank my friend across the aisle for asking Tribunals Ontario's question, Mr. Speaker, because we've been wondering at what point

the opposition will support us in moving forward to double the number of adjudicators. We've been wondering at what point the opposition will support us in terms of updating technology that the Ombudsman said the Liberals—

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Stop the clock. The member for Ottawa South, come to order.

The Attorney General has the floor.

Hon. Doug Downey: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. He's pre-empting the fact that the Ombudsman said that the Liberals left the place in shambles, Mr. Speaker. That's what he's pre-empting.

Now, Mr. Speaker, I would like to see the NDP stand up and support us in the investments we're making in terms of the staffing, the adjudicators, the technology. I'll have more to say in the supplementary.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The supplementary question? The member for University-Rosedale.

Ms. Jessica Bell: My question is back to the Attorney General. Watchdog Tribunal Watch questions whether the Conservatives understand the depth of the crisis at the Landlord and Tenant Board—a crisis that has gotten worse under their term and continues to this very day. If you can't even acknowledge a crisis, how are you going to fix it?

I quote Tribunal Watch: "It is difficult to have any confidence in the ability of Tribunals Ontario and the LTB to course-correct and address the serious issues raised by the Ombudsman."

My question is to the minister: I am imploring this government to take their head out of the sand and work with groups like Tribunal Watch to fix our tribunal system. Can you do it?

Hon. Doug Downey: I'd like to welcome the opposition to the party, Mr. Speaker. We're already getting the job done. We've doubled the number of adjudicators. We've put in a brand-new technology system. The Ombudsman says we're on the right side of this. He sees optimism. He sees that we're moving in the right direction. We've added more staff, Mr. Speaker. We're making sure that we have the people in the places with the tools to get the job done.

I'm glad that the opposition has tuned in. If they were paying attention before, they might have actually supported us on some of these advancements.

ELECTRICITY SUPPLY

Mr. Ted Hsu: Mr. Speaker, apparently Electric Avenue is the new theme song for Ontario. I'm happy we are building electric vehicles in Ontario, but if everybody were to buy an electric vehicle and plug it in, most streets couldn't handle it without local electricity grid infrastructure upgrades.

I want to spur on this government to plan ahead, but I don't trust them to plan ahead because they started their term of office by pulling out EV chargers. Doug Ford talks about an electric avenue, but until he gets the grid infrastructure rocking down to Electric Avenue, he's just Living on a Prayer.

Could the minister tell the House why the government hasn't announced the long-term plans needed to build out the local electricity grid infrastructure for handling mass adoption of electric vehicles in Ontario?

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Stop the clock. Okay. The government side will come to order so that I can hear the member who has the floor—who legitimately has the floor and has the right to ask a question, which I need to hear.

Start the clock. The response? Minister of Energy.

Hon. Todd Smith: Well, I'd be pleased to respond to that question. Mr. Speaker, we endured 15 long years of Bad Medicine from that government—a Liberal government that drove up electricity prices across our province, drove jobs out of our province. Since we formed government in 2018, we've been bringing them back. We've been bringing them back by the thousands, Mr. Speaker.

And instead of a disastrous plan—a failed plan that even their former Premier admits was her biggest mistake, Mr. Speaker—we're getting it right. The fundamentals are right: low hydro, low taxes, making sure that companies want to invest in Ontario's wealth and growth. We're seeing it on a record pace, including in the electric vehicle sector. And I'll have more to say about the supply that's coming, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Ted Hsu: Speaker, in Palo Alto, California, one in five households have an electric vehicle. They're way ahead of us, and they are encountering the fact that serious planning and years of work—for example, upgrading transformers—will be needed to electrify cars and home heating in their community.

We know that we have to burn less fossil fuels. We know that new nuclear power will take at least a decade to make a real difference. We know that part of the solution is communities using more electricity while generating and storing power themselves. That will require distributed energy systems.

I know the minister agrees with me that there's a holy trinity of modern energy: reliable, affordable and sustainable. Will the minister commit today to work with local distribution companies and to aggressively pursue the piloting and build-out of the local electricity grid infrastructure needed for a green future?

Hon. Todd Smith: The member across is a good man, he's a nice man, but he wants us to become California, Mr. Speaker? A jurisdiction that, on one day, mandates electric vehicles, and on the next day, sends out a notice to tell people that they shouldn't charge their vehicles? We are not going to become California. That's why we have a plan and one that's working. We're investing in our large nuclear facilities. We have four of our Candu reactors that are currently down for refurbishment. When they come back, that's 3,400 megawatts of clean, reliable power that is going to power our future. Those refurbishments alone at Bruce and Darlington are enough to power the city of Toronto for another 35 years.

But we're not stopping there, Mr. Speaker. We're building the first grid-scale small modular reactor in the G7 here in Ontario. We're building the largest battery-storage

facility in Canada here in Ontario. We're procuring the power that we're going to need to power our—

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

FOREST FIREFIGHTING

Ms. Goldie Ghamari: My question is for the Minister of Natural Resources and Forestry. Alberta's provincial government recently declared a state of emergency due to an unprecedented early start to their wildfire season. As tens of thousands of hectares burn, smoke from these fires has already reached the Yukon, Northwest Territories and Nunavut. Several communities and rural areas have been evacuated, with more than 24,000 people forced to leave their homes.

Our government understands that now is the time for unity. We must stand with our fellow Canadians in Alberta and support them during this difficult time. Through you, Mr. Speaker, can the minister please share how our government is assisting the province of Alberta in fighting against these destructive wildfires?

Hon. Graydon Smith: Thanks to the member from Carleton for the question. As the member from Carleton mentioned, Alberta is going through an incredibly difficult and unprecedented wildfire season right now. Our thoughts are very much with the people of Alberta, but, Mr. Speaker, so are our actions. We're proud to be part of numerous mutual aid agreements with provinces across Canada and countries around the world, and these agreements allow for the sharing of resources to minimize the burden on any single jurisdiction during exceptional fire seasons. Just as we've benefited from support from partners in our time of need, we offer our help when our friends need it.

My ministry has deployed over 177 staff, including crews and an incident management team, to support fire-fighting efforts in Alberta. We'll continue to stay in close contact with Alberta as they continue their fight with wildfires so that Albertans displaced can return home sooner.

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

Ms. Goldie Ghamari: I am proud that our government is working across provincial borders to help the people of Alberta when they need it the most, and we are grateful to the Ontarians who are supporting these communities. However, the unfortunate reality is that summer in Ontario can also mean the risk of wildfire. Forest fires can be devastating for communities, people, businesses, property and livestock. That's why our government must continue to build on the progress and investments that we have made and continue to put practices in place that will help to reduce risk and improve public safety.

Speaker, through you, can the minister please elaborate on the strategies our government has in place for wildland fire management?

Hon. Graydon Smith: Again, I want to thank the member for the question. If a province or a country is seeing increased fire activity, they can place requests for wildland fire support and resources through the Canadian

Interagency Forest Fire Centre, and they would coordinate the movement of personnel and equipment as needed. As the member opposite mentioned, Ontario has been fortunate to have a slow start to our wildfire season. Nevertheless, our ministry has been working hard to ensure we have ample resources to manage our own wildfire season.

1120

In fact, Speaker, in 2023 our government launched a high-recruitment and retention program to help bolster our wildfire prevention force. This allows Ontario to provide our provincial counterparts in other parts of Canada with much-needed support while keeping enough personnel on standby across our province.

Speaker, our government is proud to lend a helping hand to the people of Alberta while continuing to protect Ontarians.

HOUSING

Ms. Doly Begum: My question is to the Premier. Speaker, my office hears from hundreds of constituents every day who are struggling to keep up with the cost of living. I'm sure the Premier does, too. We recently heard from Parveen, who moved to Ontario five years ago and has been living in a cramped one-bedroom apartment with her husband and three children. This is the reality for so many young families across the province as they are forced to make these difficult choices just to make ends meet.

So my question is, what concrete actions is this government taking to address the rental crisis in Ontario for such families?

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

Hon. Steve Clark: Speaker, through you to the member: Our plan is working. We just received the April numbers. On a year-to-date basis from January to April, we saw in Ontario 27,427 housing starts. It's a 16% increase compared to the same period. Rental housing construction—directly to the member's question—is right on track: over 7,000 starts so far this year, more than double the amount of rental starts we had in a similar period last year.

We're going to continue to build upon that success with bills that we've got not just before the House—but also the fact that under the leadership of Premier Ford we committed to Ontarians last summer that every year of a re-elected government we would build upon our success. The numbers prove it, Speaker.

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

Ms. Doly Begum: Speaker, the price of rent, groceries, gas, hydro have gone through the roof under this government. There is nothing to applaud. From the Liberals' 60,000 wait-list for housing, we now have under the Conservatives, 85,000 who are waiting for housing, Speaker.

To rent a two-bedroom apartment in Scarborough now almost equals a family's entire paycheque. Despite Parveen's best efforts, she cannot find a home for her family. They're

worried that they actually have to leave behind the community they are part of, the health care services, the schools that her kids go to—they have to leave all of those things just to survive.

Again to the Premier, how will your government help families like Parveen's survive so they are not driven out of their communities and out of our province?

Hon. Steve Clark: This is exactly why the government's committed to a housing supply action plan bill every year under the leadership of Premier Ford.

You know what's different, Speaker—it would be nice if New Democrats would actually stand up and support increased housing supply in our province. You directly, in your city—a 178% increase this year, to date, for housing starts. We're going to continue to build upon that. But ever single measure, every bill, every initiative, you vote against, your party votes against.

We need to have collaboration and co-operation amongst all levels of government. We're going to continue to build on these numbers. The numbers speak for themselves.

ELECTRICITY SUPPLY

Mr. Trevor Jones: Good morning, Speaker. My question is to the Minister of Energy. Ontario is seeing strong economic growth with incredible new investments into our province's electric vehicle and EV battery manufacturing industries. Investments by our government in partnership with Volkswagen for the new gigafactory in St. Thomas and other major auto and battery manufacturing projects are all positive signs that the electrification of transportation continues and that manufacturing jobs are returning to Ontario finally.

However, there are concerns about the capacity of our current energy grid and its sustainability for long-term growth. Investments and partnerships with battery energy producers are leading to economic growth in our province, but Ontarians need assurance that our government is developing reliable energy solutions for the present and for the future.

Speaker, can the minister please explain how our government is addressing Ontario's energy infrastructure needs?

Hon. Todd Smith: I want to thank the member from southwestern Ontario where there's a lot of growth going on because of the environment we've created. I can assure him that, yes, we are going to have the power they need for all that growth and investment.

I've been working since day one, since becoming the Minister of Energy, to ensure that we had a plan so that our electricity grid could support the growing electrification and the growth in our economy that we're seeing. Our work, again, includes building Canada's first small modular reactor at Darlington, the first on-grid in the G7—it's going to be online in late 2028—and the first battery storage facility, Oneida, in partnership with the Six Nations of the Grand River. We've also got the largest battery storage procurement out in the field right now with the Independent Electricity System Operator—the largest in the country's history.

We're leading the way, Mr. Speaker, on building energy. And the former Liberal government, as I mentioned earlier, that drove manufacturing jobs out of our province—we're making sure that we've got the energy to bring them back.

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

Mr. Trevor Jones: It's reassuring that our government has a solid plan in place to secure the electricity this province needs to continue to power the growth and prosperity of Ontario. The people of Ontario are pleased to see that there is increasing electrification across many sectors of our economy, such as transportation and green steelmaking.

In his response, the minister mentioned Ontario's competitive procurement process for energy storage. The people of Ontario deserve an explanation about what actions our government is taking to help our province move forward in adopting additional forms of energy supply. Individuals also want information and assurances about the reliability of Ontario's power grid.

Speaker, can the minister please explain what actions our government is taking to support Ontario's overall energy strategy?

Hon. Todd Smith: Well thanks again to the member opposite. The experts at the IESO, the Independent Electricity System Operator, have indicated that generation from natural gas is our insurance policy to have the lights on, to ensure that when you walk into one of these new facilities, they're going to be able to operate and that prices are going to stay low for the long-term.

But Ontario does have one of the cleanest electricity systems in the world, and we're doing everything we can to ensure it stays that way by investing in our large nuclear reactors and our small nuclear reactors. As I mentioned earlier, we have four of our nuclear reactors that are down now for refurbishment. That's 3,400 megawatts of power at the Darlington and Bruce sites that are going to be coming back on over the next number of years, ensuring clean, reliable energy for our system, energy that's going to continue to be there for all of the new investments that come our way.

If the NDP had their way, those reactors wouldn't have come back at all, and neither would the jobs that are flocking back to Ontario.

AUTISM TREATMENT

Miss Monique Taylor: My question is for the Minister of Children, Community and Social Services. The Dean family reached out to my office last week. Their three-year-old son, Weston, has been on a wait-list for an autism assessment for over a year at Ron Joyce. While stuck on this list, Weston has become increasingly dangerous and self-injurious. They are desperate to get this assessment done, knowing they will have another long wait to access services and funding through the OAP. Private assessments cost a minimum of \$3,000—certainly out of reach for so many families.

Speaker, why are families still facing this enormous barrier to get their children the assessments they so desperately need?

Hon. Michael Parsa: I thank the member for the question, Mr. Speaker. When we formed government in 2018, we saw an Ontario Autism Program that was broken. Families and children and youth were not receiving the service. That was under that government, and it was always supported by the NDP. Only 25% of the children were receiving services.

This may have been okay and acceptable by them and the previous government. It isn't acceptable under our government, which is why we doubled the Ontario Autism Program, which is why we created a program that was developed by the community for the community. Now, children, youth and families have access to more services than ever before. Before, they had access to one service.

I'm happy to announce that this year we are increasing the support in the program by an additional 10% so that we can get more children, more youth, more families service—no thanks to the NDP.

1130

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

Miss Monique Taylor: Speaker, when this government came into place, the wait-list for autism was 24,000, and today the wait-list is over 60,000 children.

The Dean family lives in fear and stress of waiting for that assessment call and fear of their son suffering severe head injuries and bodily harm. This is a three-year-old child. They have been told that their wait will still be up to another two years, just to get the assessment—two more years of no hope in sight, of no supports for their child who is suffering.

Can the minister please tell families like the Deans what his new plans are for the assessment program, for the autism program, to ensure that they are done in a timely manner?

Hon. Michael Parsa: I thank the honourable member for the question.

To Weston and every single child, youth and family in this province: We told you from day one that we're not going to leave anyone behind, which is why—again, the member referenced the wait-list. Mr. Speaker, 8,500 children were receiving services before, under the previous government, supported by the NDP. Today, more than 40,000 children and youth are receiving services. Why? Because we doubled the funding, and we're further increasing that. Why? Because we want to make sure that children, youth and families are receiving the supports and services they need. Again, the NDP, under the previous government, had the opportunity to expedite this. They didn't do it. It took this Premier, it took this government to say, "We're not going to leave anyone behind."

We will continue to make sure that the programs—families, as I said, only had access to one program; now there are multiple pathways to service. And there's more work to do. We're going to get—

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

RED TAPE REDUCTION

Ms. Goldie Ghamari: My question is for the Minister of Red Tape Reduction. Ontario was one of the most overly regulated jurisdictions, not just in Canada, but in North America, prior to this government getting elected in 2018. For 15 years, unnecessary regulations were stifling growth, limiting job opportunities and making life harder for everyone.

That's why, under this Premier and government, we actually have a Ministry of Red Tape Reduction that is dedicated specifically to reducing unnecessary and burdensome red tape and making Ontario a place to live, grow and thrive. Under this Premier and this minister, we are seeing Ontario rejuvenate and grow, and improving the lives of everyone.

Through you, Mr. Speaker: Can the minister please provide us with some highlights of how our government's actions under Premier Ford have benefited the great region of Niagara?

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The parliamentary assistant and member for Niagara West.

Mr. Sam Oosterhoff: My thanks to the member for the question.

The Niagara region has experienced a renaissance since this government came to office in 2018. We are experiencing, currently, record-low unemployment. Jobs are coming back to our region. We're seeing investments in the areas that matter most. Here are a couple of examples of this in various ministries: We are seeing a new hospital being built in my riding—the West Lincoln Memorial Hospital; we're seeing new hospitals being built across the region, including the advancement of the new 1.3 million square feet being added to the South Niagara Hospital; we are seeing new long-term-care homes spring up across the region; when I first was elected, we had 16 hospice beds, and there are now 40 hospice beds in the Niagara region—incredible investments in health care. We've seen the Brock nursing school go from 300 students to 600 students. And we've seen thousands of manufacturing jobs come back to a region that, for too long, was left behind.

The people of Niagara know that under this government, the world doesn't end at the Burlington Skyway.

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

Ms. Goldie Ghamari: Thank you to the parliamentary assistant for his response.

Mr. Speaker, as the minister has said, reducing red tape is a key part of building a stronger economy and improving services for Ontarians. That's why our government is continuing to bring forward burden-reduction packages. This adds to our strong track record of improving access to government services and making it easier to invest and build in Ontario.

Through you, Mr. Speaker, can the parliamentary assistant provide us with some more highlights on how our government's policies have helped grow and improve the renaissance in the Niagara region?

Mr. Sam Oosterhoff: Again, my thanks to the member opposite. One of the crucial ways that our government makes the investments and the changes that are necessary

to drive prosperity for our province and for the Niagara region is by listening. I know that today, members from the Niagara region are here to meet with cabinet ministers. I'll be sitting down with them and Premier Ford later this afternoon to speak about the incredible investments that are coming into the Niagara region.

A couple of examples of this: the Homelessness Prevention Program was expanded by 86% to \$20 million annualized, supports that go to the most vulnerable in our communities. We are building housing in the Niagara region to make sure that the dream of home ownership becomes a reality. We are expanding GO train service across the Niagara region to make sure that people can get from A to B faster, easier and smarter. We're also making sure that all of these investments are focused on the well-being of our communities, building connected communities where people have the opportunity to build a better life for them and their family.

Under the leadership of this Premier and this government, we're getting it done for the people of Niagara.

SEXUAL ASSAULT CRISIS CENTRES

Ms. Catherine Fife: My question is to the Premier. A couple of weeks ago, the leader and I visited the Sexual Assault Support Centre in Kitchener, and we were both alarmed to learn about their lack of resources. Funding for sexual assault victims has not increased since 2011. In fact, funding is reduced by 17% compared to 10 years ago because of inflation and because of increased need. Some 40 people on a wait-list used to be a crisis, but now there are 270 people waiting for counselling. They've had the courage to come forward and ask for help, and that help is not there for them.

My question to the Premier, to this government: Why hasn't funding been increased and annualized for sexual assault centres across the province of Ontario?

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The Minister of Children, Community and Social Services.

Hon. Michael Parsa: I thank the honourable member for the very important question. Our government is working across government to make sure that every single person in this province is supported. That is making sure the supports are there not just for the victims but for preventative measures.

This is a government that has increased investments in all levels, in every corner of this province to make sure that every single person is receiving this support. That means that, in the member's region and all across the board, the funding has increased under our government. We'll make sure those preventative measures are there to support and also to make sure that every single victim is receiving the support that they need throughout the process.

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

Ms. Catherine Fife: In fact, funding was cancelled in 2018 by this government, and that funding has not been caught up. Minister, SASC is frantically fundraising to try to keep their wait-list down. Demand is growing, with a 58% increase in counselling requests since the pandemic. They only have one bed for human trafficking survivors.

SASC had secured two beds last year through temporary funding, and those two beds were always full. The need is so profound. Now, they're down to one bed.

Because this crisis centre is in crisis, they spend so much time fundraising and chasing the money. Does the minister agree that trauma agencies shouldn't have to fundraise to keep women and children safe in Niagara, in Peterborough, in Toronto, in Kitchener-Waterloo? It is just not right.

Interjections.

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

Minister of Children, Community and Social Services.

Hon. Michael Parsa: Again, all women deserve to live in safety and security. It's that simple. Our government is constantly working to ensure that women can live free from the fear of threats, exploitation and violence. We have made investments. We have launched programs and have passed legislation aimed at ending violence against women. To the point, the investment that I was referring to earlier: \$240 million invested for victims of violence, \$10.2 million for violence-prevention initiatives that I was referring to earlier.

We have invested in a 24-hour hotline across the province in over 200 languages to help ensure those affected by violence or sexual exploitation can access the support they need anywhere, anytime. Also, to support shelters, we have invested \$18.5 million over three years through the Transitional and Housing Support Program.

Once again, under this government, we'll make sure no one is left behind.

SERVICES EN FRANÇAIS

M^{me} Goldie Ghamari: Ma question s'adresse à la ministre des Affaires francophones.

1140

Notre gouvernement est pleinement conscient qu'actuellement un Franco-Ontarien sur cinq a 65 ans ou plus. Nos aînés, véritables bâtisseurs de l'Ontario, se sont battus pour bâtir des fondations solides qui profitent à notre francophonie d'aujourd'hui. Monsieur le Président, nous savons que l'accès aux soins dans la langue de leur choix est très important pour les personnes âgées. Non seulement cela permet une meilleure communication avec les fournisseurs de soins, mais cela assure une meilleure qualité de vie aux résidents des établissements de soins de longue durée.

Monsieur le Président, la ministre peut-elle expliquer ce que fait notre gouvernement pour améliorer les soins aux aînés francophones?

L'hon. Caroline Mulroney: Je remercie ma collègue pour son excellente question. Contrairement au gouvernement libéral précédent, qui n'a rien fait en 15 ans, notre gouvernement déploie, pour la première fois dans l'histoire de l'Ontario, une stratégie francophone en soins de longue durée pour l'Ontario. Nous avons récemment inauguré l'agrandissement du Foyer Richelieu Welland dans la région de Niagara. La construction du Foyer Richelieu est l'un des 39 projets de soins de longue durée en développement à travers la province où les services aux

résidents francophones seront offerts. La nouvelle résidence agrandie aura le double de sa capacité originale pour un total de 128 lits.

Monsieur le Président, le ministère des Affaires francophones travaille en collaboration avec le ministère des Soins de longue durée pour s'assurer que les personnes qui reçoivent des soins de longue durée obtiennent le soutien dont elles ont besoin, et ce, dans la langue de leur choix.

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

M^{me} Goldie Ghamari: Merci à la ministre pour sa réponse. C'est formidable d'entendre comment notre gouvernement soutient la population francophone de Niagara avec cette annonce importante. Cet investissement ainsi que notre stratégie de services en français qui accorde la priorité au renforcement de la main-d'oeuvre francophone et bilingue amélioreront la prestation de services de première ligne de qualité en français.

Monsieur le Président, il est important que les résidents, en plus de recevoir de soins dans la langue de leur choix, aient accès à des services qui contribuent à renforcer leur santé et leur bien-être. Monsieur le Président, la ministre peut-elle expliquer quels autres services seront offerts au Foyer Richelieu ainsi que son importance pour la communauté francophone de l'Ontario?

L'hon. Caroline Mulroney: Une fois terminé, l'agrandissement du Foyer Richelieu Welland offrira un véritable sentiment de communauté pour les résidents du centre de soins francophone. Pour la première fois en Ontario, il y aura des services parmi le continuum de soins, notamment la vie autonome, la vie assistée, les soins de longue durée, les soins palliatifs et un centre communautaire et culturel—le tout sur un seul campus.

Le Foyer Richelieu Welland, désigné en vertu de la Loi sur les services en français, est une institution de première ligne desservant la communauté francophone. Son agrandissement témoigne de notre volonté de bonifier la prestation des services en français sur le terrain partout dans la province. Mes collègues et moi continuerons, monsieur le Président, à déployer les efforts nécessaires pour assurer le bien-être de la communauté francophone et de répondre à ses besoins.

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

RECEPTION

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

Mr. Dave Smith: I'd like to invite everyone to rooms 228 and 230 for our Peterborough Day reception, where you can get your picture taken with the Eastern Conference OHL trophy, the Bobby Orr Trophy, as well as sample Ontario's best ice cream. Central Smith Creamery is there.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Now we're going to have a serious debate.

MEMBER'S BIRTHDAY

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The Minister of Red Tape Reduction has a point of order.

Hon. Parm Gill: I just want to take a moment and wish our colleague the government House leader a happy belated birthday. On Saturday, he turned 25, Mr. Speaker.

RECEPTION

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Point of order, the member for Niagara West.

Mr. Sam Oosterhoff: I would also invite everyone to rooms 228 and 230 this evening from 5 p.m. to 7 p.m. for the Niagara reception.

MEMBER'S BIRTHDAY

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): I gather the Premier has a point of order.

Hon. Doug Ford: Since we're announcing birthdays, I want to wish Patrice Barnes a very happy birthday today. She's 25 years old.

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

There being no further business this morning, this House stands in recess until 1 p.m.

The House recessed from 1145 to 1300.

HOUSE SITTINGS

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Point of order: the Minister of Labour, Immigration, Training and Skills Development.

Hon. Monte McNaughton: Pursuant to standing order 7(e), I wish to inform the House that tonight's evening meeting is cancelled.

REPORTS BY COMMITTEES

STANDING COMMITTEE ON HERITAGE,
INFRASTRUCTURE AND CULTURAL
POLICY

Mr. Graham McGregor: I beg leave to present a report from the Standing Committee on Heritage, Infrastructure and Cultural Policy on the estimates selected by the standing committee for consideration.

The Clerk-at-the-Table (Ms. Meghan Stenson): Mr. McGregor from the Standing Committee on Heritage, Infrastructure and Cultural Policy presents the committee's report as follows:

Pursuant to standing order 63, your committee has selected the 2023-24 estimates of the following ministries and offices for consideration: Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing; Ministry of Infrastructure; Ministry of Transportation; Ministry of Tourism, Culture and Sport; Ministry of Citizenship and Multiculturalism; Office of the Lieutenant Governor.

Report presented.

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

Mr. Ted Hsu: I beg leave to introduce a bill entitled Education Statute Law Amendment Act (Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder), 2023.

The bill requires boards of education to develop policies and guidelines with respect to fetal alcohol spectrum disorder, FASD.

Teachers' colleges and early childhood education programs shall be required to provide training with respect to FASD.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Mr. Hsu has moved that leave be given to introduce a bill entitled Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder—and that it now be read for the first time—

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): I'm advised that the bill is not in order.

9-1-1 EVERYWHERE IN ONTARIO
ACT, 2023LOI DE 2023 SUR LE 9-1-1 PARTOUT
EN ONTARIO

Madame Gélinas moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 107, An Act to enact the 9-1-1 Everywhere in Ontario Act, 2023 and to amend the Ombudsman Act to create an Assistant Ombudsman responsible for the oversight of 9-1-1 operations / Projet de loi 107, Loi édictant la Loi de 2023 sur le 9-1-1 partout en Ontario et modifiant la Loi sur l'ombudsman pour créer le poste d'ombudsman adjoint chargé de surveiller les activités du système 9-1-1.

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

First reading agreed to.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Would the member for Nickel Belt care to briefly explain her bill?

M^{me} France Gélinas: This bill is being co-sponsored by MPPs Sol Mamakwa, John Vanthof and Lise Vaugeois.

Basically, the bill would make sure that the government brings the provision to ensure that 911 infrastructure is available throughout our province for landlines and cell-phones, and that it also brings in call centre staffing supervision and training of staff to make sure that those calls are answered.

Finally, the bill amends the Ombudsman Act to establish the position of assistant Ombudsman so that people can make complaints against 911 if they are not satisfied with the services that they receive.

VISITOR

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): I'm pleased to inform the House that we have a special guest in the chamber with us today, a former member for the riding of Peterborough for the 38th to the 41st Parliaments: Jeff Leal.

Welcome back, Jeff. It's good to see you.

STATEMENTS BY THE MINISTRY AND RESPONSES

POLICE WEEK

SEMAINE DE LA POLICE

Hon. Michael S. Kerzner: It's my privilege to rise in the House today in recognition of Ontario Police Week, which is taking place from May 14 to May 20. I want to thank the Ontario Association of Chiefs of Police for organizing, and all police associations and police service boards for participating in this week's awareness and advocacy.

Monsieur le Président, c'est un grand honneur pour moi, en tant que solliciteur général, de prendre la parole à la Chambre aujourd'hui à l'occasion de la Semaine de la police.

Mr. Speaker, this year's Police Week comes in the shadow of tragedy. Ontario remains a province in mourning. We were all devastated to learn last week that two officers were injured and one was murdered while responding to a call in Bourget, Ontario. A veteran officer with 21 years of service, Sergeant Eric Mueller devoted his life to keeping his community safe so that we may all live, we may all work, we may all pray without fear. He will forever be remembered as a hero in life, not death.

Monsieur le Président, tous ont le droit de se sentir en sécurité chez eux et dans leur collectivité.

Mr. Speaker, along with all colleagues in this House from all sides of this House, I want to offer our deepest condolences to Sergeant Mueller's family. We also wish a speedy recovery to Constables Marc Lauzon and François Gamache-Asselin and send our thoughts out to the entire Ontario police service community in this time of unassailable grief. We will mourn with them, and we will pray with them.

The Premier and I and my colleague, my parliamentary assistant, the member from Etobicoke–Lakeshore, stand with Ontario's police community today and every day. For our government, the safety and well-being of our police officers is personal. Those who keep us safe deserve to go to work and come home safely to their loved ones each and every night.

Pour notre gouvernement, c'est personnel. Ces gens méritent de se rendre au travail et de rentrer chez eux en sécurité.

Mr. Speaker, just over a week ago, at the Ontario Police Memorial, the Premier and I, along with the members from Chatham-Kent–Leamington and Kitchener South–Hespeler, honoured police officers who have fallen in the line of duty. As we recall their names, we honour their sacrifice, and we think of their families: Police Constable Andrew Hong, 48, Toronto Police Service; Police Constable Morgan Russell, 54, South Simcoe Police Service; Police Constable Devon Northrup, 33, South Simcoe Police Service; Police Constable Grzegorz “Greg” Pierzchala, 28, Ontario Provincial Police. We also remember Police Constable Vicki Lynn Wilson, who died in 1992—Durham Regional Police Service. They, too, will

forever be our heroes in life. We hope and pray that their memories will always be for a blessing.

1310

Mr. Speaker, the legacy of policing in Ontario is strong, and it's proud, and it's enduring. We see it every day—the dynamic, the vibrant, and the modern police services that we have all across Ontario, and I have seen a lot for myself. Ontarians know the institution of law enforcement is pivotal to our democracy, and I'm pleased to share that this policing institution remains strong.

As an example, recently, the Ontario Provincial Police headquarters welcomed two outstanding new deputy commissioners: Deputy Commissioner Kari Dart and Deputy Commissioner Marty Kearns. Between them, they have over 60 years of exemplary service to the OPP and the people of Ontario, and I was proud to be there as they received their new commissions just last week.

Our police are leaders. They are also role models. And I might add, they're an extension of the communities they serve. We see the optimism on the faces of our cadets, who embark on a journey of public safety beginning at the Ontario Police College, a place that I am no stranger at, having had the honour to be part of three march pasts—and it's an amazing thing to see. They join the special bond of the Ontario police community that links one generation to another, one police service to another, one person to another.

We're making the dream of becoming a police officer more attainable for those who want to serve. Just a few weeks ago, the Premier and I announced that we've eliminated Ontario Police College basic constable training fees. We're also adding more spots for recruits, so we can graduate up to 2,000 cadets a year. This means more people on the ground, more boots on the ground to protect our communities—a continuation of a time-honoured profession that is essential to keeping our province safe, peaceful and free. Together with our police partners, we honour the tradition while marching boldly towards the future.

As I've said on a number of occasions in this House, the most fundamental duty that we all have is to uphold the safety of all Ontarians. On that note, I am proud to say that there has never been a Premier or a government in my generation that has cared as much about our public safety as our government, under Premier Ford. We have made it a priority to keep everyone in Ontario safe. Our government's support for Ontario police officers is absolute and constant, and we are proud to support our police officers and everyone else who keeps Ontario safe each day. Because of the work that police do, Ontarians feel safe in their communities.

Monsieur le Président, je suis fier de soutenir nos policiers et tous ceux qui assurent la sécurité de l'Ontario tous les jours. Grâce au travail de la police, les Ontariens et les Ontariennes se sentent en sécurité dans leurs communautés.

Mr. Speaker, the theme of this year's Police Week is “Building Bridges: Celebrating Police-Community Partnerships.” Through partnerships, we make progress. When we foster connections between police services, social services and community, we are all much better off.

Just a couple of weeks ago, we marked Family Service Day. We recognized the work being done between police services, first responders and social services to address intimate partner violence, human trafficking, and to provide appropriate, timely crisis response.

Our government is funding meaningful partnerships, including mobile crisis response teams. These teams consist of police officers and crisis professionals working together to respond to situations where mental health or addictions may be a factor. They safely de-escalate dangerous situations, and this is important.

I also think about the work being done in the community because of the initiatives that police officers take to care for the communities they serve. Just a few months ago, Project Hope began, thanks to the leadership of Toronto Police Constable Farzad Ghotbi and Detective Constable Mustafa Popalzai. I met them both; they were actually here in the chamber, and we had a chance to speak with them after, as introduced by the member from Kitchener South—Hespeler. I had the honour of supporting their community work by volunteering for a supply drive to support our government's humanitarian aid for victims of the earthquake in Turkey and Syria.

Again, police officers are our community heroes. Police officers enter a profession with inherent risk, and they deserve our respect.

In closing, we cannot take our safety for granted. Let us take a moment to thank police officers for their commitment to service and to keeping Ontario safe each and every day.

We've said this before: A safe Ontario is a strong Ontario. Qui dit Ontario sécuritaire dit Ontario fort.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Responses?

Mr. John Vanthof: It's an honour, on behalf of the official opposition and our leader, to rise here today and recognize Police Week—but we do it with a heavy heart. As the Solicitor General mentioned, Sergeant Eric Mueller lost his life. He was ambushed. He will be laid to rest this week. We offer our condolences to his family and his friends, and we wish a speedy recovery to his colleagues. I don't think there's anyone in Ontario who doesn't feel pain from what happened—and no one more than fellow police officers, people in the service, including people in our own Legislative Protective Service.

It's a sad fact that since September 2022, 10 officers have lost their lives on duty in Canada, five of them in Ontario.

I often relate issues to personal things that happen, and I'm going to do the same today. On Saturday, my wife, Ria, and I stopped at a Crime Stoppers barbecue and car wash in front of the Temiskaming OPP. The flag was at half-mast. A uniformed officer approached us, and it turned out to be Martin Thibault. Martin Thibault is an officer in the OPP detachment in Temiskaming Shores. Martin grew up on a dairy farm not very far from our place. He has also been an officer for 21 years. I gave him my condolences, as well. We started talking about what it was like to be a police officer, and one thing struck me very hard. He has been an officer for 21 years—he's very well respected, very well liked in our community—but he said it has changed in the last five. And then he actually

mentioned he knew exactly how long it was going to be before he could retire. That struck me too. In our conversation, he also talked about—I believe the figure—he said it was 35%, but I looked it up and it's 33% of police officers who are on long-term stress leave have PTSD. So it's not just a case of bringing more police in; it's about somehow protecting the police officers we have. It really struck me.

Something else in our conversation: He said that you always have to watch your back, and a few years ago, you wouldn't have thought that in rural Ontario. I'm a country guy. You always think big cities are scary, but it turns out that it's not just big cities. Police officers always have to—they protect us, but they don't feel safe themselves in normal situations. It's incumbent on us to not only look at getting more police officers, but to find out what is changing in society that is making that change, and make sure the supports are in society that are driving those changes—that the mental health supports are there, not only for police officers but for others, because some of the things that are happening are due to breakdowns in other parts of our society.

1320

In the official opposition, we fully support policing; we fully support that police officers need resources. But we also need to look at the resources that are needed to protect all members of society, including police officers. It's a very complex issue. We have to do everything we can to prevent what's happening, and we are willing to work with anyone who wants to do that.

Thank you very much for giving me this time.

PETITIONS

LAND USING PLANNING

Mr. Terence Kernaghan: It's an honour for me to present the petition entitled "Protect the Greenbelt and Repeal Bills 23 and 39." It reads:

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas Bills 23 and 39 are the Ford government's latest attempt to remove protected land from the greenbelt, allowing wealthy developers to profit over bulldozing over 7,000 acres of farmland;

"Whereas green spaces and farmland are what we rely on to grow our food, support natural habitats, prevent flooding, and mitigate from future climate disasters with Ontario losing 319.6 acres of farmland daily to development;

"Whereas the government's Housing Affordability Task Force found there are plenty of places to build homes without destroying the greenbelt, showcasing that Bill 23 was never about housing but about making the rich richer;

"Whereas the power of conservation authorities will be taken away, weakening environmental protections, and preventing future development;

"Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to immediately repeal Bills 23 and

39, stop all plans to further remove protected land from the greenbelt and protect existing farmland in the province.”

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

SERVICES FOR CHILDREN AND YOUTH

Ms. Christine Hogarth: This is a petition:

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas to address the actions that the government is taking to support youth in the foster care system, the government is investing \$170 million over three years to support a new program aimed at improving long-term outcomes for youth leaving the child welfare system; and

“Whereas the government is also expanding eligibility, which currently ends at 21 years old, to include those up to 23 years old. This investment will help youth achieve financial independence through life skills development, supports to pursue post-secondary education, training and pathways to employment; and

“Whereas, under the Ready, Set, Go program, children’s aid societies will be required to help children plan for the future, beginning at age 13. This investment will help Ontario youth become adults who are more likely to achieve financial independence and contribute to their communities;

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

“To urge all members of the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to support the passage of the Ontario budget bill, Bill 85, Building a Stronger Ontario.”

This is an excellent petition, and I’m happy to sign it and give it to Dominic.

HOSPITAL SERVICES

Ms. Catherine Fife: It’s my pleasure to table this petition on behalf of the good people of Minden. It reads:

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas the Haliburton Highlands Health Services board of directors has, without consultation with the affected stakeholders, announced the permanent closure of the emergency department located in the municipality of Minden Hills, Ontario, effective June 1, 2023;

“We, the undersigned, petition that a moratorium of this decision be implemented by the Ministries of Health and Long-Term Care immediately for a period of a minimum of one year to allow for consultations with all affected stakeholders to occur.”

It’s my pleasure to affix my signature in support of the good people of Minden and give it to page Kate.

SOCIAL ASSISTANCE

Mr. Ted Hsu: I would like to table the following petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario, which reads as follows:

“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 \$1,227 for ODSP;

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

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

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

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

SENIORS

Mr. Brian Saunderson: I have a petition that I will read in.

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas to address the budget for seniors, the Ontario government has proposed to make changes to expand the eligibility for Guaranteed Annual Income System (GAINS), starting in July 2024, which would see about 100,000 more low-income seniors receive payments, for a 50% increase in recipients; and proposing to lower the rate at which the benefit is reduced from 50% to 25%, which means a senior can keep more of their benefit as their private income increases; and proposing to adjust the benefit annually to inflation to continually put more money in the pocket of eligible seniors; and

“Whereas investing more than \$174 million over two years, starting in 2024-25, to continue the Community Paramedicine for Long-Term Care Program. This program leverages the skills of paramedics to provide additional care for seniors in the comfort of their own homes; and

“Whereas Ontario is continuing to make progress on its plan to build modern, safe and comfortable long-term-care homes for seniors and residents; and through planned investments that total a historic \$6.4 billion since 2019, Ontario is on track to build more than 31,000 new and over 28,000 upgraded beds across the province by 2028; and the government is helping to increase long-term-care capacity in communities across the province by providing development loans and loan guarantees to select non-municipal not-for-profit homes;

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

“To urge all members of the Legislative Assembly of Ontario support the passage of the Ontario budget bill, Bill 85, Building a Stronger Ontario.”

I wholeheartedly support this petition, will sign it and give it to Liam.

AFFORDABLE HOUSING

Ms. Doly Begum: “To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas Toronto city staff’s assessment of Bill 23 notes that it does not sufficiently address housing affordability, but instead decimates the city’s ability to fund services for new residents;

“Whereas the assessment from officials, including the chief planner, notes that this bill will harm the city’s ability to build affordable rentals and new homeless shelters;

“Whereas this bill does not present solutions that would push developers to build in ways that would save homebuyers any additional cost or address the skyrocketing cost of housing;

“Whereas this bill will push for a revenue loss for Toronto while the city is anticipating an \$815-million budget shortfall and residents continue to struggle with not only day-to-day costs but also underfunded city services;

“Whereas this bill will impact the city’s ability to deliver on its 10-year housing targets, invest in new shelter services, and continue affordable housing development and protection programs that support vulnerable residents;

“Whereas this bill will decrease the amount of affordable housing required under the city’s zoning policies and deliver on the HousingNowTO targets and the annual financial impact of Bill 23 on Toronto would be approximately \$200 million, \$130 million of which would be removing housing services;

“Whereas Bill 23 will take away the powers of municipalities to protect tenants in the case of demovictions and harm renters, homeowners, and families who are looking to find safe and affordable homes and remove access to city services;

“Therefore we, the undersigned, call on the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to repeal this harmful piece of legislation and engage in meaningful consultations with municipalities, conservation authorities, and communities to address the housing affordability crisis.”

1330

Speaker, I fully support this petition. I will affix my signature to it and give it to page Sophie to take to the Clerks.

ANIMAL PROTECTION

Ms. Peggy Sattler: I have another set of petitions that were collected at London’s amazing Earthfest. I want to read this into the record:

“Protect Migratory Birds.

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas an estimated 25 million birds in Canada die each year due to collisions with windows on buildings, including many migratory and bird species at risk;

“Whereas materials to prevent the collision of birds into windows can proactively be incorporated into the designs of new buildings;

“Whereas the Canadian Standards Association has established a national standard for bird-friendly building design which has been adopted by some municipalities;

“Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to incorporate the CSA 2019 bird-friendly building design standard into the Ontario building code, requiring bird-friendly materials to be used in new residential and commercial building windows.”

I fully support this petition. I’ll affix my signature and send it to the table with page Senna.

HOSPITAL SERVICES

Ms. Jennifer K. French: I am pleased to be able to share some of the over 17,000 signatures that were collected to save the Minden ER.

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas the Haliburton Highlands Health Services board of directors has, without consultation with the affected stakeholders, announced the permanent closure of the emergency department located in the municipality of Minden Hills, Ontario, effective June 1, 2023;

“We, the undersigned, petition that a moratorium of this decision be implemented by the Ministries of Health and Long-Term Care immediately for a period of a minimum of one year to allow for consultations with all affected stakeholders to occur.”

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

ALZHEIMER’S DISEASE

Mr. Terence Kernaghan: It’s my honour to present the petition entitled “Develop an Ontario Dementia Strategy.” It reads:

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas it currently takes on average 18 months for people in Ontario to get an official dementia diagnosis, with some patients often waiting years to complete diagnostic testing;

“Whereas more than half of patients suspected of having dementia in Ontario never get a full diagnosis; research confirms that early diagnosis saves lives and reduces care-partner stress;

“Whereas a PET scan test approved in Ontario in 2017 which can be key to detecting Alzheimer’s early, is still not covered under OHIP in 2022;

“Whereas the Ontario government must work together with the federal government to prepare for the approval and rollout of future disease-modifying therapies and research;

“Whereas the Alzheimer Society projects that one million Canadians will be caregivers for people with dementia, with families providing approximately 1.4 billion hours of care per year by 2050;

“Whereas research findings show that Ontario will spend \$27.8 billion between 2023 and 2043 on alternate-level-of-care (ALC) and long-term-care (LTC) costs associated with people living with dementia;

“Whereas the government must follow through with its commitment to ensure Ontario’s health care system has the capacity to meet the current and future needs of people living with dementia and their care partners;

“Therefore we, the undersigned, call on the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to develop, commit and fund a comprehensive Ontario dementia strategy.”

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

HEALTH CARE WORKERS

Ms. Doly Begum: I want to thank many of the internationally trained professionals who have been continuing to advocate for their ability to practise in Ontario, have been pushing this issue forward and have signed on this petition. It reads:

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas Ontario’s health staffing crisis means people are waiting in pain for surgery and treatment because there aren’t enough doctors and nurses to care for us all;

“Whereas regulated health care professionals face a variety of barriers when entering their fields of practice, including lack of accessible processes to recognize international trainings and credentials;

“Whereas tens of thousands of highly trained internationally educated doctors and nurses are wading through Ontario’s complex, expensive and years-long program to be licensed in Ontario; and

“Whereas there are more than 10,000 internationally educated nurses in Ontario not yet allowed to work in the province and it has been reported that 1,200 internationally trained medical graduates have been unable to clear the hurdles needed to practise; and

“Whereas practice-ready assessment offers the most qualified internationally trained physicians a quicker route to being able to work in Ontario.

“Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to urgently work with colleges, regulators, and health care workers to implement pathways that allow internationally trained and educated health care workers to support our health care system.”

Speaker, I fully support this petition. I will affix my signature to it and give it to page Sophie to take to the Clerks.

HOSPITAL SERVICES

Ms. Peggy Sattler: I am proud to present this petition on behalf of the people of Minden. It reads:

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas the Haliburton Highlands Health Services board of directors has, without consultation with the affected stakeholders, announced the permanent closure of the emergency department located in the municipality of Minden Hills, Ontario, effective June 1, 2023;

“We, the undersigned, petition that a moratorium of this decision be implemented by the Ministries of Health and Long-Term Care immediately for a period of a minimum of one year to allow for consultations with all affected stakeholders to occur.”

I support this petition. I’ll affix my signature and send it to the table with page Sanskrati.

CONSIDERATION OF BILL PR25

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Bhutila Karpoche): I beg to inform the House that, pursuant to standing order 89(a), the Clerk has received written request that Bill Pr25, An Act to revive Superior Corporate Services Limited, be referred to the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs. The order for second reading of the bill is therefore discharged, and the bill is deemed referred to the committee.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

BUILDING A STRONG ONTARIO ACT (BUDGET MEASURES), 2023

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

Mr. Pirie, on behalf of Mr. Bethlenfalvy, moved third reading of the following bill:

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

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Bhutila Karpoche): I turn to the minister.

Hon. George Pirie: It is always a pleasure to stand in this House to represent the good people of my riding, Timmins.

I’ll be sharing my time with the two parliamentary assistants to the Minister of Finance: the member for Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound and the member for Oakville. I look forward to hearing more from them about our great budget.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Bhutila Karpoche): The member from Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound.

Mr. Rick Byers: Thank you so much to the minister for this opportunity to speak on the budget. We have a great Minister of Mines. He just recently led legislation this past—recently, as I mentioned. It’s such an example of the great impact that this government has had and is going to have in the communities in the north with the development of the Ring of Fire. I’ll be talking a little bit about that in my remarks this afternoon, because this is a fundamental part of our economic development here and our vision for the province of Ontario, to create jobs in our great province, in all regions—not just here in the GTA or in mid- or southwestern Ontario, but throughout the province, right up north. That’s such an important part of who we are.

Today, it’s my privilege to rise and speak to the third reading of the Building a Strong Ontario Act (Budget Measures), 2023. These legislative changes are a part of our plan to navigate the economic uncertainty facing the people of Ontario today, while laying a strong foundation for future generations. This is our plan to build a strong economy now and for the future. It’s our plan to build

highways, roads, schools and hospitals for our growing population.

Interjection: Hear, hear.

Mr. Rick Byers: Hear, hear.

1340

It is a plan with a better deal for workers, with better jobs and bigger paycheques, to build a strong health care system that connects people to the right care. Our plan focuses on these priorities and includes a path to balance the budget.

I want to outline a little further the long-term vision of this budget and turn to one of my favourite pages in the budget, page 17. It is difficult, because there are many, many pages in the budget that I do like very much, but I'll begin with page 17, which is an outline of the infrastructure expenditures that our government is planning for the future. It's outlined by major sector: transportation, including transit and other transportation and highways; health, including hospitals and other health care priorities; education; post-secondary education, which includes colleges and universities; as well as social justice and other sectors. So it outlines the full range of sectors in the Ontario economy.

I started out my career as an accountant, so I find numbers exciting and motivating. Here are some numbers for you. The total infrastructure spending for 2023—in other words, the year that just passed—\$17.3 billion; this year, the year that we're in right now, \$20.6 billion for 2023-24, and it will increase; then it's \$25 billion and \$26.9 billion in 2025-26. Over 10 years, it's \$184 billion. What a massive expenditure program that is. It's important from a couple of perspectives, in my opinion. Number one, it does deal with the breadth of the Ontario economy, all of these sectors that are so critical to what matters to our province—health care, transit, transportation. But the other thing related to that is that not many governments have the courage to look that long-term—10 years. Most governments are just looking towards the next election, for that matter. This government has a decade plan, and that matters—a long-term vision to get stuff done.

Mr. Speaker, the people of Ontario are depending on our government to navigate the economic challenges of today. Ontario is not an island. We're not immune to global forces, including geopolitical tension provoked by the Russian aggression against Ukraine, the reopening of China's economy, the energy transition, and policies such as the United States Inflation Reduction Act. Families and workers are feeling the squeeze of inflation on their wallets.

But while the seas around us may be stormy, our prudent planning and strong foundations have given Ontario a path forward—a path forward leading to a balanced budget, a return to balance that would have never happened under the NDP or Liberals. As this budget shows, it is possible to balance the budget while investing more in health care, housing, highways, transit, manufacturing, the skilled trades, and in the north, as I mentioned earlier.

Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to relay that in the 2022-23 fiscal year, the Ontario deficit is projected to shrink to just \$2.2 billion. This is thanks to robust revenue growth and our government's prudent and disciplined planning and clear priorities. Moreover, in fiscal 2023-24, we plan to further reduce the deficit to \$1.3 billion. And starting in fiscal 2024-25, we project Ontario's return to being in the black, with an approximately \$200 million surplus. These are very important steps that we've taken.

Over the past years, with all the spending that was necessary through COVID, we kind of lost the words "balanced budget," which slipped to the bottom of the barrel. But this government knows they are a priority, not just for us but for our kids and for the next generation, to make sure they're not paying our bills. So it's very exciting news, and we're anticipating surpluses in the future years past 2024-25. The people of Ontario can have confidence that tomorrow will be better than today. This plan and its fiscal and economic approach is supported by measures in the spring budget bill.

While I am as confident as ever about the future of Ontario, there is still much that we can do to build a strong, resilient, more competitive economy here at home. A key to Ontario's future growth is found in the opportunities of the province's northern region, as I mentioned earlier, and particularly the mining sector. Just look at the Ring of Fire. It's one of the world's most promising mineral deposits. It contains critical elements that are core to the global economy today—materials essential to batteries, electronics, electric vehicles and other clean technology. The Ring of Fire can help reduce Ontario's dependency on unstable or unfriendly foreign regimes. These critical minerals are an untapped potential that previous governments have failed to unlock for no other reason than that the work of developing them was too hard. Well, our government is not afraid of hard work. We do it all the time. But it can't be done alone. We are working hand in hand with partners like the First Nations in northern Ontario—a true partnership to build the road to the Ring of Fire.

Building the road is one thing, but there are other legislative and regulatory and workforce considerations we need to account for, which is why our government is taking a comprehensive approach to accelerating the safe development of the north's mineral resources. And while Ontario is investing \$1 billion to unlock the critical minerals of the north, we continue to call on the federal government to match our commitment. Building the road is only one step in getting the minerals out of the ground.

We are also helping to get mines built. The Ontario government is increasing funding for the Ontario Junior Exploration Program to help more companies find critical minerals, such as nickel and cobalt, which are necessary to support the growing supply chain for electric vehicles and create jobs for northern and Indigenous communities. The funding, announced as part of the 2023 budget, includes an additional \$6 million over the next two years for this successful program, bringing the government's total investment to \$35 million. This approach is part of

our government's plan to build Ontario's economy by attracting investment and creating jobs so we can lay a strong foundation for future generations. That's what it's all about. That's why we're here. It's not about us; it's about those who will follow us to ensure they have the economic foundation that we were lucky enough to have in our lives. This is part of our plan to build a strong Ontario now and in the future. Launched in 2021, the program helps junior mining companies finance early exploration projects by covering eligible costs for critical and precious mineral exploration and development. So far, 48 junior mining companies have received funding and, in turn, they have invested an additional \$17.5 million in these projects. That's important work, and it matters on the ground. Once those minerals are out of the ground, they can be connected to Ontario's world-class manufacturing sector.

1350

Just look at the recent announcement by Volkswagen of its planned electric vehicle plant in St. Thomas. The German car company is investing \$7 billion to make St. Thomas the home of its first overseas EV battery manufacturing plant—the first in the world outside of its own base. As has been observed, this is not only the largest electric vehicle-related investment in Canadian history, but it's a huge vote of confidence in Ontario's highly skilled workforce, our strong economic fundamentals and our competitive business environment.

In two and a half years, Ontario has attracted over \$25 billion in investments from global automakers and electric vehicle batteries and battery suppliers. We heard today the Minister of Economic Development, Job Creation and Trade cite these investments—\$25 billion, a staggering number. But what really struck me was his additional comment about how Ontario is now number two in the world in this space. What an enormous achievement that is in such a short period of time. It will not only benefit us in the short term, as I said—and I think one of the important themes of what we are doing as a government is a long-term perspective, the next generation. This generation and the next one and the next one after that will benefit from the economic development opportunities that come, but also in the resulting benefits to our environment from electric vehicles. It's a great long-term vision.

And we aren't stopping there. Ontario's manufacturing sector is on a roll. We must keep that momentum going. The capacity is there to do more. For us as a government, we must continue supporting manufacturing and other businesses and the communities that depend on them.

One of the marquee pieces of the 2023 budget and spring budget bill is the proposed new Ontario Made Manufacturing Investment Tax Credit. If passed, this tax credit would provide a 10% refundable corporate income tax credit to help local manufacturers lower their costs, invest in workers, innovate and become more competitive. Why this is so important as a tax credit is that often it's for companies that are in the development stage. We think about taxes being on income. Oftentimes, these developing companies don't have income yet. Why? Because

they're growing, they're investing in the future, so it takes time to build up that revenue stream. This tax credit helps that process along by not having to wait down the road until they have taxable income. So it's a very important structure and an exciting opportunity for these companies.

When combined with other business measures our government has delivered since 2018, we are helping to improve competitiveness by enabling an estimated \$8 billion in cost savings and support in 2023.

Our government is also working with partners to have shovel-ready industrial sites available for new manufacturing projects so we can be ready if and when more companies like Volkswagen choose Ontario for their next investment. As the minister said when he first introduced the budget in this House, "If you are prepared to bet big on Ontario, then Ontario is prepared to bet big on you." He's absolutely right.

Supporting this growing world-class manufacturing takes energy—clean, safe, reliable energy. In addition to our support of the continued safe operations of Pickering nuclear generation station and the refurbishments of Darlington and Bruce nuclear power generation, he's also looking to the future, with small modular reactors.

I want to comment on Bruce Power in particular, because this has great relevance to my riding of Bruce-Grey-Owen Sound and the whole Grey-Bruce community. Ontario is fortunate to have one of the cleanest electricity grids in the world—over 90% emissions-free—and there's one reason why: Our nuclear sector provides the emissions-free electricity to phase out coal-fired generation in Ontario, one of the largest greenhouse gas reductions ever, and Bruce Power provides 70% of that electricity.

This past March, Bruce began their second refurbishment on unit 3, part of the life-extension program that will allow Bruce Power to continue providing clean, reliable, affordable energy through 2064—over 40 years from now. That is about the future.

But as importantly, Bruce Power supports good jobs—22,000 direct and indirect—employing some of the best-paying, highest-skilled workers in Ontario. And while the head office of Bruce is in our colleague Lisa Thompson's riding in Huron-Bruce, the Bruce refurbishment has meant suppliers like BWXT and Makwa Cahill are setting up shop in my riding of Bruce-Grey-Owen Sound, supporting the local community. In addition, Bruce Power and its partners, including the Saugeen Ojibway Nation, are commercially producing life-saving medical isotopes like lutetium-177 on a scale never seen before, thanks to their innovative new isotope delivery system opening up new opportunities. So we see that nuclear energy is so important to our baseload power and also so important to our communities, like the one I am fortunate to represent.

The SMRs will be essential to Ontario's future electricity supply and our energy supply. Our government is seizing Ontario's clean energy advantage and encouraging companies to invest here to do the same. We have launched a voluntary energy credit registry to boost competitiveness and attract jobs and help businesses meet their

environmental and sustainability goals. Proceeds from the sale of these new credits will help keep costs down for electricity taxpayers and fund the construction of clean electricity projects in Ontario through a newly created future clean energy electricity fund. This fund will help build Ontario's clean energy advantage as the province competes for and attracts new investments in electric vehicle and battery manufacturing, clean steel and other sectors, while continuing to build its clean economy. The clean energy credit registry is part of our government's clean energy advantage that is boosting competitiveness and attracting investments and jobs here in Ontario.

Along with growing our economy, our plan is also working to improve services that people depend on, starting with health care. This government is investing every single dollar we receive from the federal government's recent health care funding down payment and a whole lot more into better health care services. While we will receive \$4.4 billion in additional funding over the next three years under the recent federal agreement, our government is investing a total of \$15.3 billion more in health care over that same period.

And I'll just add, too, my second favourite page in the budget—as I mentioned, there are so many great pages in this document. Page 139 outlines the major categories of spending, from health to education, post-secondary, and on and on. On the health care front, in 2021-22, total health care spending was \$69.6 billion; in 2022-23, \$74.9 billion; this year, 2023-24, \$81 billion; and up to \$84.2 billion and \$87.6 billion—huge increases in health care spending that are so needed and are paying off day after day.

Health care should be convenient and easy to access where it is needed most, when it is needed most. The only thing better than care close to home is care at home. We are continuing the 2022 budget commitment to invest \$1 billion over three years to get more people connected to care in the comfort of their own home and community. What's more, the government is now accelerating investments to bring funding in 2023-24 up to \$569 million, including nearly \$300 million to support contract rate increases to stabilize the home and community care workforce. This funding will also expand home care services, making it easier and faster for people to connect to care.

1400

We are also investing more than \$200 million to connect children and youth to care at hospitals and close to home in their communities. And we are investing in independent health facilities to speed up care while ensuring patients will always pay with their OHIP card, not their credit card. To deliver that care, we need more doctors and health care professionals practising here in Ontario. Our plan includes hiring and training thousands of more health care workers, including doctors. We're helping more Ontario students become doctors by investing an additional \$33 million over three years to add 100 undergraduate seats, beginning in 2023, and 154 provincial postgraduate medical training seats are being prioritized for Ontario residents trained at home and abroad, beginning in 2024 and going forward.

Another community impact of this—in fact, the Minister of Colleges and Universities will be in Owen Sound tomorrow at Georgian College, and this is the home of a fantastic nurse training facility where students can get their bachelor of science in nursing. There will be 30 graduates a year from this program in a few years. That's so important because, in the past, especially in rural Ontario, students had to go away to get their health care education, and then we would hope they would come back, but having this program at Georgian College means that they will have a much higher likelihood—and most of the applications were from the local community.

So this is very, very exciting stuff and will help support a health care system for years and years to come.

Ontario residents will also be prioritized for undergraduate spots at medical schools in the province.

We're also making it easier for people to get the medication they need for minor ailments. Starting in 2023, we're allowing more over-the-counter medication to be prescribed by pharmacists for six more common ailments so that people can get the medication needed to treat them without having to book an appointment with their family physician or visit an emergency room.

Madam Speaker, our government is providing an additional \$425 million over three years to support mental health and addiction services. Our mental health and addiction strategy is using innovative solutions to improve the quality and access to mental health supports while shortening wait times and removing gaps in service.

As Camille Quenneville, CEO of Canadian Mental Health Association Ontario, said, “The vital structural base funding commitment announced today is the largest by any government for community mental health and addictions care in a decade. It will significantly help community-based mental health and addictions agencies provide high-quality care, retain dedicated and committed staff, and address rising operating costs. The budget is an overwhelmingly positive sign that the government understands the strain our sector is facing as we support Ontarians living with mental health and addictions challenges. It also demonstrates their desire to help those most vulnerable in society”—such an important statement.

We are also improving the services in place to protect our province's most vulnerable, such as children and youth involved with the child welfare services. Youth who have been involved with the child welfare system are at high risk of being trafficked, experiencing homelessness, and developing mental health issues, and have lower high school graduation rates than their peers. Those leaving the child welfare system deserve every opportunity to reach their full potential.

Our government is helping to improve long-term outcomes for youth leaving the child welfare system through the \$170 million-over-three-year investment to support the Ready, Set, Go program. Ready, Set, Go is geared to helping these young people achieve financial independence through life skills development, supports to pursue post-secondary education and job training and pathways to employment. We're also expanding our program eligibility to include those up to 23 years old.

Ingrid Palmer, chair of the Child Welfare PAC Canada and a former youth in care, has said this about Ready, Set, Go: “By implementing the Ready, Set, Go framework, the Ontario government is beginning to break down the complex barriers faced by youth from care who experience disproportionate risks and challenges throughout their lifetime. The Child Welfare PAC fully endorses this approach, which incorporates a data-driven system and a better resourced, graduated introduction to adulthood. With multiple pathways to brighter futures and improved outcomes, this framework will help us support our most vulnerable youth and provide them with the tools they need to succeed.”

Carly Kalish of Victim Services Toronto called Ready, Set, Go “an important step that the Ontario government is taking to help youth leaving foster care secure safer housing in their communities. We know that youth who don’t have access to stable housing are at a much higher risk of human trafficking, and by helping youth have a safe place to live it will reduce the likelihood that they will become victims of human trafficking or face exploitation.”

Our government is working to protect the people of Ontario and their families, and this approach to safety and well-being includes protecting people as consumers. There are several consumer protection items contained in this bill. These include the proposed legislative amendments to the Financial Professionals Title Protection Act, 2019. You see, the government is making it easier for families to reach their financial goals with the confidence that they are receiving financial advice from someone who has adequate training, expertise and credentials when it comes to planning their financial future. These amendments, if passed, would give the Financial Services Regulatory Authority of Ontario, or FSRA, the power to make rules governing the use of protected titles by credential holders when a credentialing body’s approval has been revoked or an approved credentialing body ceases to operate. The title protection framework is designed to ensure that individuals who use the “financial planner” or “financial adviser” titles have been approved from a FSRA-approved credentialing body.

As well, this bill includes a continued monitoring of how provincially regulated financial services are delivered. They include proposed amendments to the Insurance Act to support FSRA in ending the use of deferred sales charges and the sale of segregated funds. The proposed change here would help protect consumers by banning deferred sales charges for buyers of segregated funds if they withdraw money early. The proposed ending of deferred sales charges for new funds aligns with changes that came into effect in the Securities Act in 2022 for mutual funds.

We have a plan, a long-term vision for Ontario. We are taking real action to build a strong Ontario. I firmly believe this government can and will do it. We have the discipline to stay true to our planning convictions while maintaining flexibility as we navigate today’s economic uncertainty. We are building a strong economy that has the infra-

structure and workers needed to support growing communities and better services, and while returning Ontario to the black three years earlier than projected. We can do it by passing this bill and saying yes to our plan that will support people and businesses while laying a strong foundation for future generations.

I will now hand it over to my fellow parliamentary assistant the member from Oakville.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Bhutla Karpoche): The member from Oakville.

Mr. Stephen Crawford: Thank you to the member from Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound for speaking on the Building a Strong Ontario Act (Budget Measures), 2023.

It’s my sincere pleasure to be part of a team at the Ministry of Finance where we’ve been working under the minister’s leadership to get Ontario’s fiscal house in order and build a stronger province for future generations. I would certainly like to thank all of the staff members within the ministry who have worked to put together this budget. I know there’s a lot of work behind the scenes, and it’s a year’s work, really—we’re already preparing ahead now for the next budget a year from now.

Thank you to all the ministry staff for all the great work you do.

Speaker, everyone in this House would agree that Ontario is a great place to live. In fact, I see Ontario as the best place in the world to raise your family, start a business and plant your roots. Thanks to the leadership of our Premier, of our government, we are investing more in health care, in better education, in housing affordability, and in safer streets.

1410

The Building a Strong Ontario Act, 2023, is a plan that takes a responsible and targeted approach to supporting people and businesses while outlining a path to balance the budget in the next year, so that future Ontarians can inherit a stronger Ontario. This plan is our blueprint for building a strong province during a time of global challenge and change, and our work to build Ontario starts now. These are the priorities and initiatives that the people of Ontario want to see their government focus on.

But it bears repeating that Ontario is part of the global economy, and today there are global economic challenges of various stripes. While the road ahead may have some uncertainties, we are ready as a government to take them on with flexibility and prudence.

Speaker, we’ve heard details about our plan to support people and businesses today while laying a strong fiscal foundation for the future. It is a truly comprehensive and connected plan, from harnessing the critical minerals in the north so they can be used in modern EV batteries produced in the manufacturing centres in the south, to new investments and creating more jobs, growing our economy and, in turn, building the modern highways, transit, hospitals, schools, broadband and other infrastructure needed for our growing communities—growth that will allow us to invest in connecting people to convenient care, housing affordability and safer streets, while staying on course for a balanced budget.

Behind all of this growth, all of this investment, are the workers of this province. The single greatest obstacle standing in our way is the shortage of skilled workers and workers in the province of Ontario. Whether it's construction, the skilled trades or health care, Ontario needs more workers. And while the talent shortage is global, that is no excuse. Ontario must do more—and we are. It's all hands on deck to build Ontario.

That starts with expanding training opportunities for workers. That is why, in budget 2023, our government is investing an additional \$75 million over the next three years in the Skills Development Fund. The Skills Development Fund is a proven success, helping nearly 400,000 workers gain the skills they need for more stable careers. From a new pair of boots for the young construction worker, to the new Ukrainian refugee who now has a chance to start their new career in Ontario, this fund has been a life-changer.

For a career in the skilled trades, accessing training is the first step towards a better job and a bigger paycheque, and who better to provide that training than the boots on the ground, like those in private sector unions? We are also working with private sector unions and other partners to upgrade their training facilities, so that workers get the best possible training from the experts on the ground.

Our \$224-million investment in the capital stream of the Skills Development Fund will leverage private sector expertise and expand training centres, including union training halls, so they can provide more accessible, flexible training opportunities for workers. There is no better trainer than someone with hands-on experience. Local 793 of the International Union of Operating Engineers has supported this move, adding that “skilled trades workers are at the front line of our economic recovery, with unions and businesses playing a crucial role in training our next generation of workers through apprenticeship programs. Financially supporting training institutes will help attract more people to the skilled trades and better prepare them.” The International Brotherhood of Boilermakers has said that they “are proud partners of this important skills development program, and we are excited to see the implementation of a stream dedicated for capital projects. Major investment is required to upgrade Ontario’s training capacity to match the needs of the next generation.” And LIUNA has expressed their full support, adding that “the first three rounds of the” Skills Development Fund “were tremendously successful and saw thousands of people receive skills for rewarding careers in industries such as the skilled trades. The newly announced ‘capital’ stream will ensure that training providers in Ontario have the necessary tools and resources to continue their great work.”

We’re not stopping there. We are continuing to prepare students for the jobs of the future by creating stronger links between classroom learning and good-paying careers. Over three years, we are investing \$6.2 million in targeted supports for students with disabilities to pursue cooperative educational opportunities.

This is one of the next steps in our government’s plan to catch up, to help students develop skills in math and reading and get ready for their future career.

We want students to be set up for success in their future career, and for some students, that means getting a head start to help students get the training they need for in-demand jobs faster. Speaker, 27,000 students in 2023-24 will have the opportunity to earn credits towards their Ontario secondary school diploma and a post-secondary certificate, diploma, degree or certificate of apprenticeship. And we are now expanding dual credit to include health care courses so that students can get a head start in becoming nurses, personal support workers, paramedics, or medical laboratory technicians.

Speaker, there are lots of ambitious people out there, who are extremely dedicated and hard-working and want to be their own boss instead of working for someone else. That is why we are helping entrepreneurs aged 18 to 39 achieve their business goals by providing an additional \$2 million in 2023-24 for Futurpreneur Canada. Entrepreneurs have the ambition and drive it takes to take an idea and build that into a business.

It also takes ambition and drive to move from one country to another. There are people from all around the world looking to move here and realize the Ontario dream—people looking to come to Canada, to Ontario, to get a good-paying job and earn a steady paycheque that puts a roof over their head and supports their family. We want to welcome them here in Ontario. As part of the 2023 budget, we are investing an additional \$25 million over three years in Ontario’s flagship immigration program. This investment will support the doubling of the number of skilled immigrants the province can welcome and help tackle the labour shortage and help build Ontario.

The Ontario Immigrant Nominee Program allows the province to nominate individuals for permanent residence—people who have the skills and experience to contribute to Ontario’s economy in various industries, including the skilled trades and health care. Our government and the federal government have announced a doubling of the number of economic immigrants to the province to a historic high of 18,000 by 2025. The new investment in the 2023 budget will ensure those coming to Ontario can start their professional lives here quickly.

1420

It’s also why we’re expanding the Ontario Bridge Training Program with an additional \$3 million in 2023-24 to help internationally trained immigrants find employment in their fields here and get faster access to training and supports towards an Ontario licence or certificate.

Our government is continuing with our responsible, targeted approach that is training workers for the jobs of tomorrow and building an Ontario the people of this province can be proud of, not only today, but for the future.

We are also investing in growing and retaining the health care workforce. Since 2018, over 60,000 new nurses and nearly 8,000 new physicians have begun to work right here in the province of Ontario. But we know we need to build on this momentum. That is why our government is investing \$80 million over the next three years to further expand enrolment for nursing programs.

We’re also investing \$200 million this year so we can address immediate health care shortages and grow the

workforce for years to come. For example, we are, with this budget, expanding the Ontario Learn and Stay Grant program in spring 2023 for eligible post-secondary students who will enrol in priority programs in northern Ontario, including in programs for nursing, paramedic and medical laboratory technologist/medical laboratory sciences for those who agree to work in underserved communities in the region where they studied after graduation. The grant provides full upfront funding for tuition, books and other educational costs to students. We are also expanding the program to include nursing in eastern and southwestern Ontario and for medical laboratory technologists in southwestern Ontario.

Speaker, Ontario is continuing to hire more health care workers to ensure everyone can see a trained professional when they need to.

We're also addressing labour shortages in our rural and northern communities when it comes to veterinary care. Having easy access to a veterinarian is crucial for farmers and livestock owners.

Speaker, our government is investing more than \$15 million to help address veterinary shortages in rural and northern communities. This funding will be used to launch the new collaborative doctor of veterinary medicine program with the University of Guelph and Lakehead University. The new program will enrol an additional 20 veterinary students per year, resulting in up to 80 new doctor of veterinary medicine seats in total by 2023, and focus on recruiting students from northern, rural and Indigenous communities.

Recent veterinary graduates will be encouraged to practise in underserved and northern communities through the Veterinary Incentive Program. This new \$900,000 investment over three years will provide program participants with annual grants totalling up to \$50,000. The grants will be conditional on them continuing to practise on large animals in these communities.

Dr. Charlotte Yates, president and vice-chancellor, University of Guelph, said, "The University of Guelph applauds the Ontario government's leadership role and bold action to address the veterinary crisis in Ontario. As Ontario's only veterinary college and the top school in Canada, we are thrilled by this unprecedented investment."

Dr. Moira McPherson, president of Lakehead University, added, "Working with our partners in government and the agri-food industry, we will be able to provide much-needed additional veterinary care to the vital and growing animal farming sector in northern, rural and Indigenous communities throughout Ontario."

Speaker, we are building a strong Ontario for people, for families, for businesses, for workers, and for seniors. A hallmark of this government is keeping costs down, which is why we didn't wait to act. We've continued to put more money back into the pockets of Ontarians, whether at the gas pumps, on their electricity bills, scrapping licence plate renewal fees, or getting rid of the unfair tolls on Highways 412 and 418 in Durham. We have also recently eliminated double fares for most local transit

services in the greater Golden Horseshoe when commuters also use GO Transit, so that when commuters pay for their fare to get on the GO bus or train, they aren't paying again on most local services. We're expanding this initiative to include Toronto, so a commuter coming into the city only pays one fare per trip, saving them money each way.

Speaker, Ontario seniors are the people who have built our great province and made it the great province it is today. Rising inflation is hitting those on fixed incomes the hardest, like our vulnerable, low-income seniors. That is why our government is proposing changes to expand the guaranteed annual income program—or GAINS, as it's known—starting in July 2024, to see 100,000 additional seniors eligible for the program, which would be adjusted annually to inflation. Our government will give a hand up to those that need it the most.

Sadly, many around us don't have a roof over our head or a place to call home. Our government continues to be there for these neighbours.

Today, we are making a historic investment of an additional \$202 million each year in support of housing and homelessness programs to provide not only a hand up, but hope for a better life for those who need it the most. Municipal councillors and municipal mayors throughout Ontario have spoken highly of this component of the budget bill.

Deputy Mayor Jennifer McKelvie of the city of Toronto has thanked the Premier and the Minister of Finance for this investment: "\$48 million in this budget for wrap-around services for 2,000 vulnerable residents in Toronto supportive homes. Deeply affordable rental housing with wraparound health and social support services is key to addressing the dual homelessness and overdose crises, and is the most effective, dignified and cost-effective solution to chronic homelessness. These investments result in significant cost savings for the provincial government by reducing pressure on emergency shelters, hospitals, prisons and long-term-care homes."

We also have another quote, from Guelph mayor Cam Guthrie: "Today's budget speaks directly to the homelessness, mental health and addictions issues our communities are facing. The government has listened to municipalities and stakeholders and responded by providing base funding increases to these programs and by committing \$202 million in additional funds on these issues. Budgets are about helping Ontarians, and this budget will help dearly."

I will remind the members of this House that we are doing all of this while balancing the budget three years earlier than projected. Our plan has a path to balance while growing the economy; building new infrastructure for growing communities; training the workers needed for today and tomorrow; keeping costs down, especially for the most vulnerable; providing better services, including convenient and connected health care; and protecting communities. Passing this bill is moving forward with our plan to build an Ontario the people of the province can be proud of, not only today but, critically, in the future.

1430

When our government took office in June 2018, we inherited a province with the most sub-sovereign debt in the entire world, a massive annual deficit and a huge debt

which burdened the people of Ontario, burdened economic growth, burdened future generations. That put pressure on health care, education and other social services that we so need. It is so critical that Ontario as a province be creating wealth and creating prosperity so that we have the financial resources to be able to pay the bills for these social services that we so need and so want and which make our province great.

This budget 2022-23 and going forward will be approximating \$200 billion, and yet even with increased spending in health care, in education, skills development and homelessness, we are still able to balance the budget.

It is so critical that governments spend money in the right way, spend in a way to get a return on their investment so that it will continue to generate money for the economy, create jobs, create tax revenues so that we're able to balance our budget.

As a government, we've always wanted to put the horse before the cart, unlike the previous Liberal government, which spent well beyond the means of the province of Ontario, further crippling businesses and individuals. Ontario lost many residents—the highest personal income tax rates in North America. Many business people, entrepreneurs, medical professionals left the province, burdened by high taxes and substandard services. Did the province have great hospitals, great education and great infrastructure after the years of Liberal mismanagement? No, it didn't. The money was put down a black hole and spent and spent without accountability. Our government is focused on putting the money in the right spot, which will further encourage more investment, creating the right opportunities for businesses to come and flourish in Ontario.

Manufacturing is one of the most obvious examples of an area where the previous government gave up. In fact, they were entirely focused on moving Ontario to a service economy. They thought manufacturing was something of the past: "We don't need manufacturing here in Ontario. We can focus on the service economy." Nothing could be further from the truth. After 300,000 manufacturing jobs left the province in 10 years, we are now seeing manufacturing jobs come back to Ontario, in all different sectors, including the automobile sector, which was looking very, very weak and—as the Minister of Economic Development mentioned today in question period—was a sector that we had very little investment in. In fact, in the Bloomberg survey, in terms of the automobile manufacturing capacity for electric vehicles, Canada was ranked as zero just a year and a half, two years ago; we are now number two in the world.

This is a tremendous opportunity for the people of Ontario. Whether it's St. Thomas, whether it's my community in Oakville, Oshawa, Ingersoll, Alliston, we have opportunities across this province to build very high-paid, skilled jobs which will build electric vehicles, automobiles for the future, right here in our province.

I can tell you, as a person who comes from the business world, there are a lot of different places to invest, not only in Canada and North America, but throughout the world.

Companies look at friendly environments, where they know they have access to skilled labour; where they know there's law, order and good government; where they know there's access to the actual raw materials; where there's good trade law; where there's access to borders; and where there's an environment for business to flourish with not excessive taxes, regulation burdens and high energy costs. These are what companies look for, and companies are now looking at Ontario. You can see all of that hard work reflected in the numbers in this budget; you can see it by the expected economic growth in Ontario over the next two, three, four years; you can see it by increasing revenues and increasing spending in health care and education, while at the same time balancing a budget. Some people didn't think that was possible—that we could spend more on education, health care and other social services, and at the same time balance the budget.

This is not a budget of austerity. This is a budget that is the largest budget in the history of Ontario. We are spending more on social services than we've ever seen, but we're also investing money in the right spots: in transportation, in highways, in infrastructure, in hospitals. Ontario, right now, is on a very, very good path.

Passing this bill is moving forward with our plan to build an Ontario for the people of this province that we can be proud of, not only today, but in the future. This is our plan to build an Ontario that will continue to have a resilient economy; an Ontario that has the best infrastructure in place.

Again, I want to emphasize, when we took office five years ago, we did not have the best infrastructure, the best hospitals, the best schools, the best highways, the best transit. In fact, nothing had been done in transit in any meaningful way in well over a decade.

We are investing, and we have the foresight to understand that there's not just one way to expand transportation in the province of Ontario—it's not either highways and roads or subways and GO trains; it's all of the above. We need to expand all forms of transportation.

We need an Ontario that has skilled workers for the jobs of tomorrow.

We need an Ontario that connects you to the care that you need. And we will continue in our commitment to bring in and hire more nurses and doctors, and expand educational programs, Learn and Stay grant programs, to make sure they're evenly spread throughout Ontario.

We need an Ontario that has a bright future for you, your family, and generations to come—an Ontario that is strong.

On this side of the House, here in the government benches, we are saying yes to supporting the people of Ontario today, while laying a strong fiscal foundation for future generations. We are saying yes to building an Ontario that is strong. And we welcome all members of the House to join us in supporting this bill and supporting the people of Ontario.

With that, Speaker, I'd like to end my presentation for now. The member for Bruce-Grey-Owen Sound and myself are open to questions.

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

Ms. Jennifer K. French: I'm glad to be able to ask the member a question after his presentation on this year's budget. The member from Oakville talked about the fact that the government has been listening when it comes to mental health and addictions, and so I wanted to cite a few numbers and get his response.

There were 539 confirmed opioid deaths in Ontario during the fourth quarter of 2022, with another 109 deaths likely linked to opioids. There has not been a community not affected by opioids, by the death and the trauma that's connected. My question is, why are we not seeing across the province this being declared an epidemic? Why are we not seeing that strategy that would address this, and in the budget why do we not see what is needed in terms of safe consumption sites and the investment communities are begging for? Could he tell me, please, his thoughts on that?

Mr. Stephen Crawford: To the member opposite: I agree with you that there is a mental health crisis in Ontario, and the drugs and opioids that you touched on are certainly a part of that.

In terms of what we have been doing as a government, we have made major investments, and a major step forward is the investment we've put into homelessness: \$202 million, which municipalities are absolutely thrilled about. We all know that, unfortunately, one of the side effects of drug addiction, which creates mental health problems, of course, is not being able to have a house and a roof over your head, so that is certainly one stride we are making to helping those people in need.

1440

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

Ms. Christine Hogarth: Thank you to the two members for your statements today. They were very interesting and very important, and I hope people out there were listening to what our two parliamentary assistants had to say today.

One thing that comes up often is ODSP. Over the years, no government really has done anything about the ODSP rates—you look at vulnerable citizens, and you look at people who just are really not making a lot of money.

ODSP is certainly not a job, but I'm wondering if you can elaborate on some of the work that is in this budget that touches on ODSP rates and the positive for the future.

Mr. Rick Byers: I thank the member for the question. I very much agree with her about this program, ODSP, and how important it is and, more particularly, the changes that we have made to make it a much more effective program, particularly three: number one, having increased the overall amount, which hadn't been increased in a decade or so; number two, pegging it to inflation, starting next year—that is a fundamental change to the program; instead of year-by-year arbitrary changes, we're pegging it to inflation, so when CPI is rising, that program matches; and number three, a fundamental change to the income test, raising that threshold from \$200 to \$1,000 a month—it's

such an important structural change to the program; we've heard first-hand from employers what a big change that makes.

So there are many, many important and fundamental changes to make this program better.

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

Mr. Terence Kernaghan: I'd like to thank the members from Bruce-Grey-Owen Sound and Oakville for their presentation. I had the opportunity to travel for the pre-budget consultations with both of them.

Individuals living with disabilities have long been neglected by the Ontario government—and before I hear the speaking notes about a paltry 5% increase, let's all admit that it's not enough; indexing legislated poverty is not enough.

Individuals and organizations spoke at committee about the problems with the far-from-adequate housing benefit, as well as the fact that recipients can have benefits clawed back if they live with someone.

Can you imagine, Speaker? If you fall in love and live with someone who earns more money than you, then that person has to pay for you, according to the Ontario government.

So my question: Why does Ontario still police whom ODSP recipients love and live with?

Mr. Rick Byers: I thank the member for the question.

You're right; we did hear from committee members across as we were doing our travelling in the lovely months of the winter. One thing that struck me—I think there are two points in response to your question. Again, I get back to the structural change to raise the income threshold from \$200 to \$1,000. No, that doesn't affect everybody, but for those who are impacted, it was a fundamental change. But more importantly, on the broader program, ODSP is not the only program, typically, that applies, and we have made so many other changes to the tax system for low-income seniors, for a working tax credit—on and on and on—so that these programs work together.

On the household income point, I take the member's point. That may be an area we want to look at and see whether we can adjust the program going forward.

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

Hon. Jill Dunlop: Thank you to both of my colleagues for your comments this afternoon.

To the member from Bruce-Grey-Owen Sound: I know you talked about some particular pages of the budget that you really enjoyed—obviously, for me, I have a certain section with the investments in training, specifically in the health care area.

You also mentioned Learn and Stay—we're going to be together with the Minister of Health tomorrow; tomorrow is the actual kickoff day to Learn and Stay. Can you tell me what you're hearing from students in your area, or even from the hospitals and long-term-care homes, about what it's going to mean for the Owen Sound area?

Mr. Rick Byers: I thank the minister so much for her question.

I look forward to being in Owen Sound tomorrow and talking about the importance of Georgian College and the role it's having in the community.

So many of the educational measures begin on page 93 in the budget, and for the health care—it's too many pages to mention.

What is great, I'd say, and what struck me most when the Georgian College program opened—I mentioned this in my remarks in passing—is the fact that it is attracting local students. One of the biggest challenges we've had in rural Ontario for many, many years is that people had to go away to get their education and often they didn't come back. It was then a hunt to track down these doctors, nurses and PSWs. What's great about this is that we have local students who will get educated in our community and stay in our community. It's very, very exciting.

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

Ms. Doly Begum: I want to thank the members for their presentation.

Budget 2023 is one of the biggest budgets that we've seen in decades; I agree with the members on that. However, it is still one of the cruelest budgets, that fails to reach individuals, people, families or communities. In fact, we heard from so many people who came to present and talk about how this budget will actually increase suffering for so many people. One of those groups includes those who live on reserves.

My question to the members is, why is this government failing to spend or put any money, any investment, on infrastructure on reserves for services like clean drinking water?

Mr. Rick Byers: I thank the member for the question.

I'll start with the overall comprehensiveness of the infrastructure spending. As I mentioned in my remarks, sector by sector, it's a major, major investment, and not only in the near term but in the long term, because this kind of commitment anchors a government's thinking for many budgets to come. And that's the perspective I very much like.

I acknowledge the point that the member is making about investments on-reserve.

I think the other thing that I like about how this funding is designed is that we will be listening to communities in the future and sectors in the future to identify their priorities and look forward to dealing with them. So, hopefully, that addresses the member's comment at some point in time.

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

Mr. Matthew Rae: Thank you to my two colleagues for their remarks on the budget. In my opinion, it's a great budget for our province.

I know my friend from Bruce-Grey-Owen Sound has been answering a lot of questions, but I was wondering if my friend could talk about the important investments that we're making in skilled trades, especially around Bruce nuclear, which employs a lot of people in my own riding, as well.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Bhutla Karpoche): A quick response.

Mr. Rick Byers: A quick response? Well, it's a quick and great answer.

The programs and the impact we're seeing in the community is absolutely extraordinary. Bruce Power management made the—

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Bhutla Karpoche): I'm sorry. Thank you very much.

Further debate?

Ms. Catherine Fife: It's a pleasure to join all of you on this beautiful Monday afternoon to discuss Bill 85. I was trying to think of a different angle today, just for my own amusement, mostly. But I wanted to address the revenue that's coming into the province—so I'm going to save at least 10 or 15 minutes, on where the revenue is coming from and where it's not coming from and what's happening with it.

You will know from our first hour on this speech that we found this budget to be an opportunity that was missed by the government. And it is so astounding to me, still, even after 11 years here, how we see the province so differently—perhaps it's the people we're listening to; perhaps it's our communities and what kind of engagement we have with the people in those communities. Certainly, you could tell by the cross-section of questions that we asked today in question period that we have serious concerns around where health care is going, how this province is planning and overriding the planning of our municipal partners.

For us in Kitchener-Waterloo, it's not necessarily a new issue, but certainly a growing concern is the lack of resources for those who've experienced sexual assault and sexual violence. To have a wait-list at the Sexual Assault Support Centre in Kitchener-Waterloo of 240 people, primarily young women, is devastating.

There is an impact from picking and choosing where you're going to be investing, or who has your ear, or who's in that backroom or who's coming to your events, and who you actually, as government members, are listening to.

1450

I can tell you that we share some of the concerns that were raised by the Toronto Star editorial board when they described this budget, Bill 85, as a “complacent mishmash. But if it was uninspired and unimaginative, it was also largely unmemorable.” I think the tone of the editorial here is that it indicated that this government is being safe, that you are parking money in places where—I'm going to actually address—the money is not getting there, which is a transparency and accountability issue which we share with the Financial Accountability Officer.

Also, this is a government that—you have three full years ahead of you. There was a time and a place to be bold. Cost-of-living pressures are being experienced by everybody we serve, from the not-for-profit sector to the education sector to the health care sector, and we heard this loud and clear through our deputations. This finance committee travelled—we spent a lot of time together—and

we heard the same thing, but what we heard wasn't translated into action in this budget.

I think it's also important to recognize that when the government says, "We are going to balance the budget in two or three years"—that that's even foreseeable is because of inflation; it's because goods and services are costing Ontarians so much money, because we're not doing anything as a province to address the price gouging that is happening, particularly in the food and grocery sector. Those revenues are coming into this place, and there is a moral, ethical responsibility to pass on some of those savings to the people we serve, to acknowledge that they're hurting. That is the approach that we would take. It is very, very different from the approach of this government. We see those upstream investments saving money for the province—being more compassionate to the people we serve and, actually, assisting in the long term of people finding their potential, which is what we should all want for every Ontarian in this service.

The Star article went on to say that our leader of His Majesty's official opposition said that this budget fails to meet the moment, and we definitely feel that.

I do want to say, though, that we did try to make it a better budget at committee. Myself and my colleagues introduced several amendments to make this budget more reflective of what we actually heard when we were travelling around the province, and I'm going to get to some of those in a second. The quote that obviously sticks with us—and several of my colleagues have also raised it: "If this budget were a Christmas present, it would be a three-pack of white socks. Not entirely useless. But an exercise in going through the motions." So I hope that this is not setting the tone for the remainder of this term.

The editorial went on to say, "Overall, there was clanging dissonance between the budget's palpable self-satisfaction and the economic anxiety, rising interest rates, soaring prices, health care concerns that have hit Ontario residents hard."

That's exactly what we heard.

I just want to confirm: We heard from the not-for-profit sector that they're having a very difficult time keeping staff because of inflationary costs, because their budgets have flatlined and you can't stretch those dollars any more. We heard from health care professionals, both front-line nurses and doctors, that recruiting into this broken system is difficult.

So, yes, absolutely, focus on attracting new people into the health care sector, but also retain the people who are experienced and went through the storm of this pandemic. We all call them heroes. Why not actually respect them? Thoughts and prayers do not pay the bills.

When the Ontario Medical Association came before us—and the Ontario college of physicians—they said, "We want to spend more time with our patients. These are the solutions. These solutions cost a little bit of money, but they save the system down the line." So there were opportunities, wide-open doors—the barn door was fully open—on this budget really being more than a pack of

three tube socks. This could have been a turning point for so many people in this province.

If you believe that budgets are moral documents, that they speak to the priorities of the government, then the government is intentionally, knowingly leaving so many people behind.

What I said to the finance minister when he came to the committee was, "I don't understand. You have the money." The money is there. There's actually an unallocated surplus now in the province of Ontario of \$2.9 billion. The funds are there to do the work, but the choice was made somewhere along the lines not to do that work.

We now have a planned contingency fund of \$4 billion, separate from a surplus, and the reason why the contingency fund is concerning—and I believe very strongly that in a Westminster democracy, budgets are supposed to be approved by the Legislature in full. But with the government's habit of hoarding cash in massive contingency funds and making radical in-year changes to the spending plan, we increasingly, as lawmakers, cannot trust that the budget presented will be what the government actually spends, and the lack of transparency is bad for our democracy.

I have seen from this Premier a complete disregard and even disdain for our democracy. I've never seen this before. There are rules that this Premier randomly reveals in press conferences. Friday's press conference felt like a bit of an SCTV act, actually. There was policy flying all over the place, laws being run over—really just a very disconcerting randomness to the answers that the Premier was giving. Regardless of the constitutional responsibilities that we have as legislators, the Premier is not concerned with the Constitution. He's not concerned with the charter. He's not concerned with these human rights. He's not concerned with the law of the land. And this does not inspire confidence in our democracy—but also confidence in our economy and how these deals are being negotiated, how they're being met, how they're paying for them. There are some contractual agreements around here that are a little dicey, I have to say.

If you have nothing to hide, then please reveal the mandate letters that you've been fighting in court for your five full years. It has gone to court now four times, and the government has lost four times. These mandate letters need to be revealed to the people of this province because—and I'll get into where the money is going—there is a creeping privatization into the government of Ontario, and the money is not going to where it should be. And one only has to look at the gambling file in Ontario to actually use that as a full example. I will get into that.

The FAO had some words to say to the finance minister. We were on The Agenda, the Steve Paikin show, and he said we have this expenditure monitor, so we can actually track where the funding is going and where the funding is not going, and it's there for all of us to use. I will say, in his last report—and it really was his last report, because the FAO, Peter Weltman, is no longer in office. His last day of work was not last Friday but the Friday before. Apparently, based on the interview that he did with

Colin D'Mello, there was very little notice from the government; there was not a "Here's your hat; there's the door." He didn't even get that.

So this government really is a little shy around the transparency and accountability piece. They don't like to be called out when the expenditure monitor from the office of the FAO actually documents where the money is going and where the money is not going.

1500

Certainly, we were very concerned last quarter when \$6.4 billion didn't get to where it was supposed to go. This does call into question the legitimacy of the budget. The government can announce that they're going to release \$1.1 billion to community services, as they did around nine months ago to huge fanfare, really. Speaker, \$1.1 billion is a good chunk of change, and we all have community agencies in our ridings that require that funding. But when we learned through the expenditure monitor that only \$300 million got out the door into our communities, this, obviously, is concerning, and it should be concerning for everybody, especially people who are fiscally conservative. This was a moniker of the government: "We want to make sure that the money is being spent appropriately and going to the right places." Well, we now have a growing body of evidence that that is not happening. So you can't call us out for questioning this practice, because where the money is going, where the investments are going absolutely matters.

COVID-19—this was an additional part of the budget that I think is really concerning. I do want to thank our health critic for raising the issue of long COVID. COVID is serious. It's still here. People are still suffering. And the hospitals that have been cobbling together some kind of a support system, gathering research, gathering best practices, have notified the government and this Minister of Health that they don't have the funds to string these dollars along to provide that support. So if you know somebody who has long COVID, if you've seen how unproductive and debilitating long COVID can be, have a plan for it; have a strategy; have the Minister of Health stand in her place and say, "This is what we are going to do for long COVID." That has not happened. Apparently, everything is fine on that side of the House.

The other lack of transparency which is really concerning to us—because health care and housing definitely dominated in this whole process. Even when the government says, "We're going to make municipalities whole after Bill 23," the Minister of Municipal Affairs stood in his place, after really taking these municipalities by surprise by overriding many of their growth plans—years and years of planning and consultation around environmentally responsible housing, intensification within those boundaries—and this minister decided, "You know what? We're going to overrule, and we're going to reduce the development charges that municipalities can access through developers." Because this has been a long-standing relationship between municipalities and those who build houses—because it's all primarily private sector—that those development charges help with the

infrastructure costs. Those infrastructure costs matter, because they actually provide the opportunity to build the houses: the stormwater, the wastewater, the green space, the schools, the libraries, the roads. I mean, it's kind of important.

So when the Minister of Municipal Affairs said, "You know what? Don't worry, don't worry. We still value you and we'll make you whole"—in the budget, many municipalities, AMO in particular, were looking at making up for that funding gap. And for good reason, because their only other recourse is to raise taxes. So this amounted to downloading this responsibility to municipalities, who need the money. We actually did see a major jump in taxation—property taxes—across this province. Some municipalities were able to hold it to three or four, but in Waterloo region, it was at 8.9, because we're a growing area and we need that infrastructure.

But when you follow the money, even more importantly, I would have to say—through estimates, our critic found this out—there's actually a 25% Streamline Development Approval Fund for municipalities and there is a 70% Municipal Modernization Program, which is a reduction, which is a cut. So the Minister of Municipal Affairs says that he values municipalities, but when you follow where the money is going, he's actually cutting the resources, one, to prove that the assets exist, because there's a very patriarchal relationship in this House, with the Premier and with the minister and how they view municipalities—which is surprising, given the fact that they were both municipal councillors. And what the Premier said last week is that they just like to spend and spend and spend. Municipalities have the most accountability at any level, more so than federal, provincial. Local municipalities are held to a totally different level of account. So this discourse that the minister has and the Premier has with municipalities is not helpful to building new housing or even renovating new housing. So that's where we are with that. There is a genuine growing distrust, and when you have that lack of trust, this undermines even good initiatives that the government may have.

When I was pressed to say what is good in this budget, I had to go through it a few times. The \$202 million for affordable housing is a good investment. It's a good step in the right direction. But when you look where that money is going, who's getting the money and how little it actually adds to the value of housing initiatives in local organizations—I'm thinking of the city of Ottawa, whose top-up, based on this \$202 million, is only \$845,000. Our members from the Ottawa area said, "Listen, two houses"—this is not bold or ambitious housing development, not at all. There are some great inconsistencies, huge inconsistencies, between the language that the government is using about how great this budget is, and then the actual reality of what is happening in Ontario, the lived experience of Ontarians.

Thank goodness we have the Auditor General's office as well. Who knows what's going to happen with the FAO. This is a valuable part of our democracy. I'm hoping that this government will follow through and make sure that

we go through the hiring process, but the Auditor General is also up for review, and I want to thank Bonnie Lysyk for the work that she's done, particularly in the last report that came out. Her work on public-private relationships has been groundbreaking for Ontario and, really, Canada.

This is what she said around the Ontario Lottery and Gaming Corp. and the entire gambling sector. She was particularly critical of the process that was used to select private casino operators for eight gaming regions within Ontario, resulting in 20-year contracts for the winning bidders. But among the criticisms were the facts that contracts were rewarded based on unrealistic financial projections, that the amount of capital investment included in the bid wasn't included in the evaluation criteria, and that the capital investment which was included in the bids wasn't included as a commitment in the final contract even when it was used to support revenue projections.

This is the important part: These contracts—because contract law used to be actually a thing in Ontario. These errors in the process have resulted in three of the eight regions needing to renegotiate what was supposed to be guaranteed revenue commitments and other missed opportunities for economic development, with direct losses to the province projected at billions of dollars over the length of the contracts.

So to say that the gambling file in Ontario is going well would be a huge stretch; it is messy right now, even with the regulator for gambling in Ontario going into the gambling business with iGaming. It's unheard of.

She goes on to say, “Based on updated revenue projections for the eight gaming regions”—and this was as of March 2022—“total casino gaming revenue projections for the first 10 years of operations were reduced by \$9.1 billion....”

Now, I'm not a gambler. I'm too Scottish, perhaps, to be gambling. I work very hard, and I don't like losing money, and I have some charities that I'm very dedicated to, so I'm not a gambler, but gambling is here. The province of Ontario used to have this philosophy that if gambling is here, if people are going to gamble, then let's make sure it is done in a safe manner, it is regulated, and that the funding that comes into the province goes to our schools, it goes to our hospitals, it goes to agencies that are actually doing really good work and protecting people—sometimes against themselves, because gambling is also very addictive.

1510

The OLG's share of these projected revenues was reduced by \$3.3 billion—I'm sure the Minister of Education could use that money for education—reducing the projected net profit to the province by \$320 million annually on average for 2024. So we are losing money. The government is gambling and the government is losing, and it seems intentional because this is actually by design, Madam Speaker. I'd like to know who got the contract to design such a terrible system.

But you know who else it's hurting? It's hurting Indigenous communities and nations. This is actually a growing theme here at Queen's Park, when the government doesn't take into account their responsibilities to negotiate in good faith with First Nations. This is from a

recent article: “A First Nation community says they plan to challenge the Ford government's decision to move ahead with online gambling, claiming it violates a constitutional right to consultation with Indigenous leaders.

“The Mississaugas of Scugog Island First Nation ... calls the Ontario government's iGaming plans ‘deeply flawed’ and a move that will financially devastate their economy while setting back decades of community development efforts.”

It goes on to say that “most internet gambling by Ontarians currently takes place on websites not managed by the province, the new legal market will ensure integrity, fairness and player protections.” This is actually kind of comical right now.

“Kelly LaRocca, chief of MSIFN, called the announcement a ‘slap in the face of First Nations, and reduces their promises of reconciliation to a joke.’

“The First Nation says the provincial government has ignored section 35 of Canada's Constitution, claiming the Ford government utterly failed to hold formal consultations with Indigenous governments—a violation of its duty to consult and accommodate impacted Indigenous groups.”

This is another quote from the chief: ““The Ford government has recklessly ignored our concerns and has not offered any strategies to address the impact that their inadequate plan will have on our First Nation, our culture and our ability to provide services to our community.... We intend to challenge the province's iGaming scheme in court.”

And that seems like this is now the practice of this government, right? You know what the law is—the Premier, I assume, knows what the laws are. He may not have a respectful relationship, or even an understanding, that these dealings should be nation to nation. They should happen prior to announcements; they should happen prior to plans being rolled out to economies being interfered with. But he also seems very content to go to court. I've said this before in this House: The lawyers are doing very well in Ontario. This government has kept them very, very busy. I've even had to file an FOI to try to find out how many court cases this government has already engaged in. It's easy to keep track of the ones you've lost because it's actually almost all of them.

This is everything from stickers on gas tanks to—what's another one? There are so many of them it's hard to choose.

Mr. Terence Kernaghan: Oh, gosh. Bill 124, again.

Ms. Catherine Fife: Bill 124: so Bill 124—this is exciting. I think there are 34 more days until this government loses in court again on Bill 124. I will want to say, the fact that you already lost Bill 124 and then you're using more tax dollars to fight it is really—you know, there are some truly Progressive Conservative people who are not very happy with this. In fact, a lot of them do live in K-W and they have very strong opinions on it. But when you lose in court again on Bill 124, you will have to make up for lost time, for lost wages and the impact this has had on workers. Certainly, this is what we heard going community to community across this province.

But just to finish off with OLG, because I'm really just starting on OLG: The Internet gaming revenue grew by \$139 million and \$511 million in 2021-22. That's a growth of 70% per quarter. There are so many people gambling in Ontario today, including when those hockey stars or those football stars start saying, "Get out there and gamble"—it really is such a dangerous precedent. We would never have these professional sports stars advocating for smoking or more drinking—actually, the drinking does happen, but the smoking doesn't happen anymore. But the gambling in this province right now is certainly out of control, and the government has even undermined its own initial goal of generating some revenue around addictions and around supports for those who are addicted to gambling.

Meanwhile, private competitors saw growth of 65%, so introducing private competitors has cannibalized the OLG's growth. What kind of smart business person creates a competitiveness, a competitor, to compete against themselves to generate revenue? It has gone according to plan. I'm totally in agreement with Chief LaRocca: If you had consulted with First Nations, who have a lot of experience in this sector, you would have found that there are many barriers, many loopholes and certainly a lot of risk that the province has taken on, and you didn't have to. You didn't have to do this. But for us, it has also encouraged less responsible practices, providing a far smaller share of its revenue for the province. That's less money for schools, less money for hospitals, less money for child care—the things that we should be actually investing in.

I do want to say that it does appear that colonialism is alive and well in 2023, with the government saying, "Do you know what? We know best," and the House leader and the minister responsible for mining saying, "Get out of the way if you're not with us." The only place that this government is going on these constitutional challenges is court. The law still matters in Ontario, as does the Constitution and as does the charter. Ironically, especially—we saw a real lack of respect, I think, this morning on the mining question—really disappointing.

However, what the government does not acknowledge and what our critic has made very clear is that we should have learned from the past. Some of us remember Ipperwash. Some of us listen when Indigenous leaders and nations say to us, "This is our land. By law, you need our permission, our informed consent, to come onto this land," and it is not helpful when this Premier says, "I'm going to get on my bulldozer and just go up there, and it's going to happen regardless." It's irresponsible.

Actually, this is one of the major findings from the Ipperwash review, that it could have completely been avoided if there was respect—even a little bit of respect, Madam Speaker. So the Ring of Fire will be a ring of smoke, because this government is going to be in court. If you really care about mining, if you care about northern jobs, if you care about northern infrastructure, then don't spend your time in court.

And so it does feel a little bit like déjà vu. Certainly in one of my first elections, we talked a lot about Dudley George over the course of that election, and I'm genuinely

sad about this: We are going to be talking about these conflicts when the conflicts were completely avoidable if respect was on the table and if the law was followed. That would be a win-win-win for northern communities, for mining and for Indigenous communities, as well. This budget certainly reflects poorly on that.

The other thing that I did get to ask the finance minister in committee was about Ontario Place. Ontario Place also feels a bit like déjà vu in many respects. It does feel like the 407. The people of this province are in a 99-year lease for the 407. We paid for it, we built it, and we keep paying and paying over and over again. I will say that this 95-year lease for Ontario Place feels very similar to that.

1520

The finance minister is a successful businessman, by all accounts, but I asked him some basic questions about this lease, because smart business people don't sign 95-year leases. They also don't sign 99-year leases. They also don't sell off good portions of—because this is a de facto sale. A 95-year lease is a de facto sale, right? We're not going to see what happens in 95 years, but it is about legacy, because we should be setting the tone from an environmental perspective, from an inclusion perspective, from an accessibility perspective for Ontario Place.

The entire narrative that the Minister of Infrastructure has created is that Ontario Place is not used and it's falling apart and it's a write-off. That is not true of Ontario Place. For those of us who go there and use it and spend time there, it's a treasure.

Just to recap here, we did hear in 2021 that the government announced their friends at Therme were building an elite luxury spa on public parkland. I just want to tell you, there's no huge call to our offices for huge public spas. People want food prices to be controlled. They don't want to get evicted. They're looking for child care. Their special-needs children—they want them included and accommodated in the public education system. These are what people are asking for. No one is calling MPPs and saying, "We want a spa." It is just not happening.

You cut to March of this year; a city report shows a long list of problems with this plan. The spa is too big. The \$450-million taxpayer-funded parking garage—or \$350 million; it goes back and forth—violates even this government's own policies.

The Minister of Infrastructure pressed on, and they told us that they signed a standard commercial lease for the spa that just happened to be for 95 years but—not so standard—that it must be kept secret. There's no business case for a 95-year lease. Let's be really clear about that. That is the seed of distrust. There's no reason for this government to sign on to a 95-year lease—none at all. Ontarians already feel cheated on the 407, and this was the last time you signed a 99-year lease. So to draw parallels is very natural for so many of us. The lease is obviously not a standard commercial lease because if it was, then they could share it with us.

And then there are a number of issues around the transparency of this lease that I really do want to get onto the record. First of all, what we don't know about this 95-year

secret lease: Is the Therme parent company or a locally incorporated, ring-fence subsidiary—who's financing this? Who has designed this lease? Is the guarantor Therme Austria, Therme's bank or Republic of Austria? These are good questions. People want to know. Is there a break-free clause? Could we get out of this? Because that was the point I was pressuring the finance minister on in committee.

The improvement for the site—and this is interesting: the \$350 million for 65,000 square feet. Now you do the math on this. It's \$5,400 per square foot for this parking garage versus, as a comparator, \$1,000 per square foot for medical buildings and \$1,200 for theatres.

What is the actual goal here? Is this a spa or a water park?

The parking garage: Is this even practical to build 2,000 spaces under Lake Ontario? Is that going to last? Is that doable? Is that a good investment to build all these parking spots close to or under the water?

The rental payments: They're level for 95 years or they're adjusted, either by CPI or predetermined adjustments. Is this tied to inflation? Is this a fixed amount?

These are damn good questions, I have to say. I would ask these questions when I was in business. I would look at a lease very carefully. I would say, "What is the intent here?"

I think the biggest question that people have about Ontario Place these days is, "What is the intended purpose?" What is the real goal here? Because if you don't have trust, then you have incredible questions like, "Will this end up as a casino or a nightclub?" Because I don't think the average life term of a spa is 95 years, and if it is, I don't want to go to it. So these are some of the questions.

I put these questions to the finance minister, and he said "Well, call the Minister of Infrastructure to committee." And so I moved a motion in public, and I said, "Listen, I do want to invite the Minister of Infrastructure." She seems very keen on the plan. She's very enthusiastic. If she's really that proud of it, come to committee and show us the money, show us the numbers for sure, because there are lots of outstanding questions.

And if you look at the value of what this province has lost even with the 407, if you're doing a comparator, okay: The government has signed the secret lease for 95 years with Therme. We don't know who has written it, who is financing it—the financing of this is going to be very interesting—but we do know from past experience that in 1999 the Conservative government handed over a 99-year lease for Highway 407 for \$3.1 billion. That's about \$4.4 billion in today's dollars. What is the 407 worth today? Really, it is worth \$40 billion, nearly a 1,200% increase in just 24 years. Do you think that the previous Conservative government sold off this highway in our best interest? Absolutely not. Was that ever the intent? Absolutely not. As I recall, this was to try to clear the way to get rid of the operational deficit. And what are we doing? We are paying so much money. If anybody was paying attention to what people are experiencing in Ontario, it is a true cost-of-living crisis. There's so much pressure on people in this

province. So we called on the government to release the lease. They've not yet chosen to do that.

Okay. For some reason, it's going really fast.

I want to talk about autism, because autism was not mentioned in this budget. And this also led, I believe, to the minister resigning. I'm happy to hear that she is healthy and that she has moved on, but I have to say that it was a very sudden resignation. Merrilee Fullerton took a lot of heat on the long-term-care file. I do believe one of the stories that was shared about this particular minister, when she was with long-term care: that she did go to cabinet and she asked for money. And I do believe that looking at this budget on budget day and not seeing autism mentioned once would be a tipping point—not to speculate too much. I'm glad that she's healthy and spending more time with her family, but I'm really, really concerned about the autism file.

In addition to introducing these amendments to try to make the bill stronger, which is our responsibility to do—we take that duty and responsibility very seriously. The autism file—to say it's a mess doesn't even do it justice, really. Given the increasing wait-list to access core clinical services, providing interim funding to everyone on the wait-list would be a way to provide immediate relief and support to families. We've made some recommendations in consultation with our critic on this file. We want the government to make interim funding available to everyone on the wait-list. That should happen right now, because the wait-list is huge.

We want the government to address the structural administrative model of the OAP. This is something that the government can do. I like the minister who is responsible for this file. I wish him well. I wish this minister strength and courage. When he first got the file, I said, "This ministry and these responsibilities have left more experienced ministers looking for the door."

The third thing is to re-evaluate the determination-of-needs process. This letter that I sent to Minister Parsa back on May 9 was really a reach across the aisle: "Let's figure this out." But the fact that the budget did not address this backlog—this obviously was an intentional decision that the government made. I can't see why you thought that was the ethical or responsible model.

1530

This is what Bruce McIntosh, who came to committee, said to us—and this is exactly from Hansard: "The calls that the parents get—and I see this daily ... make them think that something is actually happening." Actually, this is validated by our critic, because she explained this to the minister before the minister moved on.

This is what parents do: "They open up an account on a server to get correspondence back and forth with the new program, and then they wait for that invitation to services. That wait ... is years long. The government stopped publishing the number of registered children in December. At that point, it was 60,411" children. "Four months later, I suspect it's approaching 65,000 and they missed their target at the end of the year to bring kids into the program. You know, the kids that they do bring into the program are

faced with more waiting and the kids that they fail to bring into the program to meet their targets are—you guessed it—faced with more waiting.

“This program needs to be made more efficient. The bureaucrats have to get out of the way of the clinicians. The red tape and delay in reconciling a group of—we had a mom whose entire submission of invoices was rejected because she uses a post office box for correspondence and as a billing address”—can you imagine how broken the system is, that because a mom uses a post office box, she was denied the funding? This is all in Hansard—“and the people at the ministry took issue with the fact that she was apparently presenting herself as living at the post office”—well, there is a housing crisis, but I want to say that people do not live at the post office; it’s ridiculous—“seriously. They sent it back to her. It added another three weeks to getting a new block of funding. This is just one in 100,000 of these sorts of incidents.

“This government has a minister for red tape reduction”—this is his recommendation, and I actually love it—“for heaven’s sake, what is that fellow doing?” That would be a wonderful amendment. So we’re going to introduce an amendment, because there’s a common sense solution: Let’s put the minister of red tape in charge of the autism file, and make sure that those bureaucrats actually are streamlining those services.

Miss Monique Taylor: I’ll support that.

Ms. Catherine Fife: Yes.

In essence, everyone who is connected in any way, shape or form to the autism file believes that this is an unethical process that has been set up. It’s hurting families, and it’s actually causing financial ruin for so many people.

We can do better. This budget could be better. We tried to make it better. One day—I don’t know—I’d like to introduce one, because let me tell you, it would be focused on people. That’s where our focus is.

The education folks also came to finance committee as we were trying to review Bill 85.

This is what OSSTF said:

“In its current format, Ontario’s 2023 budget falls short of what is needed to ensure all students are set up to succeed. Neither the budget nor the 2023-24 Grants for Student Needs will cover increased inflationary increases on costs in a wide variety of budget lines, let alone the rising, complex needs of students following the COVID-19 pandemic.

“It’s time for true investments. It’s time the Ford government stop shortchanging the students of this province.

“As the representative of over 60,000 front-line education workers and teachers, we hope the government will finally begin working with us in earnest so our schools can have the necessary resources and support that our students need to succeed.”

This is consistent from all education advocates, actually.

I have to say, the pandemic did leave many school boards shortchanged.

I did ask my local school board if the Waterloo Region District School Board had to use reserves to cover COVID

costs over the last two years; the answer was unequivocally yes. They incurred \$5.7 million in unfunded COVID expenses, and total COVID expenses were \$27.7 million—\$22 million of that was funded by the ministry, so there was a gap around addressing COVID in our schools. That gap has not gone anywhere. It is very real.

Finally, on the social services piece, which this budget misses entirely, is the privatized foster care that this province has. Many people don’t really understand this: When children come into the care system—the previous Liberal government decided that they would outsource that care. This used to happen through family and children’s services. These agencies—and one of them the member from Windsor West has brought to the floor of this Legislature; it’s called Hatts Off. We had a delegation come, through the OFL, who talked about what these kids are experiencing in these settings where care is not prioritized. The care component is not the first item. The first item is “How much money can we make off of these kids?” There’s a per diem, and there’s a funding formula. But do you know who doesn’t get picked up by these agencies? It’s the most complex, high-needs children, because they cost too much money, and that digs into the profit margins of these organizations like Hatts Off. This is happening in Ontario. It has been happening since the Liberals privatized it. This government has had several cases now where we’ve seen the death of children in these private care options. They’ve died from neglect. It needs to be said that these are children who have already experienced trauma, and then they get sent to a place that is not caring, that sometimes overmedicates and sometimes uses restraining orders to a degree that is not based on facts, on the best interest. So this was an opportunity for this government to address that, especially because we did have family and children’s services here lobbying us at Queen’s Park not that long ago. Because these private care companies don’t want to take care of medically complex children, they’ve had to start their own homes at their own cost. So family and children’s services are actually running deficits because they don’t have the funding, because the government hasn’t acknowledged that this is a big issue.

Finally, I want to wind up a little bit with the housing, because I cannot emphasize enough how Bill 23 is cooling the market in Ontario. In Waterloo, for instance, there was a subdivision planned of about 800 homes, but when you factored in the loss of development charges, city council did the responsible thing and said, “We don’t have the money for the infrastructure.” You can’t build homes without waste water, without water, without roads. The fact that the minister has not made these municipalities whole, not addressed this gap from a planning perspective, is downright irresponsible; it’s irresponsible when municipalities want to build the houses. In fact, there are so many municipalities that have already made approvals for housing, but the housing isn’t getting built. The minister has, in his tool box, a way to hold those developers to account. If developers are receiving the approvals to build

houses and then they're sitting on those approvals for 20 years, that's not how you accelerate the building of homes.

The intensification is something that we are completely and utterly supportive of. It is ridiculous that we get this NIMBYism back. This is exactly where we want the housing. We want the housing to be built where the infrastructure is, but it's not going to happen if the municipalities don't have the funding to actually upgrade and modernize the infrastructure. I think for Waterloo region, it kind of feels a little bit like ground zero. The region of Waterloo has done an extensive job of highlighting within the urban boundary where we can build housing, and this includes the missing middle housing. This is the housing that is accessible, that is close to transit, that is in the core. This is what needs to happen.

1540

I was really pleased to see that last week the city of Toronto passed a motion to end exclusionary zoning, essentially. They're going to build housing wherever, whenever they possibly can, within the urban boundary.

So this narrative the government has created that we must build on the greenbelt; that the greenbelt, according to the Premier, is just a piece of fiction, that somebody took a crayon and developed the greenbelt—the studies, the scientists, the communities, the ministry that was involved in developing the greenbelt, they must be watching this Premier. As I said, it was a bizarre press conference last week. There was singing. There was some dancing. No bees were harmed in that particular press conference.

I do want to say the greenbelt is real. The ecosystem is real. The wetlands are real. The farmland is real. We need that greenbelt. In fact, there is a call to action from every community across this great province, because people are not buying what this government is selling. They don't like the narrative that the greenbelt is some form of fiction. There's a cost to the entire province when people are so irresponsible with their language and with their words.

The Premier did come to KW. We're going to have a by-election there, so there's a lot of interest in KW these days. I think that the response, by and large, from the community is that they are very concerned with this Premier and with this minister and with this government unilaterally rewriting the local official plan, moving urban boundaries, violating the countryside line to open previously protected lands to development. At that particular occasion, the Premier said that this was a no-brainer. I would agree that brains were not used in this decision. The people of Ontario and the people of Waterloo region feel insulted that this is happening. They feel insulted that the government is also, for some reason, gaslighting new immigrants.

We're totally receptive to new immigrants in Ontario, from the skilled trades to all sectors. But when those new immigrants are coming into this province, they are not likely moving to a McMansion up in the greenbelt. New immigrants have said to us—we've sat down with several groups that said, "We want to be close to transit. We want to be close to schools. We want to be close to hospitals."

This social infrastructure matters to new immigrants. Certainly, the employment piece is very key, as well.

The other thing that seems to be completely missing from this budget, especially around conservation—the damage to our conservation authorities will be hard. It keeps me up at night a little bit, actually, because I keep thinking about the damage that is happening and how we're going to have to undo that damage—because you can't transport a wetland. That's not really how it works. Once it's gone, it's gone.

Waterloo region relies heavily on an aquifer. We rely on source water protection, and that is built into our regional plan. Now the government has said, "We don't need that plan. It's just an arbitrary line around our area"—it's not; it's based on where the aquifer is and where we have access to clean drinking water.

Do you know what's bad for the economy and what's bad for business, Madam Speaker? When a whole community loses their source of water. That's pretty much it. That's pretty much done. It doesn't matter where you build the houses. We've had examples of this in this province. We should have learned from Walkerton. There are so many examples of people saying, "We have lots of water"—water is life, as MPP Mamakwa always says—but there were no hydrological studies done.

So this budget has its own agenda. That's where I would take it.

What missed opportunities—just to circle back to the whole theme that this was a budget that missed the moment, that failed to listen to the very people who came to us in good faith.

And this is another thing: Why have budget consultations if you're going to ignore the lived experience, the expertise, the data that we heard on this budget round?

The Alzheimer Society, when they came to us—and the statement today around the tsunami on dementia and Alzheimer's. That is real. When the Alzheimer Society came to us and said, "You promised us in 2021-22 that you would invest \$5 million, but that money never flowed"—they came again to finance committee and said, "It's 2023; it's never the wrong time to do the right thing." So really, really hoping—and we'll be tracking it, of course, through expenditures and the monitoring of that. But we heard in finance committee that if this government does not take aggressive action and invest in the solutions that exist on dementia, every hospital up and down University Avenue, just to the south of this building, will be filled with dementia patients.

The smart thing is to partner with the Alzheimer Society of Ontario. They have great community connections. They are doing amazing work with very little money. Think of the potential that they could do if you actually invested the money that you said you were going to invest.

The other thing is for hospice—I met with Hospice Waterloo. Hospice Ontario came here from Ottawa and they said, "We need you to fund 100% of our clinical services." I didn't know that hospices were not fully funded for clinical services. They have to fundraise for basic medical health care, because palliative care is health care. And then they're still fundraising for operational

costs. We actually had a hospice that went to a food bank—a food bank. The research is really clear: Hospices provide a very important role in the health care system. They keep people out of emergency rooms. They provide a compassionate end of life for folks. Nobody wants to die in a hallway in a hospital, and if there's not an option for a home arrangement, hospices are very special places, I just want to say.

Finally, I want to end on community support services. In what world is a 40% reduction to community social services acceptable? These community support services are Meals on Wheels—Meals on Wheels provide eyes on seniors and on vulnerable Ontarians. We know from the pandemic that isolation kills, and it's a painful, painful way to die. Being lonely—we can do so much better in Ontario. The 40% reduction is really quite cruel.

So despite our best efforts to make this budget more responsive on rent, on the environment, on housing, on health care, on mental health and addictions—we really fought hard at committee and even through conversations during committee, but this is not a budget that can be supported by us. There may be some good things in this budget, but overall, it does not address, from a moral perspective, from an ethical perspective, the needs that we heard very clearly from Ontarians, and we feel that this government could do so much better.

Thank you very much for your time.

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

Mr. Matthew Rae: Thank you to my colleague from Waterloo for her remarks on the budget. I know she spoke a lot about housing. I find it kind of perplexing. As the minister mentioned this morning in question period: over 27,000 new housing starts in 2023 and a 16% increase from last year, which was a historic year, as well, Speaker, so it looks really promising for 2023 so far. And she mentioned the Homelessness Prevention Program allocations. Our government made some changes around that. It was a new funding allocation model which was based on the Auditor General's report from 2021, the value-for-money audit. The member for Waterloo mentioned the Auditor General many times.

Does the member for Waterloo support the Auditor General and her recommendations around that funding formula?

Ms. Catherine Fife: You know, it's always interesting to hear the government get up. The housing starts are approved housing that has not yet been built, so it's a clear distinction. Also, this government also never talks about what is affordable and obtainable. If the government is so committed to building more expensive housing, then you're not addressing the problem. This is why the government does need to invest directly and partner with the not-for-profit sector, which we heard loud and clear at finance committee.

1550

The housing crisis is not going to get any better. It's going to accelerate, because the housing options are unattainable and unaffordable and there are no supports for renters who are facing record evictions in Ontario right

now. So I'm not confused that he's confused; I'm confused that this government continues to follow down the same path and fail people in this province.

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

Mr. Terence Kernaghan: I'd like to thank the member for Waterloo for her comments. Listening to her comments as a whole, they were insightful, they were incisive. But I would say that it's doing this budget a kindness to call it as exciting as a three-pack of socks. It's disturbing because we see a deliberate and calculated way that this has ignored the issues that are facing Ontarians after the many deputations we heard at the pre-budget consultations. We see that the gravy train of this Conservative government is going full steam ahead, whether it's bad business decisions through the privatization of the 407, the Ontario Place lease, online gambling, the greenbelt, all of the legal losses, Bill 124. My question, though, to the member is, I wonder if they could speak about the agency nurses, yet another example of privatization that this government seems in favour of.

Ms. Catherine Fife: Thanks to my colleague for the question. He travelled with us for budget, and so we heard first-hand the damage the use of agency nurses is doing on the morale of nurses. But this is actually a quote: “It's Going to Bankrupt Health Care”: Spending on Temp Agency Nurses Up More Than 550% Since Pre-Pandemic at One Toronto Hospital Network.

“As Ontario hospitals grapple with a staffing crisis, critics warn the rising reliance of temp agencies is not financially sustainable.” It is not financially sustainable. Having a hospital nurse make a certain amount of money and then having a temp agency nurse come and work right beside her at three times the cost is demoralizing. One nurse told us it's humiliating. One nurse also says it is, from a health care practice, irresponsible. So this government should be capping the use of agency nurses in Ontario.

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

Mr. Stephen Crawford: Thank you, Speaker, and to the member opposite, thank you for your presentation today. As the finance critic, I think you probably share your concerns about the province's financial situation, and the budget, of course, is the blueprint to our financial situation. I wanted to share some news from the last week or two and quote Moody's, which is a rating agency: “While the slowing economy and ever-growing demands on government spending will challenge the province's ability to keep its budget balanced ... it now sees ‘a material probability’ that Ontario gets back to balance faster than it previously thought.

“This view is supported by the province's revenue collection and ‘a building track record of controlling spending even when revenue exceeds prior expectations’....

“Balancing the budget sooner would allow the province to reduce its debt and keep its debt service costs under control, despite higher interest rates....”

So you may not agree with all the details in the budget, but is it fair to say you're happy with this good news, as all Ontarians should be?

Ms. Catherine Fife: I'm really grateful, actually, that the member raised this issue, because it's underpinned by the fact that Ontarians are bringing more money and revenue into this place because of the high cost of inflation. Ontarians are facing higher costs of services, higher costs for goods, and because of that, more money is coming into this place. So we tried to make the case to this government: Why not pass on some of those savings to the people who actually are lifting this place up with their taxation revenue? The Moody's rating is good, let's be honest, but why would this finance minister then sit on \$2.9 billion when we have people who don't have enough food or shelter or medication in Ontario? These are hard choices to be made, but they're really not that hard when you think about it from a basic humanity and compassionate state.

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

MPP Jamie West: Thank you to the member from Waterloo. During her speech, she talked about autism. I remember, prior to the 2018 election, that the Premier had promised that families with children with autism would never have to protest outside on the Queen's Park lawn. There have been many protests since then. I believe the number back then on the wait-list was 28,000; I could be wrong about that. But I do know what was trending last year was #50KIsNotOk, meaning the wait-list was now at 50,000. The member from Hamilton Mountain recently brought up just, I think, today in question period that it's now at 60,000.

To the member from Waterloo: What is going wrong with their strategy with autism where this number keeps ballooning, even though the Premier had promised that families would be taken care of and not have to protest?

Ms. Catherine Fife: I want to thank the member from Sudbury. This is an issue that hits close to home. It is very true that during the Liberals' reign, there were so many protests out in front of Queen's Park. They've now been surpassed by the protests under this government for families with a child on the autism spectrum.

I just want to say, I think when Bruce McIntosh came to finance committee, he was really clear. He was like, "This is a program that has been designed for bureaucrats by bureaucrats." He actually asked the government to ask the minister of red tape to investigate, because it is not a program that is designed to be successful.

Certainly, if you think about the cost of lost productivity and the cost to the education system, there's a good case to be made in investing in and getting this program right, because right now, it is so very, very wrong.

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

Mr. Ross Romano: To the member opposite: I had an occasion to sit on that side of the House with that member opposite for approximately one year. I seem to remember the disdain that she had for the Liberal government of the

day. I also seem to remember her voting in favour of a Liberal budget. I'm not sure if I remember all of the times before that, because certainly I wasn't here for the year prior, but the one thing that I find quite confusing is the disdain for the former Liberal government, the disdain for this government and all of the references to the people that you're supportive of and all these individuals that you say are so upset.

But perhaps you can explain how it is, then, that this government was able to get an increase in some 20-plus odd number of seats and your particular party was able to only see a decrease in 10 seats, if what you say is accurate and everyone is so incredibly frustrated, as you claim them to be.

Ms. Catherine Fife: This member's confusion is not surprising to me. I will say that I do see Liberals and Tories on that political spectrum to be very similar. The Liberals accelerated privatization. The Conservatives have continued down that path and actually not even done some basic due diligence, as I just outlined with iGaming in Ontario.

The fact that we show up here each day and bring the real voices of the people of this province to the Legislature—we try to speak truth to power. We try to get the powers that be to listen. The fact that only 17.8% of the people voted in this province is a sign of how cynical people are about our democracy. I think the disdain that this Premier has for our democracy is also a very big part of that problem.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Bhutla Karpoche): Further debate?

Mr. Sam Oosterhoff: I appreciate the opportunity today to rise to speak to the budget. I am grateful to be able to speak in this place after hearing from both the Minister of Finance in earlier iterations of the debate, and also from the parliamentary assistants to the Minister of Finance: my seatmate, the excellent member for Bruce-Grey-Owen Sound, and of course the member for Oakville.

I appreciated hearing from both of these members some of the important investments that are being made across this province. I appreciated hearing about the record expansion of health care that's being provided through this legislation. I appreciated hearing about the ways that our government is committing to expanding access to skilled trades programs to ensure that more and more young people and those who are retraining and reskilling are able to access the education they need to have a good career within the skilled trades. And I appreciated hearing about the massive infrastructure projects that are being built in every corner of this province. I know that those members in their debate, in the participation that they had, spoke to some of the more broad provincial needs and the broad provincial investments that this government is taking.

1600

This afternoon I have the great privilege of, first of all, sharing my time with the member for Markham-Unionville and the important voice that he brings from another part of the province, from the region in York, but I'm going to be speaking a little bit about some of the

investments that this budget makes in the Niagara region. I have the great honour and privilege of being able to represent what I consider—and I've heard from many other members in this House that many consider—to be the most beautiful part of not just Niagara but of, frankly, the entire province: Niagara West, a unique gem sort of nestled between two Great Lakes, with a vibrant ecosystem of economic diversity, social diversity and, really, people who believe strongly in the value of hard work, of family, of communities that are working to build up a stronger future for them and their families.

And so, I'm going to speak about a couple of the changes that this budget makes and some of the investments that this budget makes. It's going to build upon the response I had this morning to a question from the member for Carleton. When she asked me about the ways our government is making changes that will benefit the people of Niagara, I was struck by news that I read just a couple of weeks ago with regard to our unemployment rate. Ontario, of course, as a whole is booming. We're restoring our leading edge as the economic engine of this great country. But in Niagara, we're especially seeing what I termed this morning a renaissance, a revival of sorts, in our local economy, which for too long had been left behind, had been ignored, and, under this government, is now leading in so many ways. One of the ways that it's leading is in record low unemployment.

Niagara, of course, has a long, proud history as an auto parts city, as an auto parts region, where manufacturing that services the auto sector was a crucial part of our economy. We saw for many years that the former Liberal government, propped up by the members of the New Democratic Party, failed to lend themselves to creating an environment that was supportive of that manufacturing sector. Now, under the leadership of this Premier and through the changes also in this budget—for example, introducing the new Ontario Made Manufacturing Investment Tax Credit, which will make Ontario manufacturers lower their costs, innovate and become more competitive—we're seeing a growth in this sector after decades of abandonment by previous governments.

We're also seeing investments in the infrastructure that is crucial to our agribusiness sector. Agriculture is a crucial sector of the Niagara economy. It contributes billions to our GDP, and it has a wide variety of characteristics. Niagara isn't like some of the other regions who, of course, we all love throughout southwestern Ontario but who are perhaps really stuck to some of the more traditional commodity groups: corn, soybeans, wheat, perhaps some beef or dairy and some pork producing. We have those sectors, as well, but we also have a lot of value-added sectors. We have, of course, our famous wineries, but we also have new groups that are coming forward.

I think of the Ontario Hazelnut Association, who I met with recently, who are investing in the Niagara region because of our unique microclimate and also because of the changes that our government has brought forward to make the costs of doing business more predictable, by investing in access to natural gas and making sure that

natural gas expansion across the Niagara region and across southwestern Ontario become a reality after many years of talk but no action by previous governments, by seeing meaningful efforts to reduce the red tape that the agricultural sector has to deal with when it comes to approving an expansion or to adding a new commodity group, to adding some of the unique viticultural gems that we also rely on in the Niagara region. So that has been a really, really important part of the puzzle, both expanding our competitiveness in manufacturing through tax reductions, through stable electricity supply, and also by ensuring that the agricultural sector is being supported.

But one of the areas I know many of the people who I grew up with and many of the people who I call friends and neighbours work in is construction. The investments that our government is making in world-class infrastructure projects, whether that's the new West Lincoln Memorial Hospital or the new South Niagara hospital, or whether it's the half a dozen new long-term-care homes that are going up across our region or simply the industrial and commercial expansion that's happening—I just saw, even a couple of days ago, in Lincoln and their industrial park, a new job creator coming to town, building a new site and adding 75 jobs. I saw Welland is adding more jobs in manufacturing as well.

Each of these areas, of course, requires labour. It requires skilled trades and it requires people to be able to come forward and work hard in construction. Construction is becoming an increasingly important part of our local economy. It's part of the reason that I believe our government is going to be able to achieve its goals of building 1.5 million homes to ensure that people are housed in a way that is safe and respectful. It's about ensuring that people have that opportunity to go to work knowing they will be safe and supported by their government and that they're able to build a province—a stronger Ontario, one that they can be proud of. So when I go back to my constituency and I meet with people from across not just West Niagara but from across the Niagara region and I speak with them about the future that Niagara has, there's a palpable sense of excitement.

Unfortunately, for some years under the former Liberal government, we saw manufacturing leave. And I know, as someone who grew up in the agricultural sector, there was a real sense of alienation from the agricultural communities. There was a real sense that the work that they did wasn't appreciated by the provincial government and they weren't appreciative of the value that they added to the local economy. That has changed. So much of this budget, I believe, is about building on that culture of change. It's about building on that culture of investment, yes, but also being responsive to the needs of the people of the province, whether that's in the Niagara region or in other regions across this great province.

Earlier today, I had the opportunity to be in a couple of different meetings with representatives from various levels of government in the Niagara region who came here to meet with local cabinet ministers and to hear from those ministers what the vision for the province is from our

government but also to share the work that's happening at so many local municipalities to streamline services, to be able to provide the services that the taxpayers who pay provincial taxes, federal taxes and property taxes expect and deserve from their government.

One of the pieces that I see in this budget is a real reflection of the consultations that went into it. I've had the opportunity to host the member for Oakville, the parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Finance, in Vineland. We had stakeholders from across the region come forward and share their ideas. One of the pieces that we heard about the most was the need for, yes, housing—housing that's affordable, housing that's attainable—but also the need to make sure that the most vulnerable in our society are being taken care of. So I think the change to increase the ODSP to make more earnings available for those who are on ODSP was a great step and a response to the consultations that were held not just in Niagara but I know in various parts of this province.

But I think something that's also historic is addressing the funding shortfall that Niagara region had experienced when it came to the homelessness prevention program. Going from \$11 million to almost \$21 million in annualized funding is tens of millions of dollars that will be taken off the backs of property tax payers, off the tax base in the Niagara region, and will be invested directly into new services, ensuring that our property taxes in Niagara are kept low but also ensuring that those who are the most vulnerable in our society are being looked after.

So I think recognizing the various parts of that equation—a strong economy with strong communities—is something that this budget aims and succeeds to do. Speaker, I know that I'm going to have to cede my time to the member from Markham–Unionville who will speak about his particular community, but I just wanted to add my support in debate of this budget. I will be supporting it because I believe it's good news for the people of Ontario and the Niagara region.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Bhutla Karpoche): The member for Markham–Unionville.

Mr. Billy Pang: Thank you to the member from Niagara West for sharing his time with me and for sharing his important point of view in supporting this bill. This bill is called Building a Strong Ontario Act.

I rise today to speak on this budget. This budget represents our government's commitment to driving economic growth, expediting vital infrastructure projects, and attracting more jobs and investments to help businesses, families and workers.

Our government has an ambitious plan in place to build more roads, highways, hospitals and over 1.5 million homes. We are expanding subways and public transit and creating more opportunities for people in communities throughout our province. We are taking a responsible and targeted approach that addresses the needs of today while establishing a solid fiscal foundation for future generations. We are building a stronger Ontario that works for everyone.

1610

Speaker, our government has been creating the environment and the conditions for companies to come here and to thrive, prosper and grow. When companies thrive, prosper and grow, so do the people who work at these companies. Ontario continues to lead the nation in job creation, with more than 600,000 jobs added to the province since 2018.

I am proud to share with you some remarkable achievements that have occurred in recent months. For April 2023, the monthly employment data released by Statistics Canada showed that employment in Ontario has increased by 32,700 jobs. This is seven consecutive months of job growth for our province as we continue to attract significant investments that create good-paying jobs for workers across our province.

Over the last two and a half years, Ontario has successfully attracted over \$25 billion in automotive and electric vehicle battery-related investments, including a \$7-billion investment from Volkswagen to build their first overseas EV battery manufacturing facility in St. Thomas. This groundbreaking investment from Volkswagen, Europe's largest automaker, will generate up to 3,000 direct jobs and up to 30,000 indirect jobs. Ontario's partnership with Volkswagen, among many other global automakers, demonstrates our ability to attract historic investments and reinforces our position as a global leader in the electric vehicle supply chain.

Furthermore, our government has also attracted over \$3 billion in investments from the life sciences sector and global bio-manufacturers over the past two and a half years, the most recent being a multi-million dollar investment from Moderna to partner with Novocol Pharma, an Ontario-based manufacturer, which further reinforces our commitment to economic growth and job creation.

To complement these achievements and continue to build a strong economy, we need the infrastructure to support it. Our government's plan to build is investing in critical infrastructure projects that are needed to support growth across the province. We are building new highways, roads, schools, hospitals, long-term-care homes and transit. We are making significant progress and taking action to ensure we have a safe and reliable transportation network, regardless of where in the province you live.

One of the projects that holds a high importance for my constituents is the Yonge North subway extension. The extension is a key part of our government's plan to fight gridlock. It is a critical project for York region that will provide much-needed access to reliable public transit and will connect more people to major employment centres in Markham, Vaughan and Richmond Hill. Once completed, the approximately eight-kilometre TTC Line 1 extension will put 26,000 more people within a 10-minute walk from transit, and it's expected to reduce daily travel times for commuters up to 22 minutes.

We are committed to reducing gridlock, connecting people to more jobs and making travel faster for everyone, and we are getting it done on public transit.

But we are not stopping here. We must keep the momentum up. As we continue to attract global investments, as we build Ontario, we are facing a historic labour shortage, the largest labour shortage in generations, with hundreds of thousands of jobs going unfilled each and every day. We must tackle this issue hands-on, using every tool at our disposal.

This is why our government is investing heavily in training to help people prepare for good, in-demand jobs. We can grow our economy by filling all these jobs to care for those in our communities who need it most and to help build new homes, schools, hospitals, highways and transit. We need more skilled workers, and we need them now.

Our government will continue to invest in our people and support our growing community and economy. This is why we are investing \$25 million over three years to make it easier and faster for skilled newcomers to come to Ontario to help fill the jobs in the skilled trades and health care. This new investment will ensure Ontario is ready to welcome new skilled workers. We will focus on removing the barriers that newcomers need to deal with, recognizing their credentials and helping newcomers find more meaningful employment sooner in their field. We are committed to building a better life for them and their families, because no matter where they come from, they can build their Canadian dream right here in Ontario.

Speaker, we are making the historic investments to train the workforce of tomorrow as part of our \$1.5-billion skilled trades strategy, including a \$225-million investment to upgrade and build new training centres. Ontario has the jobs, and our government has the plan—a plan that has a bright future for the people of Ontario, a future that includes a skilled workforce to build our historic infrastructure plan. Whether it is upskilling workers through our skills development programs, attracting more young people into the skilled trades, or breaking down barriers to get more skilled newcomers into the province, we are leaving no stone unturned. We are building a stronger Ontario that works for everyone.

I urge all members in the House to support this plan, to pass this budget, so that together, we can build a strong Ontario.

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

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: Speaker, last week was nurse appreciation week. Of course, we appreciate all health care workers and especially nurses on the front line every day, but this budget—they haven't put money back into hospitals like they're supposed to. They've been underfunded. They're encouraging agency workers. They have actually increased funding being diverted into independent health care facilities from \$18 million last year to \$72 million this year in their budget.

I sent out a newsletter and asked people what they think about how to respect nurses. They write back and they tell us that, rather than spending time and money on appealing the court ruling on Bill 124, Ontario could be investing in our health care system to expand access, reduce long wait times and hire more nurses. I'm getting hundreds of

responses back. Why won't this government listen to the people of Ontario?

Mr. Sam Oosterhoff: I just want to say that this budget has launched the largest health care recruiting and training initiative in the province's history. As one of the immediate actions last year, we introduced a lump sum payment of up to \$5,000 for eligible nurses in order to retain and stabilize the workforce. And building on the 12,000 new nurses registered to work in the province last year, our government is also investing in a wide range of initiatives to attract, train and hire more nurses and get them into the system sooner. We've added \$342 million to add over 5,000 new and upskilled registered nursing positions and registered practical nurses as well as 8,000 personal support workers. We've also expanded the Learn and Stay grant to help our graduates receive full tuition reimbursement in exchange for committing to practise in an underserved community.

There's a lot more that we're doing.

I appreciate the member raising this important subject.

1620

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

Mr. Brian Saunderson: I want to thank my colleagues for their presentation today.

I want to ask a question talking about our evolution on this since this party came into power in 2018. Prior to 2018, under the Wynne government, we were downgraded from stable to negative by Moody's credit rating. In 2019, we were upgraded, as a result of the work of this government, from negative to stable. Most recently, after this budget was tabled, we were upgraded from stable to positive. I'd like one of the two colleagues, if they could, to please speak to this and talk about the implications for the residents of Ontario as a result of this upgrade.

Mr. Sam Oosterhoff: Earlier this morning, I answered a question where I spoke about the "renaissance" that we're seeing in Niagara, but I believe that extends across the province. The reason I use that word is because it speaks to culture. We're building a culture of responsibility, of respect for taxpayers' dollars, something that was sorely missing. So to turn that large ship of state from a position where we saw consistent downgrades of our credit rating in international markets to a position where we're seeing it going higher and higher and people understand that Ontario is taking a responsible approach that's reflecting a culture of stewardship that permeates each and every ministry in this government is a demonstration of the Minister of Finance and his team's commitment—as well as the entire caucus and Premier—to getting it right and respecting each and every tax dollar that is provided here, reducing costs where they are unnecessary, but continuing to invest in the things that people in our communities expect and deserve, including right in Niagara region and across communities in every corner of this province.

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

Mrs. Lisa Gretzky: It's hard to sit here and listen to the member for Niagara West. I've got to wonder what planet he's living on—for stats.

I will tell you that in Windsor, we are facing an opioid crisis; we are facing a homelessness crisis.

And I know in Niagara—per capita, Niagara is in the top five regions reporting opioid-related deaths, and there is an increase in homelessness.

I suggest that the member from Niagara West take a walk through St. Catharines, perhaps, or some other areas in Niagara to see the reality, because while you're talking about Moody's—to the people who are dying on the streets, to the first responders responding to those calls and the families losing people, Moody's means nothing. The fact that you are not spending to actually address the opioid crisis or the homelessness crisis is what matters to people in this province.

So maybe the member for Niagara West could actually acknowledge, first off—instead of talking about culture, talk about the people who are actually struggling in this province as a result of the lack of spending and policies that specifically target these people in the province.

Mr. Sam Oosterhoff: Well, I would welcome the member from Windsor West to come join me in Niagara and see the impact of an 86% increase in annualized funding to the Homelessness Prevention Program that this budget places directly into our communities. You're talking about providing incredible supports to some of the most vulnerable in our society—but it's not just that. It's also about ensuring that people have hope and opportunity. It's about creating an atmosphere where people know that they're able to build a strong career, that they're able to have opportunities.

We saw in Niagara, which was an incredibly important centre for auto parts manufacturing, that abandonment under the previous Liberal government, supported by the NDP, but we're seeing that come back now under the leadership of this Premier and this government. We're seeing record low unemployment levels in the Niagara region as a result of the policies that this government has put forward. So we're building a stronger economy that supports the people, while also investing in the most vulnerable. I'd love to welcome her down, and we can walk around and I can show you what that looks like.

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

Mr. Matthew Rae: Thank you to my two colleagues for their great remarks on the budget.

As a fellow farm kid, my question is to the member from Niagara West. I'm just wondering if he could expand on the important investments we're making in the vet sector and with the University of Guelph, in particular.

Mr. Sam Oosterhoff: That's a really important one.

I grew up on a 100-acre farm. We had a number of different cattle and obviously some sheep. We had pork, as well.

To be able to ensure that your animals are kept safe and healthy and that they're treated well, it's vital to ensure that there is access to veterinarian services.

This government took action that we hadn't seen in previous years by expanding the number of veterinary school spots so that we're able to see more vets. I think one of the top issues that I actually hear about from the agricultural community is the need for more veterinarians in every corner of this province. So whether it's in the Niagara region, whether it's in Perth–Wellington, or whether it's in Timiskaming–Cochrane, we're going to see the vets who are graduating from that incredible school go on to provide world-class care to the animals that I know we all know and love—and, in the case of farms, perhaps we love to eat at some point.

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

Ms. Sandy Shaw: This government likes to throw around big numbers, but when you actually look at the spending, this is a government that's sitting on \$3 billion of unallocated funding. If you look at the expenditure report from the Financial Accountability Officer, when it comes to health care, this government was going to have a net funding shortfall of \$21.3 billion. That's a shortfall that will mean that we don't get the kinds of supports in our hospitals and all the health care supports that we need.

We're already seeing evidence of your underfunding in health care. In Ontario, we had the lowest wages in Canada for nurses. The average length of stay in the emergency for patients has increased by 34%. In fact, in the first quarter of 2023, 1,300 people received care in hallways—not to mention all of the emergency wards that were closed in this province.

How can you justify these numbers when this is the evidence of what this budget is doing to the people of the province of Ontario—

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Bhutla Karpoche): Thank you very much. Response?

Mr. Billy Pang: Talking about numbers in health care—through the 2022 budget, our government announced plans to invest \$1 billion over three years to get more people connected to care in the comfort of their own home and community. We are now accelerating the investment to bring funding for 2023-24 up to \$569 million, including nearly \$300 million to stabilize the home and community workforce. This funding will also expand home care services and improve the quality of care, making it easier and faster for people to connect to care. We are providing an additional \$425 million over three years for mental health and addictions, including a 5% increase in the base funding of community-based mental health and addictions services—providing funding by the Ministry of Health. Expanding the scope of practice of pharmacies to provide over-the-counter medication of common ailments has been very successful—not only the money, but the efficiency and effectiveness—

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Bhutla Karpoche): Thank you. Further debate?

Mr. Wayne Gates: This isn't where I was going to start, but I want to welcome the mayor of Fort Erie, who's here today, Mr. Wayne Redekop.

Before I get into my complete speech, I just want to say to my colleague from Niagara, you're seeing a different Niagara than I'm seeing on the streets of St. Catharines and Niagara Falls and Welland. We've got to do better for people on our streets. But I'll address that during my speech.

But because the mayor of Fort Erie is here, I want to start by talking about the Fort Erie Race Track. I'm hoping that the Minister of Finance is listening in his office because it's so important. What's happening is—and I brought this question up last week—Woodbine is bullying the Fort Erie Race Track as they try to close us down. They're trying to close us down. There's no doubt about it. We've been fighting this for a number of years. The mayor knows this.

What they started with—and it's a little complicated, but I'm going to explain it the best I can—is that horses that are in Fort Erie and Woodbine, they stable at Woodbine; they can come and race in Fort Erie. Under Jim Lawson's leadership—the CEO—he has put a policy in place that if they stable in Woodbine, they can't come to Fort Erie, which means that's going to hurt us trying to get horses to come to our track. They are an A-level track. They're the best of the best. We're a B-level track, so we run claiming races for \$5,000, \$7,500, and some allowance races. But the problem is, once they say, "You can't come to Fort Erie," where are they going to go?

What Lawson has done is he's now running races that are B-level races at \$5,000 to \$7,500 claimers. So he's keeping the horses in Woodbine to run in those races. He knows he's not supposed to do it. Here's the catch—and this is why it's important to the ministers that are here, because you guys talk about money all the time; taxpayers' money is important. Woodbine is getting \$110 million of taxpayers' money to run that track, and the money can only be used for purses at Woodbine, which means your purses would run the higher races—\$16,000 claimers, sometimes allowance races. So what I am saying to this government: We need your help. Fort Erie has been there for—I think it's 116 years. It's by far the prettiest racetrack in the entire country—actually, I think in North America.

1630

The other thing that they did with us—we have a race called the Prince of Wales, and they have the Queen's Plate. And it's usually spread out so that you can run the—Triple Crown race is what it's called. It's similar to the one they have in the States. But what you can do is they spread it out so the horse that runs in the one race—the Queen's Plate—then can run in the Prince of Wales. We get 15,000, 16,000 people coming to the beautiful track in Fort Erie. They put the races so close together those horses can't even run in Fort Erie for our biggest race of the year, the Prince of Wales. It's called bullying. And you know what? Fort Erie deserves better. Fort Erie has supported that racetrack, including through the town council, including when we had the slots here—which was a big mistake, taking the slots out of Fort Erie. That was done under the Liberals; it wasn't done under you guys. So I'm asking all you guys, when you guys go to your caucus meeting—

Sam, you go to your caucus meeting. You know about the Fort Erie racetrack—

Mr. Sam Oosterhoff: Niagara West.

Mr. Wayne Gates: Sorry, Niagara West—I apologize. All I'm saying is, take a serious look at what they're doing. It's wrong in the province of Ontario. What we should be doing is growing the industry. We have two thoroughbred tracks in all of Ontario—just two—and if you get rid of Fort Erie, you will have one. And you're going to hurt all of the small municipalities right across rural Ontario that have horses. That's where the breeding is all done.

So I wanted to raise that because the Fort Erie mayor is here, and he came out of his way. To the Fort Erie mayor, I'm going to continue to do everything we can, and I'm asking the Conservatives to really take a serious look at what Lawson is doing to a beautiful track down in Fort Erie in my riding, but quite frankly, what he's doing to Ontario. Because it's all about Ontario with horse racing: It's rural Ontario; it's the small communities that, quite frankly, support some PCs here. Anyways, I wanted to get that out, Mayor, and hopefully you will continue to support us on that.

I'm going to start with affordability on the budget. Like I said, I'm seeing different results in Niagara. Niagara is a wonderful place to live, great place to raise a family—all the things that we're talking about. We have jobs there; some manufacturing is coming back. I believe it's coming back—it has nothing to do with your government, by the way, with no disrespect. It has to do with the dollar. I said this about the 300,000 jobs that we lost under the Liberal government: It was about the dollar, the petrodollar. It was the petrodollar. Nobody on your side, if they know anything, including the labour minister, who is here—nobody can deny that the dollar plays a major role in bringing investment into the country. If you have a dollar that's worth 110, and now you have a dollar that's worth 72—the manufacturers left the province of Ontario under a petrodollar, and that was under Harper when he took care of the west at the expense of Ontario. I can tell you today they're coming to this province because our dollar is 72 to 74 cents. We're competitive, by the way, in the manufacturing sector at 80 cents. We're competitive at 80 cents, and actually, we could live to go to 84. So think about that: That's another 10 cents that these manufacturers are coming from all over the world and investing in Ontario—they're making more money.

The thing that we have to be careful with—and I'm saying this again to my colleagues that are here, in particular, the labour minister who is here, and I really appreciate him being here—our big advantage in manufacturing, do you what it is? Speaker, I'm looking right at you. I'm not looking at anybody else. Do you what our big advantage is? It's our health care costs. You talk to any bargaining team that's bargained in the last 30 years, they'll tell you the same thing I'm telling you. It's the envy of the world, but it's a big cost advantage when you're trying to bring manufacturing back to Ontario, and if you privatize it, we lose that advantage. And then if the dollar goes back up, I'd hate to see what's going to happen to the

province of Ontario. So you really have to rethink your position on Bill 60, for sure.

I'll get back to affordability. I can tell you rents in Toronto, as we all know, most of you—I have a one-bedroom apartment in Toronto, and I talked to people that are living in my apartment—\$3,000, \$3,200, \$3,400 a month. I challenge any of you guys who are here: How many of you could afford that? Even though you got a 16% raise—we know that—how many can afford \$3,000, \$3,200 or \$3,400 in rent?

In Niagara, a one-bedroom apartment—my good friend from Fort Erie, the mayor—is \$1,300, and how many times has the mayor gone and they had renovictions? I think we had two or three of them in Fort Erie. We had renovictions where they got rid of seniors who were paying \$800, \$900 and \$1,100, and then you see it advertised in the paper less than a week later, that same apartment, for \$1,700, \$1,800, \$1,900 or \$2,000.

Where is a senior going to go? There are no senior apartments out there. They're not getting raises. As a matter of fact, our CPP and these types of things—old age—that's what they're trying to live on. They don't get increases of 6% and 7% when inflation rises, so we've got a crisis in affordability for our seniors.

Take a look at our groceries. Has anybody gone to the grocery store lately? Put your hand up. We can have this kind of participation if you want. I'll put my hand up. Grocery stores are going on—I put a video up. I'm sure you all watched it, because I'm sure you follow me on social media. I see some of your comments. I thank you for that too, by the way, all the compliments.

But groceries: I went and checked the price of bread. I try to eat healthy; I'm not very good at it, because I really eat a lot of hot dogs that I shouldn't. But at the end of the day, I buy 14-grain bread. I went to the dollar store. Madam Speaker, I don't know if you've ever been to the dollar store, but I went to the dollar store, which is just around the corner from where I live. It was \$3 for that bread. Then I went to Shoppers, which is owned by the Weston family, who are gouging people—we all know that; the government should never have taken them on, because they're friends. I went to Shoppers. I went right into the store, and I videoed it—they ran over, by the way; they weren't happy that I was trying to video the price of it. It was \$4.49, and they're not a block away. They're not a block away, in the same area.

That's price-gouging. That's the reality. I had some people say, "No, that's competition" and all that. No, it's not. It's price-gouging. Do you know that the Weston family has made more profit during COVID than at any time in their history? They're making so much money, they don't know what to do with it—well, I apologize; that's wrong. They do. They gave the Weston CEO a million-dollar bonus for doing so well.

We see it at the gas pump; \$1.50 a litre is what I saw today. And do you know what else? This all should be taken care of with the budget. Do you know what else? Guess who is making record profits? The oil companies. They're making more money than at any time in their

history, and we're not talking millions, like we were talking with the Weston family; we're talking billions, with a B. Where is that coming from? It's coming from us, who can't afford rent. We can't. We're lucky; we're probably—well, we're not fairly compensated, but I know you guys are. But at the end of the day, what do you do with it? You can't continue it. They're making billions in profit. What's that called? It's the same like groceries: It's called gouging. They're gouging us at the pump. They're gouging at the refineries, is really where it's really starting.

Your Ontario might not be the same as mine and what I'm seeing. And yes, are some people doing really well? Absolutely. CEOs are making more money than they ever have in their lives. Some of the people at the higher scales are doing fine. They're the same ones who love Bill 60. They love our health care. They love your bill around health care, because they can afford to pay. But there are people who can't afford to pay for their health care. There are people who can't afford to pay for their rent. They can't afford to pay for their groceries. Seniors are being pushed out of their homes.

So when you stand up and say everything is wonderful, it's not, and I can't be the only one seeing it. You go walk down the street in St. Catharines. I'm going to use my whole riding. I haven't been to Sam's riding. I'll be honest, I've been to Sam's once to talk about the greenbelt and what you guys are doing with selling off the greenbelt. I had a town hall in Niagara West, in his riding, talking about the greenbelt. Talk about another mistake you guys are making.

And I want to be clear, because the Minister of Housing is here, and I've said this to him many times: I believe we should be building 1.5 million homes. As a matter of fact, the studies are saying we can build two million. Every study says there's enough land to do two million. Here's where we differ: I don't believe we need to do it on the greenbelt. That's where we differ.

1640

And do you know today, under your leadership, under Premier Ford's leadership—Madame Speaker, you may know this. I'm not sure, but you might know this. Do you know, today, we're losing 319 acres of farmland every single day in the province of Ontario? I might be wrong on this, but you might think that we would have learned our lesson with COVID. When we got COVID, we didn't have PPE. Do you remember that? We were scrambling. China wouldn't send us any PPE and we had shut down all our manufacturers who were making PPE. We had to start that all back up really quick. Well, what are we going to do when you get rid of the greenbelt? What are you going to do when you get rid of all the farmland? Who's going to feed us? Where are we going to get our food from? Are you going to rely on China or Mexico or another country? We already see some countries trying to get involved in our elections. It's a mistake. Because once it's paved over—any one of my colleagues know what happens when it's paved over?

Interjection: It's gone forever.

Mr. Wayne Gates: It's gone forever. That will be your legacy. That's what we're going to remember about you guys—well, there's going to be another thing: I believe you're going to get defeated on the private health care.

The one that tears at my heart—and I know some of my colleagues kind of make fun of my voice or whatever when I get passionate around long-term care. I want to be clear, because the Minister of Long-Term Care said that the NDP doesn't believe in building long-term care. That's a lie. I supported building long-term care long before you guys came into government in 2018. I can hold up picture after picture where I was cutting the ribbon in Fort Erie, again in Fort Erie, in St. Catharines. We supported long-term care, but what we didn't support and we still don't support is the fact that it's for-profit.

Regional homes—which Mayor Redekop would know about; he's a regional councillor as well as being a mayor. He knows all about this. But let's talk about the one that I raised the other day. I challenge anybody—you can ask me a question on this; I'll write it for you, if it helps you out. Orchard Villa, a long-term-care facility, privately run—I want to be clear: I'm not blaming the staff; I support the staff. But the problem with that place is that it was about profit, not about care. They didn't have enough staff to take care of those residents. People were dying. And guess what we had to do? We had to call in the Canadian military into a long-term-care facility. Madam Speaker, here's what they found: 80 people died in the long-term-care facility, some from dehydration. You see this water here? That would have kept them alive. They didn't have it. They sat in soiled diapers for days. They found somebody dead 24 hours after that person had died. They had rotten food. So when they brought a proposal forward to the Pickering city council, they turned it down because the government was going to give them a 30-year lease—the same company that had to have the military called in where 80 people died.

I'm asking my colleagues over there: Does anybody think that's fair and reasonable? Would you want that to happen to one of your parents? Your mom, your dad, your grandparents, your brother, your sister? I hate to break it to you, but there's a good chance that a lot of us are going to end up in a long-term-care facility, and it should be at a point and time in our lives when we can enjoy the last part of our lives. It shouldn't be a place where I'm going to be mistreated, disrespected, allowed to die from a simple thing of not having a drink of water. So yes, I'm opposed to building that and I'm supporting the council. I'm supporting that area. But I actually think it's fair and it's reasonable and it's consistent with what I've been talking about for the last eight or nine years that I've been here. So I'm saying to my colleagues across there: Don't support that.

The other part I don't support: I don't think we should be handing out 30-year leases, or 99-year leases, by the way, at Ontario Place. We thought we would have learned our lesson with the 407. That was another 99-year lease that, quite frankly, is a disgrace. Have you ever tried to drive down there? You have to get a loan to go from one

end of it to the other with how much they're charging us, because we didn't put any safeguards in place. We didn't put anything in where we can buy it back. I remember that it was the Conservatives who said, "If we get in this government, we're going to buy it back." Actually, it was the Liberals; I apologize. It was the Liberals who said that.

Miss Monique Taylor: The Conservatives sold it.

Mr. Wayne Gates: Yes, the Conservatives sold it; we know that. It was under Mike Harris. We couldn't buy it back because of the contract. And now it is worth billions.

What else do I have on my page? I'm not going to get to my speech; it's pretty obvious. Oh, Bill 124: spending taxpayers' money over and over and over again in the courts fighting Bill 124, as you say that nurses are heroes. How do you say that when you bring in Bill 124 and attack their collective bargaining rights? As a matter of fact, even in their bargaining rights, they don't have—in their agreement, they had mental health, but because of Bill 124, they don't have that now. And they capped their wages at 1%. And when my colleagues stand up and say, "Hey, everything is great in the province of Ontario," they got capped at 1%. Inflation was running at 6.5% to 7%. It looks like it has cooled down a bit, but at the end of the day, can you afford a mortgage at 5%, 5.5%, 6%, 7%? Can you now buy a car that's now running at 7%? Can you afford that? The answer is no—but Bill 124.

The last one I'll talk to—I've only got a minute—is Bill 60. This is the worst piece of language. I thought privatizing hydro was terrible—even though the Conservatives started it—under the Liberals. Bill 60 is the worst bill ever. You're going to privatize our health care system. I'll give you an example of exactly what's going to happen in hospital after hospital that's publicly funded. Take a look at the Ottawa: 21 doctors put together a corporation. They're now operating on the weekends in a publicly funded hospital with the same nurses that are working Monday to Friday. The difference is they're being paid more money or they're agency employees, agency nurses that, by the way, are between \$150 to \$300 an hour. Some friends of the Conservative government are probably getting pretty rich under that deal.

And then what really tops it off—I've got 30 seconds left—on the Friday night before they do the operating on Saturday, guess what staff they use to clean the operating rooms? Public nurses and public cleaners. And on Sunday, after they finish doing their operations, guess what they use? Publicly funded, publicly delivered nurses and janitorial workers. It's a terrible bill.

I've still got a few more that I'm not going to get to. I do appreciate the intense listening by my colleagues. I'm looking forward to any questions they may have.

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

Mr. Sam Oosterhoff: Does the member opposite know what the exchange rate was in 2015, with the US and Canadian dollars?

Mr. Wayne Gates: I'll be honest with you. I will tell you, I don't have the exact exchange rate.

But I can tell you exactly when—you guys are standing up talking about the 300,000 jobs that you lost. I can tell you what it was—the dollar was \$1.10 when they lost the jobs. Do you know why I know that? I was the president of a local union, and I had to go to Edshaw and watch them lose 300 jobs because the German company said, “We can’t afford that, to continue doing that work.” I had to watch as some of our plants closed in the province of Ontario because the dollar was a \$1.10. And you can’t deny that. It was a petrodollar. All it did was support the west, and it divided Ontario into a manufacturing crisis that we had—and we’re just starting to get it back now. Do you know why? The dollar is at 72 cents. If it had been at 72 cents, I wouldn’t have lost Edshaw, I wouldn’t have lost those manufacturing plants, because they would still be working there. People would have retired out of those plants. I wouldn’t have had to go get them other jobs.

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

1650

Ms. Sandy Shaw: To the member from Niagara Falls: I want to give you an opportunity—you were so passionate, and I’m sure there are many things that you didn’t get to talk about that are very concerning to you that this government is failing to address when it comes to the budget.

You talked about long-term care.

You talked about the privatization of our health care that’s happening under this government’s watch. People are going to find it even more difficult to access health care, and they’re going to have to pay for it.

Is there another thing that you want to add, in one minute, that you didn’t get to in your very impassioned speech?

Mr. Wayne Gates: I actually have a 20-minute speech that I could do for you. I think the key issues that I didn’t get to are the things I talked about, in St. Catharines and Niagara Falls, in my area—and I’m not blaming anybody, but mental health is a huge issue in Niagara. The opioid crisis that we’re all facing in every one of our communities—I don’t think there’s anybody over there who isn’t facing an opioid crisis in the province of Ontario. These are two things that I think we have got to do better on. That’s for sure.

And Bill 60—I didn’t get to tell you what happened to the Americans. Do you know, today, in the United States of America, because of the cost of health care—45 million people today claimed bankruptcy because of health care costs in the United States, and people died, particularly those who are on the lower scale. They die earlier because of the cost of health care. We can’t go down that road.

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

Mr. Sam Oosterhoff: I did want to ensure that the member opposite knew that in 2015 the exchange was 76 cents, on average, and in 2022, it was actually 76 cents. So to claim, in a revisionist history, that the only reason we’re seeing investments in the auto parts sector here in the province of Ontario is because of the parity with the American dollar is revisionist in a way that I can’t say I’ve seen a lot of in this House. Having been here six years,

I’ve heard the member opposite—but that is such a disrespect to the people who have negotiated in good faith with the auto parts sector to make sure that they are coming to our province, those who have put forward policy idea after policy idea to make sure that we’re able to attract and retain good jobs here in the province of Ontario; \$25 billion worth of investments in auto parts manufacturing, let alone the spinoff economic activity that has happened as a result of that. And the member opposite attempts to tie that to something that has essentially remained unchanged for the past eight years? I don’t buy it.

Mr. Wayne Gates: I really appreciate the question. I’m going to answer it for you: Because the auto sector is about eight to 10 years out in when they make their investments and when they make their decisions on where they’re going to invest. I know you’re young. I think you’re probably under 30. I don’t know your age, but you’re a young guy. I lived it. I was the president of my local union during that time. I was the president for 10 years, and I watched jobs leave St. Catharines, that plant. Do you know, in St. Catharines, how many workers worked in that plant? It was 10,000. Do you know what they’re down to today? It’s 700.

You want to talk about Oshawa? They had 21,000 working in that Oshawa plant when I was president of the local union in 1999. Do you know what they’re down to now? A few thousand.

What about Brampton?

Do you want me to go on? Do you want me to talk to the parts sector?

I can talk about every sector—and it was because of the high Canadian dollar. The reason why they’re coming back is because of the dollar. There’s no doubt about that. You can’t argue—

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

MPP Jamie West: Thank you to the member from Niagara Falls.

One of the things that he was talking about in terms of leases and housing and affordability is that there’s this offer for a private company to have this 99-year lease, or for long-term care, a 30-year lease; meanwhile, in terms of new builds, for anything built after 2018, there’s no rent control.

Why is there this change where rent control can be wide open for people who are trying to find housing in places built after 2018, but if one of the developer friends wants to have a lease for long-term care or other developments, it’s 99 or 30 years locked in?

Mr. Wayne Gates: I’d probably go on record and say we shouldn’t be giving long-term care 30-year leases. We shouldn’t do a 99-year lease. We should have learned from our mistake with the 407. That has been a disaster for Ontarians.

Your second question was about—what was it? Help me out here.

MPP Jamie West: About the rent control.

Mr. Wayne Gates: Rent controls—oh, my God. Where do you start there?

Think about it: Every new build since 2018 can charge whatever they want.

We've already said as a party—I've said it many times here—we should have rent control on all units—

Interjection: And when people move out?

Mr. Wayne Gates: For everybody.

Why did it change? Because they made sure that they helped their corporations and developer friends—that they could make money, to a point that they can't wait to build rental units because they're going to make more money on the rental units, because they're charging \$3,200, \$3,500. And it won't be long before it will be \$4,000 to get a rental in Toronto.

I know the Speaker is from Toronto. Your area is probably one to talk about, quite frankly, when you get a chance to talk over here.

We need rent controls. We need to make sure we take them off new builds from 2018. And we've got to make sure that we take care and get rid of renovictions, which is really, really—

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Bhutla Karpoche): Thank you. I have to cut you off. Sorry.

Question?

Mr. Stephen Crawford: I will concur with the member from Niagara West about the dollar. The Canadian dollar was higher than the US dollar for a very short period during the financial crisis of 2008-09, but that's neither here nor there. It's ancient history.

Let's move forward. We all want to get manufacturing jobs back in the province of Ontario. I think we all agree on that. I would hope the opposition would agree with that.

So my question to the member opposite—there may be parts of the budget you're not supportive of; that's fine. You've mentioned that in your speech.

But with respect to the manufacturing tax credit that we're providing small, private manufacturers to incent them to buy new equipment so we can have good, high-paying, in many cases union jobs right here in Ontario—is this a part of the budget that you can see yourself supporting?

Mr. Wayne Gates: That's really a fair question.

I'm going to tell you that when I was the president of the local union, I was arguing for incentives for small businesses, quite frankly, and small manufacturers. As a matter of fact, when we got our V6 plant in 1997 bargaining, it came with incentives. The same way that you're doing with the Chrysler plant now in Windsor, where you're giving them X number of dollars to invest here—well, we did the same thing at the bargaining table in 1997. It's one of the reasons why the Big Three stayed in Canada.

Even though, in 1997, we bargained the collective agreement—no, sorry; it was 1999—and we were number three in the world of manufacturing of auto parts and auto assembly; we dropped to 21. A lot of it had to do with the cost of the dollar and some of the bad policies that were brought forward by the Liberals—I'm not blaming it all on one. The Liberals were not very good at handling that, as well, when it came to jobs.

So I appreciate that, and I agree with you. Check the date. Write it down. We agree on it.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Bhutla Karpoche): A very quick question.

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: On January 9, 2023—governments enjoyed broad immunity against civil lawsuits, generally, and a 2022 Ontario law was passed barring all types of COVID-19 legal action against long-term care. A judge overruled that and said that there could be a class action lawsuit against the atrocious—actually, against the government. How do families feel about that decision that was recently passed?

Mr. Wayne Gates: They should never have put a bill in place that would stop families from going after long-term care—that quite frankly, killed and murdered people in long-term care. That should never have been a bill that protected those types of owners.

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

Report continues in volume B.

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Dowie, Andrew (PC)	Windsor—Tecumseh	
Downey, Hon. / L'hon. Doug (PC)	Barrie—Springwater—Oro-Medonte	Attorney General / Procureur général
Dunlop, Hon. / L'hon. Jill (PC)	Simcoe North / Simcoe-Nord	Minister of Colleges and Universities / Ministre des Collèges et Universités
Fedeli, Hon. / L'hon. Victor (PC)	Nipissing	Chair of Cabinet / Président du Conseil des ministres Minister of Economic Development, Job Creation and Trade / Ministre du Développement économique, de la Création d'emplois et du Commerce
Fife, Catherine (NDP)	Waterloo	
Flack, Rob (PC)	Elgin—Middlesex—London	

Member and Party / Député(e) et parti	Constituency / Circonscription	Other responsibilities / Autres responsabilités
Ford, Hon. / L'hon. Doug (PC)	Etobicoke North / Etobicoke-Nord	Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs / Ministre des Affaires intergouvernementales Premier / Premier ministre Leader, Progressive Conservative Party of Ontario / Chef du Parti progressiste-conservateur de l'Ontario
Ford, Hon. / L'hon. Michael D. (PC)	York South—Weston / York-Sud—Weston	Minister of Citizenship and Multiculturalism / Ministre des Affaires civiques et du Multiculturalisme
Fraser, John (LIB)	Ottawa South / Ottawa-Sud	
French, Jennifer K. (NDP)	Oshawa	
Gallagher Murphy, Dawn (PC)	Newmarket—Aurora	
Gates, Wayne (NDP)	Niagara Falls	
Gélinas, France (NDP)	Nickel Belt	
Ghamari, Goldie (PC)	Carleton	
Gill, Hon. / L'hon. Parm (PC)	Milton	Minister of Red Tape Reduction / Ministre de la Réduction des formalités administratives
Glover, Chris (NDP)	Spadina—Fort York	
Gretzky, Lisa (NDP)	Windsor West / Windsor-Ouest	
Grewal, Hardeep Singh (PC)	Brampton East / Brampton-Est	
Hardeman, Ernie (PC)	Oxford	
Harden, Joel (NDP)	Ottawa Centre / Ottawa-Centre	
Harris, Mike (PC)	Kitchener—Conestoga	
Hogarth, Christine (PC)	Etobicoke—Lakeshore	
Holland, Kevin (PC)	Thunder Bay—Atikokan	
Hsu, Ted (LIB)	Kingston and the Islands / Kingston et les Îles	
Jama, Sarah (NDP)	Hamilton Centre / Hamilton-Centre	
Jones, Hon. / L'hon. Sylvia (PC)	Dufferin—Caledon	Deputy Premier / Vice-première ministre Minister of Health / Ministre de la Santé
Jones, Trevor (PC)	Chatham-Kent—Leamington	
Jordan, John (PC)	Lanark—Frontenac—Kingston	
Kanapathi, Logan (PC)	Markham—Thornhill	
Karpoche, Bhutla (NDP)	Parkdale—High Park	First Deputy Chair of the Committee of the Whole House / Première vice-présidente du comité plénier de l'Assemblée
Ke, Vincent (IND)	Don Valley North / Don Valley-Nord	
Kernaghan, Terence (NDP)	London North Centre / London-Centre-Nord	Deputy Opposition House Leader / Leader parlementaire adjoint de l'opposition officielle
Kerzner, Hon. / L'hon. Michael S. (PC)	York Centre / York-Centre	Solicitor General / Solliciteur général
Khanjini, Andrea (PC)	Barrie—Innisfil	Deputy Government House Leader / Leader parlementaire adjointe du gouvernement
Kusendova-Bashta, Natalia (PC)	Mississauga Centre / Mississauga-Centre	
Leardi, Anthony (PC)	Essex	
Lecce, Hon. / L'hon. Stephen (PC)	King—Vaughan	Minister of Education / Ministre de l'Éducation
Lindo, Laura Mae (NDP)	Kitchener Centre / Kitchener-Centre	
Lumsden, Hon. / L'hon. Neil (PC)	Hamilton East—Stoney Creek / Hamilton-Est—Stoney Creek	Minister of Tourism, Culture and Sport / Ministre du Tourisme, de la Culture et du Sport
MacLeod, Lisa (PC)	Nepean	
Mamakwa, Sol (NDP)	Kiiwetinoong	Deputy Leader, Official Opposition / Chef adjoint de l'opposition officielle
Mantha, Michael (IND)	Algoma—Manitoulin	
Martin, Robin (PC)	Eglinton—Lawrence	
McCarthy, Todd J. (PC)	Durham	
McGregor, Graham (PC)	Brampton North / Brampton-Nord	
McMahon, Mary-Margaret (LIB)	Beaches—East York / Beaches—East York	
McNaughton, Hon. / L'hon. Monte (PC)	Lambton—Kent—Middlesex	Minister of Labour, Immigration, Training and Skills Development / Ministre du Travail, de l'Immigration, de la Formation et du Développement des compétences
Mulroney, Hon. / L'hon. Caroline (PC)	York—Simcoe	Minister of Francophone Affairs / Ministre des Affaires francophones Minister of Transportation / Ministre des Transports
Oosterhoff, Sam (PC)	Niagara West / Niagara-Ouest	
Pang, Billy (PC)	Markham—Unionville	

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Parsa, Hon. / L'hon. Michael (PC)	Aurora—Oak Ridges—Richmond Hill	Minister of Children, Community and Social Services / Ministre des Services à l'enfance et des Services sociaux et communautaires
Pasma, Chandra (NDP)	Ottawa West—Nepean / Ottawa-Ouest—Nepean	
Piccini, Hon. / L'hon. David (PC)	Northumberland—Peterborough South / Northumberland—Peterborough-Sud	Minister of the Environment, Conservation and Parks / Ministre de l'Environnement, de la Protection de la nature et des Parcs
Pierre, Natalie (PC)	Burlington	
Pirie, Hon. / L'hon. George (PC)	Timmins	Minister of Mines / Ministre des Mines
Quinn, Nolan (PC)	Stormont—Dundas—South Glengarry	
Rae, Matthew (PC)	Perth—Wellington	
Rakocevic, Tom (NDP)	Humber River—Black Creek	
Rasheed, Hon. / L'hon. Kaleed (PC)	Mississauga East—Cooksville / Mississauga-Est—Cooksville	Minister of Public and Business Service Delivery / Ministre des Services au public et aux entreprises
Rickford, Hon. / L'hon. Greg (PC)	Kenora—Rainy River	Minister of Indigenous Affairs / Ministre des Affaires autochtones Minister of Northern Development / Ministre du Développement du Nord
Riddell, Brian (PC)	Cambridge	
Romano, Ross (PC)	Sault Ste. Marie	
Sabawy, Sheref (PC)	Mississauga—Erin Mills	
Sandhu, Amarjot (PC)	Brampton West / Brampton-Ouest	
Sarkaria, Hon. / L'hon. Prabmeet Singh (PC)	Brampton South / Brampton-Sud	President of the Treasury Board / Président du Conseil du Trésor
Sarrazin, Stéphane (PC)	Glengarry—Prescott—Russell	
Sattler, Peggy (NDP)	London West / London-Ouest	
Saunderson, Brian (PC)	Simcoe—Grey	
Schreiner, Mike (GRN)	Guelph	
Scott, Laurie (PC)	Haliburton—Kawartha Lakes—Brock	
Shamji, Adil (LIB)	Don Valley East / Don Valley-Est	
Shaw, Sandy (NDP)	Hamilton West—Ancaster—Dundas / Hamilton-Ouest—Ancaster—Dundas	
Skelly, Donna (PC)	Flamborough—Glanbrook	Chair of the Committee of the Whole House / Vice-présidente et présidente du comité plénier de l'Assemblée Deputy Speaker / Vice-présidente
Smith, Dave (PC)	Peterborough—Kawartha	
Smith, David (PC)	Scarborough Centre / Scarborough-Centre	
Smith, Hon. / L'hon. Graydon (PC)	Parry Sound—Muskoka	Minister of Natural Resources and Forestry / Ministre des Richesses naturelles et des Forêts
Smith, Hon. / L'hon. Todd (PC)	Bay of Quinte / Baie de Quinte	Minister of Energy / Ministre de l'Énergie
Smith, Laura (PC)	Thornhill	
Stevens, Jennifer (Jennie) (NDP)	St. Catharines	
Stiles, Marit (NDP)	Davenport	Leader, Official Opposition / Chef de l'opposition officielle Leader, New Democratic Party of Ontario / Chef du Nouveau parti démocratique de l'Ontario
Surma, Hon. / L'hon. Kinga (PC)	Etobicoke Centre / Etobicoke-Centre	Minister of Infrastructure / Ministre de l'Infrastructure
Tabuns, Peter (NDP)	Toronto—Danforth	
Tangri, Hon. / L'hon. Nina (PC)	Mississauga—Streetsville	Associate Minister of Housing / Ministre associée du Logement
Taylor, Monique (NDP)	Hamilton Mountain / Hamilton-Mountain	
Thanigasalam, Vijay (PC)	Scarborough—Rouge Park	
Thompson, Hon. / L'hon. Lisa M. (PC)	Huron—Bruce	Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs / Ministre de l'Agriculture, de l'Alimentation et des Affaires rurales
Tibollo, Hon. / L'hon. Michael A. (PC)	Vaughan—Woodbridge	Associate Minister of Mental Health and Addictions / Ministre associé délégué au dossier de la Santé mentale et de la Lutte contre les dépendances
Triantafilopoulos, Effie J. (PC)	Oakville North—Burlington / Oakville-Nord—Burlington	
Vanthof, John (NDP)	Timiskaming—Cochrane	Opposition House Leader / Leader parlementaire de l'opposition officielle
Vaugeois, Lise (NDP)	Thunder Bay—Superior North / Thunder Bay—Supérieur-Nord	
Wai, Daisy (PC)	Richmond Hill	
West, Jamie (NDP)	Sudbury	

Member and Party / Député(e) et parti	Constituency / Circonscription	Other responsibilities / Autres responsabilités
Williams, Hon. / L'hon. Charmaine A. (PC)	Brampton Centre / Brampton-Centre	Associate Minister of Women's Social and Economic Opportunity / Ministre associée des Perspectives sociales et économiques pour les femmes
Wong-Tam, Kristyn (NDP)	Toronto Centre / Toronto-Centre	
Yakabuski, John (PC)	Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke	
Vacant	Kanata—Carleton	
Vacant	Scarborough—Guildwood	