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Clerk: Todd Decker

Président : L'honorable Ted Arnott
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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
OF ONTARIO

Monday 27 March 2023

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE
DE L'ONTARIO

Lundi 27 mars 2023

The House met at 0900.

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

Prayers.

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

ORDERS OF THE DAY

BUILDING A STRONG ONTARIO ACT
(BUDGET MEASURES), 2023

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

Mr. Bethlenfalvy moved second reading of the following bill:

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

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

Hon. Peter Bethlenfalvy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Merci beaucoup, monsieur le Président. I would like to note that I will be sharing my time with the member from Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound, who I see right behind me, and the member from Oakville, who I also see right there, in that order.

Today, it gives me great pleasure to speak to the second reading of Building a Strong Ontario Act (Budget Measures), 2023. Last week, I introduced the 2023 budget: Building a Strong Ontario. The budget and this spring budget bill before us today move our plan forward to build a strong province. It is a plan for building a strong economy for today and tomorrow. It is a plan for more roads, more highways, more transit, more broadband, right across the province.

Our plan profiles support for employers. It provides more training opportunities for skilled workers. It's a plan that sees us moving forward the critical minerals sector in Ontario's north and connecting the north and its minerals with our globally competitive manufacturing sector in the south. It is a plan to make life more affordable for those that need it the most, with better health care and public services for everyone who calls Ontario home, a plan that makes streets safer and protects you and your family.

C'est un plan qui nous permet de faire progresser le secteur des minéraux critiques dans le nord de l'Ontario;

un plan pour relier le Nord et ses minéraux à notre secteur de fabrication de classe mondiale dans le Sud. Il s'agit d'un plan pour rendre la vie plus abordable pour ceux qui en ont le plus besoin, avec de meilleurs soins de santé et services publics pour l'ensemble de la population ontarienne, un plan qui rend les rues plus sûres et qui vous protège, vous et votre famille.

It is a plan to do all of this while at the same time returning Ontario to a balanced budget.

The plan is rooted in strong fundamentals, a long-term vision on real actions, actions not only in the face of the current turbulence we see around us in the global economy, but actions that will help us tomorrow and, from this period of turbulence, to emerge stronger than ever. I know we can and we will do it. I say this confidently because we have the discipline to stay true to a plan that is working, that maintains flexibility to navigate the ongoing economic uncertainty.

The numbers are so important. For government, just as for a family, a business or an individual, the numbers mean everything. I'm pleased to report that in the 2022-23 fiscal year, the deficit is projected to shrink to just \$2.2 billion. This is thanks to robust revenue growth, our disciplined and prudent planning, and setting very clear priorities. In 2023-24, we plan to further reduce the deficit to \$1.3 billion.

And, Madam Speaker, I have some more good news. I'm pleased to stand here today and say that, starting in 2024-25, we project Ontario returning to the black, with a surplus of approximately \$200 million. But it gets better: We have anticipated surpluses into future years.

While uncertainty persists, these numbers demonstrate Ontario is in a position of greater fiscal strength. In fact, as shown in the budget, Ontario's net debt-to-GDP ratio is now forecast to be 37.8% in 2023-24. This is down 3.6 percentage points from the net debt-to-GDP ratio of 41.4% projected in the 2022 budget. With this progress on the net debt, the people of Ontario can have confidence that tomorrow will be better than today. Measures contained in the spring budget bill support this plan.

Madam Speaker, it is a hallmark of governments that they always face tough choices. The opposition would argue that the only plan to balance a budget is to impose higher taxes, more tolls and fees, or deep cuts to the programs and services people count on. As the Minister of Finance of this government, I say sincerely we reject that way of thinking. In this budget we are showing it is possible to balance a budget while investing more in health care, more in housing, more in highways, more in transit, more in manufacturing, more in the north and more in the skilled trades.

Hon. Prabmeet Singh Sarkaria: Hear, hear.

Hon. Peter Bethlenfalvy: The member for Brampton really likes that one—Brampton South, I might add.

Ontario is facing the day from a position of budgetary strength, but I will be frank: The world today is a more unsettled and uncertain place. Ontario is part of the global economy and it is not immune to the impact of global forces: geopolitical tensions, such as the Russian aggression against Ukraine, China's economic reopening and the energy transition before us.

L'Ontario fait partie de l'économie mondiale et n'échappe pas à l'impact des forces mondiales: les tensions géopolitiques, telles que l'invasion russe en Ukraine, la réouverture de l'économie chinoise, la transition énergétique and policies that have global trade impacts, such as the United States Inflation Reduction Act.

It is undeniable that more and more global trading partners are pivoting to looking inward. As a result of these realities, supply chains have become disrupted or strained. The wallets of families and businesses have become squeezed by the elevated inflation that defines this post-pandemic environment. People are finding it harder and harder to obtain affordable housing and to pay for groceries and for everyday household goods. In the face of these stresses, our government is doing its part for the people of Ontario. It does this through a responsible, targeted approach that starts with building a more resilient and more competitive economy right here at home.

0910

Take the Ring of Fire, Madam Speaker, one of the most promising mineral deposits in the world—critical minerals that are essential to batteries, electronics, electric vehicles and other clean-tech that are core to the global economy today. The Ring of Fire is our ticket to reducing our dependency on unstable or unfriendly foreign regimes.

Le Cercle de feu est l'un des moyens dont dispose l'Ontario pour réduire sa dépendance à l'égard de régimes étrangers instables ou hostiles.

In particular, we are working hand in hand with the First Nations in northern Ontario to build true partnerships that will ensure Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples alike can benefit from these untapped riches beneath the surface.

Of course, building the roads to the Ring of Fire is not by itself the solution; we have to get the minerals out of the ground. You've got to put your effort into those mines. Our government is once again taking this challenge head on. We are taking a comprehensive approach to accelerate the safe development of the north's mineral resources. And while we are going ahead with investing \$1 billion to unlock the critical minerals in Ontario's north, we continue to call on the federal government to match our commitment. I'm very hopeful, based on tomorrow's budget by the finance minister of Canada, because—do you know what, Madam Speaker?—what is good for Ontario is good for Canada.

Et tandis que nous investissons 1 milliard de dollars pour l'exploitation des minéraux critiques du nord de l'Ontario, nous continuons à demander au gouvernement

fédéral de nous emboîter le pas, parce que ce qui est bon pour l'Ontario l'est aussi pour le Canada.

One of the pieces of our plan, detailed in this budget, is the proposed new Ontario Made Manufacturing Investment Tax Credit. This credit, if passed, would provide a 10% per refundable corporate income tax credit to help local manufacturers lower their costs, invest in workers, reinvest in their business, innovate and become more competitive, because we're not an island here in Ontario; we're part of a global economy.

When combined with other business measures our government has delivered since 2018, we are helping improve competitiveness by enabling an estimated \$8 billion in cost savings and support for Ontario businesses in 2023. This includes proposing to expand access to the small business corporate income tax rate, by increasing the phase-out range. This change would provide Ontario's small businesses with additional Ontario income tax relief of \$265 million in 2022-23 to 2025-26.

Our budget also includes measures to train more people in the careers that are in the greatest need of workers. This includes providing \$224 million in 2023-24 for a new capital stream of the Skills Development Fund. These investments will leverage private sector expertise and expand training centres, including union training halls, so they can provide more accessible, flexible training opportunities for workers.

Our government took action early to help make life more affordable for those who need it the most. We are helping by putting more money back in their pockets, whether it is at the gas pumps or on electricity bills. We're also eliminating double fares for most local transit services in the greater Golden Horseshoe when commuters also use GO Transit services like Brampton Transit, like MiWay, like Durham Region Transit—I have a colleague who took that this morning and will benefit from the integrated fares. Our government is expanding this initiative to support more people using public transit who come to Toronto, because many, many people in this province rely on public transit.

We are providing financial support to more low-income seniors. We are proposing changes to expand the Guaranteed Annual Income System program—also known as GAINS—starting in July 2024, to see 100,000 additional seniors be eligible for the program and see the benefit adjusted annually to inflation. Madam Speaker, our government will give a hand up to those that need it the most.

Sadly, many around us do not have a roof over their head or a place to call home. That is why we are investing in supportive housing with an additional \$202 million each year in the Homelessness Prevention Program and Indigenous Supportive Housing Program. And thank you for the leadership of the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing on that. Madam Speaker, this is to help those experiencing or who are at risk of homelessness, those escaping intimate partner violence, and struggling with mental health and addictions.

Our government is also investing more in health care. We are 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 from the federal government under the recent agreement in principle, negotiated by our Premier, our government will also invest \$15.3 billion into health care over the same period to improve health care in Ontario.

Madam Speaker, this includes accelerating investments in home care to bring funding in 2023-24 up to \$569 million, including nearly \$300 million to support contract rates increases to stabilize the home and community care workforces. We are also investing over half a billion dollars, including an additional \$425 million, over three years in mental health and addictions supports. This includes a 5% increase in the base funding of community-based mental health and addiction service providers funded by the Minister of Health and the Ministry of Health.

Our government also understands that it is a challenging time for Ontario residents in medical school to find residency spots here at home. That's why we are adding an additional 154 postgraduate medical training seats to give first priority to Ontario residents trained at home and abroad, beginning in 2024 and going forward. We will also see an additional 100 seats for medical undergraduates and continue to prioritize Ontario students for these spots.

Now, Madam Speaker, Ontarians can know they have a provincial government that is determined to get the important things right. Our plan is responsibly investing more for people and businesses while continuing with prudence and planning assumptions that leave us the flexibility for future surprises.

Madame la Présidente, les Ontariennes et Ontariens peuvent compter sur leur gouvernement provincial pour s'occuper de ce qui compte vraiment. Notre plan consiste à investir plus d'argent de façon responsable au profit des particuliers et des entreprises, tout en continuant à faire preuve de prudence et en adoptant des hypothèses de planification qui nous laissent une certaine marge de manoeuvre pour faire face aux surprises dans l'avenir.

Our government never assumes the extremes, the best-case or worst-case scenarios. For example, we are always prudent and a little more cautious than the average private sector views in our economic and fiscal assumptions. And, Madam Speaker, while much has changed since the last budget, economic circumstances have confirmed our plan was, and is, the right one. In fact, our plan is already showing results. When you look at the top-line economic numbers, they offer evidence of how good things are in our province. Manufacturing investment is up. Jobs are up. The population is up. Over 14 million people now call Ontario home. Over 275,000 more people a year are moving to Ontario—over a million people every four years. Madam Speaker, this is all good news. With this growth, we are seeing stronger communities right across Ontario.

I am as confident about the province's future as I have ever been. And while I do see a brighter future ahead for all of us, success in life is not automatic or guaranteed. And that's why we have a plan to build a strong, more resilient and more competitive economy right here at home. Building a Strong Ontario Act (Budget Measures), 2023, is an important piece of legislation that will enable to us put this plan in action.

0920

I urge—let me repeat that—I urge all members to vote for this plan to build Ontario's economy, to build highways and other infrastructure, to work for workers, to keep costs down and to serve the people of Ontario.

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

Mr. Rick Byers: Thank you, Madam Speaker, and thank you very much to the minister for your outstanding remarks this morning and your outstanding work on behalf of the people of Ontario.

Today, I rise to speak as part of the second reading of the Building a Strong Ontario Act (Budget Measures), a crucial part of our government's plan to navigate these uncertain times and support people and businesses. As we heard from the minister, Ontario is continuing to attract and protect investments and jobs as part of our plan to build Ontario's economy. And key to Ontario's future economic growth and jobs is unlocking northern Ontario's potential, particularly in the mining and critical minerals sector.

Speaker, our government's fantastic Minister of Mines is working to incentivize and encourage exploration by providing an additional \$3 million to the Ontario Junior Exploration Program this year and next year. Our government will also be reopening the Mining Act and undertaking an end-to-end review. This is so we can ensure that the act reflects the realities of today, including a non-negotiable commitment to safety and environmental stewardship, while also ensuring that we have a truly competitive jurisdiction and market to attract future investment in our mineral sector.

Our approach to unlocking these opportunities can be found in Ontario's Critical Minerals Strategy. Right here in Ontario, we have the minerals needed to manufacture clean technology like electric vehicles. Our critical minerals strategy is Ontario's road map to secure our position as a reliable global supplier and processor of responsibly sourced critical minerals.

There are six pillars of the strategy: Enhancing geoscience information and supporting critical minerals exploration; growing domestic processing and creating resilient local supply chains; improving Ontario's regulatory framework; investing in critical minerals innovation, research and development; building economic development opportunities with Indigenous partners; and growing the labour supply and developing a skilled labour force.

But of course, the job does not end when the minerals get out of the ground. We need to connect them with a world-class manufacturing sector—Ontario's world-class manufacturing sector.

Speaker, this dovetails with another important part of our plan, arguably the most visible part to anyone who visits or calls it home: our investment in the infrastructure this growing province needs. Ontario's population is growing. Our economy is growing. Ontario is now the heartland of Canada's electric-vehicle revolution. Thanks in part to Ontario having been at the centre of Canada's automotive sector since the Second World War, we come to the changing global economy with a competitive advantage. We are capitalizing on this advantage and doubling down on these opportunities. That is why our government is working with partners who have shovel-ready industrial sites available for new manufacturing projects.

And we are also already seeing success with this. Just look at the recent announcement by Volkswagen of its planned electric vehicle plant in St. Thomas, an amazing commitment and amazing investment in Ontario. The cars of tomorrow, the jobs of tomorrow and the investments of tomorrow.

Tapping this immense potential requires energy—literally, electricity. Our government believes clean, safe, reliable, emissions-free nuclear energy must be an even bigger part of our future supply mix. That is why, in addition to our support of the continued safe operation of the Pickering nuclear generation station and the refurbishments of the Darlington and Bruce nuclear generating stations, we continue to support small modular reactors. These new technological developments will be essential to our future energy supply. And, I might add, we are a leader in battery procurements, with the largest battery storage project in Canada being built right here in Ontario.

Mr. Graham McGregor: Wow.

Mr. Rick Byers: Absolutely.

Madam Speaker, while it took a lot of rebuilding, we can see today that Ontario manufacturing has come thundering back. But I want to remind members how far we've come: Under the Liberals, Ontario lost 300,000 good-paying manufacturing jobs. But when the people of Ontario elected our government, the tides changed. In the last two and a half years, Ontario has attracted \$17 billion in investment from global automakers and electric vehicle and battery manufacturers.

Interjections.

Mr. Rick Byers: Absolutely.

That's along with \$3 billion in investments from global life sciences companies. But we are not stopping there; we must keep the momentum going. We have the capacity to do more, which is why in the spring budget bill, we are proposing legislation that, if passed, would introduce the Ontario Made Manufacturing Investment Tax Credit, which would help more Canadian-controlled private corporations expand and grow. As the minister said, "If you are prepared to bet big on Ontario, then Ontario is prepared to bet big on you." And that, Speaker, is a promise we are making and a promise we will keep.

Now, Madam Speaker, we can't build a healthy economy without healthy people. But with a health care system that at times is a little slow and difficult to access,

too many people are waiting too long and travelling too far to get the care they need. That's why our Minister of Health introduced Your Health: A Plan for Connected and Convenient Care, a plan to strengthen all aspects of the health care system. And that includes home and community care.

We are continuing with our promise in the 2022 budget to invest a billion dollars over three years to get more people connected to care in the comfort of their home and community. And now, we are accelerating these investments to bring funding in 2023-24 up to \$569 million, which includes nearly \$300 million to support contract rate increases to stabilize the home and community care workforce. This funding will also expand home care services and improve the quality of care, making it easier and faster for people to connect to care.

Speaker, the women and men on the front lines of our health care systems—our doctors, our nurses, our PSWs, all health care workers—are the ones we depend on for care. We are supporting our health care workforce today while also building a strong health care workforce for tomorrow by investing \$22 million to hire up to 200 hospital preceptors to provide mentorship, supervision and training to newly graduated nurses; \$15 million to keep 100 mid-to-late-career nurses in the workforce; and \$4.3 million to help at least 50 internationally trained physicians get licensed here in Ontario. But that isn't all, Madam Speaker.

Since January, people have been able to go to their pharmacists to get prescriptions for 13 common ailments. This has proven to be an overwhelming success, which is why, as part of our plan, in the fall of 2023, we're adding six more ailments to the list, including mild to moderate acne, canker sores, diaper dermatitis, yeast infection, pinworms and threadworms, and nausea and vomiting in pregnancy. For all of these, people will soon be able to get the medicines they need to treat these common conditions without ever having to set foot in a doctor's office, clinic or emergency room.

0930

I'd also like to underscore the point the minister made a moment ago, about total health care spending. In 2022-23 it was a record amount of \$74.9 billion, but in 2023-24 that is going up to \$81 billion and by 2025-26 will be \$87.6 billion—as noted, a \$15.3-billion increase over the next three years. These are huge investments for the people of Ontario, and it's great to be part of a government that's making them happen.

Speaker, youth in the child welfare system are at a higher risk of being trafficked or of experiencing homelessness. Transitioning out of the child welfare system can be challenging for these young people. That's why our government is working to improve long-term outcomes for youth leaving care, with \$170 million over three years to support the Ready, Set, Go Program. This program is geared at helping these young people achieve financial independence through life skills development, supports to pursue post-secondary education, training and pathways to employment. We are also expanding program eligibility,

which currently ends at 21 years old, to include those up to 23 years old.

This is consistent with our overall increase in education funding. Let me again cite some numbers: This year, 2022-23, \$32.4 billion was spent in education. Next year, 2023-24, that number will increase to \$34.7 billion, and by 2025-2026, to \$37.5 billion. These are huge numbers. They are part of our plan. We want to get it done for the people and students of Ontario.

Speaker, to build a strong Ontario, we need to get shovels in the ground. We need to build. In the last election we said we would build more highways. Guess what? We're doing just that. All told, as part of our historic, 10-year infrastructure plan, we are spending almost \$28 billion on highways and roadways.

We said we would invest in transit, and so we are. We are bringing back the Northlander train from Timmins to Toronto. We are increasing GO service to Niagara from Union Station and building GO rail infrastructure in places like Kitchener, Maple and Bowmanville.

Interjection.

Mr. Rick Byers: Exactly.

The numbers for transit over 10 years are staggering: \$70 billion invested in transit. That's what makes our economy go. That's what contributes to a better environment. We are getting that done with a huge investment in transit—so important.

We also have a plan to build vibrant complete mixed-use communities at or around transit stations. Transit-oriented communities will help increase transit ridership, create sustainable communities and build more homes, including more affordable housing around GO Transit, light-rail transit and subways. This is a sensible solution. It's happening and we are going to make it happen even more.

We are also building new schools, child care spaces, hospitals and long-term care. In terms of education infrastructure, \$22 billion over 10 years—again, a record amount, so important. We're building new hospitals and expanding existing ones, like the redevelopment of St. Mary's General and Grand River hospitals in Kitchener-Waterloo, and I'm looking forward to the opening of the Markdale Hospital in our great riding of Bruce-Grey-Owen Sound this year, on time, on budget. In total, our 10-year health care infrastructure spend is \$56 billion, an incredible investment for today, but more importantly, for tomorrow, for our generations yet to come. Their health care is why we're doing that.

Safe and comfortable long-term care homes are going up in communities across the province, including Owen Sound in my riding of Bruce-Grey-Owen Sound.

In total, there's \$184.4 billion of investment in infrastructure in all these sectors over 10 years. This is a historic commitment to our province that our government has made, and we will ensure we get that done. I'm so proud to be part of this team that's investing so heavily in this amazing infrastructure commitment.

Madam Speaker, among our government's priorities is ensuring the safety and well-being of everyone who calls

Ontario home, and this approach to safety and well-being includes protecting people as consumers. In the spring budget bill, we are proposing changes to enhance consumer protections when interacting with a financial professional. These specifically are proposed legislative amendments to the Financial Professionals Title Protection Act, 2019. You see, Madam Speaker, people deserve to have confidence when they are seeking out financial advice that they are dealing with someone who has the adequate training, expertise and credentials. These amendments, if passed, would give the Financial Services Regulatory Authority of Ontario, or FSRA, the power to make a rule about 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 would also give financial planners and advisers the confidence that there is a plan for their future if their credentialing bodies are no longer able to operate. This is a very important enhancement to investor protection in the province of Ontario.

Madam Speaker, we know that these are challenging times, but our plan is working. It is the right plan to not only get us through these challenges, but to emerge from them as a stronger Ontario. So if the members of this House support building Ontario's economy, building highways, transit and infrastructure, working for workers, keeping costs down and better services, then vote for this bill. Pass this budget so that together we can get to building a strong Ontario.

Madam Speaker, I'll now share my time with the fantastic member for Oakville and parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Finance.

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

Mr. Stephen Crawford: Good morning, Speaker, and thank you to my colleague for your presentation, and to the minister for discussing some of the highlights of the budget and why we think the opposition and the House should support it.

Today I rise to speak to the second reading of Building a Strong Ontario Act (Budget Measures), 2023, in support of our government and the Minister of Finance. Speaker, our plan is building Ontario so we can have a strong economy for the future and the infrastructure needed to support growth across this province. It is a plan to build the economy, to build highways, build infrastructure, to work for workers, keep costs down and to serve the public better.

Speaker, we all know Ontario is a great place to live. It always has been and always will be. And it has a strong economy. And we need this strong economy so that we are able to invest in health care, education, training, housing and safer streets while keeping Ontario on course for a balanced budget. These are the priorities and initiatives that Ontarians want to see.

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Speaker, it bears repeating that today there are global economic challenges and Ontario is not isolated from this global economic uncertainty. Uncertainty defines the road

ahead. In no way is the job of Ontario's government done. We must continue our job with flexibility and prudence so we can optimally take on the challenges that come our province's way while still delivering on our plan. Our government knows we can do it. We can build a better tomorrow for Ontario. We have the right plan to do it.

This is our plan to build an Ontario that will continue to have a diverse economy known for resilience; an Ontario known for having the best infrastructure; an Ontario that is known to have the skilled workers trained for the jobs of tomorrow; an Ontario known as being able to connect you to the care you need; an Ontario that is known to be strong. It is beyond dispute—we are getting it done.

Speaker, our plan for a strong Ontario is truly a comprehensive plan, for everything we do is connected. We are driving forward our plan to tap into the resources of Ontario's north to supply the critical minerals that are crucial in modern EV batteries, connected by roads and rails and wires and WiFi. These natural resources and this connected infrastructure and the revitalized manufacturing base in the province's south are all connected and will help bring investments and better jobs and bigger paycheques to the people of Ontario.

This is why our government has committed close to \$1 billion to support critical legacy infrastructure such as all-season roads, broadband connectivity and community supports in the Ring of Fire region, to keep moving forward on one of the most promising mineral deposits in Canada, one that will play a critical role in batteries, electronics, electric vehicles and clean technology.

This new modern manufacturing sector, in turn, depends on a stable supply of skilled workers supported by private sector unions who will ensure they have the training and other supports they need. These workers will revitalize local communities that, in turn, help us build the modern highways, transit, hospitals, schools, broadband and other infrastructure that Ontario families need.

We also realize that people can be ambitious and sometimes would rather strike out on their own versus working for someone else. Getting young people onto career trajectories sooner is why our government is helping close to 27,000 students earn credits toward their Ontario secondary school diploma and a college degree or certificate of apprenticeship at the same time through dual-credit opportunities. It's also why we are providing an additional \$2 million in 2023-24 for *Futurpreneur Canada*, which helps entrepreneurs aged 18 to 39 achieve their business goals.

It takes ambition and willingness to be an entrepreneur. As well, it takes ambition and willingness to strike out on one's own and move from one country to another. Ontario tries to do all it can to help these international economic migrants. That's why we are enhancing the Ontario Immigrant Nominee Program with an additional \$25 million over the next three years, to attract more skilled workers, including in-demand professionals in the skilled trades, to the province of Ontario so they can hit the ground running and start contributing to Ontario right away. It's also why we are expanding the Ontario bridge training program

with an additional \$3 million in 2023-24 to help internationally trained immigrants find employment here and get faster access for training and supports toward an Ontario licence or certificate.

Ontario also needs a more stable and steady supply of another type of skilled worker—those in the health-related fields. This is the thinking behind how we are expanding access to dual credits in health-related courses. This additional investment of \$3.3 million over the next three years will help an additional 1,400 secondary students make their way into the health field.

Pivoting slightly, I would like to also note that with the 2023 Ontario budget, we are also investing \$14.7 million over two years for a new, collaborative doctor of veterinary medicine program with the University of Guelph and Lakehead University, starting in 2024-25. This is to address the shortage of veterinarians in rural and northern communities.

Now I'd like to discuss how we are keeping your costs down. Whether you have lived here all your life or are just getting your feet under you here, we know everybody is looking for some relief from the high cost of living. We know the provincial government does not control the global forces driving inflation, but there are things we can do, in our control, like eliminating licence plate renewal fees, which is saving hundreds of dollars for families by refunding two years' worth of fees for eligible vehicles; cuts to the gas tax and the fuel tax rate in 2022 and extending that until 2023. This will have a dramatic impact on families here in Ontario, as costs not only here but around the world have spiralled out of control with inflation, due to some external factors, such as the war in Ukraine.

We're also now eliminating double fares for GO Transit and local transit throughout much of the greater Toronto and greater Golden Horseshoe. This will make it easier for commuters to get on the bus, to get on the GO train instead of getting in a car. We're also working to expand this initiative to include Toronto, so someone commuting to the city only pays one fare per trip, saving them money each way.

We are continuing to provide targeted electricity bill relief for eligible low-income households and on-reserve First Nation consumers, as well as eligible rural and remote customers. This is in addition to the on-bill Ontario Electricity Rebate for all eligible residential customers.

Further, our government launched catch-up payments, a \$365-million investment that offers parents \$200 per child or \$250 per child with special needs in direct financial support that can be used to help their children's education.

Speaker, I stop here to add a special note: In order to tackle the ongoing housing affordability crisis, I can't emphasize more that our governments at different levels need to work together to get more shovels in the ground. So I stand here today before you to say the Ontario government is calling on the federal government to defer the harmonized sales tax on all new, large-scale, purpose-

built rental housing projects. This is part of our government's plan to spur the construction of more rental housing units while helping to create jobs, create economic development and support growth. As elected parliamentarians all trying to serve the best interest of the people of Ontario, I hope that all parties of the Legislature will join us in calling for the federal government to make this kind of commitment so we can get more affordable housing for the people who need it.

One of our guiding principles is the need for Ontario to serve the public better; that is, improving the services you and your family need, starting with health care. We are investing every single dollar we receive from the federal government's recent health care funding down payment and a whole lot more this year into better health care services. While Ontario will receive \$4.4 billion in additional funding over the next three years from the federal government under the recent agreement in principle, as part of the recent one-time top-up provided by the federal government, Ontario will also allocate additional funding and work with front-line pediatric health partners to meet the needs of children and youth.

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To make this happen, we are also investing more than \$200 million to connect children and youth to care at hospitals close to home in their communities. We are challenging the status quo by making common sense changes to get people care faster. 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.

As we make health care more convenient, 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 in Ontario. But no doubt we still need more, so we will continue on the path. That's why our government is investing \$80 million over the next three years to further expand enrolment for nursing programs throughout Ontario.

We are also investing \$200 million this year so we can address immediate health care shortages and also grow the workforce for years to come. This includes expanding the Ontario Learn and Stay Grant in the spring of 2023 for eligible post-secondary students who enrol in priority programs in northern Ontario, including nursing, paramedic and medical laboratory technologists and medical laboratory sciences, and who work in underserved communities in the region where they studied after graduation. This is definitely a move in the right direction to help those underserved communities where they are in such bad need of doctors, nurses, laboratory technicians etc.

We are building on the success of the Ontario Learn and Stay Grant by expanding the program to include nursing in eastern and southwestern Ontario, and for medical and laboratory technologists in southwestern Ontario.

Among our priorities is, of course, helping to protect the people of Ontario against the challenges of life that can come up unexpectedly, and unfortunately with potential injuries to life and property. I'm talking about community

safety and protecting you and your family. This is an area of top priority for the government of Ontario. Additional resources are being provided to local police and communities to protect law-abiding citizens from illegal gun and gang violence. We are fighting gun- and gang-related crime and building safer communities by investing \$13.4 million in 2023-24 as part of the Guns, Gangs and Violence Reduction Strategy.

This additional funding will continue effective gang prevention and intervention strategies that are known to work. For example, from 2021 to 2022, over 1,000 completed and ongoing investigations received funding through the Gun and Gang Specialized Investigations Fund. These investigations, which target guns, gangs and human trafficking, have seized over 437 firearms, seen 1,259 persons charged and 58 organized crime groups targeted.

When it comes to reducing crime, some changes, such as bail reform, must be taken up by the federal government. I pause here to make this statement again, and again I hope all parliamentarians in this Legislature standing up for the people of Ontario will call on the federal government to reform Canada's bail system. All provinces, regardless of political stripe, have joined us in the province of Ontario in calling on the federal government for bail reform. Again, I hope that everyone here in the Legislature will.

Our government is unified that there are too many criminals who should be behind bars who have been allowed to be backed on to the streets due to lack of appropriately tough federal laws.

Province-wide emergency preparedness is also top of mind for our government. With this budget our government is also making the province better prepared and quicker to respond to future emergencies by investing \$110 million over three years to fund, train, coordinate and improve Ontario corps and the province's emergency preparedness system.

The new Emergency Management Preparedness Grant being created will support community organizations with purchasing equipment required to help and protect people and communities. And a new Emergency Response Fund will provide the urgent relief impacted municipalities, First Nations and communities often need in the first 24 to 72 hours after an emergency arises. The government is also enhancing the Ontario volunteer corps portal and IT systems to support data and information sharing with emergency management partners.

Speaker, we recognize the heroic efforts of Ontario's first responders, those brave persons who are often seen running toward dangerous situations, not away from them. We recognize that heroism can come at a cost, and that's why our government is supporting a full continuum of care for the first responders experiencing post-traumatic stress injury and other concurrent mental health disorders.

And speaking of mental health, I wanted to mention how the CEO of the Canadian Mental Health Association in Halton had comments to speak about with respect to our budget as it pertains to mental health. No doubt mental

health has been a growing concern, not only in Ontario but through the country and indeed throughout the world over the last few years as we've had economic turbulence, as we lived through COVID, as we've had inflation and war affecting us. And it should be noted that a lot of health care professionals are often not happy with the provincial budget because the need is always so great for funding in health care. The past few years have changed many things about the world, including the demand for mental health services. Our government has made a commitment to mental health supports in this budget.

I'll quote the CEO of CMHA Halton, Rashaad Vahed, when he's speaking about our budget and the funding increases for mental health:

"This funding increase is a historic boost to community-based mental health services to continue to deliver supports by stabilizing what we provide and helping to retain qualified staff as operating costs continue to rise. Most of all, it will help our friends and neighbours in Halton get care when, where and how they need it to improve their health and wellness.

"Community organizations are a vital part of the broader health care system, and this investment by the government reflects the importance of organizations like CMHA Halton. We appreciate that community mental health and addictions has been made a priority."

So I think it's important to note that the Ford government has allocated \$425 million to be allocated over the next three years, including a 5% increase in base funding for community-based mental health and addictions services providers in the province of Ontario.

That's just one example of a community organization thrilled with what they see in the budget. I know the opposition speaks a lot to mental health, and I think we all agree on some of the challenges that we have with mental health with many individuals in the province of Ontario, so I hope the opposition will be supportive of the budget, this being just one part of that.

The support specifically as it pertains to first responders is being provided through an additional investment of \$9.6 million to accelerate the approval and construction of the Runnymede Healthcare Centre's first responders wellness and rehabilitation centre. When built, the centre's dual sites in Toronto and Peel will serve first responders from across Ontario. This is critically important. We know that first responders—fire, police, ambulance—see many unfortunate and traumatic situations on a daily basis that none of us could even imagine. Giving them the supports to be able to deal with this is critical.

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Speaker, we touched on some of the great things that are happening in the budget—some of our spending initiatives, where we're investing to help those in health care and education and the economy. I'd like to, in my last few minutes, just touch on some of the investments in the manufacturing sector, because it's so critical in our province to put the horse before the cart. We need to have a strong, resilient economy and have wealth creation, in

order to fund the supports for the health care, education and mental health services that we need.

The government announced a manufacturing tax credit. This tax credit was announced, actually, in my riding of Oakville just last week and is going to affect thousands upon thousands of small and mid-sized private businesses in the province of Ontario. What this tax credit is going to do is help those businesses invest in the equipment and technology they need to become more efficient and more competitive as our economy changes. Technology is changing at a very rapid pace, and businesses need the money to be able to invest in these products so that they can then hire more employees to work and grow, because we all know that we have a labour shortage in this province of 300,000 to 400,000 people right now. So we are critically short labour throughout the province. Investing in these technologies, giving businesses a chance to compete more globally is going to allow us to compete, and it's going to raise more tax revenue for the province.

I think what's critically important about this budget—and I've heard some opinion pieces in some cases from some members of the opposition that perhaps we're not spending enough in certain areas. But what I can say is, this is a record budget in the history of the province of Ontario, and we are moving to a balance over the next one to two years, which would have been unprecedented thinking just a few years ago. Coming through COVID and coming through 15 years of Liberal economic mismanagement, which drove hundreds of thousands of jobs out of the province and piled on our debt so that Ontario became the most indebted sub-sovereign government in the entire world, we are moving back to balance, not by making dramatic cuts, not by dramatic austerity, but by investing in the right places so we're going to get a return on those investments. And then, guess what? We're going to have the money to be able to fund the mental health care investments we need, the education investments we need, the health care investments we need. We know as a province we need these investments, but we also need the wealth creation and the economic activity to pay for those in the future.

With that, Speaker, I'm happy to end my time here and answer any questions if we have time for that.

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

Ms. Catherine Fife: You know, budgets are about choices. The member from Oakville and the member from Bruce-Grey-Owen Sound travelled around the province with us hearing from Ontarians. What we heard was that cost-of-living pressures are top of mind for people; people are in crisis across this province. High rents—we have record evictions, but the government still has not done anything about rent control, and so people are being evicted—more and more senior women. Minimum wage—one fellow said to us, "I can't survive. I'm losing hope." They were looking for medical assistance in dying because there was no dignity in their lives. And the nurses—Bill 124, still on the books—told us how demoralizing it is.

So my question for either member: Did you even try to get these issues in this agenda, in this budget? Because the finance minister and the President of the Treasury Board clearly did not hear these voices, but you did.

Mr. Rick Byers: I thank the member for the question. Yes, I certainly enjoyed our visits to various parts of Ontario, be it Kenora on January 9 or Sault Ste. Marie or Sudbury or Peterborough, Windsor, Kingston.

The member talked about choices. Well, I'll tell you the choices that our government is making. Infrastructure spending—a record of \$184.4 billion over 10 years. That's a choice that will matter not only to this generation but to the next. Record spending in health care—has gone up from \$74.9 billion to \$81 billion over the next three years, spending \$15.3 billion.

Those are the choices that our government made, and I'm very proud to be a part of those choices. And I hope this House supports the bill.

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

Mr. David Smith: I also travelled across the province of Ontario and listened to many concerns around ODSP.

Our government announced last year that it would increase the ODSP rate by 5%. Now, in the budget of 2023, we have confirmed that ODSP will be indexed to inflation. Could the member highlight why this is an important move to help Ontario's most vulnerable?

Mr. Stephen Crawford: Thank you to the member from Scarborough Centre. I appreciate your comments.

This government recognizes that there are vulnerable populations in the province of Ontario, and this government increased ODSP by the largest increase ever, by 5%, most recently, and we've also indexed it to inflation—which, to my understanding, we are one of the first, if not the first province in the country to be able to do that.

But it's not just about ODSP; it's also about energy rebates. It's a multi-faceted program. It's also about the low-income tax credit, which is the largest tax credit savings for low-income families in the province of Ontario. It's also about the GAINS program, which is helping low-income seniors.

So as much as we want to create wealth and prosperity for our province, we do recognize that there are those who are more vulnerable, and we want to be able to help them.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Bhutila Karpoche): Next question?

Mr. Jeff Burch: Seniors in my riding and seniors all across Ontario are struggling with the rising cost of living, with everyday expenses. I think we were all shocked—and I heard from seniors over the entire weekend—that your government would reduce OHIP-covered eye exams for seniors. I don't understand, in this climate, when seniors are suffering right across the province, how this government thinks it's okay to reduce OHIP-covered eye exam funding for seniors. So could the member explain how that helps people in our ridings across Ontario—to treat seniors in this way?

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

Seniors are a priority for this government in so many ways. You just saw the increase in the GAINS program, which is so successful—another 100,000 low-income seniors will be on that program this year. That is back to supporting seniors. And we're increasing our health care spending overall, as I mentioned before and I'll keep mentioning over and over and over again—record health care spending for our seniors. We care about them, their families, and we'll keep caring about them, because we want to make sure we have the best health care system on the planet, which we will continue to invest in—so those are the supports for seniors that I'm very proud to be a part of this government and support.

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

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: I'm wondering if one of the parliamentary assistants could elaborate on some of the critical investments that have been made in the city of Ottawa. I know, having had a meeting with a lot of women on women's economic empowerment on Friday and, of course, later in the afternoon, talking about critical investments into our nation's capital—what other investments outside of the \$3 million that were delivered to Invest Ottawa could we discuss today and talk about, in the second-largest city of the province of Ontario?

Mr. Rick Byers: I'm so pleased to respond to the member for all the investments that we're making in the Ottawa area, that many she outlined already—but all different sectors, and it comes back to our infrastructure plan. Many governments don't have the courage to look out beyond the next few years—just to the next election. Well, our government is looking out for a decade, to generations beyond. So with respect to Ottawa, it's investments in health care, it's investments in highways, in transportation, in community organizations that will continue. I'm very proud to have been part of a plan to have those budget measures succeed. Thank you very much for the question.

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

Mr. Peter Tabuns: My question for the member is—as they may well be aware, the city of Toronto's transit system has just announced very significant cutbacks. Those cutbacks reflect the financial difficulties the city finds itself in. It reflects the difficulties that the Toronto Transit Commission finds itself in.

I don't see relief in this budget for the city of Toronto or its transit system. The members are well aware that as people use less transit, they will be using more cars. It will drive up greenhouse gas emissions in this province. Frankly, as you're also well aware, these cuts will disproportionately hit the people who are most vulnerable, the people with the lowest incomes, the people we depend on to actually make sure that this society runs.

What steps are you going to take to amend this budget so that the city of Toronto and the Toronto Transit Commission are protected?

Mr. Stephen Crawford: I find it ironic these questions pertaining to public transit are coming from the opposition, because the opposition seems to have a problem with commuters in this province. They have a problem with people in my riding that want to take the highway. They have a problem with people in my riding that want to take the GO train. They have a problem with people in Toronto that are taking the subway. They don't want to expand the subway lines, the Ontario Line.

Look, our population is growing at an exponential pace in this province, and that's good news. But we need the transit infrastructure to be able to accommodate these people getting from A to B quickly and safely. Whether it's subways, electrification of the GO line or building highways, roads and bridges, we are making more investments than any government in the history of Ontario. I would encourage you to support us in that objective.

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

Mr. Lorne Coe: Could the member from Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound share with the Legislature the effects of the health care investments, particularly in his riding and the hospital that's situated there?

Mr. Rick Byers: Thank you so much to the member for that question. Madam Speaker, I am so grateful to talk about the investments in health care that I'm seeing and our community is seeing in Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound first-hand, beginning with the new Markdale hospital. In the fall of 2023, this hospital will open. It's part of the Grey Bruce Health Services network of six hospitals—a brand new hospital on time, on budget, in Markdale. It will be great for our community and the whole region. But it's beyond that.

Long-term-care centres: People Care just announced an opening of the long-term-care centre in Meaford—beautiful building. I was there to see it open first-hand.

Also in Owen Sound—a beautifully refurbished, South-bridge-operated long-term-care facility. It just opened, and I was there to see the residents were almost in tears at the beauty of their new home.

There are great health care services all over. I am so grateful to the health care workers in our community that are supporting these, but this is a government that has a long-term vision, opening these facilities for the future of our community.

Second reading debate deemed adjourned.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

WOMEN'S WORLD HOCKEY CHAMPIONSHIP

Mr. Graham McGregor: They didn't call them the Brampton Thunder for nothing. Being one of the original teams in the Canadian Women's Hockey League, the Thunder were consistently a top contender throughout the league's history, winning two Clarkson Cup Championships in 2014 and 2016, as well as making the finals in half

of all of the championship finals in the league's 12-year history.

Brampton is a city with a strong history when it comes to ice hockey, especially women's hockey.

Cassie Campbell, former captain of the Canadian Olympic team, grew up in and played for Brampton. She has a community centre in Brampton named in her honour and continues a successful broadcasting career.

Jayna Hefford, another Canadian hockey legend, was also raised in and played for Brampton. She played for Canada's national team for over 17 years, winning four Olympic gold medals and seven world championships. She is also one of the all-time leading scorers in women's international hockey.

Continuing our proud tradition, it's my privilege to invite members of this House to come on down to Brampton between April 5 and April 16 where we will be hosting the 2023 IIHF Women's World Championship at the CAA Centre.

Today, fans from coast to coast to coast look forward to seeing the likes of Sarah Nurse, Jocelyne Larocque and Marie-Philip Poulin next month, as they wow the world on the international stage.

Speaker, Brampton is a hockey town. I want to wish Team Canada all the best in April. I know they'll make us proud.

ADOPTION DISCLOSURE

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: Speaker, I'll be introducing a bill today on the issue of next of kin accessing adoption records, and I will be reading two statements.

Statement 1: "My name is Catherine King and I am an Ontario adoptee of the Sixties Scoop. My father was born at the Andrew Mercer Reformatory in 1951 and was adopted. My children's aid society file contained no mention of my true heritage. Thankfully, my biological father was alive to pass on this hidden information to me. Not everyone is as fortunate in finding a living relative. Therefore it is time for Ontario to extend access to post-adoption birth information. Roseneath, Ontario."

Statement 2: "Current legislation provides identifying information to the birth parent, and the person adopted only. Although this legislation has been very well received by the community, and has allowed for many affirming family connections, it does not allow for the next of kin of a deceased adopted person to obtain access to their full identity and possible Indigenous heritage. As well, the next of kin of a deceased birth parent are prevented from connecting with family."

Today we ask you to take the legislation a step further to ensure that the next of kin are able to explore their full identity and Indigenous heritage, restore severed family relationships and research deceased adopted ancestors.

On behalf of Lynn Mayhew, families of incarcerated women and girls; Colleen Cardinal, Sixties Scoop Network; Valerie Andrews, Origins Canada; Wendy Rowney, Adoption Support Kinship; and Monica Byrne, Parent Finders.

FRANK GIANNONE

Mr. Rudy Cuzzetto: Last week, I was proud to attend Community Living Mississauga's 36th annual tribute dinner at the Mississauga Convention Centre, which honoured my friend Frank Giannone, a visionary Italian Canadian community builder who was among the first to recognize the great potential of building complete communities along transit lines.

Frank has served as the president of the Ontario Home Builders' Association, which recognize him with a lifetime achievement award. But he's not finished yet. He's working to transform the old Texaco refinery land in Port Credit into the Brightwater, a modern, vibrant and new waterfront village. Frank also founded the Port Credit Community Foundation and helped to organize many local events, including the Southside Shuffle, Paint the Town Red, the Mississauga Waterfront Festival and many more.

Speaker, on Thursday, over 900 people attended and over \$300,000 were raised to support Community Living Mississauga. With this funding, over 200 children with intellectual disabilities will be able to attend recreational programs this summer. I want to thank everyone who made this night possible, including the chair of the planning committee, Jack Prazeres, and the sponsors, including LIUNA Local 183. And most of all, thank you to Frank Giannone for everything he is doing to help build a better Mississauga and a stronger Ontario.

CLIMATE CHANGE

Ms. Chandra Pasma: Last week, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change released a very sobering report, warning governments to act now as the window is closing very quickly to prevent catastrophic levels of global warming. This is a final warning before it becomes too late to stop a 1.5-degree Celsius increase in temperatures.

The report identifies an increase in extreme weather events around the globe that are having a devastating impact on humanity. We are already seeing this in Ottawa West–Nepean, Speaker, where in the past six years, we have experienced two once-in-a-century floods, a tornado and an incredibly destructive derecho. All of these events destroyed homes and displaced residents. Just this winter, for the first time, we saw our beloved Rideau Canal fail to open, hurting many local businesses, and disappointing locals and tourists alike.

But the report also offered hope, Speaker. We can still address climate change, prevent the worst outcomes and secure a safer future for all of us if we act now. We have the tools and the knowledge of what needs to be done. What we need is the political willpower.

As UN Secretary-General António Guterres said, the report is a “clarion call to massively fast-track climate efforts by every country and every sector and on every time frame ... our world needs climate action on all fronts—everything, everywhere, all at once.”

We need this government to take that call seriously, Speaker. The solutions are there to reduce emissions,

boost our economy, keep people safe and hand a better world to our children. Will they heed that call?

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2023 ONTARIO BUDGET

Mr. Sam Oosterhoff: Last Thursday our government, under the leadership of the Premier and the Minister of Finance, tabled the 2023 budget, Building a Stronger Ontario. It's a serious budget for serious times, a plan that navigates ongoing global economic uncertainty with a responsible, targeted approach to help people and businesses today while laying a strong fiscal foundation for future generations. It's a plan for building a strong province as well as a stronger Niagara, a plan that is working.

Highlights for the Niagara region include:

- expanding GO rail service to Niagara by increasing current service levels and building four new and improved stations, as well as supporting local transit-oriented communities to build more attainable housing;

- twinning the Garden City Skyway over the Welland Canal in St. Catharines; and

- supporting the redevelopment of the West Lincoln Memorial Hospital as well as the new South Niagara Hospital.

Speaker, I could go on. The bottom line is this: Our government and our government alone is building a strong Ontario, whether it's more mental health funding, more new schools, more new local roads and bridges, more supportive housing, more jobs for auto workers, more nurses for our hospitals or more support for our rural economic development.

A strong Ontario means a strong Niagara, and this plan is a plan that supports the people of Niagara and our province, today and into the future. Together, let's work to support and pass Bill 85 as soon as possible so that we can get to work and continue building a stronger Ontario.

ART BATTLE

Mr. Chris Glover: Last week, the Art Battle Toronto All-Stars competition took place in The Great Hall in my beautiful riding of Spadina–Fort York. The New York Post describes Art Battle as Iron Chef, but with paint. The whole evening is a blast. Music is pumping everyone up. The bar is open. The host, Tanya, stokes the crowd. Meanwhile, six artists are arrayed on stage in the middle of the room with a canvas and acrylic paints. When the battle starts artists have 20 minutes to complete a canvas while the audience walks in a mass circle and watches the progress.

Meanwhile, the event is being live-streamed while colour-commentators Morgan and Tyson provide the play-by-play and people vote online and bid on the pieces as they are being created. Kudos to the artists who, in this incredible pressure cooker, created phenomenal canvases. Kudos to the winner of the evening, Julie Amlin, and even more kudos to Simon Plashkes and Chris Pemberton, who held the first Art Battle tournament in Toronto 14 years

ago and are now exporting it to Reno, Minnesota, Pawtucket, Pocatello, Mexico City, London, New York, Chicago and 50 other cities.

We're all looking forward to the next Art Battle, coming on March 30 to Ottawa and then returning to The Great Hall in Toronto on April 25. Support local artists and have a blast. Come out to the Art Battle.

CHILD CARE

Mr. Brian Riddell: Two weeks ago I tabled a motion aimed at improving the safety of our youngest citizens. The motion reads: That, in the opinion of this House, day cares and child care facilities should be required to report absent children to parents, guardians and caregivers, similar to the safe arrival program in our public schools.

The idea behind this motion came from a discussion with a person in my riding named Sandra Camara. Devastated by the death last summer of a young boy who died after he was forgotten in a family vehicle, Camara reached out to my office. Camara, a day care provider herself for more than 15 years, described being shaken to the core by the little boy's death.

In a letter, she wrote, "It should be mandatory that a day care centre, licensed and unlicensed home day care providers be required to contact both parents if the child is more than 30 minutes late. If they are unable to reach the parents or have not heard back from them in five minutes, the parents' place of employment should be contacted, followed by a listed emergency contact. This process would follow the regular school board processes where a parent is contacted if a child is absent or late and it has not been reported to school."

Mr. Speaker, it is often these meaningful talks that we have with people in our riding that lead us to positive changes for Ontarians. I believe my conversation with Ms. Camara was one of these conversations.

SAULT COLLEGE COUGARS WOMEN'S HOCKEY TEAM

Mr. Ross Romano: This time last Monday, the Sault College Cougars women's hockey team was in Boston preparing to play in the final game of the playoff tournament for the American Collegiate Hockey Association Women's Division 2 national championship. The team was set to face off against Northeastern University. After the heartbreaking 2021-22 season finish losing at the ACHA nationals, the team was hungry to bring the championship home. Going into the tournament, the team was undefeated—a perfect 30 and 0. No pressure at all.

In the game, Emily Moore scored twice, while Emma Lee, Alyssa Turcotte, Brooke Brazeau and Stephanie Pagnotta added singles for the Soo. Emily Hansen got the start in goal.

I am pleased to say that the Sault College Cougars completed the season with a 6-1 win over the Northeastern team, bringing home the trophy for the ACHA Women's

Division 2 national championship game. The Cougars finished the season with a perfect 31-0-0-0 record. The club started and finished the season on a win streak—the final number coming in at 31 consecutive wins. The closest games came when the Cougars ended up on the right side of a four-goal game, two of them coming in overtime. They scored 229 goals and allowed only 22 goals, with multiple players at the top of many statistical categories.

Congratulations to the Sault College Cougars women's hockey team for an amazing year. Go Cougars!

NOT YOUR AVERAGE DAYCARE

Ms. Mitzie Hunter: It is an honour for me to rise today with my member's statement on behalf of the people of Scarborough–Guildwood. For more than 30 years now, Not Your Average Daycare, NYAD, has been an integral part of the local community; in fact, it started in my riding of Scarborough–Guildwood. Over this time, the organization has expanded and evolved, offering a range of programs, and focusing on accessibility.

I recently met with the executive director, Danielle Wittick, and members of the NYAD team, and what I heard was deeply concerning. Their stories provided context to how licensed child care in Ontario is facing the worst workforce crisis in its history. They spoke about the \$19 wage floor for RECEs, and they can neither recruit nor retain these workers as a result. The severity of this situation can be clearly seen at the YMCA, Toronto's largest child care provider, which recently reported that having so few staff—16,000 children enrolled in a 35,000-licensed-space facility.

Across the province, child care programs need more support, and families are counting on the Ford government for help.

I want to thank Danielle and her team at NYAD for all the work that they do each and every day for our youngest learners.

And I urge this government to invest in the child care program—especially to those workers who need the help the most.

INTERNATIONAL AGRI-FOOD WORKERS

Mr. Trevor Jones: Each year, my region welcomes over 16,000 international agri-food workers from Mexico, Guatemala and the Caribbean to work alongside our farmers and greenhouse growers to produce the fresh food that has earned a reputation for being among the most trusted in the world. I've been so fortunate to have met, learned from and worked with many of these workers over the years. What was first small groups of young men who would travel to the area for short durations to support their families abroad is now people of all ages and genders who stay longer to support Ontario's critical food supply chain year-round.

Our government is encouraging more people from around the world with in-demand skills and experience to choose to call Ontario home so they can support their families and continue to contribute and prosper as permanent residents and citizens.

My community has benefited from this diversity and investment, as bustling small businesses and a vibrant food scene has emerged in Leamington, inspired by Mexican, Latin American and Caribbean culture and cuisine.

Later this spring, Leamington's Migrant Worker Community Program, led by my good friend Martin Varela, will host its second annual Greenhouse Cup soccer tournament, where international players from area farms will come together to showcase their skills and compete in the universal language of sport. I want to thank all international agri-food workers for their valuable contributions to our culture, our economy and for all the good things grown in Ontario.

1030

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Mr. Andrew Dowie: I'd like to wish a very warm welcome to a good friend of Windsor, a good friend of the province of Ontario, His Worship Mayor Drew Dilkens.

Miss Monique Taylor: I know there are a lot of guests in the House today, but on my list I have a few. I have the MP for Hamilton Centre, Matthew Green; his wife, Jayde Jarvis; and their son, Langston Green.

And then from my constituency office, I have Heather Lambert-Hillen, who is with us; her daughter, Charlise Hillen; and former page Daunte Hillen. Welcome back to Queen's Park.

Hon. Caroline Mulroney: I want to welcome to Queen's Park the Ontario Road Builders' Association, ORBA. Mr. Speaker, today we have Mario Villeneuve, Andrew Weltz, Malcolm Croskery, Kevin Machej, Kieran Hawe and Christian Dover, as well as Michael McSweeney.

Ms. Sandy Shaw: It gives me great pleasure to introduce people from my riding of Hamilton West—Ancaster—Dundas: the wonderful Daniela Giulietti—welcome to the House. Also I'd like to welcome the Hamilton school board trustee Sabreina Dahab and her sister, Batool. Welcome to your House.

Hon. Todd Smith: I'd like to welcome Dale and Theresa Hoard. They're from Sterling. Dale is the owner of MicroAge Technologies in Belleville, and he's also the president of the Belleville and district chamber of commerce. Welcome to Queen's Park.

MPP Jamie West: I'd like to welcome many people from labour to our House today: Patty Coates, Ahmed Gaied, Janice Folk-Dawson from the OFL, Yolanda McClean from CUPE. From OPSEU Local 428, we have Jody Pringle, the president; Lee MacLaren; Michelle Langlois; Tina Faibish; Melissa Coenraad; Chrisy Tremblay; Hilary Cook; and, of course, J.P. Mrochek—sorry; J.P. Mrochek is a friend of mine—JP Hornick from

OPSEU/SEFPO, who is also a friend of mine. Welcome to your House.

Ms. Mitzie Hunter: I too would like to welcome our friends from labour. I'll reiterate: Patty Coates; Andria Babbington, for the Toronto and York Region Labour Council; Yolanda McClean from CUPE; and also I can't help but re-welcome Matthew Green, who is part of the federal Black caucus. It's really wonderful to see you and your family here today.

Mr. Chris Glover: I just want to welcome to the House Michau van Speyk from the Ontario Autism Coalition. He celebrated his 28th birthday last week, so happy birthday, Michau.

Mr. Mike Schreiner: I too want to welcome our friends from labour, with a special shout-out to Janice Folk-Dawson from the great city of Guelph. Welcome to Queen's Park.

Mr. Joel Harden: I rise with great pleasure today to welcome the family of Ethan Blonski, who is part our page team this week: Stephanie Joyce, Ken Blonski, and brother Ryan Blonski. And, Speaker, Ryan is one of the people who signed up to be a page, but, because of the pandemic, couldn't. So, Ryan, special props to you for signing up. Thank you so much to the family of Ethan for being here.

MPP Jill Andrew: Good morning, Speaker. I'd like to welcome Lycée Français de Toronto school to Queen's Park. Bienvenue au parc de la Reine.

I'd also like to welcome the Coalition of Black Trade Unionists's Yolanda McClean, who is the CBTU president and international board member; Andria Babbington, the president of the Toronto and York Region Labour Council; Ahmad Gaied, the OFL secretary-treasurer; Patty Coates, OFL president; Janice Folk-Dawson, executive vice-president of OFL; also JP Hornick, sitting on the government side; as well as Michau van Speyk, an autism advocate who we all adore. Welcome to Queen's Park.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): I'll continue with introduction of visitors unless there are any objections.

Mr. Wayne Gates: It's a great day for Niagara Falls today. Our page captain today is Claire Fish, from my riding, Claire, welcome.

I'd also like to welcome her family who are also here today: Stephen Fish, Kathleen Taylor, Evelyn Fish. Welcome to Queen's Park. Claire is doing an absolutely amazing job on behalf of all the pages, so thank you very much.

MPP Jamie West: I'd like to welcome members from the Ontario Road Builders' Association. They're having a lobby day tomorrow, but I was able to meet with them. Thank you to Michael McSweeney, Mario Villeneuve, Kevin Machej, Andrew Weltz and Malcolm Croskery for coming today to meet with me.

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

INDEPENDENT MEMBERS

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): I understand the member for Ottawa—Vanier has a point of order.

M^{me} Lucille Collard: I do, Mr. Speaker. Thank you for the attention. I am seeking unanimous consent that, notwithstanding standing order 45(b)(iv), the time for debate on opposition day motion number 3 be allocated as follows: 54 minutes to each of the recognized parties and 12 minutes for the independent members as a group.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Ms. Collard is seeking the unanimous consent of the House that, notwithstanding standing order 45(b)(iv), the time for debate on opposition day motion number 3 be allocated as follows: 54 minutes to each of the recognized parties and 12 minutes to the independent members as a group. Agreed? Agreed.

INTRODUCTION OF MEMBER FOR HAMILTON CENTRE

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): I beg to inform the House that the Clerk has received from the Chief Electoral Officer and laid upon the table a certificate of the by-election in the electoral district of Hamilton Centre.

The Clerk of the Assembly (Mr. Todd Decker): The certificate bears today's date, is addressed to the Clerk of the Legislative Assembly and reads as follows:

"Dear Mr. Decker:

"A writ of election dated the 15th day of February, 2023, was issued by the Honourable Lieutenant Governor of the province of Ontario and was addressed to Ryan Leverton, returning officer for the electoral district of Hamilton Centre, for the election of a member to represent the said electoral district of Hamilton Centre in the Legislative Assembly of this province in the room of Andrea Horwath who, since her election as representative of the said electoral district of Hamilton Centre, has resigned.

"This is to certify that, a poll having been granted and held in Hamilton Centre on the 16th day of March, 2023, Sarah Jama has been returned as duly elected as appears by the return of the said writ of election, dated the 24th day of March, 2023, which is now lodged of record in my officer.

"Yours sincerely,

"Greg Essensa, Chief Electoral Officer."

Ms. Jama was escorted into the House by Ms. Stiles and Mr. Vanthof.

1040

Ms. Marit Stiles: Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present to you and to the House Sarah Jama, member-elect for the electoral district of Hamilton Centre, who has taken the oath and signed the roll and now claims the right to take her seat.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Let the honourable member take her seat.

Applause.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): I beg to inform the House that, pursuant to standing order 2, the member for Hamilton Centre is authorized to indicate her desire to be recognized by the Chair to speak by raising her hand; is authorized to signify during any proceeding relating to

voting and divisions by raising her hand; to signify by raising her hand in any proceeding that requires members to stand in their places; and to similarly signify by raising her hand in any relevant proceedings in any committee of the assembly.

It is now time for oral questions.

QUESTION PERIOD

HEALTH CARE

Ms. Marit Stiles: Good morning, Speaker. This is a moment in history right here today—very exciting.

My question is to the Premier. Not every Ontarian has an OHIP card—migrant workers who help keep our agriculture sector going through back-breaking labour, out-of-status workers in the construction sector who face risks on the job, and refugees fleeing violence in conflicts around the world. Through you, Speaker: Does the Premier think the uninsured should be eligible for urgent medical care?

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The Deputy Premier and Minister of Health.

Hon. Sylvia Jones: Congratulations to the member from Hamilton Centre on your victory and coming here to join us in the House.

Absolutely, we as a government understand the valuable work that our immigrant workers play, which is why we continue to fund those services through OHIP-funded services. The member opposite has on the NDP website today, right now, false information, Speaker, and I don't use that word lightly. They are suggesting to the general public that individuals who have come to Ontario are not going to get services in the province of Ontario. It is factually incorrect. And it continues to be on their website, even though multiple sources, including the Toronto Star, have told them that in fact that is not the case.

Would the member opposite respectfully remove that false information from their website?

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): I'm going to caution the minister on her language.

Supplementary question.

Ms. Marit Stiles: Wow. Well, Speaker, this Minister of Health should be listening to the physicians across this province who are telling her what this is going to mean for their patients. On a very busy Friday, it was revealed that the government is eliminating the Physician and Hospital Services for Uninsured Persons Program. This is going to make it harder for refugees, for unhoused people and for those with mental health challenges to access urgent health care.

That this government is making these cuts while redirecting public money out of public care and into the private pockets of a few connected people makes this even more shocking.

Speaker, my question is to the Premier: Why did his government choose to eliminate this simple, yet compassionate, program?

Hon. Sylvia Jones: The member opposite should know full well that this program was put in place when individuals could not travel in the province of Ontario at the beginning of the pandemic, when we had limitations on individuals who needed to be able to return to their homes, to their home communities. That was removed. Because of that, we put in a funding model that ensured that individuals who were in Ontario could get the medical coverage they needed.

I want to reinforce: We have 75 community health centres spread across Ontario that have funding models that ensure that they can provide necessary health services for individuals who, for any number of reasons, do not have an up-to-date OHIP card. We have temporary foreign workers who have programs provided by the federal government to ensure that they have health care funding in the province of Ontario.

Again, Speaker, I would urge the member opposite to take down the misinformation because it is seeding unnecessary fear in the people of Ontario, and it's wrong.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Stop the clock for a second. I'm going to again caution the member. It's causing some concern on the other side of the House, but I don't believe that the minister said anything unparliamentary.

Final supplementary?

Ms. Marit Stiles: So I guess the answer is: They are going to go ahead and end that program. That's what we're hearing now.

I want to try this out on you: "Devastatingly cruel"; "A big mistake"; "A regressive decision"; "Harmful and cruel"; "Unconscionable"—not my words, Speaker, but those of physicians across this province who are talking about this government's decision to eliminate this program.

Speaker, the Premier seems to have no problem finding ways to help out people that he knows, his friends, but when it comes to helping Ontarians who are in need, he's willing to turn his back.

So my question to the Premier again is: Will he reverse his decision to end this program and finally put those in need ahead of his insider friends?

Interjections.

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

The Minister of Health to reply.

Hon. Sylvia Jones: Speaker, I will be as clear as I can, unlike the NDP news release that is spreading false information. There is no change—

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): I'm going to ask the minister to withdraw—

Hon. Sylvia Jones: I withdraw.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): —and conclude her response.

Hon. Sylvia Jones: I would respectfully ask that the NDP take down a press release that is seeding fear unnecessarily in the province of Ontario. There is no change in the way that uninsured persons will receive care in the province of Ontario.

The only change is how hospitals, community health and midwifery centres will be reimbursed for insuring and providing that care.

GOVERNMENT POLICIES

Ms. Marit Stiles: Speaker, I'll tell you something else that Ontario needs. Ontario needs 1.5 million new homes over 10 years to keep up with demand. The NDP has proposed many ideas—

Interjections.

Ms. Marit Stiles: Yes, we did.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Order. I'm going to ask the government side not to interrupt the Leader of the Opposition when she has the floor the way they just did. Please don't do it again.

Restart the clock. The Leader of the Opposition has the floor.

Ms. Marit Stiles: We need them; these folks aren't delivering them.

The NDP has proposed many ideas to achieve this, such as updating zoning rules to allow more affordable missing-middle housing and investing in hundreds of thousands of new affordable and non-market homes.

The government has said no to every single solution we present. Instead, they focus their attention on carving up the greenbelt, a decision that will only help a few insiders while everybody else is being left behind.

Speaker, the government's own budget shows that new housing starts are going down in Ontario instead of up. Does the Premier really think that his plan is working?

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

Hon. Steve Clark: Speaker, over the last two years, housing starts have reached a level that this province hasn't seen in over 30 years. Last year, rental housing was at an all-time high. We've never had more rental housing starts than we did last year.

Speaker, the member can say all she wants, but the facts are right in Hansard. When we proposed to give a break to non-profit housing, they voted against it. When we decided to make it cheaper and easier to build more purpose-built rentals and provided those incentives, her party voted against it. Time and time and time again, we present positive opportunities to create better gentle density in neighbourhoods, more rental opportunities, and more non-profits. It's the NDP that is the party of no. They are the ones—

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The member will take his seat.

The supplementary question?

1050

Ms. Marit Stiles: Speaker, that's all a bit rich, because last week's budget has no new funding to build new social

housing or even to protect the ones that are already built. And the Premier's own Housing Affordability Task Force said that a shortage of land was not the cause of the housing crisis. They said we need to make better use of land already available. The NDP supports this principle, but this Premier does not. He ignored his own task force and targeted prime farmland and the greenbelt for destruction. Now, the budget shows that housing starts are going down instead of up.

Speaker, to the Premier, will he admit that his housing policies are failing?

Hon. Steve Clark: Speaker, you've got to be kidding me. In Minister Bethlenfalvy's budget, the number 1 and number 2 asks for municipalities: (1) we need more supportive housing—\$202 million we're adding to the homelessness prevention program; (2) wraparound mental health and addiction services with those supportive housing units. We have delivered exactly what municipalities asked as their number 1 and number 2 asks.

It's going to be very interesting though, Speaker, to see if the Leader of the Opposition and Ontario New Democrats support the number 1 and number 2 requests from 444 municipalities.

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

Ms. Marit Stiles: Speaker, this Premier and his government need to get out there and actually listen to Ontarians, because I can tell you, their budget completely missed the moment and failed Ontarians. Not only is the Premier targeting farmland and the greenbelt, but he's targeting tenants, too. He trashed rent protections for tenants, he made evictions easier and he's threatening rental replacement bylaws that are going to put existing affordable rental homes at risk. The Premier's policies have failed tenants and made them more vulnerable at a time when people are really hurting out there.

Speaker, my question is to the Premier again: Will he protect tenants by bringing back real rent control and invest meaningfully in affordable and non-market housing?

Hon. Steve Clark: Speaker, I already talked about our historic levels of rental construction last year but, you know, she mentioned the word "listen." Well, I've got a few quotes that I'd like her to listen to. Deputy Mayor Jennifer McKelvie from the city of Toronto: "I want to thank Premier Doug Ford and Finance Minister Peter Bethlenfalvy for committing ... \$48 million in this budget for wraparound services ... for 2,000 vulnerable residents in" Toronto's supportive housing.

Hon. Todd Smith: What else you got?

Hon. Steve Clark: Mayor Bonnie Crombie from the city of Mississauga, chair of OBCM: "Ontario's Big City Mayors have been calling on the province to address the mental health, addictions and homelessness crisis we are experiencing in our communities and today's announcement for over a half a billion for mental health and addictions, and an additional \$202 million per year for the next three years in homelessness prevention will have a

big impact in the ability of our cities to provide residents with the support and the resources they need."

That's who we're listening to.

Interjections.

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

Start the clock. The next question, the member for Waterloo.

ONTARIO BUDGET

Ms. Catherine Fife: Budgets should reflect the needs of the people that were elected to serve. During budget consultations, we heard from Ontarians who presented solutions to the major issues facing Ontarians who are facing record evictions, barriers in access to family doctors or even access to an open emergency room in this province. People in Ontario are hurting, but there was no sense of urgency in budget 2023. In fact, one editorial said, "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."

Why didn't this government listen to the people of this province? Because they presented solutions to our health care crisis, to a housing crisis and, yes, to a climate change crisis.

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

Hon. Peter Bethlenfalvy: Thank you for the question. I, too, want to congratulate the member from Hamilton Centre and welcome her to the House.

Mr. Speaker, my great parliamentary assistants from Oakville and Bruce-Grey-Owen Sound criss-crossed the province to listen to people—me, too. We went around the province and we heard from the people of Ontario. And do you know what they said? They said, "Yes, times are tough. The price of everything is going up. Thank you for acting in the budget of 2022." And, by the way, Mr. Speaker, what did the opposition do on that budget? They voted no.

Well, then, we went to the fall economic statement, where we continued the gas-tax cut and increasing the minimum wage; lower taxes for the lowest-income workers of this province; ODSP, GAINS—I could go on. Which way did the opposition vote? Yes or no?

Interjections: No.

Hon. Peter Bethlenfalvy: So you have an opportunity now: budget 2023, which continues an historic investment in the people of Ontario to build a strong Ontario. Which way are you going to vote? Yes or—

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

Ms. Catherine Fife: Budgets are about choices, Mr. Speaker, and we are seeing record evictions, up 22%. Yet this government refuses to provide rent control. RAO has said, "Budget 2023 won't address the health care staffing shortage." Wages are still capped at 1%. You cannot recruit new nurses into a broken system.

Municipalities were promised to be made whole by the minister after Bill 23 removed the development charges and compromised cities' abilities to actually produce housing in the province of Ontario. In fact, budget 2023 contains a \$124-million cut.

Education: School boards are facing millions in shortfalls with depleted reserves, and OSSTF notes that the entire budget change for the education sector comes from the federal child care money—which leads to a general question about transparency in the budgeting of this government.

Will this government be amenable to fixing this budget? Because we are focused on solutions on this side of the House.

Hon. Peter Bethlenfalvy: Speaker, where to begin? First off, I'd like to just highlight that the education budget went up by another \$2.3 billion in this budget.

As we listened right across Ontario, do you know what they asked for? They asked for health care. Well, this budget gets \$4 billion from the federal government over the next three years—which is true; we'll give you that. Do you know how much we're investing in the people of Ontario in health care? It's \$15 billion over the next three years—this government. And do you know what that \$15 billion does? It goes to pay nurses; it goes to pay personal support workers, physicians, therapists—you name it. We are supporting our health care workers. In fact, we put in an additional \$80 million over three years to expand our nursing education for 1,000 registered nurses, 500 registered practical nurses and 150 nurse practitioners.

Please join us and vote for the budget and support our health care workers.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Mr. Lorne Coe: My question is for the Minister of Finance. To begin, congratulations to the minister on the introduction of the budget that lays out our government's plan to build a strong Ontario economy. Under the leadership of Premier Ford and this minister, the province is on a steady path to meet any challenge that comes our way.

However, Ontarians know that we're not immune from the effects of global economic uncertainty, high interest rates and inflation. All these factors can adversely impact the ability of manufacturers to grow, innovate and become more competitive while creating new jobs.

Speaker, can the minister please explain what steps our government is taking to create the right conditions for expansion in Ontario's manufacturing sector?

Hon. Peter Bethlenfalvy: First off, I want to thank the very hard-working gentleman from Whitby.

Mr. Speaker, these are uncertain times; there's no question. We are working hard to build a more certain future for future generations by focusing on the economy, the infrastructure and our workers in this province.

1100

Last week, I talked about a road trip that we took around the province. We made multiple stops around the province, and one of the stops that we should have made was

in Brampton. Do you know what is happening in Brampton, Mr. Speaker? We are supporting auto manufacturing in Brampton, which had left, which was leaving the province—300,000 manufacturing jobs leaving the province over the last decade and a half. Guess what, Mr. Speaker? They're coming back. They're coming back to Brampton, to Oshawa, to Oakville, to Windsor—right across this province.

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

Mr. Lorne Coe: Thank you to the minister for that great response. It's encouraging to know that our government is continuing to support local communities by attracting key investments that protect jobs. The clear, decisive and targeted investments announced by our government will help contribute to the creation and retention of thousands of good-paying jobs. In contrast to the previous Liberal government, with its reckless policies and complete disregard for the manufacturing sector, our government is leading with a balanced and sound approach that will benefit individuals, families and our communities.

Speaker, can the minister please elaborate on how the proposed Ontario Made Manufacturing Investment Tax Credit will improve our province's competitive edge?

Hon. Peter Bethlenfalvy: Well, Mr. Speaker, as was mentioned earlier, the mayor of Windsor is here today, and part of that road trip—

Interjection: A champion.

Hon. Peter Bethlenfalvy: Yes, he's a champion; he's a good guy, too. We did that road trip and we stopped in Windsor, because do you know what? We're bringing back good jobs through Stellantis building a battery manufacturing plant. We're building a new hospital there. We're building roads.

But here's the thing: The businesses that are risking their capital will benefit with the Ontario Made Manufacturing Investment Tax Credit. This will help literally hundreds and thousands of businesses that support the supply chain, secondary and tertiary manufacturers who are investing their own capital to create jobs, to create new opportunities for families. That's why we're investing in this tax credit. If passed, it will help cities like Windsor, it will help the workers in Windsor and it will help Ontario prosper.

OPTOMETRY SERVICES

MPP Lise Vaugeois: Preventive care keeps older Ontarians out of hospitals and emergency rooms. Currently, seniors can access an eye exam every 12 months, but under this government's new rules, they will have to wait 18 months to get an exam covered by OHIP. This is a move to push seniors into using privatized services that many seniors cannot afford, nor should they have to.

To the Premier: Why is this government jeopardizing seniors' health by reducing access to OHIP-covered eye care?

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Deputy Premier and Minister of Health.

Hon. Sylvia Jones: I am incredibly proud of the work that our team was able to do, ratifying an agreement with the Ontario Association of Optometrists for the first time since 2011. Some 98% of Ontario optometrists voted in support of this deal. Why? Because they understood clinically—and we worked very closely with the Ontario Association of Optometrists, and I really have to thank them for their commitment to getting this deal done. They worked very closely to ensure that we were looking at all of the services, where they needed to be expanded—which, of course, we have expanded in appropriate areas like access to glaucoma—and also saying, “Where are those investments and where do those pieces need to be?” Is it a healthy 65-year-old who has no eye issues or is it that young patient who has diabetes, that senior who has—

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

And the supplementary question: the member for Nickel Belt.

M^{me} France Gélinas: I think we all know that good vision has a huge impact on our quality of life. The move that has been done by this minister leads me to ask: What body of evidence that was used does the minister have to support her decision to reduce access to eye care for vulnerable seniors with deteriorating vision? What is the body of evidence that supports the move that this government is doing?

Hon. Sylvia Jones: The body of evidence is the Ontario Association of Optometrists, who are the experts in this field, ratifying this agreement by 98%. The new funding agreement will actually increase care for people with chronic diseases such as glaucoma and ocular complications due to diabetes. Why, Speaker? Because Ontario optometrists understand that that is where the focus needs to be, where people who have active and engaged issues have eye care that is immediate and there for them. This agreement does this, and again, I am very proud of the work that our team has done settling this.

ONTARIO FILM AND TELEVISION INDUSTRY

Mr. Brian Riddell: My question is for Minister of Tourism, Culture and Sport. The film production industry has been a major success story in Cambridge, and we welcome the tremendous economic injection into our local economy from domestic and foreign film productions. Nearly \$900,000 was brought in just last year.

One production that has been filmed here since its first season is *The Handmaid’s Tale*, which became Cambridge’s unofficial claim to fame on the small screen. While viewers greatly enjoy this show as it wraps up its final season, local businesses in my community greatly benefited from the production and the work completed here.

Speaker, can the minister please explain how our government is supporting the film industry in Ontario,

especially in communities like mine, with new film and cinema production opportunities?

Hon. Neil Lumsden: Mr. Speaker, you bet I can. That’s a great question. I also appreciate the member recognizing what happens within his community when the film and television industry comes in not for a visit, but to do their work and stay for a while. The ripple effect is positive for everybody. Thank you for noticing.

The film and television production industries continue to thrive. Some people might say to me, as they have before, “Thrive? How could they have thrived?” Well, let me tell you: 2022 was the best year ever. Hard to believe, but that goes to show you what a great industry it is. It is thriving, as I said, and it has wonderful people driving the bus—highest productions ever. I don’t like to say numbers but I will say it’s over \$3 billion back into the economy. That’s 46,000 jobs.

This is an industry that’s moving forward aggressively—

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

The supplementary question.

Mr. Brian Riddell: Thank you to the minister for that response. It’s positive that our government is committed to making these targeted investments in Ontario’s growing film and television sector, but is there more that can be done to solidify Ontario’s position as a first-rate centre for film and television production?

Besides enjoying the annual growth of this industry and the benefits to our economy, the people of Ontario expect our government to ensure we have a permanent foundation for homegrown film and television industries. Can the minister please elaborate on the outlook for the film and television industry in Ontario?

Hon. Neil Lumsden: Thank you for the question. We’re not as reliant on international productions as we used to be. Domestic film and television production was up 25% last year. Confidence in Ontario was—

Interjection.

Hon. Neil Lumsden: Go ahead; 25% is a big deal. Confidence isn’t just within Ontario; it’s from outside of Ontario as well. There is a very large—might I say massive—production studio being built, 1.2 million square feet, in Markham, Ontario. It’s being done by a gentleman who grew up in Canada and who is a star in the film industry, Ryan Reynolds. His company is building this. There are more than just a few people, Mr. Speaker, who have confidence in Ontario and what they’re doing, on top of which, driving jobs, driving revenue, good-paying careers for people down the road in this industry—a great opportunity for young people.

EDUCATION FUNDING

Ms. Chandra Pasma: Our schools are facing significant cuts to the supports our children need next year, yet this government’s new budget continues to massively underspend on education. If the government had just kept up with inflation since 2018, they would be spending \$2.5

billion more on education. That doesn't even take into account the additional supports our kids need because of the pandemic.

1110

Will the government finally invest in our children, reimburse school boards for their COVID expenses and provide the stable and adequate funding our children need?

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Minister of Education.

Hon. Stephen Lecce: I thank the member opposite for the question. I am very proud to confirm that the budget increases funding in the public education school system by \$2.3 billion, of which \$1.3 billion specifically in baseline education funding is up from the year prior, Mr. Speaker. This year, compared to last year, it's up \$671 million. Every single year, we've increased funding.

In fact, under the Premier's leadership, funding is up, compared to the former Liberals, by 27% in the Ministry of Education. That is an investment in children.

We've hired 8,000 more staff. We have 200 more principals. We have another 800 more teachers.

Mr. Speaker, we just announced a \$15-billion investment to build new schools after the systematic closure of schools under the former Liberals. We're going to continue to invest and ensure these kids get back on track.

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

Ms. Chandra Pasma: The only thing historic about this government's education spending, Speaker, is their inability to get the funding out the door.

Under this government, kids with accessibility needs are already not getting the support they need. And now the government is forcing thousands of kids with autism into school with no transition plans and no additional resources for schools, which means already inadequate supports are going to have to be stretched even further.

How are we going to keep these kids safe? How are we going to help them succeed? Where is the plan? And where are the resources to make sure that every child can thrive in our schools?

Hon. Stephen Lecce: I thank the member opposite for the question. We, of course, are very committed to all children, including those with special education needs, with exceptionalities within our schools. It's why, in the funding announced last year for this school year, we increased the special education budget by \$92 million in addition to the hiring of 7,000 education workers, which include EAs, which are so consequential to the life of those kids.

Mr. Speaker, the special education budget this year is up to \$3.2 billion. That is the highest level it has ever been in our province's history. I assure the member opposite that for children with intellectual and developmental disabilities, we are working together across the ministry to ensure they have the supports, the resources and the staff in place to succeed in our schools.

HOUSING

Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon: A glorious morning, everyone, and welcome to the new member from Hamilton Centre.

Housing is an issue that is top of mind for most Ontarians. For many, owning a home is completely out of reach, and finding a home to rent is also a struggle. There are simply not enough homes to go around and not enough that are affordable.

Enter the government, with their impressive, albeit lofty, goal to build 1.5 million homes in the next 10 years.

Last week, we received the 2023 Ontario budget. The government projects over 80,000 housing starts a year for the next three years. This is a substantial decrease from the forecast in last year's budget, and if we continue this way, we'll need to build almost 200,000 homes a year thereafter. This will be next to impossible, Mr. Speaker.

Can the Premier explain to Ontarians how the government plans on achieving the goal of 1.5 million homes in 10 years based on the numbers we saw in the budget last week and considering we are already behind schedule?

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

Hon. Steve Clark: I want to thank the member for Beaches—East York for her question. As I said earlier in the House, over the last two years, we've seen housing starts in Ontario the likes that we had not seen in over 30 years. In fact, on the rental piece, as I said earlier, it's the highest amount of starts in Ontario's history last year.

We need everyone, all three levels of government, to work together.

I want to specifically talk about the member for Beaches—East York because she repeatedly, as a member of Toronto city council, voted to exempt development charges on affordable housing, supporting the city of Toronto's Open Door Affordable Housing Program. I want her to take the same principles from when she was at Toronto city council and apply them to support our measures in More Homes Built Faster, because that's exactly what we need to do.

We need to incent non-profit housing. We need to incent more rental opportunities—

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Thank you very much. The minister will take his seat.

Supplementary question?

Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon: To the member opposite, I am darn proud of my track record on building housing at Toronto city council.

We know people want to live in existing communities, in urban centres and vibrant neighbourhoods, with access to infrastructure they need to enjoy a fruitful life: schools, public transit, parks, hospitals, shops. We should focus on creative solutions—building up and not building out, not creating more sprawl. It can and should be done. Homes don't have to be built in the greenbelt. They don't have to be built on flood plains and wetlands. They don't have to be built in areas where you need to access everything by car.

Mr. Speaker, my question is, will the government be focusing on building in existing communities, and if so, what are some of the solutions that they are exploring and how will they do so quickly, efficiently and sustainably?

Hon. Steve Clark: Speaker, I think one of the best initiatives the government has put forward was on Thursday in Minister Bethlenfalvy's budget, where we provided an additional \$202 million to Ontario's 444 municipalities, including the city of Toronto. I read Deputy Mayor McKelvie's glowing support for the budget and the initiatives we put in under the Homelessness Prevention Program and also the wraparound services for supportive housing that are in the budget for mental health and addictions. Also, because I know she's a big advocate for housing, I'm glad that she has indicated she will continue to support our government's policies on non-profit.

"The Ontario Alliance to End Homelessness is pleased to see this significant investment in homelessness services from the government of Ontario. This is a much-needed increase in funding to help address the homelessness crisis affecting municipalities throughout the province."

Again to the member, I hope she continues to support our budget and support those initiatives to help prevent—

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

The next question.

RED TAPE REDUCTION

Mr. Graham McGregor: My question is for the Minister of Red Tape Reduction. Red tape gets in the way of businesses and is a waste of time, energy and money. Unnecessary and outdated regulations implemented by the previous Liberal government, backed by the NDP, led to frustrations, delays, and compromised Ontario's competitive economic advantage over other jurisdictions.

Under the leadership of the Premier and this minister, our government is following through on our promise to tackle the inconvenience and hardship of pointless fees, complicated paperwork and duplicative processes. While significant success has been achieved to make life easier through the Less Red Tape, Stronger Ontario Act, more work needs to be done.

Speaker, can the minister please explain what positive impacts the people of our province can expect to see as a result of this legislation?

Hon. Parm Gill: I want to thank the hard-working member for Brampton North for the important question. We know that under the previous Liberal government, supported by the NDP, the province was drowning under red tape. Of course, we know that businesses were fleeing our province and families were having a hard time making ends meet.

Since 2018, reducing red tape has been one of the top priorities for this government, and we have been working hard. We've introduced nine different bills to help Ontarians when it comes to unnecessary red tape burden. What all of that means, Mr. Speaker: It means saving businesses and individuals over half a billion dollars in annual costs. Of course, our most recent bill, Bill 46, the Less Red Tape,

Stronger Ontario Act, again includes a number of meaningful, impactful legislative and regulatory changes to boost our economic growth and modernize our government processes. And we will continue that hard work, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Graham McGregor: Thank you to the minister for that response. We know the Liberals and the NDP have never seen a regulation they didn't want to duplicate or a tax they didn't want to double. The people of this province expect our government to find solutions that drive our economy forward, strengthen the resiliency of our local supply chains, and make government programs and services accessible and easy to understand.

People and businesses in my riding and right across the province are best placed to help our government identify and eliminate outdated regulations and burdensome red tape. A focused and collaborative approach will ensure our continued economic success. Their knowledge and expertise will pinpoint unnecessary rules that do not serve a purpose and those that could be improved.

1120

Speaker, can the minister please explain how our government will engage with Ontarians to identify how best to remove regulatory barriers?

Hon. Parm Gill: I want to thank my colleague for that question. Again, one of my priorities as the Minister of Red Tape Reduction—and I know our government, under the leadership of our Premier—is to hear from as many businesses and individuals as possible and to hear their first-hand experience and learn from that. Last week, I had an opportunity to meet with another consultation group from the retail council sector, which was very productive. I can tell you that their insight and recommendations are what help inform our red tape bill. I am proud to say that my team and I are already working on our next red tape bill.

We will continue to engage with all Ontarians to generate new ideas on how we can continue to remove unnecessary red tape and continue to build on the tremendous success we've had so far. The people of this province deserve nothing less.

TENANT PROTECTION

MPP Kristyn Wong-Tam: In 2019, Nicole's landlord filed for a personal-use eviction. She later learned that this was misrepresentation. Today, Nicole is still waiting for an LTB hearing after moving into a new apartment that costs her now twice as much. LTB's own data shows that landlords are being fast-tracked for hearings over tenants.

Can the Premier explain why he is making tenants wait so long for access to justice?

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

Hon. Doug Downey: Thank you to the member opposite for the question. This really starts with the Liberals letting a system crumble and the NDP standing by while it

happens. As we've brought forward significant resources, a record number of adjudicators, during COVID, we protected tenants by putting a pause on evictions.

But when we brought forward investments for recruitment, the NDP voted against it. And when we brought forward investments for back-office support in the millions of dollars, the NDP voted against it. And when we brought forward almost \$14 million to help with accelerating the hearings and the systems, the NDP voted against it.

We've made significant investments in the back end of the system, because the Liberals had let it crumble and the NDP stood by. I'd be pleased to talk about those in the supplementary.

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

MPP Kristyn Wong-Tam: Inadequate funding and flawed budgets aren't anything to brag about. After waiting three years, my St. James Town constituents received an LTB ruling that ordered them to repay their landlords hundreds of thousands of dollars, reversing a prior rent reduction. If they can't pay and repay in 16 days, these new rental arrears may lead to evictions. They had to wait over three years for a hearing. They just got their ruling. Now they have 16 days to pay.

Why is it agreeable to this Premier that tenants have to wait so long for access to justice?

Hon. Doug Downey: It's worth noting that the independent tribunal does strike a balance between protecting the landlords' and the tenants' rights and sets its own docket accordingly. But instead of the performative questions from the NDP, we're actually taking action and we're getting the job done. We have invested \$28 million in a new system. It's a huge improvement which we learned about and adopted from the NDP in British Columbia. It's a phenomenal system. It came fully online at Christmas. We have 60,000 individuals who have used it so far to navigate the system.

Mr. Speaker, I'm very proud of the work that we're doing. We have more work to do. I look forward to the NDP supporting us at some point for something to help move us forward.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Mr. Brian Riddell: This time, my question is for the Minister of Economic Development, Job Creation and Trade. For years, the previous Liberal government sent hundreds of thousands of manufacturing jobs out of the province, including my riding of Cambridge. But they were also responsible for sending droves of IT jobs south of the border, leaving Ontario unprepared for the industries and jobs of the future. That's why we have taken action to rebuild the province's advanced manufacturing and IT sector jobs, all while growing the economy and creating these great jobs.

Speaker, in competitive sectors that employ hundreds of thousands of workers, will the minister please explain how our government is tracking new investment and ensuring Ontario is open for business?

Hon. Victor Fedeli: Speaker, just this morning, we welcomed a \$40 million investment from VueReal. This is a made-in-Ontario start-up in Waterloo region. VueReal has become a leader in the development and manufacturing of MicroLED displays and sensors. They're used in devices in aerospace, automotive and medtech. This investment, with a \$2-million support from the province, will boost local manufacturing and strengthen clean-tech innovation while creating 75 new, good-paying jobs in the process.

Speaker, this is how we're bringing new life to local manufacturing, and this is how we are building Ontario.

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

Mr. Brian Riddell: Thank you, Minister, for your answer. It's great to hear the government is focusing on the province's advanced manufacturing and IT sectors that are attracting significant investment to the project and the province, including homegrown start-ups. It's clear that these types of investments are only possible because Ontario has created the right conditions for companies to grow and thrive.

Speaker, with today's announcement from VueReal, can the minister please elaborate on what conditions these are and explain why companies are choosing my riding of Cambridge and Ontario?

Hon. Victor Fedeli: From lowering the cost of doing business by \$8 billion—yes, \$8 billion—annually, to putting Ontario on the map as the second largest tech cluster in North America, with the Waterloo region accounting for a significant portion from that cluster, we are doing everything it takes to make Ontario the most competitive place to invest and grow.

We have 26,000 tech companies, over 400,000 tech employees, 65,000 STEM grads every year—all part of a world-class innovation ecosystem. That's our competitive edge. That's the proof that we're creating the conditions for companies like VueReal to succeed. And that's why companies continue to land here in Ontario.

FERRY SERVICE

MPP Jamie West: My question is for the Premier. Speaker, ferry workers in Kingston are in a manufactured staffing crisis. Instead of raising these ferry workers' wages to competitive levels, the minister has decided to pay an out-of-province temporary staffing agency two to three times more than what these unionized MTO ferry workers earn.

Some of the workers are in the public gallery today, Speaker, and their question is to the Premier: Will the Conservative government finally stop paying scab labour to do their jobs? Will they respect the collective agreement and repeal Bill 124 so that workers can get back to work with fair pay and competitive wages?

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

Hon. Caroline Mulroney: I thank the member opposite for the question. Ferries are an integral part of Ontario's transportation network, and I know that communities

across the province rely on this essential mode of transportation for them to get to and from their homes and for first responders as well.

Ontario is facing a historic shortage of workers that impacts sector across the board, including an industry-wide shortage of licensed seafarers that has affected ferry operations in the province. Mr. Speaker, in our budget, we announced funding for 20 new staff for our ferries. And in response to this industry-wide shortage of seafarers, my ministry is working with the Ministry of Colleges and Universities so that we can offer more training programs to get more workers in the industry.

Mr. Speaker, this is not just a problem that is facing Ontario; it is a problem across the country. And that's why, at my most recent federal-provincial-territorial ministers meeting, I had the opportunity to discuss this with my colleagues from across the country so that we can make sure that we're addressing it so that we can get ferries operating on a consistent basis.

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

MPP Jamie West: Speaker, the minister has money to pay people to cross picket lines but not to pay the workers who do that work.

The ferry passengers have experienced cancellations and delays of up to 12 hours on this vital transportation route, and worse still, the understaffing situation is a health and safety issue. There was a dangerous incident on the Wolfe Island ferry just last month. These workers deserve to have safe working conditions, and the passengers deserve to feel secure, knowing that there are well-trained, experienced staff to ensure they're safe during their commute.

1130

My question, Speaker: Will the Conservative government stop the service disruptions and reductions caused by deliberate ministry understaffing and invest in permanent MTO ferry workers who keep our ferries safe and on time?

Hon. Caroline Mulroney: Mr. Speaker, let me be clear: Our government will never compromise when it comes to the safety of our travelling public. As per Transport Canada regulations, all ferries must be staffed with qualified and properly trained workers, and our goal is to make sure that all ferries are safely operational as soon as possible. That's why we're working so diligently towards it.

We have new ferries coming on board. The new Wolfe Islander IV and the Amherst Islander II ferries will be in service as soon as possible. As I said, our government is committed to working across the country with our partners, but also within government, with the Ministry of Colleges and Universities, to make sure that we have training programs in place so that we can have workers operating our ferries as soon as possible.

VETERINARY SERVICES

Mr. Kevin Holland: My question is for the Minister of Colleges and Universities. Many veterinary practices across Ontario are struggling to meet the growing demand

for animal health care services, particularly in rural, remote and Indigenous communities across the north.

As MPP for the great riding of Thunder Bay–Atikokan, I have consistently advocated for a veterinary medicine program at Lakehead University in Thunder Bay. Lakehead University is a leading post-secondary educational institution that is forward-looking and well-positioned to educate more veterinary practitioners to help address this pressing need throughout our province.

Speaker, can the minister please explain when a veterinary medicine program will be implemented in Thunder Bay?

Hon. Jill Dunlop: The member from Thunder Bay–Atikokan has been relentless in his advocacy for this initiative, and I'm happy to say that we are bringing vet education to your riding.

Speaker, I am always excited to stand up and talk about the important work that my ministry is doing to address the most pressing needs and support economic growth across this province. Budget 2023 has a ton of great investments for the post-secondary sector, such as 100 new undergraduate medical seats and funding to support their clinical education.

But our universities don't just educate the human doctors of the future; we also train the amazing pet and farm animal doctors our province desperately needs. I'm thrilled to say that as part of budget 2023, our government announced funding for a new and long-awaited doctor of veterinary medicine program collaboration between Lakehead University and the University of Guelph. This joint veterinary program, which will focus on integration of human, animal and environmental health, will address the shortage of veterinarians in the province by creating an additional 80 new spots for students.

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

Mr. Kevin Holland: Thank you, Minister. That is indeed great news.

I am thankful that our government recognizes the agri-food opportunity and economy of the north, highlighted in the commitment made in our budget last week. I want to thank the Ministers of Colleges and Universities, and Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs, for ensuring the expansion of vet services in the north, particularly large-animal vet services. This has been described by my community industry leaders as a game-changer.

We know that across the north, vet services are spread thin while responding to vast geographical areas. A significant portion of veterinarians operate practices which are small businesses and have their own economic impacts.

The people of Ontario are interested to know how this new veterinary medicine program will work to make a real difference in the post-secondary sector. Speaker, can the minister please elaborate on this new program, along with information about the overall benefits provided for north-eastern Ontario?

Hon. Jill Dunlop: Over the coming years, the doctor of veterinary medicine program will begin training cohorts of

the next generation of veterinarians in Ontario. As I said before, this new funding will bring 80 new DVM students to this collaboration, helping more students get the training and education they need for rewarding careers, while supporting the needs of rural and northern communities.

Veterinary medicine contributes well over a billion dollars per year to Ontario's economy and supports over 7,000 jobs—that's right, Speaker: 7,000 jobs. Through the addition of this program we will support the veterinary medicine sector across the province, while supporting the local economy in the communities across Ontario. This also gives students greater choice in where to study, helps develop a skilled workforce and will support the health of animals everywhere.

Ontario benefits when Ontario's post-secondary institutions give students the skills they need to enter the workforce, ready to take on the jobs of today and tomorrow. As always, through hard work and a focused approach, we get it done for the people of Ontario and animal lovers everywhere.

LONG-TERM CARE

Ms. Sandy Shaw: A question for the Premier: Another inspection in a for-profit long-term-care home has exposed terrible living conditions for our seniors, this time at Blackadar Continuing Care Centre in my riding, managed by Extencare. We heard from the daughter of a resident who was distraught with the undignified conditions her mother is living in, including numerous and extended power outages.

Under this government, 5,400 seniors died in long-term care during COVID and the vast majority of these deaths were in for-profit care. Have you learned nothing from this tragedy? Why is this government giving these same for-profit operators multi-decade licences, instead of correcting these standard care issues through enforcement?

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Minister of Long-Term Care.

Hon. Paul Calandra: I appreciate the question from the honourable member. There was an inspection that was done at the home, and the home itself has been ordered to fix the generator problem by June 30 or face administrative monetary penalties.

Speaker, as you know, the member opposite did vote against the increase in inspectors. We have the highest inspector-to-home ratio in North America now, something that, of course, they voted against. The member opposite would remember that she specifically voted against the new homes that are coming to her riding. The member also voted against the additional 27,000 health care workers for long-term care and the over \$60 million worth of funding for the member's riding to increase the level of care. The Minister of Colleges and Universities is helping us attain that 27,000 additional health care workers.

Look, I'm glad to hear that the member opposite actually supports some of the initiatives that we've done, especially when it comes to inspection.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The supplementary question: the member for Niagara Falls.

Mr. Wayne Gates: Back to the Premier: The problems at Blackadar Continuing Care Centre, which is managed by Extencare, are consistent. It is an obvious pattern. The recent power outage wasn't an isolated incident. It has happened at this home three times in two years.

Three days after the news report from the Globe and Mail, the Hamilton Spectator reported that internal documents showed that—listen to this—that long-term-care home had dirt, mould and leaks in their home. Extencare saying “not my fault, not my responsibility” is unacceptable. Long-term-care operators need be held accountable.

Speaker, through you: When will the Premier and his ministers stop protecting their corporate, profit-driven long-term-care buddies and protect seniors living in long-term-care homes, where 5,400 of our moms, our dads, our aunts and uncles, our brothers and sisters have died?

Hon. Paul Calandra: As I just said, we have doubled the amount of inspections that are done in our long-term-care homes. We have the highest inspector-to-home ratio in North America. That member voted against that investment. That member has also voted against the over \$61 million worth of staffing improvement in his riding; that's a North America-leading four hours of care in our long-term-care homes.

This is the exact same member who last week suggested that those health care workers working in for-profit long-term-care homes cared less about the seniors that they were caring for, and as a result, this gentleman here across the aisle suggests that's why he can't vote for all of the initiatives that we are doing to improve care across the province of Ontario—not something that they did when they held the balance of power. In fact, they completely ignored long-term care.

Here is the good news, Mr. Speaker: Because of the investments in the budget, we're continuing to improve long-term care and—

Interjections.

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

ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION

Mr. John Jordan: My question is for the Minister of the Environment, Conservation and Parks. It's always an education to hear from this minister, and I appreciate his environmental knowledge and expertise.

Under the previous Liberal government, supported by the NDP, the people of Ontario heard lots of talk and promises about protecting ecologically sensitive lands. In contrast, our government has demonstrated our commitment to environmental conservation by making significant investments and getting it done.

There is never a more important time than the present to continue to invest in initiatives that will conserve, restore and manage natural resources, including forests, wetlands and grasslands.

Can the minister please explain how our government is preserving Ontario's natural environmental heritage?

Hon. David Piccini: Thank you to the member from Lanark-Frontenac-Kingston. He's such a strong advocate for the outdoors and our environment.

The member is right; you'll hear a lot from members opposite—they will oppose a couple of trees that would take 28,000 cars off the road, with the largest public transit expansion in Canada's history that this government, under this Premier, is making. They'll be against building more homes, but they have no solutions.

That's why I'm pleased to say that thanks to this finance minister and this Premier, in the budget, we're investing more than \$14 million more in the Greenlands Conservation Partnership program. This is a solution to protecting more in the province of Ontario and represents a 40% increase in funding, which will be used to secure ecologically important land and conserve Ontario's natural beauty.

Speaker, you can't spell "Conservative" without the word "conserve." And I'm pleased to stand here today to tell you that we're getting it done for the people—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Supplementary.

Mr. John Jordan: Thank you to the minister for that response. It is important for the people of Ontario to know that our government is committed, in both words and actions, to expanding protection for Ontario's lands and waters, for the good of both people and nature.

Our natural areas support our local communities and provide habitat for species. Therefore, continued investment and support by our government is critically important. The people of Ontario expect that our government will continue to protect Ontario's rich biodiversity.

Can the minister please confirm how these investments will help build Ontario for all of us?

Hon. David Piccini: Yes, I can.

I heard a member opposite say "cringey," and it's that member who said that who has presided over sewage spills in her own community and proposed no solutions to that. But this government is getting it done.

We hear a lot about pointing fingers at problems, with no solutions from the members opposite.

Well, a solution to conserve more land is to invest in the Greenlands Conservation Partnership program. It has protected over 400,000 acres of land and is the single largest provincial fund in this province's history to support private land security. That's the equivalent of over 300,000 football fields of protection under this Premier and this government. That's real action. That's real results.

Mr. Speaker, the previous government talked a lot about it, but we never saw these sorts of funds, these envelopes to conserve and protect more.

It's under the leadership of this Premier and this government that they're going to work with—

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

This House stands in recess until 1 p.m.

The House recessed from 1143 to 1300.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Mr. Anthony Leardi: Please welcome to the Legislative Assembly my new Queen's Park assistant, Kaleena Lee.

MPP Jamie West: I'd like to welcome back our friends from OPSEU, the ferry workers, going through a labour dispute currently and anxious to hear the petitions being read today.

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

ADVISORY COMMITTEE TO PROTECT ONTARIO'S PEOPLE AND ECONOMY FROM AIRBORNE PANDEMICS ACT, 2023

LOI DE 2023 SUR LE COMITÉ CONSULTATIF POUR LA PROTECTION DE LA POPULATION ET DE L'ÉCONOMIE DE L'ONTARIO CONTRE LES PANDÉMIES À VIRUS TRANSMISSIBLES PAR VOIE AÉRIENNE

MPP Wong-Tam moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 86, An Act to establish an Advisory Committee to Protect Ontario's People and Economy from Airborne Pandemics / Projet de loi 86, Loi créant un comité consultatif pour la protection de la population et de l'économie de l'Ontario contre les pandémies à virus transmissibles par voie aérienne.

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

First reading agreed to.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): I'd like to invite the member for Toronto Centre to briefly explain their bill.

MPP Kristyn Wong-Tam: Thank you, Speaker, and I will do so with much pride.

The bill enacts the Advisory Committee to Protect Ontario's People and Economy from Airborne Pandemics Act, 2023. The act provides that the Standing Committee on Social Policy shall establish an advisory committee to protect Ontario's people and economy from airborne pandemics. The advisory committee shall make recommendations to the Minister of Health and the Standing Committee on Social Policy to improve Ontario's infrastructure, regulations and standards relating to indoor air quality in non-residential workplaces and public settings.

VITAL STATISTICS AMENDMENT ACT, 2023

LOI DE 2023 MODIFIANT LA LOI SUR LES STATISTIQUES DE L'ÉTAT CIVIL

Ms. Armstrong moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 87, An Act to amend the Vital Statistics Act to provide for greater access to information related to adoptions / Projet de loi 87, Loi modifiant la Loi sur les statistiques de l'état civil pour prévoir un meilleur accès aux renseignements liés aux adoptions.

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

First reading agreed to.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): I will invite the member for London–Fanshawe to briefly explain her bill.

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: The act is amended to provide for the meaning of next of kin of an adopted person and the meaning of next of kin of a birth parent of an adopted person.

The act is amended to permit the next of kin of a deceased adopted person or the next of kin of a deceased birth parent of an adopted person, as the case may be, to access adoption information.

The act is amended to permit the Registrar General to enter into an agreement with an authority responsible for birth or adoption registration in another province or territory of Canada in order to share information for certain purposes and if certain conditions are met.

PETITIONS

EDUCATION FUNDING

Ms. Jessica Bell: This is a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario about stopping the cuts and investing in the schools, as students deserve.

“Whereas the ... government cut funding to our schools by \$800 per student during the pandemic period...;

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

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

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

—immediately reverse the cuts to our schools;

—fix the inadequate education funding formula;

—provide schools the funding” they need “to ensure” there are “supports necessary to address the impacts of the pandemic on our students;

—“make the needed” improvements and “investments to provide smaller class sizes” to our children.

I fully support this petition. I want to thank the Elementary Teachers of Toronto for collecting these signatures and sharing our concerns to stop the cuts and invest in our schools.

FERRY SERVICE

MPP Jamie West: I have a lot of petitions to table. This is a petition to the Legislative Assembly:

“Whereas the Wolfe Island ferry and Glenora ferry have had serious service disruptions due to a staffing crisis created by the Ontario government; and

“Whereas residents and visitors to Wolfe Island have been trapped on the island for up to 12 hours with no way to leave, even for emergencies or work; and

“Whereas Glenora ferry has had a reduced schedule during this year’s busy tourism season, creating hours of lineups and delays for passengers; and

“Whereas the Ministry of Transportation (MTO) ferry workers are drastically underpaid in comparison to the rest of the marine industry, causing recruitment and retention issues; and

“Whereas instead of paying competitive wages and hiring more permanent staff, MTO has contracted out the work to Reliance Offshore, an out-of-province, private temporary staffing agency, which charges up to twice as much hourly as ministry staff earn; and

“Whereas contracting out the work is a waste of our public funds on a stopgap solution that doesn’t provide long-term stability to our ferry system;

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

“(1) Fix our ferries—stop the service disruptions and reductions caused by ministry understaffing.

“(2) Repeal Bill 124, which has imposed a three-year wage cut on already underpaid ferry workers during high inflation, and pay them fair, competitive wages.

“(3) End the outrageously expensive contracts with private temporary staffing agencies and hire permanent Ministry of Transportation ferry workers to work and live in our communities instead.”

I wholeheartedly support this petition, Speaker. I’ll affix my signature and give it to Jing to give to the table.

EDUCATION FUNDING

Ms. Chandra Pasma: I’m pleased to rise today to present this petition to stop the cuts and invest in our schools, which our students deserve. I’d particularly like to thank the parents and community of Jack Miner Senior Public School, which was just one of many schools where these signatures were collected.

The petition reads:

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

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

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

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

—immediately reverse the cuts to our schools;

—fix the inadequate education funding formula;

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

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

1310

I wholeheartedly endorse this petition, Speaker, will add my name to it and send it to the table with page Paul.

SOCIAL ASSISTANCE

Mr. Mike Schreiner: I have a petition from my constituents to double ODSP rates.

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas the government systemically underfunds and fails to adequately support peoples with disabilities; and

“Whereas the government cancelled a planned 3% increase in ODSP benefits; and

“Whereas persons with disabilities have borne a disproportionate burden of the pandemic; and

“Whereas the cost of shelter” and food has gone up; and

“Whereas persons with disabilities on ODSP have been struggling to survive...;

“Whereas the government must place people with disabilities at the centre of the province’s pandemic recovery plans, addressing a long-standing gap in Ontario’s social safety net while honouring its commitment to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities;

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

“To instruct the Ontario government to immediately commit to doubling ODSP rates and take action to ensure Ontario provides a livable income supplement for people with disabilities.”

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

EDUCATION FUNDING

Mr. Joel Harden: It’s a great honour for me to rise today in the House and introduce this petition, which is entitled as follows:

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

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

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

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

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

“—immediately reverse the cuts to our schools;

“—fix the inadequate education funding formula;

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

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

Speaker, I’m honoured to sign this petition and I will be sending it with the great page Ethan from Ottawa Centre to the Clerks’ table.

EDUCATION FUNDING

Mr. Terence Kernaghan: It’s my honour to present this stack of following petitions which are to stop the cuts and invest in the schools our students deserve. It reads:

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

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

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

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

“—immediately reverse the cuts to our schools;

“—fix the inadequate education funding formula;

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

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

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

HOSPITAL SERVICES

Mr. Jeff Burch: I have another stack of petitions from folks in south Niagara to save the Welland Hospital emergency department.

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas the current Niagara Health system restructuring plan approved by the Ontario Ministry of Health includes a removal of the emergency department, emergency surgical services and associated beds and

ambulance service from the Welland hospital site once the Niagara Falls site is complete, creating inequity of hospital emergency service in the Niagara region and a significant negative impact on hospital and emergency outcomes for the citizens of Welland, Port Colborne and all Niagara;

“Whereas the NHS is already experiencing a 911 crisis in EMS, a shortage of beds and unacceptable off-loading delays in its emergency departments across the region;

“Whereas the population in the Welland hospital catchment area is both aging and growing;

“Whereas the Ontario Legislature passed a motion by Niagara Centre MPP Jeff Burch on April 13, 2022, to include a full emergency department and associated beds in the rebuild of the Welland hospital;

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

“To work with the Ontario Ministry of Health and the Niagara Health system to implement motion 47 to maintain the Welland hospital emergency department and adjust its hospital plan accordingly.”

I will sign it and send it to the Clerk.

MISSING PERSONS

Miss Monique Taylor: I have a petition titled “Vulnerable Persons Alert.

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas there is a gap in our current emergency alert system that needs to be addressed;

“Whereas a vulnerable persons alert would help ensure the safety of our loved ones in a situation where time is critical;

“Whereas several municipal councils, including, Brighton, Midland, Bonfield township, Cobourg and Mississauga and several others, have passed resolutions calling for a new emergency alert to protect our loved ones;

“Whereas over 90,000 people have signed an online petition calling for a ‘Draven Alert’ and over 6,000 people have signed an online petition calling for ‘Love’s Law’, for vulnerable people who go missing;

“Whereas this new alert would be an additional tool in the tool box for police forces to use to locate missing, vulnerable people locally and regionally;

“Whereas this bill is a common-sense proposal and non-partisan in nature, to help missing vulnerable persons find their way safely home;

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

“Support and pass Bill 74, Missing Persons Amendment Act, 2023.”

I wholeheartedly support this petition. I’m going to affix my name to it and give it to page bring it to page Keya to bring to the Clerk.

ADOPTION DISCLOSURE

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: I would like to read the petition on behalf of Anne Wildman.

“Extend Access to Post-Adoption Birth Information....

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

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

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

I fully support this petition. I’ll sign it and pass it to page Morgan to deliver to the table.

EDUCATION FUNDING

Mr. Chris Glover: This petition is from the Dewson Street Public School, which my children attended and which is represented by the honourable leader of the Ontario NDP.

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

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

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

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

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

—immediately reverse the cuts to our schools;

—fix the inadequate education funding formula;

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

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

I fully support this petition. I will affix my signature and pass to page Jonas to take to the table.

1320

EDUCATION FUNDING

MPP Jill Andrew: I appreciate having the opportunity to stand and represent St. Paul’s community members who

have signed, along with the Thorncliffe Park community—and it's from ETFO.

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

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

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

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

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

“—immediately reverse the cuts to our schools;

“—fix the inadequate education funding formula;

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

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

I am deeply honoured to sign this petition.

Thank you to every student, every education worker, every teacher, every parent who is making our schools the best that they possibly can be, under hard circumstances.

I'm passing it to Ryan for the table.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): That concludes our petitions for this afternoon.

RESIGNATION OF MEMBER FOR KANATA-CARLETON

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): I beg to inform the House that a vacancy has occurred in the membership of the House by reason of the resignation of Merrilee Fullerton as the member for the electoral district of Kanata-Carleton, effective March 27, 2023. Accordingly, I am issuing my warrant to the Chief Electoral Officer for the issue of a writ for a by-election.

OPPOSITION DAY

EDUCATION FUNDING SUBVENTIONS DESTINÉES À L'ÉDUCATION

Ms. Marit Stiles: I move that:

Whereas the independent Financial Accountability Office found that the government failed to allocate \$600

million in COVID-19 response funds and underspent its education budget by \$432 million in the 2022-2023 fiscal year; and

Whereas the funding provided to school boards has been inadequate to cover pandemic-related expenses; and

Whereas this has resulted in an estimated budget shortfall of at least \$100 million for school boards across the province; and

Whereas school boards are proposing hundreds of staff layoffs due to this budget shortfall;

Therefore, the Legislative Assembly calls on the government to cover all pandemic-related expenditures for school boards, including the programs and infrastructure needed to support students following three years of learning disruption.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The Leader of the Opposition has moved opposition day number 3.

I recognize the Leader of the Opposition to lead off the debate.

Ms. Marit Stiles: I look up at the galleries today, and I see so many students. We always have students joining us in this place—and it reminds me, every time I look up in our galleries, that that's what we're here for. We're here to make sure that they have the future that we need them to have. They are the future of our province.

Speaker, on Thursday, this government failed students. Their budget failed education workers, and it failed parents. The Premier and members opposite failed Ontario's public education system, and with that, they snatched away a bright and prosperous future from thousands, indeed, millions of kids across this province. This government gave us a budget with nothing meaningful for the public education system, its workers or its students.

It has been a really tough few years for schools. I think we all know that. The pandemic caused serious disruptions in learning. So many students across this province face learning difficulties and mental health challenges. But where was this government? They were missing in action—missing in action just when our kids needed them most. I was the education critic during the pandemic, so I know that school boards had to dip into their own reserves to meet expenses. The Premier and the education minister sat on \$600 million in COVID-19 response funds. They underspent the education budget by \$432 million in 2022-23.

And now that kids are finally back in school, we needed this government to ramp up those supports, not cut them down. But do you know what they did, Speaker? They took an axe to them. In fact, I'm going to quote Press Progress here. They say that the Premier made “a sneaky move to quietly cut education,” leaving school boards with a gaping hole of millions of dollars.

This government would have us believe that they've increased funding for schools. They'd really like us to believe that, but the truth is, they've shortchanged students, shortchanged teachers, shortchanged parents by \$47 million.

Thanks to this government, more school boards are looking at funding shortfalls again this year. According to

the independent Financial Accountability Office, this year alone there is a \$400-million shortfall, and over the next six years that gap is going to grow by \$6 billion. That's \$6 billion less for students, less for schools and for the workers who keep them running. This government is leaving kids without the supports they need to get back on track, and we all know what that means: It means cuts to staff, the education workers and teachers and educational assistants, the admin support our students and staff so desperately need. The repair backlog is going to continue to grow. It grew so much—a billion dollars under this government—poor ventilation, classrooms sweltering hot in warmer months and cold as ice in the winter, crumbling schools. It means no financial or human resource support to address the growing issue of violence in schools, no new investments in early childhood educators or mental health professionals. They say they plan to recruit more math coaches in schools, but they're struggling to hire any educators whatsoever because they can't compete when it comes to wages. And this means no new funding for base investments in education supports.

Without proper funding, schools are going to be forced to make really tough decisions, and they're looking down the barrel right now of staff cuts and layoffs.

Here in Toronto, the Toronto District School Board is projecting the elimination of 522 staff positions, including 65 teachers, 35 special education workers, 35 child and youth workers, and 40 school-based safety monitors. I've got to tell you, Speaker, if I go to the doorstep and talk to parents in my community about that, they're going to say, "What are they thinking?"

The Ottawa-Carleton District School Board is looking at cuts next year of between \$9 million and \$39 million.

Last year, school boards were already forced to make cuts due to underfunding. The Peterborough Victoria Northumberland and Clarington Catholic District School Board cut 65 support workers, including educational assistants. The Trillium Lakelands District School Board cut 77 educational workers, including EAs.

I'm going to say it again: All these cuts are resulting and will result in bad and worse, and worse still, outcomes for our kids and for the future of Ontario.

This government seems to have no issue finding public money when it comes to their insider friends, but when it comes to students in our province, they always seem to come up short.

School boards need the government's support to give our kids a good education. It really is that simple. It's a cliché for a reason that today's youth are the future of tomorrow. What Ontario are we heading towards when we aren't investing our highest dollars in students right now?

1330

This government talks a lot, and they did in their budget, about the need to attract and recruit new workers, newcomers into Ontario. But how are we going to convince families to come to Ontario and to stay here if they see that we have a public education system in crisis? We talk a lot on both sides of this House about the situation in health care right now. The health care situation is

absolutely a staffing crisis; it is a human resources crisis. But that's what we're seeing in education, as well.

I'm hearing from boards in the north who are saying that they can't—small boards, and they've got 40-plus positions opened up for educational assistants. That means that our kids are not getting that support that they need—the kids who are struggling the most. We have kids in our public school system across this province still struggling with the challenges that they faced during the pandemic. We know that they're having trouble, in many cases, catching up. We know that education workers are really struggling with the stress of the day-to-day work, because they face those struggles of those kids every day when they can't help them. How heartbreaking is that? We're hearing increasingly about boards going out and hiring unqualified staff because they can't find qualified staff who will work for these wages in this situation.

There's only one solution: You have to stop squirrelling away those dollars for a rainy day. The rainy day is here right now.

Speaker, this is why we put forward this motion today. I want to also acknowledge our amazing education critic, the member from Ottawa-Nepean, for her incredible work on this. That's why we put this motion forward—to help our kids get back on track, to help all those families out there who are struggling.

I want to say to those families who are watching this today: We have got your back. We're not going to let this government get away with this.

Do you know what they want to do, Speaker? Do you know where they want this to go? This government wants to do the same thing they've done with health care. They want to manufacture a crisis, where things get so bad that—what's the solution? "Oh, yes, I've got this buddy over here. He's got this plan. He's got this private company that can come in and ride in and save the day." They're going to come up with some kind of voucher system. We've called it; I know it's coming. That is not the answer. Look at the research. Look at what has happened around the world.

We have a public education system in this province that we are proud of. I moved to this province 30 years ago from Newfoundland. I stayed here and I raised my family here because we had a public education system that my kids could believe in, that I could believe in, that would be there when my kids were struggling, that would help lift them up when they fell down. We cannot afford to lose that system. We will be the laughingstock of the world.

This government needs to and should absolutely cover all pandemic-related costs for school boards. Parents across this province are looking at the Premier and they're looking at the Minister of Education to step up; our children sure need them to.

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

Mr. Graham McGregor: I'd like to begin my remarks by thanking Ontario's educators, school staff and parents for their incredible efforts to make the 2022-23 academic year a normal one for Ontario's students.

I'd also like to thank the Leader of the Opposition for her remarks opening up the debate today. I'd also like to thank the education union representation that was here for the first three minutes of the leader's speech, but I guess they're off. But it was a really good speech; we should make sure that they get a transcript or a Hansard of it.

Thanks in part to our investments of over \$3.2 billion, the kids are back in school, there have been no disruptions to learning this year, and students are enjoying the full school experience of sports, band, field trips and after-school clubs and activities.

Speaker, I mention our government's incredible and nation-leading investments in school safety to provide some necessary context for today's debate. Our government made these record investments because we know there's a shortage of skilled labour in the economy, and we believe in the power of public education to prepare Ontario's young people for the jobs of tomorrow.

As we pivot from a failed discovery math program and introduce evidence-based learning in math and STEM curriculum, training will need to be provided to teachers to make sure their pedagogy is meeting the highest standards. To achieve this, Ontario is providing \$30 million to double the number of school math coaches beginning this September, as well as providing additional staffing support in grade 9 math classrooms to ensure students are supported in their learning.

Ontario students are being well-positioned by having coding and financial literacy embedded in the curriculum that is in line with real-world needs, to ensure our students succeed in and outside of the classroom. Previous Liberal inaction for over a decade developed a disconnect with what math was being taught in the classroom and good-paying careers. These supports build upon the landmark math curriculum changes for grades 1 to 9 to help support continuity and better prepare students for more advanced math, to allow students to pursue any post-secondary, skilled trade, and STEM pathway that they choose.

Continued curriculum updates will focus on life and job skills by revising curriculum in language; science, technology, engineering and mathematics; and the skilled trades. This includes a new computer studies and revised technological education curriculum, beginning with the implementation of a new grade 10 computer studies course in September 2023 and revised grade 9 and grade 10 tech ed courses to be offered in September 2024.

Similarly, after a decade when the previous Liberal government, supported by members of the NDP, closed over 600 schools across the province, our government is investing \$14 billion over a 10-year time frame to build new schools, improve existing facilities, and create new child care spaces. That includes \$1.4 billion in capital funding for the 2022-23 academic year.

Since 2019, our government has invested over \$2 billion in education capital projects, including 100 new schools, 88 school additions, and over 6,400 new licensed child care spaces.

Again, our government is investing in education infrastructure because we're listening to the concerns of hard-

working parents across the province and because we believe in the power of public education to prepare our young people for the job market of the future.

So when I hear my honourable colleagues from the opposition falsely accusing our government of making cuts and shortchanging school boards—

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Bhutla Karpoche): I'm going to ask the member to have a seat.

Please withdraw that comment.

Mr. Graham McGregor: I withdraw.

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

Mr. Graham McGregor: When I hear the arguments made about our government making cuts and shortchanging school boards, I get a little confused—I was going to say “upset”; parliamentary language—especially when you consider the Ontario NDP's actual record on education spending. Yes, it's true that Bob Rae is a Liberal these days and he last governed this province three decades ago, but he was still Ontario's last and only NDP Premier, and it's worth remembering that his 1993 social contract broke contracts with public sector workers, froze public sector salaries, and required teachers to take 12 unpaid Rae Days off every year. Needless to say, I strongly advise Ontarians to take these accusations of inadequate funding for school boards with a giant grain of salt.

With all due respect, I would humbly suggest to my NDP friends that, while they're entitled to their own opinions, they are not entitled to their own facts.

Speaker, here are the facts—the real facts: Our government has increased education funding every year since we took office in 2018. That includes an increase of \$683.9 million to \$26.6 billion for the 2022-23 school year. On a—

Interjections.

Mr. Graham McGregor: I won't ask how they voted on those increases.

On a per pupil basis, we're investing over \$13,000 per student. That's almost a \$1,000 increase per student from 2017-18.

I wish I could cite the new education funding numbers for the 2023-24 academic year. Honestly, this debate feels a little bit like discussing Hamlet without actually mentioning the prince of Denmark. But rest assured, the new Grants for Student Needs and priorities and partnerships funding will be released soon, and I'm fairly certain they will once again reflect a steady increase in funding for public education.

1340

Clearly, we are making record investments in public education, and we are delivering more funding to school boards than the previous Liberal government.

Let's go back a minute and review a few more funding numbers from the 2022-23 academic year. You might be wondering, has our increased funding to school boards led to more front-line support for students? The answer is yes. Across the province, staffing by school boards has increased by nearly 8,000 individuals since 2017-18. That

includes over 200 principals and vice-principals, over 900 teachers, and nearly 7,000 education workers.

Let's talk about special education for a minute. This year, our government provided a \$92.9-million increase to the GSN, for total special education funding of over \$3.25 billion. That's the highest amount ever provided in special education funding. And guess what? It's nearly \$386 million higher than what the previous government invested in 2017-18.

There is no question that the past few years under the pandemic have been an unsettling time for young people. Our government understood that from the very beginning, which is why we made sure to provide necessary mental health supports. We're delivering \$90 million in student mental health supports this academic year. To put that into context, that's a 420% increase in funding since 2017-18, under the previous Liberal government. Let's be clear: Mental health is health, and our government is serious about supporting Ontario's young people.

Unfortunately, many students feel they have been set back by the pandemic, and they are unsure about their next steps in life. I'm proud to say that our government is meeting this challenge, with Ontario's Plan to Catch Up, which includes the largest tutoring program in Ontario's history. We invested \$176 million to expand access to free school-based tutoring so that thousands of Ontario students are able to utilize learning resources in their communities, to help them succeed. Some of our other key investments in the plan to catch up include math action teams that have been deployed to underperforming school boards; new digital resources to support parents, students and educators; new universal screening for reading for all students in junior kindergarten to grade 2; and an extension of the historic tutoring support program, the only one of its kind in the nation.

Many parents have invested in their own tutoring supports for their children, which is one reason we announced the availability of catch-up payments for families last year. Our government was elected to make life more affordable for Ontario families, and we're delivering on that promise. During the pandemic, we provided over \$1.6 billion in direct payments to parents through three dedicated support programs to help families cover the costs of child care and at-home learning created by the pandemic. Well, we are going further by investing \$365 million in direct financial relief to parents who could use some support in uncertain times to help their kids catch up. Through this program, parents with school-age children up to 18 years old will receive \$200 per child. That's \$200 per child going back into parents' pockets so they can use that for their families. And parents with school-age children with special education needs up to 21 years old will receive \$250 per child.

Applications for catch-up payments will remain open until March 31, which, of course, is a few short days from now. If any eligible parents watching at home have not yet signed up for catch-up payments, I strongly encourage them to do so before this Friday.

Time and time again, our party, our government, has supported parents in affording school supplies and tutoring supports to best position their children to catch up on their learning. As life returns to normal, we remain focused on helping students catch up in their studies, and we will continue to put money back into the pockets of hard-working parents, where it belongs.

I know I'm going to sound like a broken vinyl record, but I'll say it anyway: Our government made these investments because we believe in public education and we believe in the power of public education to prepare Ontario's young people for the labour market.

I believe the facts that I have provided offer a strong defence of our government's record on education funding, but I'm going to provide my NDP friends and my PC Party friends with a few more numbers.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: You have a lot of friends.

Mr. Graham McGregor: You don't win a seat like this without a few friends.

I was talking to my good friend Kevin Yarde the other day. Kevin Yarde is not imaginary—despite the efforts of some parties around here.

To get back to the topic at hand, I really do think we need a few more minutes to drill down on our government's support to the province's school boards.

The Toronto District School Board and the Toronto Catholic District School Board have been in the news lately, asking for additional financial assistance.

Not surprisingly, our friends in the NDP have been busy spreading the narrative that these cuts are somehow the fault of this government when, in fact, nothing could be further from the truth.

Would it surprise you to hear that the TDSB has enjoyed an increase of \$38 million since the 2017-18 school year, even though its enrolment has fallen by 16,000 students? That's right, Speaker: Funding for the TDSB went up at the same time that student enrolment went down substantially. This is the equivalent of removing the populations of the eight largest high schools in the city from the TDSB's enrolment numbers. In fact, our government has increased per pupil funding in the TDSB by 6.2% since we were first elected in 2018. The same is true with the Toronto Catholic District School Board. The TCDSB—love the acronyms—has enjoyed an increase in funding of over \$20.5 million since the 2017-18 school year, even though its enrolment decreased by 6,743 students during that period.

Let's look at Hamilton for a moment. The Hamilton-Wentworth District School Board has enjoyed—

Interjection.

Mr. Graham McGregor: They get quiet when you mention Hamilton, eh?

The Hamilton-Wentworth District School Board has enjoyed an increase of over \$51.5 million in funding since the 2017-18 school year, and it has hired 228 additional staff since then. Similarly, the Hamilton-Wentworth Catholic District School Board has seen an increase of over \$30 million in funding since 2017-2018, and it has hired 132 additional staff since then.

Then there is Ottawa. My friends in the NDP might be surprised to hear that the Ottawa-Carleton District School Board has enjoyed an increase of over \$88.8 million in funding since 2017-18. It has hired an additional 667 staff, including 268 teachers, since that year. Meanwhile, the Ottawa Catholic School Board has seen an increase of \$82 million in funding since 2017-18, and it has hired 394 new staff, including 33 teachers, over the past few years.

I realize that our friends in the NDP want to blame our government for anything that goes wrong in this province. I get that they've got a job to do, and they may have trouble assigning agency to large organizations with authority for the many schools under their purview, but I think an important point needs to be made.

At the end of the day, school boards are responsible to the families they serve and to the taxpayers who ultimately pay their bills. If certain school boards have trouble balancing their books, even though our government has consistently increased their funding and their own student enrolments have decreased, maybe it's time for a look in the mirror. Maybe it's time for certain boards to carefully review their expenditures, find some efficiencies that make sense and that do not impact the delivery of education, and take ownership of their decisions.

1350

Speaker, the NDP motion calls on the government to essentially bail out any school boards that are having trouble balancing their budgets. I'm sure my New Democrat friends have heard of the concept of moral hazard, but please allow me to dive a bit deeper. Bailing out school boards that are unable to balance their books would of course feel like a huge slap in the face to the boards that were actually able to live within their means with the funds that our government provided to them. Most importantly, one-time bailouts to troubled boards would signal to all school boards that they do not have to be responsible with the business of how they conduct themselves. The message a bailout sends is simple: "If you run into financial trouble, don't worry, because the province will take care of it." I'm sorry, but that's unacceptable. To borrow a phrase, that dog don't hunt.

Speaker, our government is focused like a laser beam on helping students prepare for the jobs of tomorrow. We strongly believe in the power of public education to deal with the province's shortage of skilled labour, and we are providing real support to our school board partners to make that happen. We're delivering the largest tutoring program in Ontario's history, funding substantial student mental health supports, building new schools after decades of school closures, and modernizing the curriculum to ensure it does a better job of meeting the ever-changing needs of the labour market. I'm proud of our government's education record. We're getting the job done.

Thank you for your indulgence.

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

Ms. Chandra Pasma: I'm pleased to rise to this motion, put forward today by the leader of His Majesty's loyal opposition, because this is such an important motion.

Our children have really borne the brunt of the past few years. They had three years of disrupted schooling in which this government refused at every turn to make it easier on our children. They didn't want to invest in the smaller class sizes that would have allowed our schools to stay open safely, so our kids spent more time out of school than any other jurisdiction in North America. They gave COVID tests to private schools but left our publicly funded schools at the back of the line to access testing that would have allowed schools to avoid outbreaks and stay open. They wrote cheques to parents that covered, at best, an hour or two of tutoring instead of hiring more teachers and education workers to provide supports to all children in the classroom. Their total mental health funding works out to less than a quarter per child, per day, when our children are in crisis.

We all recognize that the pandemic required some extraordinary measures to protect kids, but this government refused to fully fund those measures, even though they received billions of dollars in COVID support funding from the federal government. They left school boards to pay out of their own pockets for those measures. We know from the financial statements of school boards last year that the government paid less than half of COVID-related operating expenses in Ontario. The year before that, at the height of the pandemic, the government still left school boards to pay 20% of COVID-related operating expenses.

Because of this situation, the Toronto District School Board had to pay \$70 million out of their own reserves, and now they're facing a deficit of \$64 million for next year, with no reserves left to cover it. The Toronto Catholic District School Board had to pay \$60 million out of their reserves, and now they're facing a deficit of \$25 million for next year. The Ottawa-Carleton District School Board paid \$10 million out of reserves and are now looking at having to make cuts of somewhere between \$9 million and \$39 million next year.

It is unbelievable to me, as a parent, that the government could have been so callous as to sit on millions of dollars rather than investing in protections and supports for our kids at a really critical moment.

And now, while the minister has been promising a normal, stable school year and talking about catching up on test scores, the government is still refusing to provide the funding that our schools need.

The minister likes to claim that he's providing historic funding levels, but the only thing historic about this government's funding is the government's failure to actually get promised money out the door. The reality is that the government is providing \$2.5 billion less in funding than they would have if education funding had just kept pace with inflation over the past five years—and that's just to maintain the system; that's not to provide any additional supports to kids who have been hit hard for the past three years. The minister can't even get the money he has committed out the door. The government is underspending its education budget by \$432 million this year alone, and so, instead of getting more supports, like they deserve, our

children are going into next year with even fewer supports. We already have far too many kids who have experienced learning loss in crowded classrooms, where they can't get the help they need because the teacher is trying to teach too many kids at once who are all over the map in terms of their learning level and needs.

Laura Neville is just one of many parents in Ottawa West–Nepean who have reached out to me about class sizes. Her son attends D. Roy Kennedy Public School, where his grade 6 class is now up to 35 students. Parents are receiving regular updates at D. Roy Kennedy informing them that students are being added to classes that are already overcrowded. The parents all really appreciate the grade 6 teacher, Mrs. Bowker, but they recognize that Mrs. Bowker is being put in an impossible position, trying to support 35 students who are in very different places in their learning and abilities. The students are being forced to learn in a classroom that is busy, noisy and cramped, because it wasn't built for 35 students. In fact, the room is too small for 35 desks, so students are crammed together at small tables just to be able to physically fit in the room. Kids with IEPs can't get the support they need—because how many kids can you provide individualized support to when you have that many children in one classroom?

Our kids' mental health is really struggling too. I'm sure there's not a parent in Ontario who is not feeling this. I have three kids, and all three have needed mental health support in the past few years, which has given us an experience of what the system is like. In December, we were referred to the school social worker for one of my children. That meeting finally happened at the beginning of March, and it was a meeting basically to tell us that there are no supports available through the school and we're on our own to find some.

When I spoke to the Ontario Association of Social Workers earlier this month, they told me that social workers with their own practice are getting heartbreaking requests every single week for young children who are depressed, anxious, sad, not engaging normally in school, and their parents are desperate for help because they are being left totally on their own to find support. These social workers don't have room to take on new clients because of the high level of demand. They say that putting supports in schools would be a more effective way of addressing the demand because they'd be able to intervene earlier and offer group supports.

According to a recent report from People for Education, 59% of students in Ontario report being depressed about the future; 91% of principals said their schools need mental health support, but less than one in 10 schools has access to a regularly scheduled mental health professional. Half of schools have no mental health resources at all. That's how badly this government is shortchanging our kids. And yet, the Minister of Health wants us to believe that providing less than a quarter a day per child after this incredibly disruptive global pandemic is somehow a major achievement worthy of a gold star. Parents aren't falling for it. They are giving this government's record a big red F.

The government is also failing kids with accessibility needs. There aren't enough EAs to support every kid who needs one. Too many kids are being told they can't come to school because there's no one there to help them. Too many parents are sitting outside their child's school to provide help because there's no EA available. Too many EAs are running down the hall with walkie-talkies trying to determine which of the five children they are expected to support needs them the most right now. And in the middle of this situation, the government is transitioning the autism legacy kids into schools without a single dollar of additional support—thousands of kids with accessibility needs joining our schools, and no additional money for EAs or for special class placements. This government is setting these kids up to fail, just like it is already failing the many children with disabilities already in our schools.

This is the inevitable outcome of the government's underfunding. It means cuts to supports instead of more support. It means fewer teachers and larger class sizes. It means fewer EAs, fewer child and youth workers. It means fewer safety monitors in schools at a moment when violence is increasing because of the mental health crisis and because of staffing shortages.

We don't know yet what all the cuts will be, but we already know some of the damage this government is doing to our students next year. There will be 522 positions lost at the Toronto District School Board, including 65 teachers, 35 special education workers, 35 child and youth workers, and 40 school-based safety monitors. The Toronto Catholic District School Board is looking at the loss of 120 positions. The Ottawa–Carleton District School Board, which will be discussing academic staff positions tomorrow night, is facing the loss of many of its support teacher positions, who provide assistance to students who are struggling.

1400

The minister says he wants to address reading and math competency. Well, students in Ottawa are losing seven literacy and numeracy support teachers and coaches, along with another six learning support teachers. Blind, deaf, low-vision and hard-of-hearing students are losing a teacher.

CUPE is warning that across the province, we are about to lose 7,000 education workers supporting our kids day in and day out.

What's frustrating is that all of these cuts are avoidable. The mental health crisis is solvable. We can provide our children with the supports they need. We can give them smaller class sizes.

We need the government to reimburse school boards for their COVID-related expenses, and we need them to provide adequate and stable funding so that schools can provide children the supports they need, delivered in the classroom by caring adults.

Nous voyons les effets du sous-financement systématique de notre système d'éducation par ce gouvernement : les coupures que les conseils scolaires doivent mettre en place à un moment où nos enfants ont besoin de plus de soutien, le manque d'aide pour la santé

mentale, la pénurie des soutiens pour des enfants qui ont des besoins d'accessibilité. Mais les solutions existent. Il faut que le gouvernement rembourse les conseils scolaires pour leurs dépenses liées à la COVID-19 et que le gouvernement donne un financement adéquat et stable à notre système d'éducation.

I hope the government will consider who they are harming with their ideological agenda and will provide the necessary funding so that our kids can finally get the support they need.

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

Mr. Mike Schreiner: It's an honour to stand up today and speak to this motion and stand up for our public education system, stand up for the students, the families and the educators who make that system work, because we know that a high-quality public education system is vital to our quality of life. It's vital to our economic prosperity. And it's vital to democratic and civic participation.

It's essential that we invest in our schools, in the staff and educators who teach and support students. Speaker, we all know that the pandemic had a tremendous negative impact on everyone in our society. But students bore the brunt of that impact. Due to the lack of investments and the fact that we had larger class sizes and repair backlogs in our buildings with inadequate ventilation, we had more days with our students out of school than any other jurisdiction in North America.

So we know that our students paid the price, and they've struggled. They've struggled with mental health challenges. They've struggled with learning gaps. They've struggled to maintain those social connections that are so vital to their quality of life.

I know the member from Brampton North, our friend over here, threw out some statistics and numbers in his talk, but here's the bottom line: School boards were forced to dig into their reserve funds, funds that are set aside for capital improvements to invest in improving and upgrading their schools, because the government funded less than half of the COVID-related expenses the school boards faced. Quite frankly, the government failed to allocate \$600 million to support COVID-related expenses. No wonder so many school boards across the province now are struggling to fund the things that our students need.

Speaker, I want to just say that the people who have been filling those needs and covering those gaps and managing the shortfalls are the educators and the support staff in our schools. But they've had to do it under tremendous pressure, without the kinds of supports they need, and so I want to thank those teachers and education staff.

I also want to remind everybody here that those teachers and support staff have gone above and beyond the call of duty, pre-pandemic and post-pandemic. I think we can all be grateful, prior to the pandemic, when we were having educational days of action in our schools, that it was teachers and educators and support staff who were walking the picket lines, saying no to larger class sizes and no to mandatory online learning. I think the pandemic

highlighted for us that—I don't think anyone wants mandatory online learning, so thank goodness educators stood up and said no to that prior to the pandemic. And I think the pandemic has highlighted the need for smaller class sizes, not larger class sizes. Sometimes when people attack education unions and say, "Hey, why are you disrupting our schools?"—it's oftentimes, most of the time, because they're fighting to improve our quality of education, and thank goodness, prior to the pandemic, that's exactly what happened.

Now that we've made it through the pandemic, we need the government to step up and actually flow the money that our schools need. We need to make sure that we make the investments in smaller class sizes, that we have enough educational assistants and mental health supports, because the inadequacy of those has real-world consequences.

I just want to tell a few stories, because I think parents' and students' stories need to be told, Speaker. I can tell you, I did a round table with a group of parents who have children with special needs. Each and every one of them talked about how many times they're called to the school to take their child home because the school does not have the adequate staff to serve their child's needs, and then sometimes the lack of staff actually leads to danger for their students' safety. And then the disruptions that are caused from that lack of teachers, educational assistants and adequate staff creates disruption that affects the learning of all the students in that classroom. The struggles that those parents and those students go through, the increased violence that it leads to, the fact that we have educational assistants now wearing Kevlar in our schools to protect themselves—I don't think enough people in the public understand what's happening in our schools due to lack of staffing, resources and the real-world consequences it has on people. So to me, I just don't understand how the government failed to spend \$435 million that they allocated for education that didn't actually get spent given the clear needs in our schools.

And I don't understand how the budget failed to actually address the \$16.8-billion repair backlog that exists right now across the province in our public education system. Students are hot in the summer, cold in the winter. The ventilation systems are inadequate. There's nothing in the budget to address those needs.

The least the government could do in order to make sure that our students receive the quality of education they need and deserve is to pay the pandemic-related costs those schools experienced, Speaker. That's why I'll be voting for this motion.

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

Mr. Sam Oosterhoff: I'm very thankful to be able to stand today to speak to the Leader of the Opposition's debate and to speak to the motion brought forward by the Leader of the Opposition. I appreciate all those who have had the opportunity to contribute.

I do want to begin by also acknowledging and thanking our hard-working education workers here in the province of Ontario, those who spend so much time investing in our

students and in the children of this province. I know I express the gratitude on behalf of the government of Ontario and all members of the House for the work that they do. I had the great privilege of working closely with many over the years that I've been in this place and also in the four years that I served as parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Education, and I'm grateful for their leadership and the work that they do.

1410

I know many are watching today, and I'm grateful to be able to rise in this House and to be able to address some of the issues that were raised, perhaps not correctly, by the members of the opposition in having this conversation about the important funding of our education system and our commitment to publicly funded education. I say, Speaker, that it is a pleasure for me to rise, because I think we need to combat widespread misinformation that is out there with regard to the subject of education funding here in the province of Ontario.

Speaker, when my volunteers and I went door-knocking during the last election campaign, we would encounter voters who accused our government of making cuts to education. When we would politely ask them to explain what they meant, they usually couldn't—or perhaps they confused our government's one-time investments in school safety during COVID with permanent funding and then incorrectly assumed that we were making cuts. For the sake of clarity, Speaker, I'm of course referring to the \$3.2 billion in special COVID-19 resources that were provided to school boards since the start of the pandemic in 2020. Thanks to these investments, which include the major improvements to air quality and ventilation in our schools all across this province, Ontario's classrooms are again safe for in-person learning, because of the historic investments made by this government, this Premier and this minister in our education system.

I can't stress this enough, Speaker: Those COVID-19 resources were one-time investments specifically targeted for crucial investments at that time, and we made that abundantly clear to school boards. So Speaker, when my campaign volunteers and I would door-knock and we would speak with local residents, where they had heard about the alleged education cuts, they usually couldn't remember actually or see where these alleged cuts were, because they had often been, unfortunately, misled by local Liberal or NDP candidates. We saw the local Liberal or NDP candidates—

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Bhutla Karpoche): Please withdraw the comment.

Mr. Sam Oosterhoff: Withdrawn, Speaker.

For the sake of clarity, the lack of accurate information that was shared in my constituency by members of other political parties unfortunately led to a great deal of confusion when I would be speaking with our hard-working education workers at the doors. So I'm going to speak a little bit about the substantial investments that have been made in our education system, to clear the air and make sure that the cold, hard facts are on the table and

that we see all the people in this chamber and those watching understand the substantial amounts of funding that have been allocated, the historic investments, and the rapid increases in that funding for the people of Ontario.

Thanks to the investments, which included major improvements to air quality and ventilation in schools all over the province, we've seen that Ontario's classrooms are truly safe for in-person learning. I think that the Premier and the minister's goal of ensuring that students stay in class all year we're seeing has been a reality. We've seen students able to learn safely and with the supports that they need.

Now I can't stress enough, Speaker, that it always is frustrating when I see people from other political parties sometimes mischaracterize or accuse us of an action that may not have actually occurred, but during my time, Speaker, I want to walk through some of our government's investments in education and why we're making them.

I want to say, Speaker, I was a little bit baffled when I first read this motion, because I know for a fact that our government has a great track record when it comes to education funding. I know that the Leader of the Opposition previously served as her party's education critic, so I can only assume that she has some unfinished business on that file or perhaps she's looking to try to get back at the minister for all the times that he responded to her questions with the facts about what was happening in our funding of the education system.

Now here's a key fact, Speaker: Our government has increased the Ministry of Education's investments every single year since we came to office. This includes a \$2.3-billion increase in this year's education funding, to a total of \$34.7 billion for 2023-24. I can actually remember when I first became the parliamentary assistant for the education ministry. I remember the then Minister of Education announced when the threshold crossed \$30 billion. I remember when we saw for the first time an education funding allocation that crossed \$30 billion. I remember that we were commenting about how historic that was, the first government to ever allocate \$30 billion, and now we're at \$34.7 billion. I don't know about you, Speaker, but that sounds like a lot of money ensuring that we're representing the single largest investment in Ontario's history in the education system.

This massive investment actually stands for a 27% increase from the education year prior to our government forming office, a 27% increase over the past five years. I'd like to thank this entire House for supporting those investments, especially the members on this side. Unfortunately, we saw members of the opposition vote against those investments in the past. But I'm confident that with the historic amounts being brought onto the table in this 2023 budget, we should see the opposition perhaps come to their senses and support these investments in our local schools.

A 27% increase in education base funding in a five-year period, and yet we still hear from the opposition about cuts—I don't know. Perhaps it's a by-product of the discovery math days, but I don't know where they're coming to this conclusion, because the facts speak for

themselves. We spent billions and billions of new dollars in education to ensure that each and every student is receiving a world-class education system here in the province of Ontario.

And we could look at this a different way. We could look at it on a per-pupil funding basis. Speaker, our government is providing over \$13,000 per student, \$1,000 more per student than when the previous government was here in this House. Yes, the money we provided to school boards has been going to front-line funding positions. Since 2017-18, we've seen that front-line education staffing has increased by roughly 8,000 positions since our government came to office. That includes hundreds of principals and vice-principals, over 900 teachers and 7,000 education workers.

Interjections.

Mr. Sam Oosterhoff: That is a round of applause meant for those hardworking men and women who, each and every single day, go into our schools to ensure that students receive a world-class education.

Additionally, it's not just about the staffing, as much as we know that staffing is very, very important. We saw for many years the former Liberal government—when the NDP held the balance of power, we saw a government that closed hundreds of schools—

Interjection: What?

Mr. Sam Oosterhoff: —here in the province of Ontario. Shameful, I know. Frankly, in my riding of Niagara West, we saw the consequences of that when these schools were underfunded by the previous government. We saw the consequences of that leading to school closures right in my riding.

But our government now is investing \$14 billion over 10 years in building new schools. I have to say, this is one of the aspects that I always really enjoyed in my time working with the Minister of Education, visiting different communities across this riding. I remember going to an eastern Ontario visit. I think we announced 11 schools in the space of a week, just going through communities who hadn't seen meaningful investments in their local education systems under previous governments—and the gratitude and the thankfulness that I saw on the faces of the children and also expressed by those hard-working education workers, who saw that our government was taking infrastructure renewal seriously and building the new schools that were needed in every corner of this riding.

And it's not just new schools. It's building new child care spaces for hardworking families. Since 2019, we've invested over \$2 billion into 100 new schools, 88 additions and 6,410 new licensed child care spaces. These are pretty significant investments, Speaker, and yet we seem to see once again this opposition motion claiming that our government is providing school boards with a so-called inadequate amount of funding—again, billions of dollars in new funding. But of course it's never enough for the opposition.

The opposition motion also irresponsibly calls upon the Ontario government to provide an undisclosed amount of

money to school boards to cover their budget shortfalls. They don't say how much. They just say, "Give it all. Give the money away. Give it away." But the amount of money is undisclosed, Speaker, because you can bet the farm that it would be an astronomically high number if we went down that road.

Incentives do matter. If our government was foolish enough to take the NDP's advice and bail out school boards facing deficits, we would see that frankly, the boards had no reason to act responsibly. Every school board in the province would clamour for more funding, trying to make sure that they spent every red cent to get more funding from the provincial government. But we know that incentives matter, and we are taking a responsible approach.

In a nutshell, the NDP motion completely misdiagnoses the state of education funding in Ontario. It proposes a so-called solution that would, frankly, do more harm than good.

1420

Now, just as an aside, Speaker, I am amazed that the NDP can so completely mischaracterize our government's record on education funding with this incredibly accusatory tone and then turn around and attempt to take zero accountability for their time in government. Ontario's first and only NDP government froze salaries for public sector workers; meanwhile, under our education deal, we see workers receiving a cumulative 15.8% raise, after this NDP, when they were in government, froze workers' salaries. And we've seen that they ripped up signed contracts. They not only didn't act in good faith when they were in negotiations; they ripped up signed contracts and ordered teachers, doctors, nurses and other public servants to work 12 days a year for free. It doesn't sound like the NDP have a record to stand on, and not surprisingly, we did see that this resulted in some of the worst labour unrest in Ontario's history.

When I read the motion we're debating, it reminded me: It's easy. I remember being in opposition, and it's easy for the opposition members to criticize. Perhaps some of them haven't been here that long, but I know others who have been in opposition for a great deal of time and have spent, I think, their entire political careers in opposition—and I think that is more than likely where they will stay. But it's easy for them in opposition to demand our government hand over undisclosed amounts of additional funding to school boards.

The reality is this governing is far more difficult, because we know that governing entails accountability; it entails responsibility; it entails being good stewards. And when they were given the opportunity to govern, unfortunately, we saw that the NDP made some terrible decisions. Of course, I wish they hadn't—I'm sure they wish they hadn't—and I know the people of this province wish that they had not made those decisions. But unfortunately, it seems to be they haven't learned their lesson. We often hear the opposition members smugly try to tell us, "Well, Bob Rae is a Liberal," and pretend none of it ever

happened. Well, Speaker, it's the NDP record, and I think they have to stand behind their record.

I would now like to take a little bit of time in the time that I have left—and I know we're running a little bit close, but I do want to walk through a little bit of this government's achievements so far on the education file, because I think they're substantial and important for education workers to understand. Our government strongly supports public education here in the province of Ontario. We know that it has a critically important role to play in the years to come. Ontario is facing the largest shortage of skilled labour in generations.

The Minister of Labour, Immigration, Training and Skills Development recently said it best: "Our government is taking an all-hands-on-deck approach to attract and train the next generation of skilled trades workers for better jobs and bigger paycheques for themselves and their families." There are currently over 100,000 unfilled skilled trades jobs across the province, and it's projected that by 2026 approximately one in five job openings in Ontario will be in a skilled-trades-related field.

Ever since our government was first elected, we have taken action to update the province's curriculum and ensure that it does a better job of reflecting the changing needs of the labour market. For over a decade, we saw previous generations of students lacking math, financial literacy and numeracy skills.

I'm proud to tell this chamber that the government made some incredible progress over the last five years. We have new curriculums that emphasize relevance in today's job market, with an emphasis on practical life skills, learning more about interest, debt, savings, personal budgeting and price comparisons—things that really matter to people when they're living in the real world—as well as helping students prepare for the jobs of tomorrow by introducing students to how to apply coding skills, to better understand complex mathematics and how to make predictions.

As we pivot from a failed discovery math program and introduce evidence-based learning and math and STEM curriculum, training will need to be provided to ensure that teachers have the pedagogical training to meet the highest standards. To achieve this, Ontario is providing \$30 million to double the number of school math coaches, beginning this September, as well as providing additional staff support—

Interjections.

Mr. Sam Oosterhoff: Absolutely—double the amount of school math coaches.

Mr. Graham McGregor: They need school math tutors over there.

Mr. Sam Oosterhoff: Absolutely—as well as providing additional staffing support in grade 9 classrooms to ensure that students are supported when they're learning math in these classrooms.

But we're not stopping there; we're expanding online learning opportunities provided by TVO and TFO that will provide resources for both students and teachers, available wherever there are.

Another item announced in last week's fantastic budget, brought forward by the Minister of Finance, was that Ontario is expanding resources and partnerships so that more students will have hands-on learning experiences to further their financial literacy learning and growth. We will be releasing self-directed learning modules that provide senior students with further opportunities to explore how financial literacy helps them transition to post-secondary pathways and compete in a rapidly changing economy. Foundational knowledge such as financial literacy prepares Ontario's students for success by giving them the basics that they need to pursue a career in STEM, the skilled trades or entrepreneurship.

A new initiative that was also brought forward in last week's budget that deserves a bit more of a spotlight is the expansion of the co-op program for special education students. We believe that every child in Ontario, especially those with intellectual and physical disabilities, should be able to graduate from school, access a job and live a life of dignity and respect. It's why our government is expanding placements in co-op to allow these students to get the hands-on learning experience that they deserve. Educational assistants will provide individualized supports to students with disabilities, to help them be successful in all areas of their learning, including co-operative education.

Another landmark initiative brought forward in last week's budget is the \$25-million fund to screen every student from senior kindergarten to grade 2 on their reading competencies and provide targeted supports for those who really need it. We know that early interventions are crucial. This will be the most comprehensive program of its type in our country—yet another way that the Ministry of Education and the public school system here in Ontario lead the charge in our country.

Teacher-led reading assessments will also ensure that students who are struggling with reading at a young age are identified early, to allow appropriate supports to be put in place sooner, supporting long-term reading success. The investment will provide kindergarten-to-grade 3 educators—around 30,000 different educators in this province—training in the science of reading, representing a significant shift from the discovery math reading program that we saw under the former Liberal government.

Our government has been clear: We are committed to investing in access to all learning recovery resources, to ensure success for all students. Our government is strongly committed to supporting public education in the province of Ontario, and it shows that we are providing students with the resources that they need.

We're on the right track. We're reforming the curriculum to address the shortage of skilled labour here in the province, and we're investing more than ever before to get students on track—learning, growing and thriving in classrooms, with a greater focus on reading, writing, math and technical education, to prepare our students for the jobs not just of today but of tomorrow.

The bottom line is this: Despite the mischaracterizations of our government's funding, we strongly believe in our public education system, have demonstrated that

with the real dollars to back up that commitment, and our funding to school boards has gone up, not down.

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

MPP Jill Andrew: The Conservative government has been gaslighting our school boards. They're denying to admit—

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Bhutila Karpoche): Will the member please have a seat?

I ask the member to withdraw her comment.

MPP Jill Andrew: Withdraw.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Bhutila Karpoche): The member may continue.

MPP Jill Andrew: Thank you, Speaker.

I would first like to thank every student, every teacher, every education worker and staff in St. Paul's, and our school board trustees, who have been doing the best they can on a shoestring budget for years—not to mention the last few years. The government has heard their voices; they have heard their cries for help to make our schools safer, to sustain the mental health of our students and the caring adults who take care of them. And the government has refused to act on those cries for help.

Throughout the pandemic, Ontario students were victims of school closures lasting longer than anywhere else in North America. That was on this Conservative government. And this was not without consequences; we're seeing them play out today, as a mental health crisis is gripping our public education system.

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Our provincial goals towards equity and inclusion and a sustainable future for this province are more and more at risk every day this Conservative government fails to invest in the next generation of learners and leaders. Students and children cannot be made pawns by this Conservative government's endless austerity narrative, but that's exactly what is happening.

The TDSB, one of the boards that oversees schools in my riding of St. Paul's, is facing a deficit of more than \$61 million in the upcoming year. This is the result of this government downloading responsibility onto boards to keep children safe through the pandemic without the funding to help them do so; without the funding to help them keep class sizes lower; without the funding to ensure that every school had the cleanest air possible to keep our kids safe, to help stop the spread of COVID; without the funding—in one of our schools—to provide our schools with hand sanitizer. I remember the parents who were fundraising for hand sanitizer. The TDSB was forced to dip into their limited resources, incurring approximately \$70.1 million in pandemic-related costs that were not covered by this Conservative government. And please make no mistake, Speaker: Those pandemic-related costs are still here today because we're still dealing with COVID and our schools still need support.

According to a letter written to the Minister of Education by the chair, Rachel Chernos Lin, and director, Colleen Russell-Rawlins, of the TDSB, asking for what

we're echoing today—to reimburse the school boards across Ontario for stepping up and doing what it takes to keep students safe. Without this reimbursement from the Conservative government, the \$61-million deficit means the TDSB is projecting the elimination of 522 staff positions, including 65 teachers, 35 special education workers, 35 child and youth workers, and 40 school-based safety monitors. What that means is less than the quality of education that we know as Ontarians we should be providing within our public education system.

This is at a time when 91% of school principals across this province have said they need more support for students' mental health and well-being, according to a report from People for Education, a non-profit located in my riding. The same report showed that just 9% of schools have regularly scheduled access to a mental health and addictions specialist or nurse, and 46% have no access at all.

Let me say, Speaker, it simply isn't fair to have one social worker or one psychologist flying across the city in five, 10 or more schools. We need school-based supports.

The rise in violence in Toronto schools has this school year on track to be the worst since the Toronto District School Board began collecting data in 2000. And make no mistake, Speaker: Police in schools is not the answer. The answer is having trained mental health care professionals to help end the violence.

Please reimburse our schools so they can get back on track, helping to keep our students safe.

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

Ms. Stephanie Bowman: It's a pleasure to rise today to speak to this opposition day motion.

The pandemic hit all of our communities hard, and it's not news to any of us that students and school staff were among those hit the hardest. And while the pandemic seems to be mostly behind us, its impacts are definitely not.

Teachers and education workers deserve our continued gratitude for their service to our kids, but instead, once again, they feel like they're grovelling to this government to get the supports they need.

Time and again, we've seen the government short-change students. This government received significant COVID funding from the federal Liberal government, and as the opposition day motion mentions, they underspent that money by \$600 million and underspent on education by \$432 million. Let's be clear, Speaker: That is money that school boards are now trying to make up for as they work to develop a balanced 2023-24 budget.

Let me remind the Premier and the education minister that Toronto and Peel were two of the areas hardest hit by the pandemic. When this government did not give them the money they needed to keep their staff and students safe—to lower class sizes—school boards like the TDSB did what they needed to do to respond. They were told to tap into their reserves to take the actions necessary to minimize risk to children, instead of getting the money they needed from this government. So they did. They

dipped into their reserves to make class sizes smaller, to support our kids as well as the teachers and education workers who worked so hard to support and educate our kids during the toughest times of the pandemic.

According to TDSB's letter from Chair Rachel Chernos Lin and ED Colleen Russell-Rawlins written to the Minister of Education on March 22, "The government and TPH's health and safety directions were critical to maintaining the confidence of everyone we served during the health emergency. In following those directions, the TDSB incurred approximately \$70.1 million in pandemic-related costs that were not covered by the Ministry of Education."

Now, because of that, the TDSB faces a funding shortfall that could result in them cutting 485 positions. Those positions are for people who supported kids through the pandemic, who support them now, who are supporting them as they deal with the impacts of the pandemic on learning, which are not over.

Cutting positions for youth and social workers, counsellors and special education workers will hurt kids and families in Ontario, in Toronto, and in my riding of Don Valley West—especially those who are refugees and new immigrants to Canada, whose first language is not English, and many who have special needs.

Teachers, educators, researchers and families are telling this government that our children need more support to catch up from the learning loss they experienced. They need more support for mental health. Cutting that albeit temporary funding now that provides these supports is "reckless" according to the TDSB. Ontario school principals know this too and are calling for these additional supports to remain in place.

In a recent piece in the Toronto Star, Karen Littlewood, president of the OSSTF, quoted a People for Education report stating that more than 90% of Ontario school principals reported their students need greater access to mental health supports and services. And now this government is cutting it.

Our kids need the support of the education workers, and this government needs to step up and make sure teachers and education workers don't leave our schools.

Balancing a budget by not spending on our kids' education and mental health needs is not balanced. The potential cuts to 485 workers in TDSB when we're still trying to recover and rebuild after the devastation that was COVID is not fiscally responsible. Students, parents, teachers and education workers had to weather the storm with insufficient support from their provincial government, and now that government continues to tell families who need their support that they're going to pull it away.

Speaker, I'm proud to support this motion, and I thank the opposition for proposing it.

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

Mr. Terence Kernaghan: It's my honour to rise today to speak in support of this motion. This motion would make school boards whole for the costs that were incurred as a result of COVID. It's money that the government

has—money that was allocated to the government for the relief of COVID—and yet this government is making a choice not to spend it. This official opposition day motion would make school boards whole, and I think it makes a great deal of sense, because that cost and that money would be invested into the education of students.

I want to start by thanking all the hard-working educators, all of the support staff and the administration.

Also, I'd like to thank all of the parents who, through their hard work and their dedication, have kept the education system together and kept their kids together.

As I look back, it did not have to be this way in Ontario. It should not have had to be this way in Ontario. The official opposition brought forward ideas and initiatives time and again for this Conservative government, to invest in smaller, safer classrooms, but this government claimed that there was nothing to worry about. They said that they were following the science—and, news flash, they weren't, and children suffered as a result, because this government mishandled the pandemic.

Ontario had the longest school closures in North America, and it's because this government refused to budge on their ideological adherence to larger class sizes. Had they followed the science, there would have been more supports for students; there would have been smaller, safer classrooms—and worse yet, they had the money to make sure that was possible, and they chose not to.

Now we see the impacts of Conservative short-sightedness. School boards were forced to do the heavy lifting that the Conservatives couldn't do. Mental health needs are staggering, and violence is at an all-time high.

Education is an investment. It is not a cost. Children are worth the time, they're worth the care, and they are a fiscally prudent investment.

It's time for this government to stop failing our kids.

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What concerns me most, as a former educator, is the funding for special education. Funding for special ed is arbitrary—and it's very convenient for governments. It has been convenient for Liberals, and it has been convenient for Conservatives, because it lets them off the hook. It lets them spend less. It shows the level of care that this government has for students.

So I urge this government to do the right thing: to make sure that they are spending this money to alleviate the burden on school boards, so that this money can go to the kids who need it most.

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

Mr. John Fraser: I want to thank the member for bringing this motion forward, and I'm glad to support it.

Here's what I'd like to say to the other side: In a few short months, thousands and thousands of children on the legacy autism program will be coming into our schools. And guess what? The schools don't know they're coming. Guess what else? There's no money for them—no money, to add insult to injury.

The message that I'm hearing from this government is, "We're making a historic investment," which, by the way,

happens every year in this province in every department—health, education, roads. We always spend more money, so it's not historic. Next year will be history as well, by that count.

But their message in this budget, by what they've done with education, is that if you have a child with special needs that are not being met at school, you're on your own. If your child is struggling with mental health, you're on your own. If your child has somehow fallen behind, guess what, families? You're on your own. They're not making life easier for people; they're making it harder.

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

MPP Kristyn Wong-Tam: It's an honour to rise in the House, as always, to speak on behalf of the good people of Toronto Centre. I'm here to speak in favour of this motion for school board funding.

I want to start by recognizing the hard-working, exceptional teachers that we have in Ontario. They're simply the very best. I've had the benefit myself of being educated here, and I hope that the next generation can have the same opportunities that I've had.

By Toronto Centre standards, Speaker, my story is not uncommon. I learned to speak English at Sprucecourt Public School. Public education was taught to me, as well as life skills. Public education built my confidence. It actually gave me the opportunities that I have today, and I'm so grateful for it.

But decades of education cuts mean our youngest will not have the same opportunities. We can see those opportunities eroding and slipping away as we speak. At the core of this debate, which is so painfully hard for me to understand, is, why can't the government understand what they are doing? It's a very simple question that has to be answered. Does this government want the young people of Ontario to have the same chances today that we did to make it into this House?

This motion is important, Speaker, because I don't see this government answering "yes" to that question. They're not delivering real, sustainable solutions in last week's budget. Worse, this government's recent budget is cutting COVID learning recovery funds. The Toronto District School Board has requested \$150 million from this government to ensure that students are properly supported, a request that last week's budget has completely ignored.

At the Toronto District School Board, 522 staffing positions will be lost, including 65 teachers, out of which 45 fewer elementary teachers will be helping our youngest learners succeed and adjust to school. This also means 200 fewer lunchroom supervisors to help keep our kids safe from bullying during lunchtime. This also means 35 fewer child and youth workers supporting our students. This is all happening while violence is on the rise, and this also means that we have 40 fewer school-based safety monitors. This is entirely going in the wrong direction.

I specifically want to touch upon safety issues. It is an issue that has been dominating conversations I've had with many of the parents in my community. Lunchroom supervisors and safety monitors protect students at risk of

bullying. We all know that. We've been there. Our students are there. Our children are there. Safety monitors prevent students from joining gangs. They actually touch base with them while they're in the school. They develop supports. They allow them to have alternative conversations and they help them respond to violence in different manners. Losing those preventive supports would embody the expression of penny-wise and pound-foolish.

These supports keep kids in school. They ensure our youngest community members feel safe to go to school. They keep young people out of the criminal justice system. They prevent extraordinary expense in the future. In all my conversations with the parents, the education workers, the teachers as well as the students in Toronto Centre, I've never heard them once say—never once have they ever said—that there is enough support at their school.

But what exactly is this government proposing? Well, my community is doubtful that the government has any solutions for them. At a recent Church Street public school meeting, I met with parents as well as students as well as TDSB leadership. They were asking for support around having more education workers and special needs workers. They recognized that the classroom sizes were too big; TDSB leadership admitted to that. But they also agreed with the parents that although education workers were needed, they couldn't provide them. They could not provide the supports that their students as well as the children of those families needed to be successful. Everyone walked away from that meeting demoralized, knowing that they were stuck.

Speaker, after hearing from Church Street public school parents and students, I then spoke to Nelson Mandela Public School as well as Lord Dufferin public school parents. I spent so many hours at Tim Hortons, pouring over the coffee cups, listening to their stories about what they were struggling with and experiencing. It was heart-breaking. They told me stories about violence in their communities in Regent Park that is coming back over and over again. They know the solutions are there, but they're not getting any support or help. They've identified violence in the classrooms, violence in the hallways, violence in the lunchrooms, violence in the schoolyards. They want help. They're begging, asking, pleading. They can't get a response. And all we get from this government is just an excuse: "We've done enough. You should be grateful. You're mismanaging the funds. You're running a deficit. You should not be in charge of your school budget." All of that is setting the ground for what is yet to come, which is going to be worse.

This government has school boards facing record deficits. They blame those boards. They blame those school boards for bloated classrooms. They blame those school boards for crumbling schools. They blame those school boards for not having adequate supports in the classrooms to provide high-quality education so that students can be successful.

This government likes to talk about facts. These are the facts: This government has cut funding to our schools by \$800 per student. This government is planning to cut \$6

billion to our schools over the next six years. The Financial Accountability Office has caught this government under-spending \$2.1 billion in the 2021-22 budget. Those are the facts. If we're going to talk about facts, then you might as well lay them all on the table.

Ontario students, parents and education workers just survived a historic global health emergency. They cannot get through to the other end without additional supports, and by them asking for supports, what they desperately need and deserve—no response is coming from this government.

Now is not the time to forget these essential workers, these heroes. Now is the time to build back better, as the government likes to say. Now is the time for you to vote in favour of this motion.

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

Mr. Joel Harden: I'm very happy to be rising for this motion this afternoon. I would like to believe, when I hear the government members talk and talk about themselves being friends of education, that they know what a friend actually does. We on this side of the House don't judge our friends by what they say; we judge our friends by what they do.

Let me tell you something that's happening in our community at home right now in Ottawa Centre, Speaker, because I want to believe that some of the great kids in our high schools right now will go on one day to post-secondary education, and some of those kids might choose Carleton University. But guess what? Carleton University is on strike today. And do you know why Carleton University is on strike today? They're not on strike against that university administration; they're on strike against Bill 124, legislated by this government, which arbitrarily capped wages at 1% for the last three years. Did they cap their own salaries? Did they? Did they cap the salaries of their deputy ministers, who they pay handsomely to drive their policy? Do they cap any special interest group favouring the Conservative Party at any single point? Do they cap them?

1450

Interjection: No.

Mr. Joel Harden: No, but they capped the hard workers at Carleton University who are on strike right now against this government. Let's be very clear: That's not what a friend does.

But I tell you what an actual friend does, Speaker. An actual friend goes to someone in crisis and lifts them up. That's what I saw in this great province last November. I saw a purple tide of custodians, ECEs and EAs and library techs and receptionists that had enough of this government's spin. There are some days when I'm in this chamber and I hear the education minister talk, and I think that member is going to spin so hard, he's going to leave the ceiling of this building and end up somewhere on the Gardiner Expressway. It's unbelievable.

If you believe the minister, Speaker, you would think that our education system is properly funded. But here's what the member for Ottawa West—Nepean just told us

earlier in this debate: We are losing 21 critical positions in the Ottawa-Carleton District School Board. So when they say, "We're a friend of public education; we're coming to help," I think about the health care debates we've been having in this place. Friend to nurses: Have we heard that before? We know that in 2022, there were 158 emergency rooms that had to close because of the cuts of this government.

We have to reckon reality with rhetoric. We have to reckon the espoused friendship with that person's actions in this place. Speaker, I want to tell this government through you, you are no friend of the education system if you stand in this place, talk about people wanting bailouts while you make their schools harder to work in and harder to study in. You are no friend.

I also want to say this, Speaker. I've had occasion to work with a dad of an autistic child back home. His son goes to high school. In the pandemic, the school that this young adult went to accommodated this son and was helping him figure out a way to explore that classroom, because there was a lot more space in the school because so many kids were at home learning virtually. There was a lot of hard work put into accommodating that child. Moreover, that dad, Steve, reached out to our children's hospital to bring in specialized autism expertise to make that successful.

Guess where we're at with Steve's son now, Speaker? Last I heard, the school has said that because of interactions, now that everybody is back, now that there's a lot of stimulus, now that it's tougher for Steve's son to get by in the school, that he is only entitled to two hours of high school a day—two hours. This minister talks about all the great work they're doing for students with special needs, but for Steve's son—two hours of education in the province of Ontario. You are no friend to that family. You are no friend to that son. Nor are you a friend to the thousands of kids in the legacy autism program who need as good an opportunity as everybody else.

Speaker, I don't call them students with disabilities; I call them students with superpowers who have so much to offer and give. But you are not helping them. You are no friend to them. You are no friend to the staff if you make their workplaces hard to live in.

I encourage the folks watching this debate at home: Judge this government by how they vote. You're not a friend to public education if you make education worse.

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

Ms. Jessica Bell: I am proud to be here today, standing up in support of our motion to ask the Ontario government to fund school boards for pandemic-related COVID expenses. It is extremely important.

Our kids and parents have just gone through an incredibly hard three years. The impact of those three years is being felt today. I see this. I am a parent of two children who go to the Toronto District School Board system. I regularly communicate with parents, principals, teachers and students about their experience at schools and what they're seeing and experiencing. What is very clear

is that learning outcomes for math, STEM, reading, writing—we're behind. When it comes to mental health, behavioural issues, violence, we are also falling behind. Our kids are struggling.

That is especially true for children with special needs. We regularly work with parents who have kids with autism who are in the school board system, and they are having huge difficulties getting access to school, being able to stay in school for the entire school day and have the additional supports they need—the educational assistants they need—to ensure their kid can be the best that they can be.

It has been a very, very hard few years, and it's been good to hear my colleagues remind me and other parents that compared to every other school system in North America, our schools were closed the longest. It's hard to think back at that time, raising two children during the pandemic and thinking about how many days my partner and I got up in the morning and thought: How are we going to get through today and work full-time and teach our kids?—knowing that there are over a million families in Ontario who are experiencing what we were experiencing, and many of them are not as lucky as us. It's been a hard few years.

And so you would expect this government at this time to acknowledge and recognize that parents and teachers and students have had a hard time and invest in our schools. But that is not what we saw in this budget. What we saw in this budget is cuts. There are a lot of fancy numbers when you look at it, but when you actually look at what the school boards are showing us right now—because I've gone through the Toronto District School Board's estimates for next year and they've been very clear about what they're seeing. What they are projecting is a loss of 522 staffing positions. That is what they are projecting will be cut: lunchroom supervisors, elementary schoolteachers, secondary schoolteachers, social workers, child and youth workers, caretakers. That is what is going to be cut.

The TDSB is early in its budgeting process compared to other school boards, but now we are also seeing other school boards come out with their numbers as well, and they are seeing the same thing. The Toronto Catholic District School Board is looking at cuts: 122 staffing positions. The Ottawa-Carleton school board is also looking at cuts. And we will be seeing that again and again and again as school boards get closer to finalizing their budgeting process. This is not the direction that we should be going when we're talking about school boards and the fundamental human rights that our kids have to a good education. This is not the direction that we will be going.

What I fear—and this has been mentioned earlier—is that the government is looking at doing what they did with health care and they're looking at doing the same thing with education, where they create a crisis, where they cut, and as a result, people are motivated to go to the private system because they want a better alternative, when a better solution is to invest in the education system that we have. That is what we are calling on you to do today, starting with this very pragmatic motion, which is to cover

pandemic-related expenses that school boards experienced in the past, that they had to cover, and the pandemic-related experiences that they are looking at continuing to deal with this year.

I support this motion; I urge you to vote for it. I will also be working with parents, with educators and with the school systems to ensure that this government treats school boards and students and teachers with the respect that they deserve, and that will translate into funding so that our kids can get the education they deserve.

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

Hon. Stephen Lecce: I do appreciate this opportunity to rise and speak about our government's record with respect to publicly funded schools—and I recall so vividly at the time the former critic, now the Leader of the Opposition, speaking and using rhetoric, posing the question rhetorically, “Where are all of these staff? Where are all these investments? Where are all these public health nurses? Where are all these EAs and educators and custodians and ventilation upgrades and HEPA filters we invested in?” That's in the transcript from just six and 12 months ago, and yet here we are today.

For the members opposite, who spent the last two years suggesting the investments don't exist, the people don't exist in schools, the ventilation hasn't been improved, only today to have the chutzpah to come in this House and urge us to reinstate the funding they never believed was in place in our school system—only the NDP could do that with a straight face. Only New Democrats could sit here and actually believe they have the credibility in this Parliament to communicate to the government, who increased the very funding in every single measurement—and now to proclaim the great saviours of public education, when their record is consistent, systematic opposition to the hiring of 8,000 net new staff. That is the NDP record, and a regrettable one, because maybe we disagree with the rate of increase—perhaps the opposition suggests going even further—but to have opposed every single investment, even incrementally, seems to defy the principle of more investment, more staffing, more resources.

1500

Let's reflect on where we started in 2018 in mental health, as a case study—an issue that I believe every member in this House cares about. The provincial Liberals, under Premier Wynne, were investing, in their election budget, the peak of spending, \$18 million in mental health funding for schools. The funding today is at \$90 million. It has been increased by 400%. I appreciate and am the first to acknowledge that we have to keep going, because the needs are rising, especially in a post-pandemic world—but the funding has been increased by 400%. It is the highest rate of increase we've seen in the federation, including when compared to New Democrats in BC.

Madam Speaker, when we look at areas like capital renewal, we are cognizant of the challenges in many schools in Ontario. There's a reason why, in the first

budget of this government, and reconfirmed in the Minister of Finance's budget, there is nearly \$15 billion in capital investments, so that all of your communities, from the most rural and remote parts of Ontario to the most urban here in Toronto—every one of us and our children—has access to a modern school. That's an investment in building schools that meet the needs of Ontario, both for the current population and for future immigrant populations, which will come to this province at a quantum of 300,000 per year, every year. We're going to be ready for that. We are investing in a modern school system. There are a hundred schools under construction today and 200 in the pipeline in this province, because we're investing, because we recognize there is more need, because we recognize the former Liberals, for all the spending—that itself isn't a virtue; it's the outcomes, the measurements. It's the benchmark of success with taxpayer dollars. They spent a lot and delivered so little for the people of Ontario—600 schools closed, failing outcomes in math and literacy. That isn't a metric of success.

While I know the member from Waterloo and others feel that the most superior metric is just spending more money—we are doing that, but we also expect accountability from school boards, from unions, from all of us, to step up in the interest of children. The metric of success is our kids' graduation rates—which, by the way, has been increased from 85% to 89% under our Progressive Conservative government. That's a metric of success.

Youth employment—connecting young people from the classroom into the labour market—is a critical benchmark. We're seeing more young people work in the private economy—making better jobs—with the recognition that we have to do more to help ensure they've got a high wage that leads them to an affordable home.

When it comes to investment in this budget—this item before the House is germane to the most recent budget, introduced by the Minister of Finance—the overall funding has been increased, yes, by \$2.3 billion, but even when you look at baseline funding in education, it's still up \$1.3 billion from last year. I'm sorry; this is not a matter of debate, interpretation or ideological dispositions of left or right. It's a matter of fact. The funding is up \$1.3 billion.

We are following the money—to the member from Waterloo—and it's going into classrooms in Waterloo region to a higher level than ever before in Ontario history. That's a good outcome for families in Kitchener, Waterloo, Cambridge and, frankly, across Ontario.

Madam Speaker, look at the staffing. We have a relatively flat enrolment rate in Ontario. It has gone up and it has gone a bit down over the past four or five years in Ontario, but it has fundamentally been flat—roughly two million kids in the publicly funded school system. Yet when you look at the amount of staff, net staff—not through attrition; no cutesy interpretation. The amount of people working today when compared to 2017—the number is north of 7,000, for education workers.

One of the members from Ottawa spoke passionately about the needs of children with special education needs, those with exceptionalities in our schools. There are 7,000

additional education workers—EAs, custodians, social workers, or child and youth workers. All of these have been hired and funded—not somehow absent provincial investment; not in spite of, but because of our government's investment.

There are 200 more principals and vice-principals working in our schools. There are roughly 800 front-line educators working within our schools. That is an investment in publicly funded schools. That is an investment to meet the challenge to ensure the next generation of young people are set up for success in our economy, so that they can succeed and dream and be ambitious and be able to own a home and achieve the full partnership of being a Canadian in this country.

Madam Speaker, just on ventilation alone—there is no province in Canada, during the pandemic, that put more investment in ventilation. We have more HEPA filtration in this province—if you aggregate every province and add it up, we still have more: 100,000 HEPA filters. We put \$600 million in ventilation upgrades in every single one of your schools—not an exception to the rule. Every school was assessed. Every school was upgraded—the highest standards of MERV 13, which the science said, two years ago, was the best. We didn't wait until September 2023. Folks, we did this in September 2021 and 2022 and kept it in place in 2023—\$600 million in mechanical ventilation. We set a new standard in this country. If a school does not have mechanical ventilation—roughly 20% to 30% of Ontario schools in our respective ridings do not. We set a standard that no one has in this country—I'm not aware of it on the continent—where every classroom, every learning space, every gym, every cafeteria, every place where a child works, congregates, studies would have fitted-for-the-room HEPA filtration. Every kindergarten class, where kids were too young to wear masks, of course—we put two HEPA filters in it, sized to the room, to reduce the risk for those children. We stepped up.

I understand in this House—and the nature of our political system and of our democracy—it's healthy to oppose. It is also healthy to acknowledge even incremental action that makes a difference in the lives of those we represent. I would expect, when we put 100,000 HEPA filters; \$600 million in ventilation; when we hire staff; when we launch a new math strategy to literally, in budget 2023, double the amount of math coaches to emphasize numeracy, to strengthen training of our staff and get in there in those classrooms that need more intervention; when we are the only province in Canada to have a reading assessment strategy recommended by the Ontario Human Rights Commission—I would hope the NDP would be an advocate for us following the advice of the Ontario Human Rights Commission.

Here was one of the recommendations in the Right to Read report. It suggested the former Liberal curriculum did not follow the science of reading. They suggested that children with disabilities—to the member from Ottawa—are disproportionately left behind from the old language curriculum under former Premiers Wynne and McGuinty. The OHRC put out a damning report of that curriculum,

saying you need to reform the curriculum and come up with a meaningful, wholesale reading-screening strategy for every child, from kindergarten to grade 2. That is what we did on the day the report was tabled.

Perhaps something counterintuitive: The Ontario Human Rights Commission put out the report on the Right to Read—the government moved immediately to adopt a new language curriculum, which will be in place this coming September. For those who have a face of a perplexed nature—Google. In addition, we also announced \$25 million, then, to provide a screening tool. There's only one province in Canada that's going to screen every child—kindergarten, senior kindergarten, grade 1 and grade 2—at least once but up to two times a year with a common screening tool, with teacher training, which we're providing. Over 400,000 kids are going to get this. There's just no jurisdiction in the nation that's doing it in nearly as expansive a fashion as Ontario. We're not doing this to boast. We're doing this because we recognize, after the pandemic, that literacy rates for young kids have regressed. I acknowledge the challenge. No one is suggesting that Ontario is some island in and of itself, when the entire Western world—the industrialized nations, east and west—have seen regression in fundamental math and reading skills. We're not immune to that reality. We're certainly not the worst in the federation, according to EQAO data. But we recognize there's a problem, so we stepped up with a solution, with the full support of the Ontario Human Rights Commission. Even when we did that, something that perhaps is more ideologically inclusive to other members in the House—even then, we didn't have a peep of support from any member, any critic. Education, disability—it didn't matter. Silence. We can't even recognize when we do the right things, even in a mere narrow or targeted fashion.

I am standing up in this House today with a simple message: The funding is there. The supports are there. The staffing is there. In a most granular way, we are stepping up—from literacy to numeracy to mental health to special education and to staffing.

1510

We've heard this line before: "Where are the staff?" I have so many quotes from the member from Davenport—and with a great level of gratitude to a sparring partner for many years. But what I will simply say is, they're there. Let's not pretend that we didn't double the amount of public health nurses. Let's not pretend that we didn't hire 7,000 more people. Those are not open to interpretation, colleagues. You can make the argument that you need more, but to hear the rhetoric—

Interjections.

Hon. Stephen Lecce: Literally making my point in real time, which is so brilliant.

To literally say, as I'm speaking about the personnel who have been hired—they're now urging me to reinstate funding for something they opposed. Sorry; there's no logical consistency here.

Let's be intellectually honest all the time for a chance—and that requires us to continue to support investments when we make them in Ontario.

Our Premier speaks about this because he recognizes the linkage between education and the economy. He sees building the skill set of the next generation of young people not through an economic lens, exclusively. Let's be clear. We're not producing little economic robots. We're trying to produce well-rounded, civically minded, emotionally intelligent, technologically savvy, kind, hard-working, disciplined, inclusive young people. But part of our task as Progressive Conservatives is not to decouple the economic imperative of giving young people a curriculum that leads them to a job—and we see both. We have to do both, which is why we updated the curriculum, another area where we don't necessarily have to spend more. But we can get so much more out of our classroom experience if our math curriculum, for example, for the first time actually mandates financial literacy.

This budget presented by the Minister of Finance actually includes not just—it builds upon the government's commitment to mandate financial literacy in every grade, starting in grade 1, all the way to grade 9. Because of the support of the Minister of Finance, we actually have an additional increased investment in financial literacy resources for teachers, for parents, and for the kids themselves to build a more personally responsible young citizenry in this province. That's a good thing.

Madam Speaker, we updated the curriculum to realign it with labour market needs, because kids weren't being taught how to code—in BC all the way to Nova Scotia, we had many provinces that were leading. And it is our objective, as Progressive Conservatives, to give this generation of young people a competitive advantage when they graduate so that no longer will they have to be unemployed or in a job not related to their skills or really not optimizing their potential. How many times have we heard, as parliamentarians, a person say, "I have a job disconnected to my skills," or an employer say, "We have people without work or work without people"? Either way, that skills mismatch is a problem. So we're actually emphasizing real life and job skills—yes, coding; yes, financial literacy, things that are actually going to help young people succeed.

In the most recent update in the new math curriculum, the new STEM curriculum, the new computer science curriculum, the new technology curriculum—all things avoided by the members opposite in this House today. Why? Why would we avoid referencing elements that give young people an advantage in our country? Why would we not recognize that the curriculum under the former Liberals—perhaps an area we can coalesce and agree on. They didn't do a good job. They left so many people behind in the economy.

That's the leadership that we're providing to the people of Ontario—a new curriculum, modern schools, hiring of more staff, an increase of funding. That is an investment in publicly funded schools. That is going to make a difference in the life of a young person.

So we are stepping up. We are providing clarity and consistency. In every budget, we've been providing more funding. I think that's important because for many of us—

many of you are parents; some of you are uncles and aunts, as I am. We're caregivers. We care about these kids. We all have a personal connection to young people in our civil society. We all want them to succeed. It's very personal to us.

So when we are increasing the amount of staff and increasing the amount of funding and increasing the amount of resources, recognizing, full stop, that the demands are rising in our schools and our society—I want families who are watching to be assured that as the challenge arises, so will the province, to meet the challenge of this generation, to ensure they are supported and wrapped around with supports they need. It's in addition to the funding in education—we're also stepping it up in the community. Think of what we're doing just in tutoring.

Madam Speaker, when the opposition had an opportunity to vote—\$175 million tutoring program that didn't—

Interjection.

Hon. Stephen Lecce: Madam Speaker, the average child had 22 hours of direct intervention under children—under groups of five. I know the inconvenient truth for the member of Waterloo—because it just seems to be inconvenient from the ideological blindness of recognizing a good thing when you see it: \$175 million. No one in this country, including New Democrats in BC, had the wisdom to do it, and yet here we have the opposition saying, “We should renew the fund that I opposed just one year ago”—no credibility and no trust.

But the people know this Premier could be counted on to deliver an effective and accountable education system that leads young people to a good-paying job—and we will continue to do that, in spite of the members opposite.

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

Mr. Chris Glover: It's an honour to rise today. The NDP have got a motion today, and all we're asking the government to do is to cover the pandemic costs that were absorbed by school boards across the province. This will help to reduce the number of cuts that this government is going to be making to our schools and our staff over the next year. It's very simple.

The Minister of Education was just boasting about the investment in HEPA filters and other things, and that was good, except there were two issues I take with what the government did in that area. The first was that the pandemic started in March 2020, and our schools were closed. Our students in Ontario had the longest closure, missed the most school days of any jurisdiction in North America. In January 2022, this government was boasting about a new investment in HEPA filters in our schools, so they could open classrooms. It took them a year and a half to make that investment in those HEPA filters that the minister was just boasting about just a few minutes ago. We need a government that's actually going to invest in our students today.

The minister also has continuously boasted in the House about a \$680-million increase in education funding

from last year to this year, but the Financial Accountability Office, which is an independent office of the provincial government, says that they didn't spend \$430 million in the education budget. When you look at inflation, inflation over the last year was 5.4%; if they had increased education funding by the rate of inflation, it would have been a \$1.5-billion increase, not a \$680-million increase. So the amount that they increased did not account for inflation, and they didn't actually spend the amount that they had been boasting about, that they budgeted for last year. The impact is that we have 8,000 more students in the province of Ontario—these are government figures—and 2,000 fewer education workers: 2,000 fewer teachers, education assistants, special-needs assistants and custodians.

I am deeply concerned about education. I was a high school teacher in the 1990s, and I continued teaching part-time after that. I was a school board trustee from 2010 to 2018. The reason that I am so passionate about our education system is that our publicly funded education systems are the foundation of our democracy and the foundation of our economic growth, and we need to support them.

And so when the government is putting out all these numbers and the numbers don't actually equate with what's happening in the classroom, then this is a problem, because spin is not going to educate our children. What's going to educate our children are the teachers, the education assistants, the special needs assistants, the custodians, the secretaries and all of the staff, all of the workers, in our schools. That's who is educating our children, and they are the ones who need to be supported.

But right now, the Toronto District School Board spent \$70 million to ensure that their schools met the health guidelines provided by this government during the pandemic. That money was not reimbursed, and so they're just asking the government to reimburse that \$70 million in pandemic measures that the TDSB made. Instead, the TDSB is facing a \$61-million shortfall in the next school year, 2023-24. The outcome of this will be—and this is the bottom line; this is where people will be able to judge whether the government is giving the full story or not. They are estimating that they're going to have to cut 522 staff. And from what I've heard from the other side, from the government side during this debate, it sounds like they're not going to support the motion to reimburse school boards for the pandemic measures. And the other thing that I've heard from them is they're going to start attacking the school boards. Even though all of the funding is provided by this government to the school boards, they're going to start attacking the school boards and saying, “Hey, you've got to manage your budgets better.” Well, the government insisted. They forced the TDSB to spend \$70 million on pandemic measures and they didn't reimburse them. That's what this motion is about: reimbursing those pandemic measures.

1520

At the TDSB, it will mean 65 teachers, 35 educational assistants, 35 child and youth workers, 40 school-based safety monitors. We are facing a crisis in our society

coming out of this pandemic and this government is proposing to cut school-based safety monitors. The Toronto Catholic District School Board used \$60 million in reserves during the pandemic, and next year they're projecting a shortfall of somewhere around \$35 million, and they are expecting to lay off at least 120 education workers. The impact of this is that we have larger classes; we have fewer resources; we have fewer staff to serve our students in our schools.

And the other thing—I don't have much time left, but I just want to say, the government spins all these numbers out. Every time you ask them about something, they spin out the numbers. But my real concern is that their goal is to privatize our education system just like they're privatizing our health care system. We spend \$80 billion a year in Ontario on health care. We spend \$34 billion a year in education. And there are a lot of corporations that look at that money and they think, "How can we possibly divert some of that into our pockets? How can we change these systems—these public, not-for-profit systems—into private, for-profit systems?" That's what's happening in our health care system, and it's something that I think this government is doing in our education system as well. And I think it's really, really unconscionable to be privatizing education when it is truly the foundation of our democracy and of our economic growth.

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

I turn to the leader of the official opposition, please.

Ms. Marit Stiles: I want to thank all the members for participating in the debate this afternoon on this opposition motion. And I want to be clear: Really, what this motion does is just simply ask the government to come through on funding that they haven't covered for costs that boards had to take on during the pandemic just to keep up—just to barely keep up. Nearly five years into this government's tenure, and I've got to tell you, everywhere I go around this province, life is not better for people. People are struggling. They really, really are. Whether you look at the situation in health care or in the workplace or—it's just not better.

But for people with school-aged children right now, boy, that struggle has been so deep and so long. And it is our very littlest kids that are struggling the most. They're struggling with really basic things like playing nicely together and sharing and learning to read, and we're hearing this from those experts on the front line. And what this government is doing by failing to come through on this funding request by the school boards is going to mean that those little kids get less and less support, because it will mean cuts. And we heard members of the government caucus here today basically—I would consider it threaten boards.

And I've got to say, I want the government to show some responsibility here. I would really, really request and beg the government to please come through with this funding. Our kids need all the support you can provide right now. They don't need excuses. They don't need spin. They just need to make sure there are enough teachers,

educational workers and educational assistants in the classroom to help them with the very most basic things. Thank you, Speaker. I hope I can count on their support.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Bhutla Karpoche): Thank you. MPP Stiles has moved opposition day number 3. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? I heard a no.

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

All those opposed to the motion will please say "nay."

In my opinion, the nays have it.

Call in the members. There will be a 10-minute bell.

The division bells rang from 1525 to 1535.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Bhutla Karpoche): Members, please take your seats.

MPP Stiles moved opposition day number 3. All those in favour of the motion will please rise one at a time and be recognized by the Clerk.

Ayes

Andrew, Jill	Gretzky, Lisa	Shamji, Adil
Armstrong, Teresa J.	Harden, Joel	Shaw, Sandy
Bell, Jessica	Hsu, Ted	Stiles, Marit
Bowman, Stephanie	Jama, Sarah	Tabuns, Peter
Burch, Jeff	Kernaghan, Terence	Taylor, Monique
Collard, Lucille	Mamakwa, Sol	Vanhof, John
Fife, Catherine	McMahon, Mary-Margaret	Vaugeois, Lise
Fraser, John	Pasma, Chandra	West, Jamie
Gates, Wayne	Rakocevic, Tom	Wong-Tam, Kristyn
Gélinas, France	Sattler, Peggy	
Glover, Chris	Schreiner, Mike	

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Bhutla Karpoche): All those opposed to the motion will please rise one at a time and be recognized by the Clerk.

Nays

Anand, Deepak	Jordan, John	Romano, Ross
Bailey, Robert	Kanapathi, Logan	Sabawy, Sheref
Barnes, Patrice	Kusendova-Bashta, Natalia	Sandhu, Amarjot
Bethlenfalvy, Peter	Leardi, Anthony	Sarkaria, Prabmeet Singh
Bouma, Will	Lecce, Stephen	Sarrazin, Stéphane
Byers, Rick	MacLeod, Lisa	Saunderson, Brian
Calandra, Paul	Martin, Robin	Scott, Laurie
Clark, Steve	McCarthy, Todd J.	Skelly, Donna
Coe, Lorne	McGregor, Graham	Smith, Dave
Crawford, Stephen	McNaughton, Monte	Smith, David
Cuzzetto, Rudy	Mulroney, Caroline	Smith, Graydon
Dixon, Jess	Oosterhoff, Sam	Smith, Laura
Dowie, Andrew	Pang, Billy	Smith, Todd
Gallagher Murphy, Dawn	Parsa, Michael	Surma, Kinga
Ghamari, Goldie	Piccini, David	Tangri, Nina
Gill, Parm	Pirie, George	Triantafilopoulos, Effie J.
Grewal, Hardeep Singh	Quinn, Nolan	Wai, Daisy
Hardeman, Ernie	Rae, Matthew	Yakabuski, John
Hogarth, Christine	Rasheed, Kaleed	
Holland, Kevin	Riddell, Brian	

The Clerk of the Assembly (Mr. Todd Decker): The ayes are 31; the nays are 58.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Bhutla Karpoche): I declare the motion lost.

Motion negatived.

Report continues in volume B.

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO
ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

Lieutenant Governor / Lieutenante-gouverneure: Hon. / L'hon. Elizabeth Dowdeswell, OC, OOnt.

Speaker / Président: Hon. / L'hon. Ted Arnott

Clerk / Greffier: Todd Decker

Deputy Clerk / Sous-greffier: Trevor Day

Clerks-at-the-Table / Greffiers parlementaires: Valerie Quioc Lim, Wai Lam (William) Wong,

Meghan Stenson, Christopher Tyrell

Temporary Sergeant-at-Arms / Sergent d'armes par intérim: Mike Civil

Member and Party / Député(e) et parti	Constituency / Circonscription	Other responsibilities / Autres responsabilités
Anand, Deepak (PC)	Mississauga—Malton	
Andrew, Jill (NDP)	Toronto—St. Paul's	
Armstrong, Teresa J. (NDP)	London—Fanshawe	
Arnott, Hon. / L'hon. Ted (PC)	Wellington—Halton Hills	Speaker / Président de l'Assemblée législative
Babikian, Aris (PC)	Scarborough—Agincourt	
Bailey, Robert (PC)	Sarnia—Lambton	
Barnes, Patrice (PC)	Ajax	Second Deputy Chair of the Committee of the Whole House / Deuxième vice-présidente du comité plénier de l'Assemblée législative
Begum, Doly (NDP)	Scarborough Southwest / Scarborough- Sud-Ouest	Deputy Leader, Official Opposition / Chef adjointe de l'opposition officielle
Bell, Jessica (NDP)	University—Rosedale	
Bethlenfalvy, Hon. / L'hon. Peter (PC)	Pickering—Uxbridge	Minister of Finance / Ministre des Finances
Blais, Stephen (LIB)	Orléans	
Bouma, Will (PC)	Brantford—Brant	
Bourgouin, Guy (NDP)	Mushkegowuk—James Bay / Mushkegowuk—Baie James	
Bowman, Stephanie (LIB)	Don Valley West / Don Valley-Ouest	
Brady, Bobbi Ann (IND)	Haldimand—Norfolk	
Bresee, Ric (PC)	Hastings—Lennox and Addington	
Burch, Jeff (NDP)	Niagara Centre / Niagara-Centre	
Byers, Rick (PC)	Bruce—Grey—Owen Sound	
Calandra, Hon. / L'hon. Paul (PC)	Markham—Stouffville	Minister of Legislative Affairs / Ministre des Affaires législatives Minister of Long-Term Care / Ministre des Soins de longue durée Government House Leader / Leader parlementaire du gouvernement
Cho, Hon. / L'hon. Raymond Sung Joon (PC)	Scarborough North / Scarborough- Nord	Minister for Seniors and Accessibility / Ministre des Services aux aînés et de l'Accessibilité
Cho, Hon. / L'hon. Stan (PC)	Willowdale	Associate Minister of Transportation / Ministre associé des Transports
Clark, Hon. / L'hon. Steve (PC)	Leeds—Grenville—Thousand Islands and Rideau Lakes / Leeds— Grenville—Thousand Islands et Rideau Lakes	Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing / Ministre des Affaires municipales et du Logement
Coe, Lorne (PC)	Whitby	
Collard, Lucille (LIB)	Ottawa—Vanier	Third Deputy Chair of the Committee of the Whole House / Troisième vice-présidente du comité plénier de l'Assemblée législative
Crawford, Stephen (PC)	Oakville	
Cuzzetto, Rudy (PC)	Mississauga—Lakeshore	
Dixon, Jess (PC)	Kitchener South—Hespeler / Kitchener-Sud—Hespeler	
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 civiles 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	Deputy Opposition House Leader / Leader parlementaire adjointe de l'opposition officielle
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	
Hunter, Mitzie (LIB)	Scarborough—Guildwood	
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
Khanjin, 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 (NDP)	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
Oosterhoff, Sam (PC)	Niagara West / Niagara-Ouest	Minister of Transportation / Ministre des Transports

Member and Party / Député(e) et parti	Constituency / Circonscription	Other responsibilities / Autres responsabilités
Pang, Billy (PC)	Markham—Unionville	
Parsa, Hon. / L'hon. Michael (PC)	Aurora—Oak Ridges—Richmond Hill	Minister of Children, Community and Social Services / Ministre des Services à l'enfance et des Services sociaux et communautaires
Pasma, Chandra (NDP)	Ottawa West—Nepean / Ottawa-Ouest—Nepean	
Piccini, Hon. / L'hon. David (PC)	Northumberland—Peterborough South / Northumberland—Peterborough-Sud	Minister of the Environment, Conservation and Parks / Ministre de l'Environnement, de la Protection de la nature et des Parcs
Pierre, Natalie (PC)	Burlington	
Pirie, Hon. / L'hon. George (PC)	Timmins	Minister of Mines / Ministre des Mines
Quinn, Nolan (PC)	Stormont—Dundas—South Glengarry	
Rae, Matthew (PC)	Perth—Wellington	
Rakocevic, Tom (NDP)	Humber River—Black Creek	
Rasheed, Hon. / L'hon. Kaleed (PC)	Mississauga East—Cooksville / Mississauga-Est—Cooksville	Minister of Public and Business Service Delivery / Ministre des Services au public et aux entreprises
Rickford, Hon. / L'hon. Greg (PC)	Kenora—Rainy River	Minister of Indigenous Affairs / Ministre des Affaires autochtones Minister of Northern Development / Ministre du Développement du Nord
Riddell, Brian (PC)	Cambridge	
Romano, Ross (PC)	Sault Ste. Marie	
Sabawy, Sheref (PC)	Mississauga—Erin Mills	
Sandhu, Amarjot (PC)	Brampton West / Brampton-Ouest	
Sarkaria, Hon. / L'hon. Prabmeet Singh (PC)	Brampton South / Brampton-Sud	President of the Treasury Board / Président du Conseil du Trésor
Sarrazin, Stéphane (PC)	Glengarry—Prescott—Russell	
Sattler, Peggy (NDP)	London West / London-Ouest	
Saunderson, Brian (PC)	Simcoe—Grey	
Schreiner, Mike (GRN)	Guelph	
Scott, Laurie (PC)	Haliburton—Kawartha Lakes—Brock	
Shamji, Adil (LIB)	Don Valley East / Don Valley-Est	
Shaw, Sandy (NDP)	Hamilton West—Ancaster—Dundas / Hamilton-Ouest—Ancaster—Dundas	
Skelly, Donna (PC)	Flamborough—Glanbrook	Chair of the Committee of the Whole House / Vice-présidente et présidente du comité plénier de l'Assemblée Deputy Speaker / Vice-présidente
Smith, Dave (PC)	Peterborough—Kawartha	
Smith, David (PC)	Scarborough Centre / Scarborough-Centre	
Smith, Hon. / L'hon. Graydon (PC)	Parry Sound—Muskoka	Minister of Natural Resources and Forestry / Ministre des Richesses naturelles et des Forêts
Smith, Hon. / L'hon. Todd (PC)	Bay of Quinte / Baie de Quinte	Minister of Energy / Ministre de l'Énergie
Smith, Laura (PC)	Thornhill	
Stevens, Jennifer (Jennie) (NDP)	St. Catharines	
Stiles, Marit (NDP)	Davenport	Leader, Official Opposition / Chef de l'opposition officielle Leader, New Democratic Party of Ontario / Chef du Nouveau parti démocratique de l'Ontario
Surma, Hon. / L'hon. Kinga (PC)	Etobicoke Centre / Etobicoke-Centre	Minister of Infrastructure / Ministre de l'Infrastructure
Tabuns, Peter (NDP)	Toronto—Danforth	
Tangri, Hon. / L'hon. Nina (PC)	Mississauga—Streetsville	Associate Minister of Housing / Ministre associée du Logement
Taylor, Monique (NDP)	Hamilton Mountain / Hamilton-Mountain	
Thanigasalam, Vijay (PC)	Scarborough—Rouge Park	
Thompson, Hon. / L'hon. Lisa M. (PC)	Huron—Bruce	Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs / Ministre de l'Agriculture, de l'Alimentation et des Affaires rurales
Tibollo, Hon. / L'hon. Michael A. (PC)	Vaughan—Woodbridge	Associate Minister of Mental Health and Addictions / Ministre associé délégué au dossier de la Santé mentale et de la Lutte contre les dépendances
Triantafilopoulos, Effie J. (PC)	Oakville North—Burlington / Oakville-Nord—Burlington	
Vanthof, John (NDP)	Timiskaming—Cochrane	Opposition House Leader / Leader parlementaire de l'opposition officielle
Vaugeois, Lise (NDP)	Thunder Bay—Superior North / Thunder Bay—Supérieur-Nord	
Wai, Daisy (PC)	Richmond Hill	

Member and Party / Député(e) et parti	Constituency / Circonscription	Other responsibilities / Autres responsabilités
West, Jamie (NDP)	Sudbury	
Williams, Hon. / L'hon. Charmaine A. (PC)	Brampton Centre / Brampton-Centre	Associate Minister of Women's Social and Economic Opportunity / Ministre associée des Perspectives sociales et économiques pour les femmes
Wong-Tam, Kristyn (NDP)	Toronto Centre / Toronto-Centre	
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