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of Ontario



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Jeudi  
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Speaker: Honourable Ted Arnott  
Clerk: Trevor Day

Président : L'honorable Ted Arnott  
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# CONTENTS / TABLE DES MATIÈRES

Thursday 11 April 2024 / Jeudi 11 avril 2024

## ORDERS OF THE DAY / ORDRE DU JOUR

### 2024 Ontario budget

Hon. Stan Cho.....	8331
Ms. Bhutla Karpoche.....	8334
Hon. Nina Tangri.....	8334
Mr. Chris Glover.....	8334
Mr. Adil Shamji.....	8335
Mrs. Daisy Wai.....	8335
Mrs. Lisa Gretzky.....	8335
Mr. Wayne Gates.....	8335
Mr. Deepak Anand.....	8338
Ms. Bhutla Karpoche.....	8339
Mr. Aris Babikian.....	8339
Mr. Rick Byers.....	8339
Ms. Peggy Sattler.....	8340

### Correction of record

Mr. Sol Mamakwa.....	8340
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### 2024 Ontario budget

Mr. Adil Shamji.....	8340
MPP Andrea Hazell.....	8341
Mr. Rick Byers.....	8342
Mrs. Lisa Gretzky.....	8342
Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon.....	8342
Vote deferred.....	8343

## PRIVATE MEMBERS' PUBLIC BUSINESS / AFFAIRES D'INTÉRÊT PUBLIC ÉMANANT DES DÉPUTÉES ET DÉPUTÉS

### Affordable Energy Act, 2024, Bill 172, Ms. Begum; Ms. Bell; Ms. Pasma; Mr. Tabuns / Loi de 2024 sur l'énergie abordable, projet de loi 172,

<b>Mme Begum; Mme Bell; Mme Pasma; M. Tabuns</b>	
Mr. Peter Tabuns.....	8343
Mr. Rudy Cuzzetto.....	8345
Ms. Jessica Bell.....	8346
Mr. Ted Hsu.....	8347
Ms. Sandy Shaw.....	8347
Ms. Peggy Sattler.....	8348
Mr. Peter Tabuns.....	8349
Second reading vote deferred.....	8349



LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY  
OF ONTARIO

Thursday 11 April 2024

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE  
DE L'ONTARIO

Jeudi 11 avril 2024

*Report continued from volume A.*

1320

ORDERS OF THE DAY

2024 ONTARIO BUDGET

Resuming the debate adjourned on March 28, 2024, on the motion that this House approves in general the budgetary policy of the government.

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

**Hon. Stan Cho:** I will be sharing my time with the great member for Hastings–Lennox and Addington this afternoon.

Speaker, I want to say I always love standing for debate on the budget. I haven't done it in a while, but I'm looking forward to it. Before I do, because the budget covers such a wide array of priorities for government and when I think about government now, six years into this process, you think about where you came from sometimes and what helped you shape those priorities.

So before I get to the debate, I want to just talk about someone that was near and dear to me, somebody that was pivotal in me entering the world of politics, and for that, I have to rewind about eight years—hard to believe it's been that long—but eight years ago, running a business, I remember wanting to get involved and I didn't know how to do it. So, one day, I ended up at this Willowdale EDA riding association meeting for the PC Party. I walked inside, and I met this lady, who was just a force. You knew she was a presence. I introduced myself: “Hi. I'm Stan Cho.” Immediately, this wonderful lady, named Patti Starr, said, “Well, hello, Stanley. Nice to meet you.” She's one of two people in my life that call me Stanley, the other being my mother, but I let her get away with it because I dare not tell her otherwise.

One of the first things Patti actually said to me was, “Do you know who I am?” I didn't at the time, but I sure know who she is now. She was a true legend, a force, somebody who adored politics—which, Speaker, was not always kind to her. But despite all the lows, she believed in the power of public service and always fought for her family and for her community.

Speaker, Patti Starr was a proud mother, a grandmother, a fearless advocate for the Jewish community and, boy, did she love Korean food. We shared some of our fondest memories at my parents' house having Korean food or at Dragon Pearl Buffet, where we actually shared our last meal together.

She would always call me her Jewish grandmother, even though I'm a year older than her son, Randy, who is here with us today, along with her husband, Jerry—“Jer” as Patti called him—and Tara, Leora, Brook, Zoe, Rachel and Jonah. Please welcome Patti Starr's family to the Legislature.

Speaker, I will get to the budget in a second, but I also just want to conclude my remarks about Patti Starr. There's a photo in my office that hangs above my desk that I look at often and it is my inauguration photo in 2018. Right there, prominently I see Patti Starr's face every time I look at that picture and it reminds me that, without her, I don't represent my neighbourhood and I'm not standing in this Legislature here today.

Rest in peace, Bubbe. I miss you very much.

Now, Speaker, Patti Starr was a senior. And I've said in this Legislature before, and now that my parents are seniors, we have to take care of our seniors. We know we've had that aging population for decades and decades. Now my mom texted me at 9:02 this morning while I was sitting in this chair, and she actually texted me, “Sit up straight.” I will always be her little boy. In 2018, when she first visited me in this Legislature, she had a giant bag with her when I went to say hi downstairs, and it's something Patti probably would have done too, but inside that bag were eight egg salad sandwiches, thinking somehow I still have the metabolism of 15-year-old boy. I certainly do not.

But I think we can agree in this House, despite our disagreements, that in our lives we have a senior who shaped who we are today, who made us what we are, who gave us our lives as we know it, and I know the Starr family certainly feels that way. I do, too.

Seven months ago when I had the great honour of being given the privilege of serving as Ontario's Minister of Long-Term Care, I didn't take that privilege lightly. The first thing I did, as I was researching what some of the problems were in long-term care, I noticed that this sector had been neglected for decades upon decades upon decades. I actually discovered that the outgoing Premier, Premier Wynne, had said that one of her biggest regrets was not investing more into our seniors and into long-term care. Despite our differences in politics, that should not be political. We should all care about investing into seniors and to building capacity, and that last government, unfortunately, when they exited in 2018—it's a fact that they had only built 611 net new long-term-care spaces in this province.

And I want to get away from that in this Legislature— if we all could make an effort, to stop calling them “beds,” because beds are furniture. I know Patti Starr was visiting

a long-term-care home in Downsview—I have visited many myself, and I challenge all members in this House to visit your local long-term-care homes. Go in there and see the hard-working staff. These are our seniors' families, and we need to call them homes because that's exactly what they are. I think to Dickie in Windsor when I visited her. She insisted on showing me her home; that's what she called it. And on her wall I saw pictures of her grandkids, her great-grandkids at dance recitals, sporting events—a lifetime that had been created through her memories in Windsor.

Another individual in that home, Bronco, he insisted on showing me, once again, his home. He was a welder. He showed me his collection of hats and pins, and then he proceeded to take me through the home and showed me each and every single one of the plants that he wakes up at 5:30 in the morning to water every single day. Let me tell you, Speaker, those plants are in a lot better shape than the plants in my house, and that love shows on the part of Bronco's efforts there.

Speaker, that's why our government said we are doing things differently, with a record investment into the largest expansion in long-term-care space history ever—\$10 billion. But that didn't come without challenges, did it, Speaker? We had inflation. We had a pandemic globally that nobody saw coming. But out of that crisis can come opportunity. The pandemic truly showcased what happens when you ignore anything for such a long period of time. We have an opportunity to fix the mistakes of the past.

**1330**

So it's not just the \$10-billion investment we're talking about. When inflation hit, when those supply chain challenges hit, this government said, "We have to help the sector." We introduced a construction funding subsidy to help get shovels in the ground, and that worked. Since 2018, since taking office, built or on the way are 18,000 new long-term-care spaces in the province of Ontario. Of course, we hit a snag once again with those same challenges, so in the latest budget we introduced a further construction funding subsidy, which will be good until November 30 of this year, to get more shovels in the ground.

Of course, Speaker, the budget went further. We know that these long-term-care homes do very important things, and we have a diverse community of seniors. It's not the seniors maybe we saw 50, 60 years ago. I was just chatting with the Starr family about this at lunch. Now we have such a diverse senior group. We have many Jewish Canadian seniors. We have Korean Canadian seniors, Chinese Canadian seniors, Armenian Canadian seniors, Punjabi Canadian seniors, Jamaican Canadian seniors.

As I look out at my colleagues here, we're represented in the senior population very well. That means we have to take care of them in the way they want to be taken care of: for example, kosher food at Baycrest; culturally appropriate food in Scarborough for the Jamaican Canadian community. For Koreans, I know, my parents being seniors, that they want to speak in that language they grew up in, and they want to have the food that they're used to.

That means bibimbap or bulgogi—the things Patti Starr really loved.

Speaker, that's why this government introduced a huge injection into level-of-care funding: \$353 million in the budget. That is a 6.6% annual increase in the operational side of a long-term-care home, so we don't have to think about putting what's comfortable for bubbe or halmoni on their plate when it's mealtime, because that forms how our seniors live a good, high quality of life.

I was just having lunch with the Starr family, and Rachel was telling me how she wants to possibly go into aesthetic nursing. I hope I'm not violating any confidentiality agreements. I didn't sign anything at lunch, so I think I'm okay to say this. But she was telling me how, while her passion is for nursing, it's also maybe looking towards that aesthetic end. I think that's crucially important because when I visit these homes, seniors are just like us. They want to have movie night; they want to get their hair done and get their nails done. They want to have the same things that we do, but they have challenges when it comes to, maybe, mobility—getting to the nail salon or getting to the hairdresser. So we need future nurses like Rachel to be there for these seniors who took care of us, to give them that high quality of life. That increased level-of-care funding, Speaker, is going to go towards exactly that.

But, of course, Speaker, we didn't stop there. Long-term-care homes throughout the province in the last couple of weeks since the budget was tabled are receiving notices that they will also be receiving one-time funding of over \$202 million, or \$2,543 per space in this province. Those additional resources, let me tell you what they can go towards.

I was in a home two weeks ago or so. I was touring through, and I noticed that there were—it was a sad scene, actually—about 12 or 14 seniors in a crowded hallway watching TV. I asked the staff, "Why are the seniors watching TV in a hallway like this?" And she told me that the rec room had flooded and that after they had done the structural repairs, there was no money left over to bring the rec room back to its original state. That made me really sad, because I know we all want what's best for our loved ones. If you're watching TV in a hallway, jammed in there like sardines, well, that's not very relaxing; that's not a very high quality of standard.

So this funding, this \$202 million—which, as I said, is \$2,543 per space in each home—can be used to fix up the rec room, to put on a fresh coat of paint, to fix plumbing or drop ceilings. These are examples I'm not just making up; I have seen these first-hand throughout the province in my many travels of long-term-care homes. That is going to be a game-changer for seniors and how they live their lives.

Now, Speaker, I'm really happy that many of the long-term-care associations are actually reaching out to me and telling me what they believe. Let me just give you one quote from Lisa Levin, who represents the fine not-for-profit long-term-care sector in AdvantAge Ontario:

"Today's budget includes important investments aimed directly at the priority needs of long-term-care homes,

including staffing, resident care and getting more homes built and redeveloped to serve our aging population.

“Long-term care is facing significant ... pressures. We are very pleased that government has recognized those needs and responded to them in this budget. This is good news for Ontario seniors.”

I’m also receiving texts such as the one from a Toronto home. Now, when we think about Toronto homes, there are other challenges that rural areas—well, we have different challenges. There’s a reason that Toronto has had those challenges, if you think about how competitive it is to find real estate in the first place, and then how expensive it is in such a competitive marketplace to find workers, then pay workers. Toronto has those challenges when it comes to building long-term-care homes, and we see that. It lags behind other jurisdictions when it comes to the amount of homes that are built.

I got a text from a Toronto home yesterday, and she said, “This is a miracle. The success of this government and these numbers—oh, my God. My board met last night. They were crying—after 14 years. This is our future. You are changing lives. I would love to have a glass of wine to celebrate.”

Now, I won’t take her up on the glass of wine, but that makes me really happy because this is a not-for-profit home in Toronto that otherwise was shelved. They had no plans on building their hundreds of spaces in a much-needed community until this announcement was made.

But we’re not done there because I have set out a challenge to all of the long-term-care homes throughout the province, and that is to share with me those successes of how those funds are being used. All in all, what we are looking at in long-term care is not just the capital expansion of \$10 billion, as I said—and we’ve gone over the historic amount for health human resources, nearly \$5 billion to make those homes into homes. In this budget, we have the highest level of increase to level-of-care funding in the history of our entire country, 6.6% increase to the level-of-care funding, and with the additional funding, a nearly 12% increase to making sure that we take care of those who took care of us.

I think to seniors like Patti, who wouldn’t have had it any other way, to seniors like my parents, John and Sandy Cho, who wouldn’t have it any other way. Seven months ago, actually, when I was appointed, the first call I made was to my mother, and I said, “Mom, the Premier gave me this great honour of serving as Ontario’s long-term-care minister”—I’m not making this up right now, Speaker; she actually just texted me, so I’m going to turn off my phone and put it over here—and she said, “I’m really proud of you. Work really hard. Seniors are so important. Let me hand over the phone to your dad.” And my dad, upon hearing the news, paused for a second, and then he said, “You work for me now.” So I kindly reminded my dad that he works for my mom, and we went right to work.

Why is that so important? Why is it so important? Why am I so proud of this budget and such historic investments? Patti Starr heard this story from me, and I love telling it everywhere I go, because I know the Starr family

and their history. Patti, growing up in a time when it wasn’t easy to be Jewish, went through some stuff. But out of her trials and tribulations, she built this beautiful family that I’m looking at up here right now. And that is the story of the Canadian dream, isn’t it? You can escape persecution. You can go through tough times. But in this great country of ours, with some hard work and the right supports, you can create a family like the one I’m looking at right now.

And Patti loved to hear my story because it was the same story. My parents came to this country 50 years ago from South Korea with nothing. I know my dad worked a minimum wage job, and he eventually grew a company that employed 200 people—the true success story, that with hard work, you can go from very little to giving a better life to your kids than you had had. That’s how I see this budget: We’re paying it backwards to the people who gave us our lives as we know them.

### 1340

I think to little—not little; I don’t mean that, Leora—but the youngest of the group up there, who, I am told, is exactly like Patti, the most similar to Patti. Speaker, if I’m lucky enough—we are expecting, and if I’m lucky enough to have a daughter, I would be so happy to have a daughter just like Leora.

As I look to Zoe, who makes Patti so proud every day, and telling me that she might go into politics one day: My offer is now on the public record, Zoe, of you, any time you need help, giving me a call and making Patti Starr as proud of you—I know she was so proud of you. But, boy, could you imagine the smile on her face and the look she would give you if you told her you were going to run for us one day. I can’t wait to have those conversations.

And to Jerry—who I didn’t really know was “Jerry” by full name because every time Patti referred to him, it was “Jer”—boy, did Patti love you. Every time we had our conversations at the board meetings, it was all about, “I’m going to take some of this for Jer.” “Jer and I are going to do this.” And I just hope that my love, as I go through my marriage, can be half as strong as what I saw between you and Patti.

Again, thank you to every one of you for visiting me in this Legislature this afternoon. It was truly a privilege to know Patti Starr.

Speaker, as we go through this budget, there is always, of course, a time for politics, but I encourage members opposite to have a look at the historic investments that we have indeed made, and they’re clearly outlined—we all get chippy in this Legislature, I am certainly guilty of that—but clearly outlined on pages 184, 185, 186, 187, 188, 189 you have every line ministry and every investment, this year as well as the out years, that clearly detail that this government is committed to building this province, is clearly committed to our seniors—to paying it back to those who gave us so much.

While there is time for politics in a political world, I encourage the members opposite, who I have not yet seen vote in favour of a budget, to reconsider this time around. This is the budget that invests in Ontario and continues to

build. Let's continue to build in our future generations. Let's continue to remember the generations that got us here. Let's continue to remember people like Patti Starr.

**The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly):** It is now time for questions.

**Ms. Bhutla Karpoche:** I listened to the minister's speech, and I agree with him on certain points, such as being appreciative and grateful for the contributions that seniors have made to our province and country, and our responsibility to take care of them.

During the pandemic, thousands of seniors died in long-term-care centres—that was a very, very difficult experience. Seniors died without saying goodbye to their families and loved ones, without anybody to hold their hand. They died because of a lack of care. They died due to negligence by for-profit, private operators. And this minister has had many opportunities—with all of the bills that he stated and included in this budget—to ensure that this never happens again and to ensure that families get some semblance of justice. So my question to the minister is, why didn't you?

**Hon. Stan Cho:** I have a lot of respect for the member opposite who just asked that question, but it's very important to look at facts as facts, right? A global pandemic had hit, and I had said in my debate that we had collectively, as a society, ignored our seniors for a very long time. It is objective fact that the last government failed to build capacity into the system and ensure that our seniors had a certain quality of care. Now, there are three types of homes—municipal, private and not-for-profit—and the devastation through the sector was common throughout all three for the reasons I outlined earlier.

Now, there is an opportunity here to learn from the Liberals' mistakes, to build upon that, to invest, to see and to invest into the holes that were shone by such a dark situation that was COVID-19. That's what we've chosen to do, with record investments—

*Interjections.*

**Hon. Stan Cho:**—that the Liberals, who are chirping now, simply failed to do. We're going to get it right. They got it wrong.

**The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly):** Further questions?

**Hon. Nina Tangri:** I really do want to thank the minister for presenting today and talking about the budget and long-term care. Prior to being elected and since being elected, I have had the privilege of visiting many of my long-term-care facilities in Mississauga–Streetsville, and it's been unbelievably eye-opening and heartwarming at the same time. But listening to the people there and understanding those challenges, bringing that to Queen's Park and talking with our colleagues about what we can do to support them has allowed us to get to where we are today and being able to make and take those great measures.

So my question to the minister is, how does the increased level of care, the additional funding—what are we to expect for our seniors in how we should be supporting them?

**Hon. Stan Cho:** I can't wait to go with that minister to the homes in her riding to ask those exact questions, because this is record funding. To recap, it's not just the level-of-care funding, which is the highest in history, it's also one-time funding for those other types of supports. That means they can put it towards building. They can put it towards fixing the pain—or the rec room, like I mentioned—or just simply buying a new hair salon for seniors if they want it. It's about improving the quality of life.

I'm glad the NDP—I wish the Liberals will follow suit—call these homes “homes.” That's what they are, Speaker.

For every member in this Legislature, go to your local long-term-care home. It doesn't matter what type they are out of the three. Go visit these hard-working front-line health care workers who are indeed family to those seniors. Ask them, “What are your needs?” Because they now have the funds and the resources to say that we can have a better quality of life. That's exactly what we're going to do.

*Interjection.*

**Hon. Stan Cho:** And I'm going to go to Hamilton Mountain and make sure that we tell them this record level of funding is there for them. I want to see how that member, who is chirping me right now, votes on this budget, because I'll be sure to let them know how that went down, because this is about quality of care for those seniors.

**The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly):** Further questions?

**Mr. Chris Glover:** I appreciate the comments from the Minister of Long-Term Care. He said that this government is clearly committed to our seniors and giving back to those who gave so much. But their record says exactly the opposite. This government is giving long-term contracts to Chartwell, which is a corporation, a real estate investment trust. It's not a seniors' care corporation. It's a real estate investment trust which is evicting 180 seniors in Mississauga.

So my question to the minister is, how much money is this government giving to Chartwell, and will you use that leverage to stop the evictions in Mississauga?

**Hon. Stan Cho:** I invite that member to go to the homes in his riding with me. Let's go to the private homes that he's speaking of, and you tell those seniors who are so proud to live there—I think to the Rekais. I think to a lot of these private operations. Come with me. Let's walk into those homes. And we can ask those seniors and those front-line health care workers, “This member is saying that we should close you”—right? This member right here is saying, “We should fire all of the staff here and we should send these seniors somewhere else”—right? That's what he is saying. He would like to close 40% of the homes in this province who provide that quality of care.

Now, Speaker, I've seen many of them. I have talked to many of these seniors and to the front-line health care workers, who are family, as I said, to these seniors. I can't look them in the eye and say, “We're closing your home.”



If that member wants to do it, go ahead and do it. We're going to continue to build for seniors in this province.

**The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly):** Further questions?

**Mr. Adil Shamji:** My question is, with supposedly record investments in health care, how does the member across reconcile this province's worst health care performance in its entire history?

**Hon. Stan Cho:** Wow, Speaker—from the doctor himself, who represents a party whose own Premier, when exiting government in 2018, said, “My biggest regret is not investing more into our seniors and into long-term care.” That is your record, sir. So when we look at the Liberals who are challenging the investments made now—go back to the budget on pages 184, 185, 186, 187, 188 and 189 and look at the difference between our investments and your investments, which are pitiful.

Speaker, it is not a comparison. We have \$204 billion in this budget, \$9.8 billion of which goes towards long-term-care investments—a far difference from what you had actually accomplished. We're actually building the capacity for seniors. We're actually taking care of them. Imagine how much better we would have fared if your government had actually invested before the pandemic had hit. Show your passion back in the past where it belongs.

1350

**The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly):** Further questions?

**Mrs. Daisy Wai:** Thank you, Minister, for sharing that with us just now. We understand how important seniors are to all of us, especially to our government. I know that if I ask you to analyze all the things we have done for long-term care, it would take you hours, but can you just highlight a few things that we have done in this budget for long-term care, as well as for seniors?

**Hon. Stan Cho:** The member is absolutely right, I could take hours to highlight all of the investments made into long-term care. I'm going to go through the three big ones, and with that member, I'm going to tour the homes in her riding to make sure that they know exactly how these investments can be used.

(1) A construction funding subsidy 2.0. In other words, we know costs are still high. We still have to get rid of that carbon tax—that would help a lot—but costs are high, so we introduced a construction funding subsidy round that will, once again, go until November 30 of this year to get more shovels in the ground.

(2) The highest level-of-care funding investment in history: a 6.6% increase to those operational budgets that include things like nutrition and staffing for every single long-term-care home in this province—the highest in history, as I said.

(3) Also equally important, \$202 million in one-time funding that can be used, that's \$2,543 per space for every long-term-care home. Once again, that can be used for things like deferred maintenance.

I know the member cares deeply for seniors in her role as PA. This is going to go a long way to making our—

**The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly):** Thank you.

Further questions?

**Mrs. Lisa Gretzky:** I'm glad that I heard the minister say it's about quality of care, because I have a question on behalf of Michele and her mother Ruth Poupard, who is 83 and currently in hospital in Windsor—the minister just rolled his eyes at me. Anyway, Ruth is 83, has lived through cancer, a heart valve transplant and the onset of dementia. She had a fall and broke her hip just after Christmas. She's had surgery and was referred to rehab. They were given 24 hours' notice to pick a home not of their choosing, to which their daughter said the home was filthy, there wasn't enough staff and the security clearance was posted on the outside of the home. Michele says this law is elder abuse—

**The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly):** Back to the minister for a response.

**Hon. Stan Cho:** For the record, Speaker, the only time I rolled my eyes at her was when she falsely accused me of rolling my eyes.

The reality is a hospital is not a home—a hospital is absolutely not a home. That's why we are making sure that if you are an ALC patient, we are going to move you to a long-term-care home: five of your choice. That's what we are doing and that is making sure that 17,339 seniors are no longer patients in hospital, but residents in a long-term-care home. We're going to keep going, Speaker.

**The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly):** Further debate?

**Mr. Wayne Gates:** I will get into long-term care because I'm glad the minister is here, but I think I'll start on something positive first. Everybody knows I spend a lot of time in my riding and I go to a lot of the long-term-care facilities.

But I want to say to the Fort Erie Meteors: Congratulations. Your series is tied 2-2. I'm looking forward to seeing the game Saturday night.

And Burd Sisler—I'm sure the minister knows all about this—turns 109 years old on Sunday. He's the second-oldest person in Canada, so I want to say to Burd, happy birthday, and I'll be there Sunday at 1 o'clock.

I wasn't going to start on long-term care, but I'm going to. I don't know how anybody can stand here and talk about long-term care, and not apologize for the 6,000 seniors that have died in long-term care, and not apologize that they had to call in the military, where people were dying in homes—the minister is leaving because he doesn't want to listen to this. It's unfortunate he's leaving because I wanted to talk to him. But he never once has apologized to them. I have been consistent on the file, so I know the file.

I know the file. That minister is the fourth minister I've had in five years. So when you say you care about the file, you care about seniors, you care about retirement homes and long-term-care homes—and, quite frankly, probably the most important thing we never talk enough about in here is home care. Because I think you would agree with this, Madam Speaker: We all want to stay in our homes as long as we can. I think if we invested more in home care, if we invested more in staffing, if we paid them better, if

we unionized them, home care could be a solution to a lot of the problems we have with alternate level of care and all those things.

But we haven't done that. The reason being is that under a previous government before the Liberals—and I want to say to the doctor, I thought it was out of line, what he said to you. I have nothing but respect for doctors. It doesn't matter what party you belong to, whether it's the Conservatives, the Liberals or the Greens. You're a doctor. You're not giving up and saving lives every single day in the province of Ontario. From the bottom of my heart, I say thank you. Because if it wasn't for a doctor, I wouldn't be here today being an MPP. So thank you very much for what you do every single day, particularly in our emergency rooms.

I wanted to say, how do we fix long-term care? I've said it since I've been here. Under the Conservative government and that guy named Mike Harris—I know there's not a lot of people here, but under a guy named Mike Harris, he brought in the privatization of long-term care. That was the start—

#### *Interjections.*

**Mr. Wayne Gates:** It's unfortunate that I can't at least do my 20 minutes here. They have the opportunity to question me on whatever they want. They can ask me whatever they want. I've been here for 10 years. I answer any questions. I don't hide from anything.

But the reality was they brought in privatization. What that did is it took the dollars—our tax dollars—away from care and put them into private, which meant that a corporation was going to make money on the backs of seniors. So what did they do? They started cutting. They didn't have as much staff. They didn't have the quality of food. They didn't have the upkeep of the place. That's what happened. So what they did is—I'm telling you, there was in an article in the Star two years ago—they were sucking \$1 billion out of long-term-care facilities and putting it into shareholders and CEOs, like Premier Harris at that time. That's what happened.

So we've said, and I've said, and I'll continue to say it: How do you fix it? Okay, take a look at what has been successful. You know what has been successful? Not-for-profit. Do you know why? They're not there to make money. They're not there to answer to a board of directors. They're only there to take care of my mom, my dad, my grandparent, my aunt, my uncle. That's what they would do in a long-term-care facility that is not-for-profit.

So what we've said on this side of the House is, let's transition into getting rid of all the for-profit—we're not saying get rid of staffing because there aren't enough staff anyway. You can't get rid of the staff. We need all the staff we can in these homes. But that's what happened.

So you want to fix long-term care? This is how you do it. Go to a not-for-profit. Make sure every single tax dollar that we're—they're talking about budget; they can say \$300 million. I'll use that for an example. Out of that \$300 million, ask that same minister how much of that money is going to care, and how much of that money is going to profit and to shareholders. Ask that question, because that

would tell you exactly what's going into those homes and what our problem is.

Now, I've talked to AdvantAge, who had that quote. They were in my office two weeks ago—because I'm going to bring a bill forward—and you know what they're saying? We've known there was going to be a crisis of people getting older—60, 65, 70. It's going to be unbelievable the number of people that are going to get old all at one time. We're not ready for it. There are not enough beds. There are not enough staff. There are lots of issues with that.

We're saying to the minister, "Here's a way to fix it." You can get more people—and most of them are women, by the way. That's the reality of it. It's probably 80% women, 20% men if you look at the big picture in health care. How do you fix it? You got to have the staffing. You got to make sure that you have the homes, but the staffing is a big issue. They're grossly underpaid. They're overworked. They're not valued. What do they do? They start leaving. That's what has happened.

But the big issue is profit. If you want to fix long-term-care and retirement homes, take the profit out of it. If you want to make sure that we're not having our moms and our dads and our grandparents go to these homes, invest more into home care.

I didn't want to spend the first part of my speech on long-term care, but you know what? When the military was called in, do you know how the government responded? They responded by bringing a bill in so those who were dying because of malnutrition—made it almost impossible to sue the government or the home. Now, that's not saying, "I care about what's going on." Instead of rolling their sleeves up and saying, "What happened here is wrong," and closing Orchard Villa down, what they did is they just gave them another—I think it was \$100 million or more—and a 30-year lease to continue doing what they're doing.

#### **1400**

There are fixes here. And I'd rather work with the Liberals and the Greens and the Conservatives, because do you know what I care about? I care about my grandparents, my mom, my dad, my aunts and uncles, and in some cases, it might be some of the people here. I think that I want to make sure that, in their senior lives, when they contribute and they can no longer work, but they have to be in a long-term-care or retirement home, they're getting the care they deserve, and we show them the respect they deserve. There's a way to do it, and I've been trying to tell this government to do it.

Instead, what do they do? Every time I stand up and talk, I get some guy yelling and screaming as he's leaving the room. You know why? Because I'm telling the truth, because that's what I was brought here to do. I look you straight in the eye. The one thing that I take great pride in is, I am honest as the day is long, and I show a lot of passion when it comes to whatever issue I'm taking on.

At the end of the day, we can fix this. We can do it together. But we've got to take the profit out of long-term care. That's how we're going to fix it. And we should

never, ever put laws in place—I asked the lawyer this in government agencies, when I got punished and taken off committee. I asked the lawyer, “Should any government put laws in place so that you can’t be sued?” Her response was, “No. No government shouldn’t do that.”

So I’ll get off of long-term care. It’s unfortunate that the minister didn’t stay. I would love to—

*Interjection.*

**Mr. Wayne Gates:** I withdraw.

I appreciate your giving me the time, and I know you gave me a little leeway there, so I do appreciate that.

The other thing that drives me nuts: They’ll stand up and they’ll say, “The NDP don’t vote for this; they don’t vote for this. The Liberals don’t and everybody”—the Greens. Do you know, in a budget—and I know this is, what, your second or third term, Madam Speaker? I’m not sure. It might be your third.

*Interjection.*

**Mr. Wayne Gates:** Second.

When the PCs were in power—you know, they were in power for 15 years. No, they weren’t in power; they were in official opposition for 15 years. So, for 15 years, there was a budget brought forward, right? There’s a budget every year. And do you know, out of those 15 years, how many times the Conservatives supported the budget? None. So when you stand up to say, “You don’t support the budget”—there isn’t a party that’s in opposition that has supported the budget, because every budget has a poison pill in it. Are there good things in this budget? Absolutely, including for my own riding. But there’s a poison pill in here, or something missing in the budget, where we could have done better, like affordability, rent control, all of the things that we could do. That’s why you might not support the budget.

But the Conservatives never supported one when they were in opposition, and that’s my point. So when they stand up and say, “The NDP didn’t support this; they didn’t support this”—we’ve never supported, in opposition, a budget in the last 30 years. I just want people to understand how they try to use that against people.

I’ve got a nice speech here. I hope I get to it. They talk about the 300,000 jobs lost. This one has driven me nuts ever since they started saying it. The reality is, I came out of a sector—and you know this because I’ve gone to rallies with you before you got elected. You know I’ve talked about this. The reason why we lost those 300,000 jobs in Ontario was very clear. The reason why the auto sector—which I came out of and in which I was a president for 12 years—was so successful is why? Because we had a low dollar. Our dollar was around 82 cents.

The other thing that we had a major advantage in was we had a publicly funded, publicly delivered health care system. That gave us a big advantage over the United States, who was our main competition—and Mexico. Mexico was tougher because, at that time, they were working for \$3.19 an hour.

What happened is, under the Harper government, they decided to have a petrol dollar, where they supported the West because they had all that oil. Remember all that oil

was flowing, and BC and the West were throwing money at the residents: “Here’s a \$2,000 cheque,” or a \$1,000 cheque, because they were making so much money. Well, what that did is the dollar went to \$1.10.

Do you remember this, Madam Speaker? Remember when our dollar was \$1.10? We were going, “Oh, my God.” Now, some people loved it. Quite frankly, places like Windsor and Niagara Falls thought it was great because now we were going over to the States, and we were getting the extra money or whatever. That part was helping, but it was killing the auto sector.

We can’t compete in this country with other countries when our dollar is at a buck 10. We just can’t do it. And what happened? The manufacturers left during that period of time. The parts manufacturers were killed. I’m talking about auto, I’m talking about steel and I’m talking about the big manufacturers. They got killed, and they left. They left because of a high dollar. At that time, by the way—this is from memory, please correct me; I don’t have any notes in front of me—I believe we were the third-leading producer of automobiles in the world when it was at 82 cents, and we’re now currently about number 21. That was the effect of the dollar.

What has happened now 15 years later—I’ve only been here for 10. But 15 years later, what do we have now? We have a low dollar. As a matter of fact, our dollar isn’t 84 cents; our dollar is in the low 73 cents, 74 cents, 75 cents. That gives us another advantage. What do manufacturers do? Manufacturers say, “Oh, Ontario is a good place to invest. The auto sector is a good place to invest.”

Because of the union never giving up on that Oshawa facility, and it was the Conservatives that said it—you were on that side before you had the Speaker here. They said, “That ship has sailed.” Remember that for Oshawa? “That ship has sailed.” When GM mentioned they were going to close it, at that time I think it was Unifor—I think they were called Unifor at the time—and quite frankly, Jerry Dias, who said, “No, you’re not doing that to Oshawa. We’ve been here since the early 1900s.” He fought back and he took that corporation on. He knew that the dollar was going down, down and down. What they did, in one of their collective agreements, they were able to save about 400 jobs. What it did is it kept the plant open and that investment here in Canada. As our dollar went down, he was able to convince—why? Not just because of Jerry. It was because of their leadership.

The big thing that we have as auto workers in this country is we produce some of the best products in the world. We are renowned for our safety record and our quality record. That’s why they’re investing in EVs today. It’s all about the dollar and our health care, and I’m trying to tell the government to listen to the health care part, because they’re trying to privatize our health care and that will take another disadvantage away from manufacturing. I just wanted to say that.

Now I’ll get into some of my speech. Some of the things that I was really surprised about was the deficit. I don’t know if you noticed it. I think it was \$9.6 billion. It’s the

highest deficit ever in the province of Ontario—\$9.6 billion. That to me was incredible, absolutely incredible.

I wanted to mention quickly—I'm trying to do these from my notes quickly, because I want to talk about some of the things that I need to make sure I raise. Health care: They're trying to privatize it; we all know that. We ask questions on this all the time, but what's important to me, quite frankly, in my riding, in Minden is what they've done is they've taken away the emergency rooms, they've closed them. In my riding in Fort Erie—40,000 people live in Fort Erie today. They took away our urgent care centre, which used to be open 24/7. That means they're open 24 hours a day, seven days a week. What they did is they've now cut those hours down to 10 hours a day. What I'm saying, I don't see anything in the budget here that says, "No, we're going to invest and we're going to make sure that they open that and they run 24/7," just like Minden should. You can't have small, rural communities not have hospital services. It makes no sense to me.

I say to the residents down there: We're going to continue to fight to try to convince this government and convince this health minister—because it has to be the health minister who does it. The hospital boards are going to make decisions, but if the minister says we got to open Minden back up or we got to open up Fort Erie again, it will get done. I've gone to the Premier about this and talked to him about this. I want to say to Fort Erie: We are not going to give up on that, for sure.

I want to talk a little bit about transit. How many saw the eclipse on Monday? You know what they did in Niagara? Anybody heard of Niagara Falls? I'm sure some of you guys have heard of it. They said there was going to be a million people coming to Niagara Falls. You know what Metrolinx did, to their credit? I don't like the fact that they have 3,000 employees now who are making over \$100,000 a year, but that's a whole different issue. You know what they did, to their credit? They put more trains going to Niagara Falls the day of the eclipse. How many here think that was a good idea? Put your hand up. You guys think so? Look, even the Conservatives are nodding to me and putting their thumbs up. The trains were carrying 5,200 people. I think it's a great idea, and that's why I'm saying to Metrolinx that's a great idea.

1410

But guess what I've been arguing with Metrolinx on for the last three years? We need more trains. We need two-way, all-day to Niagara Falls. And somebody said, "Why?" Well, we're one of the fastest-growing areas in the country, by the way. Everybody's coming to Niagara. It's a beautiful place—good golf, good wines. Niagara-on-the-Lake's down there. How many have been to Niagara-on-the-Lake?

So I'm saying to Metrolinx, if you can do it on the eclipse, why can't you do it 365 days a year? Niagara Falls, Niagara-on-the-Lake and Niagara in general—you might not know this—we are probably going to go to 15 million tourists this year. When we had COVID, we had 40,000 people lose their jobs overnight—like that—and it's taken us a couple of years to get our tourism back.

Guess what: It's back. Domestic tourism is up. International tourism is up. The Americans are coming back. Some of that is because their dollar is worth a lot more in Canada than it is in the States. And a lot of people from the GTA, on the weekends, are coming down to Niagara.

What will it solve? The biggest thing is it will free up the QEW on a Sunday—then it's a parking lot, where people are parking there. It would fix the environment. How many people think the environment's important? An easy way to do it: Bring the GO train all the way to Niagara—not to Niagara, because they'll say that's Grimsby—all the way to Niagara Falls. If they can do it when there's an eclipse, they can do it every single day, seven days a week. It will help our tourism, it will help the economy, it will provide more jobs and it will help the environment. There's four wins right off the hop—win, win, win, win.

So I'm saying to the government—and why am I raising this? Metrolinx put out their 10-year plan. They're going to expand all over Ontario, which is a good thing, right? We all think that's great. But guess where they weren't going to expand to? Niagara Falls, where I just said we're going to have 15 million visitors, a lot of them from the GTA. Wouldn't it be nice to get the GO train to get down to Niagara Falls, come back, and from our end, we could hop on the GO, go to a Blue Jays game, we could go to the theatre. Again, that's good for the economy, it's good for jobs. It makes no sense, the decision not to do it.

I've only got 24 seconds left. I don't know if there's something here I should get out quickly. The Metrolinx one; I think the big one in Toronto is we need to get back to rent control on new builds. Rents in this particular city, in Toronto, where they have a lot of high-rises, the average price is \$3,200. No one can afford that.

**The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly):** Unfortunately, you're out of time for debate, but it is now time for questions.

**Mr. Deepak Anand:** I was listening to the member opposite, and he was talking about how important it is to have investments in infrastructure, so thank you for acknowledging that. We really appreciate it.

To the member, my question is, everywhere we go, we talk about the labour shortage, especially in his riding, the honeymoon capital of Canada. I want to ask him what his view is about the labour shortage and what does he think about the government's investment of \$100 million in the Skills Development Fund. Does he support that? And would you say it is enough or do we need to do more in the Skills Development Fund?

**Mr. Wayne Gates:** I appreciate that. There's lots more we could do around skilled trades. I do know that the government is giving money to a lot of training facilities. I think that's one thing that is certainly good. The skilled trades are one of the most important things we could do. We need to get more women into the trades. We need to get more Indigenous people into the trades, racialized people into the trades. That's where the future of jobs is going to be—in job growth.

But there's a lot of things we could do better within the skilled trades and fixing our labour shortages. One of them is that—your government heard it. I know it's been fixed a little bit now. Bill 124 certainly hurt the labour force. That's why we had shortages in health care, why we had shortages with PSWs. Bill 124 did not do you any favours certainly with the labour force in the province of Ontario.

**The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly):** Question?

**Ms. Bhutila Karpoche:** I thank the member for his budget presentation. He touched a bit on the environment when he was talking about two-way GO to Niagara. I was wondering if he could talk a little bit about the issue of climate change.

This government has not taken the issue of the climate crisis seriously. In fact, the budget follows a pattern that we've seen with the Ford Conservatives, which is a complete abdication of responsibility on the issue. The climate crisis is getting worse. There are so many provincial tools that we can use to address the issue. Now we are left with being a province that does not have a credible plan when it comes to the climate crisis.

Could you talk a little bit about what we can be doing as a province on this issue?

**Mr. Wayne Gates:** I think the first thing they should do is get away from their building new highways like the 413 and cutting a path through prime farmland and prime wetlands. For all those things, for whatever reason, they're going to spend \$14 billion or \$15 billion and get rid of prime farmland.

I've said this and I'm going to say it all the time: Even though I don't think agriculture is mentioned once—it may be once; I don't think it is, from what I've read. I might have missed it. I'm getting a little older and maybe my eyesight is not as good as it was, but I don't believe agriculture was mentioned. But if you're a province that can't feed itself or a country that can't feed itself, you're going to be in trouble. The only way I can explain that to the PCs is, look what happened under COVID when we were relying on not on our country, but the United States and China for PPE. Do you remember how we had to do that and we were out of PPE because we weren't manufacturing it? We have to protect our farmland. We have to protect our wetlands.

**The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly):** Further questions?

**Mr. Aris Babikian:** My question is to my colleague on the issue of the deficit. On one hand, the NDP always ask for more services and more programs, and when we try to provide these services and programs, you have to run a deficit, especially when you have a year like this year, with extra increased interest rates and cost of living etc.

What is your choice? Is it your choice to increase taxes on our citizens and burden them with further cost of living? Is it cutting programs? You have to make up your mind. Which way is it? Is it running a deficit for the short term or going with taxes and cutting programs?

**Mr. Wayne Gates:** Here is what you can do: Spend the money wisely. And when I talk about health care, you're spending billions of dollars in health care, but most of it is

going to for-profit. That's where it's going now because you are now privatizing it. You can do the same thing with long-term care.

But I'm going to give you a thing—I wasn't going to raise this, but now that you raised this—about spending wisely. I don't think it's wise that the Premier's office, which used to have 20 people making \$100,000 a year—

**Mr. Aris Babikian:** But that is a different issue.

**Mr. Wayne Gates:** I don't know why you're heckling me. I didn't heckle you when you asked the question.

Today, we have 48 people making over \$100,000 and some making over \$200,000. So it's about priorities. When you take your money and say, "Where should we invest it?", invest it in not-for-profits who are dying for money and begging this government to give them a 5% raise just to—

**The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly):** Thank you. Further questions?

**Mr. Rick Byers:** I thank the member for his comments on the budget. I was listening and was interested in his comments about transit. I'm very supportive of that. I take his comment that he's not 100% supportive, but he seems broadly supportive of the investment we're making in transit. The budget document, on page 18, outlines what this government's plan is over 10 years: \$67 billion in transit. For so many reasons, that's great.

I'm glad the member mentioned climate. This is a very important investment that will help climate change in our community. It will also help investment and jobs, and I know the member's background in that. But isn't that significant investment in infrastructure, as you look at our plan, a reason for you to look at this budget and support that plan for transit and support the budget?

1420

**Mr. Wayne Gates:** I think I was very clear. There are some things in the budget I can support, and I'll tell you one that I can support that might help you out a bit. I support the fact that after five years of me standing up here, arguing about getting rid of a 6.1% tax, an unfair tax on our medium and small wineries in Niagara-on-the-Lake and across the province of Ontario, you have finally agreed and have now said that as of April 1, you're no longer going to collect that tax. The reason why it was important is because small and medium-sized wineries that sell on-site, they were going to end up having to close some of them in the province of Ontario.

So when you look at the budget, there are some good things in the budget, and I already said that earlier in my presentation, but as you know—or you might not know—there isn't any opposition over the last 15 years that has ever supported the government's budget. The reason is that some of the things are good—if we could pull that out, we'd vote for it tomorrow—but there are things in this budget that we can't support or there are things in this budget, quite frankly, that you're not addressing, like rent controls. How do we have people in Ontario—

**The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly):** Thank you. Further questions?

**Ms. Peggy Sattler:** I'd like to thank my colleague the member for Niagara Falls for sharing his comments on the budget with this House today. I know the member has some excellent post-secondary institutions in or near his riding. There's Brock University, Niagara College, and I know that he understands the importance of those institutions to the local and regional economy, to providing young people with the opportunities to enter great careers.

I wondered if there's anything in the budget that will address the financial crisis that our post-secondary institutions are facing in this province, that was highlighted by the government's own expert panel, and if there is any support for colleges and universities to avoid having to close programs and potentially shut down campuses?

**Mr. Wayne Gates:** I'd like to thank my colleague for the question. Just so you know, my three daughters all went to Brock University and my wife went to Brock University, so I know how important post-secondary education is. But here's the problem we have right now that is not being addressed in the budget: Brock University today is \$35 million in debt. How are they going to pay that? They're going to have to cut programs if this government doesn't invest more money into universities.

And then, I met with Niagara College—my colleague knows—just last week. I was actually shocked when they told me that Niagara College—which is one of the most respected colleges, quite frankly, in the province of Ontario and provides a lot of the workers for the tourist sector—is \$12 million in debt.

So we have the two in my riding—

**The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly):** Unfortunately, I apologize, but we are out of time for the rest of your response.

#### CORRECTION OF RECORD

**The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly):** I recognize the member from Kiiwetinoong on a point of order.

**Mr. Sol Mamakwa:** This morning, in the first question during question period, I want to correct my record where I said \$59 million. I want to say, to correct the record, that it's \$59 billion. Thank you.

#### 2024 ONTARIO BUDGET

**The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly):** Further debate?

**Mr. Adil Shamji:** I want to begin by saying that I'll be sharing my time with the dynamic, talented and outstanding member for Scarborough–Guildwood.

It is always an honour to rise in this august chamber to discuss the greatest challenges facing my constituents in Don Valley East and across this province, particularly as it relates to the proposed budget that has recently been introduced. As we contemplate what has been proposed in that budget, I wanted to start by just reflecting on what life is like for my constituents in Don Valley East, where many of them can't get a family doctor.

Their hospital, Michael Garron Hospital, is seeing record volumes, without any of the financial support that it requires in order to grow and meet those new needs. The price of groceries has skyrocketed. The hope of owning a home has grown farther out of reach. People are being forced out of their homes, places like Sonic Condos, because they can't afford rent, because this government abolished rent control. There are rampant demovictions. People are stuck in gridlock on the Eglinton Crosstown because Metrolinx is mired in delays without any accountability. Now they're worried about the same thing happening with the Ontario Line, which intersects in my riding. Our very sense of community is being eviscerated through the government's reckless attempt to move the science centre.

This is not a rosy picture. But wait, a new budget, an opportunity to set things right, right? But if only. Rather than tackling the greatest challenges of the day, this budget, frankly, only acknowledges the government's defeat on being able to actually improve the lives for my constituents in Don Valley East or across Ontario.

Here's what it shows. First, the government projects a deficit this year of \$10 billion and debt that grows by another \$60 billion over the next few years. What do they have to show for it? We have GDP growth under this Premier at 1.5%, significantly lower than under past governments. We have the bleak future that I previously described for my constituents in Don Valley East. Never has a government spent so much to achieve so little.

Let's dive a little bit into health care specifically: 2.3 million people without a family doctor province-wide, 12,000 ER closures last year, more closures happening every weekend this year. If you're lucky enough to get into an emergency department, then wait times are at historic highs. Health care workers are leaving in droves, and this government has no retention plans. Temporary nursing and staffing agencies are taking our hospitals for a ride. Patients are being upsold and overbilled at private clinics with no one to defend them. And we have the complete and utter neglect of rural hospitals and rural health care.

Now is certainly not a time to cut spending in health care, but this is exactly what this budget amounts to. All this government could muster was a 0.59% increase in health care funding, which is well and dramatically below the rate of inflation. In that climate of inflation and gross government mismanagement, our health care system is now being forced to do more with less.

Let's put this in even greater perspective. The budget had approximately \$500 million more as an increase in health care amidst the most expensive budget in our province's history—\$214 billion. The only increase was about \$500 million. Even then, it sounds, perhaps, like a lot in absolute numbers. I don't think so. Because just remember this: We received a federal health transfer top-up of \$2 billion. That's within the context of an agreement that will see \$198.6 billion over the next 10 years. But most recently, we got \$2 billion. Yet the only investment we're seeing from it is \$500 million. Where is the rest,

guys? Probably going to some donors' pockets. The people of Ontario deserve to know this answer.

When I said earlier that never have we spent so much to achieve so less, let's look at where we're going with primary care. Some 2.3 million people don't have a family doctor right now. Within the next two years, that will go up, not down. That will go up to 4.4 million people.

After six years of this government in power, this unambitious budget only even tries to solve the problem for 600,000 people. That's all that you're even bold enough to brag about—simply unambitious.

Worst of all, under this government, we now have a marketplace for primary health care, with people paying out of pocket to see nurse practitioners and doctors at executive health clinics. Literally, you cannot get on public transit without seeing ads inviting people to pay for primary care.

This budget does nothing by way of health care worker retention. All it does is it takes a bucket of water that's spilling water out the bottom and tries to pour a little bit in. For as long as those holes are open at the bottom, we're not going to be able to solve our health care worker crisis. And I mentioned the hospital that serves my riding, Michael Garron Hospital, sees more patients than it's ever seen before. It's projected to have more people move into that riding, into our riding, than ever before and has no support to add more hospital beds. How is that right? It reflects only the lack of foresight by this government. Because I know that our hospital has been asking and not getting anything back in return.

1430

We've seen other members in this House point out, and of course I agree that rural health care has been left entirely by the wayside. We have people that are losing their family doctors in the north, losing their ERs in the north and being forced to travel long distances to access primary and specialist care. We have a Northern Health Travel Grant Program that is well behind helping people meet the costs that they're facing. And this government, when offered an opportunity to fix that, chose not to do so with private members' bills and now in this budget—a few million here, a few million there, little trickles of water. There is nothing for what people actually need. People need family doctors. They need functioning emergency departments. This budget will not let that happen.

Now, I have much more to say about housing—we could bring in rent control; we could build more affordable and rental housing—but I must give the rest of my time to the outstanding member from Scarborough—Guildwood.

**The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly):** I recognize the member from Scarborough—Guildwood.

**MPP Andrea Hazell:** Thank you to my colleague, and I will continue.

Madam Speaker, I was very excited to hear what would be presented in the 2024-25 budget, but I can tell you after hearing the minister's presentation of the budget, that I was very disappointed as a new member coming into this chamber. I had really high hopes for the families of Ontario.

And I want to talk about the pressures that the families of Ontario are feeling, that they're experiencing, and there was no hope in the budget to support that. This budget will spend a record of \$214.5 billion while accomplishing so little for families in Ontario. They're struggling to find a family doctor, to put their children in daycare or afford skyrocketing rent increases that has no cap and continues to increase and increase.

What are the implications of this budget for the millions of people living in this province for our families? For our seniors? For our students? For the people who are on fixed- and low-income? I did not see any specifications in the budget to support these families.

Madam Speaker, we are in a deep affordability crisis. But this isn't an affordability budget because I have looked at it. I have reviewed it. A lot of people in Ontario, in all of our ridings here, can't afford to pay rent, to put food on the table, to purchase crucial medicine, to pay for child care and to save for their retirement. And what do they get from this budget? Nothing to support their situation. The best the government can do for them is remove the licence plate renewal fees. They seem to think that the be-all and end-all of affordability revolves around automobiles and not all 15 million Ontarians drive or can even afford a car—and we want cars off the street.

I want to stay on the families in Ontario, they matter to us. In times like this, our residents need their government to have their back. That's why I introduced the Relief for Renters Act, which would have saved a lot of families and renters millions of dollars and protected them from evictions. They could have used those savings for other essential needs, but this government said no to that. And just like how this government said no to helping renters by voting against this bill, they are saying no to helping renters with this budget.

Renters from across Ontario are feeling the budget pressure. They're feeling the crisis. Numbers don't lie. Low-income renters are stuck in unaffordable units, where 87% or 122,000 households in the private rental market are paying over 30% of their income making \$30,000 a year—that's what I call our families who are renting in Ontario. There are 1.7 million families that are renting in Ontario. They're feeling the pressure.

This also increases food bank usage. There are now one in 8 people that have got to go to the food bank. And I could tell you, I could prove this number because I am living proof of what is happening in Scarborough and what is happening in Scarborough—Guildwood. This evening at 6 o'clock, I am meeting with 75 renters in Scarborough. I have to look in their eyes, and I can't give them hope.

Affordability measures, or lack thereof, are not the only place where this budget is falling short. Transit agencies across Ontario are going broke. The TTC has a repair backlog of almost \$7 billion. Transit agencies are raising fares and cutting routes to make up for it. But not one cent of this budget is aimed at stopping their decline. This government says they want more people to use transit, but if the bus doesn't run on time, no one will want to use it.

The craziest part of all of this is that this is the most expensive, bloated budget of all time. Where is the money going, if not to health care, education or assisting the middle and working class of this country? It is going to record-high salaries to Conservative operatives, with the salaries of those in the Premier's office being doubled. As my colleague from Ottawa South said in question period, "Never has there been a government that has spent so much, borrowed so much, incurred so much debt to do so little."

I will continue to stand up for the families of Ontario. Let's put money back into their pockets and give them hope to live with confidence and peace of mind.

**The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly):** It's now time for questions.

**Mr. Rick Byers:** I appreciate both members' remarks here. But there were comments about the spending, and I'd like to just remind both members about the spending that is happening: \$194.5 billion in 2023-24, rising to \$200.6 billion in 2024-25.

Keeping going, health care in the last two years has gone from \$75 billion to \$85 billion—huge numbers, and it shows the dedication and the focus this government has on health care and on health care infrastructure. Over 10 years, we're spending \$48 billion on new hospital construction, and other health care is \$8.6 billion. So the spending and focus on health is a record for the province of Ontario and it shows this government's commitment.

Aren't those factors that would allow the members to consider supporting this budget?

**Mr. Adil Shamji:** My response to that is simply: What does this government have to show for that? In this province, we have the worst health care system performance in Ontario's history.

And to make that point clear, when I say "worst in history," I mean every year under this government has been worse than the last. You've had six years to try to do anything you can to make our health care system fire on all cylinders, and all we have is an increasing number of people without family doctors and, weekend after weekend, week after week, hospitals in urban, rural and remote areas that have closed emergency departments. So when both my colleague and I made the point that never has a government spent so much to achieve so little, health care is perhaps the classic example of that.

**The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly):** Further questions?

**Mrs. Lisa Gretzky:** I'm happy to be able to ask a question of my colleague. Again, I also want to reiterate that those of us in the NDP appreciate all of our health care workers, regardless of what political stripe they are.

1440

My question is specifically around—I raised recently an issue in my riding where we have parents who are surrendering their children to the CAS, parents who have exhausted every avenue to get their children mental health supports for their intensive needs, and they feel like now they are forced by this government to surrender their children to children's aid, thinking they're going to get

help that way, only to find out that children's aid is not set up to provide that support, and we have kids who are four or five years old being put in hotels while they wait for supports.

So could you tell me maybe something the government could have done differently—like maybe cut the Premier's political staff in his office—in order to be able to invest in the supports that those families need?

**Mr. Adil Shamji:** The majority of mental health care in our province is delivered by family doctors; it's delivered in primary care. So when we have a challenge in which people do not have a family doctor, when we literally have cases across our province of parents with newborns that cannot get someone to take on that child to provide care, then what do we see? We see a snowball effect: no care as a newborn, no care as a child, no care as an adolescent and no care as a teenager. No wonder we have mental health challenges, and with no emergency departments to turn to, no wonder parents feel they've got nowhere else to turn but to the children's aid society.

**The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly):** Further questions?

**Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon:** Thank you to my colleagues for their wise words this afternoon on the budget. I had a question for the very energetic member from Scarborough–Guildwood. I know that you are a very active member in Scarborough, and you are out and about, ricocheting around every street. I read your newsletter, and I've seen you on social media but in real life as well, all the work you do for your residents. I'm wondering what you're hearing from the residents of Scarborough. You have a finger on the pulse of people in Scarborough. What are you hearing, and do they have faith in this government?

**MPP Andrea Hazell:** Thank you to my colleague for that great question. Yes, I am on the ground in Scarborough; I'm on the ground in Scarborough–Guildwood. As I said, I am leaving here as soon as I'm finished to get into Scarborough to speak to 75 renters who, if they've missed one rent payment, they're hitting the streets, they're going to be homeless.

I've been speaking to seniors who have no confidence in—if there is less monies that they're getting in their fixed income, they do not know where they're going to live. They will not be able to afford to pay their rent. People in Scarborough are supplementing their incomes by going to the food bank. It is very challenging for the people living in Scarborough that are paying rent—very difficult.

**The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly):** Further questions?

**Ms. Bhutla Karpoche:** I thank both the Liberal MPPs for their presentations on the budget today. They spoke very passionately, but—

**The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly):** I apologize to the member.

Pursuant to standing order 61(d), I am now required to put the question.

On March 26, 2024, Mr. Bethlenfalvy moved, seconded by Mr. Ford, Etobicoke North, that this House approves in



general the budgetary policy of the government. 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 ayes have it.

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

*Vote deferred.*

**Hon. Andrea Khanjin:** Point of order, Speaker?

**The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly):** I recognize the Minister of the Environment.

**Hon. Andrea Khanjin:** If you seek it, you will find we have unanimous consent to see this clock at 6.

**The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly):** The Minister of the Environment says if we seek it, we can see the House at 6 o'clock. Agreed? Agreed.

## PRIVATE MEMBERS' PUBLIC BUSINESS

### AFFORDABLE ENERGY ACT, 2024

#### LOI DE 2024 SUR L'ÉNERGIE ABORDABLE

Mr. Tabuns moved second reading of the following bill:

Bill 172, An Act to improve energy affordability through distributed energy resources and deep retrofits / Projet de loi 172, Loi visant à rendre l'énergie plus abordable grâce aux ressources énergétiques distribuées et aux rénovations majeures.

**The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly):** Pursuant to standing order 100, the member has 12 minutes for his presentation.

**Mr. Peter Tabuns:** Speaker, I'm pleased to lead off the debate on Bill 172, the Affordable Energy Act. This legislation, which I am proud to co-sponsor with my colleagues MPPs Pasma, Bell and Begum, would, if passed, create a new public agency called Affordable Energy Ontario. Affordable Energy Ontario would have a mandate to do two things: support deep energy retrofits to homes and buildings across Ontario and oversee the creation of community sources of energy, known by the technical name of “distributed energy resources.”

Deep retrofits help to reduce the amount of electricity and other energy required to power a home. This has the benefit of lowering your energy bills while also reducing demand on the power grid. Meanwhile, community sources of energy, such as solar panels on roofs or over parking spaces, provide a cost-effective, stable source of energy that can provide energy credits to the owner, further reducing their bills while also providing more power to the grid. If properly configured, ensuring that those solar panels are on a home or in a neighbourhood can provide power to residents during a power failure, something that happened recently in the state of Victoria in Australia.

We face three big challenges when it comes to electricity in Ontario: cost, reliability and sustainability. This initiative addresses all three.

First, let's talk about affordability. I think everyone in this chamber, everyone who's watching this debate on a screen, knows how tough things are out there. People are stretched, they're stressed, they're anxious about meeting their bills, they're frustrated by high costs. They expect us to make their lives more affordable. When it comes to electricity and energy, generally they want us to put affordable energy at the top of the list. Energy efficiency is the cheapest way to provide homes with electricity.

The Independent Electricity System Operator, the IESO, has said it; even the Minister of Energy has said it, which is a shocker to me, but nonetheless true. Both have said the cheapest kilowatt hour is the one you save rather than generate. The IESO, the Electricity Distributors Association and the Royal Bank of Canada have all put out reports showing savings for families and for the electrical system from investment in efficiency.

Affordable Energy Ontario will have the power to organize, promote and provide financing for deep retrofits for homes across Ontario, with a goal of making them zero emissions and net-zero energy use. For those who are not familiar with the term, a deep retrofit is one that thoroughly insulates a home—all the walls, the roof, the basement—upgrades windows, seals air leaks and uses heat exchangers to capture heat from any air vented out of a building. It tries to maximize the amount of energy kept in a building in winter and maximize the cooling kept in a building in summer.

Natural Resources Canada notes that deep home retrofits can cut energy bills by 60%, and by locking in savings through reduced consumption, residents are shielded to a great degree from future price rises. Deep retrofits also dramatically reduce electrical demand so that large-scale introduction of energy- and cost-saving heat pumps will make much less demand on the electricity grid. Less demand on the energy grid means less money spent on building transmission lines, saving money for the whole electricity system.

Twinned with deep retrofits is the introduction of solar panels and battery storage to homes and neighbourhoods so those homes and neighbourhoods can generate as much energy as they consume. Again, renewable power located at the point of consumption allows us to avoid large investment in generation and transmission at a cost below what we're paying now.

Dunsky, a consulting company, provided a report to the IESO that showed that distributed energy, energy sources located on or near homes and other users could provide real reductions in costs for homeowners and the system as a whole. And frankly, Speaker, not just homeowners, but tenants, as well.

#### 1450

Energy users in Ontario need a break financially, and making sure they get the heating and cooling they need from local power and reduced demand will give them a financial boost. As everyone here knows, Ontario now

spends about \$7 billion a year to subsidize electricity costs in Ontario. The less electricity people need, the more they generate at home, the less we will have to spend on these subsidies, freeing money up for other uses, like our education system and our health care system. We are going through an energy transition away from fossil fuels. I think it is just common sense to develop a plan for that transition that focuses on the lowest-cost sustainable options first. Efficiency and conservation are the cheapest options and we should fully develop them before we go on to the next most cost-effective option, and so on, to minimize cost impacts.

The second concern I noted was reliability. My colleague MPP Pasma has talked about the impact of severe climate-driven storms on power reliability in Ottawa. As she has written, as Ottawa experiences more severe storms due to climate change, Ottawa residents, unfortunately, are getting used to spending multiple days in the dark.

Just last Easter, a surprise April ice storm took out power for over 170,000 residents, many of them waiting over the long weekend to have hydro restored. A thunderstorm in July required multiple days to clean up, leaving over 37,000 people without electricity. A tornado that same month also knocked out power to 1,600 homes in Barrhaven—and that was just 2023.

Because these outages are lengthy, they are challenging for residents to live through. She heard from many people on fixed incomes who were deeply upset at having to throw out a fridge's or freezer's worth of food every time this happens, knowing they can't afford to replace it. Seniors and people with disabilities who live in multi-storey apartment or condo buildings were trapped in their own homes, without access to food, water or medical care. Those who needed life-saving devices struggled to find power sources.

Ottawa has been incredibly lucky so far. Each of these storms has been followed by a reasonably temperate period of weather. It's only a matter of time until, in Ottawa, we have a period of freezing cold or severe heat while the power is out, putting lives at risk and increasing the scale of the emergency response required.

Every time one of these power outages happens, the city has to spend resources on wellness checks, evacuations, emergency response and community respite centres where folks can find hot food, a shower and a place to charge devices. These outages are not just costly for individuals, they affect Ottawa's bottom line, too, which is why we need to look at ways to address the perils of power outages while also fighting climate change and making life more affordable.

As I had noted earlier, a recent report by Dunsky consultants for Ontario's Independent Electricity System Operator concluded that these kinds of energy sources—distributed resources and solar panels in neighbourhoods on buildings, along with other technologies—could meet all new peak demand in Ontario in a cost-effective manner. And just last month, Nova Scotia introduced its own Community Solar Program.

Having these community sources of energy also means that many homes and communities will have a local power supply that can power their homes when the grid is down. This may not be enough power to run every electronic device in your home, but enough to keep you warm, keep the lights on and the fridge on. And, let's face it, climate-driven extreme weather is going to mean our grid is increasingly under assault. To the extent that homes and businesses need much less power and have more power locally, the easier it will be to ride out the storms. And that extreme weather is coming from climate change. We will have to adapt to the changes already on the way, but it will be critical to reduce emissions from the electricity and energy systems to avoid even worse extreme weather.

Ontario's drive to build and operate even more gas-fired power plants means more global heating. Cost-effective options like the ones that we propose with this bill can reduce and eliminate the need for gas-fired power. That's critical to meeting our climate goals and protecting ourselves. Cutting energy demand enough to allow the transition away from natural gas over the next few decades is critical to meeting our overall climate goals. Buildings are responsible for about 25% of our greenhouse gas emissions in Ontario. We can't meet our goals for reducing emissions and protecting ourselves from climate disasters without substantially cutting use of natural gas. A program of deep retrofits for buildings and distributed renewable energy is the most cost-effective way to meet that goal quickly, and we need to meet it quickly. The longer we put off reducing emissions into the atmosphere, the hotter it is going to get and the more disastrous the consequences—and the more expensive.

In the mid-2000s, the British government published a report, the Stern report, on the economic consequences of climate change. It showed that the climate change that we were expecting to experience and still expect to experience would result in economic impacts on our society comparable to the Great Depression or World War II. This was not a fever dream; this was a detailed analysis of what climate change can and will do if we don't act.

Just recently, a new study by the British institute of actuaries illustrated the scale of risk we face. Actuaries are the people who work for insurance companies. They calculate risk on different classes of insurance. They calculate the potential return on pensions. Their report warns that current risk assessments by the financial industry are woefully inadequate because they don't accurately assess how big the risks are. We could see a rise of 2 degrees in world temperatures by 2050, with dramatic damage to our economy. Don't expect pension funds to pay out in those situations. Actuaries professionally assess risk, and they professionally believe that the assessments currently in vogue in governments and financial institutions are way off the mark.

Before I wrap up, I want to thank Geoff Stiles and Roger Peters for their work in developing this bill and ensuring that it was grounded in the real energy options that we have before us. Their long history of energy

analysis and proposals was extremely valuable in putting this bill together.

The opportunity is there to act—an opportunity to cut our cost of living and to protect us from some of the consequences of climate change. I urge people to seize the opportunity, pass this bill and put it into effect.

**The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly):** Further debate?

**Mr. Rudy Cuzzetto:** As the parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Energy, I appreciate the opportunity to speak here this afternoon on Bill 172, the Affordable Energy Act, introduced by the member from Toronto–Danforth and co-sponsored by the members from Ottawa West–Nepean, Scarborough Southwest and University–Rosedale. I appreciate that they have a passion for this issue, and I want to thank them for bringing this here today.

On this side of the aisle, we all understand the importance of an affordable and reliable supply of energy.

We all remember, as the *Globe and Mail* wrote, that the former Liberal government had completely broken the electricity system, creating huge new costs without benefits. Their skyrocketing electricity costs cost Ontario over 300,000 manufacturing jobs. Many of these jobs moved from Ontario, where we have one of the cleanest electricity systems in the world, to American states like Ohio or West Virginia, where over 90% of their energy came from coal-fired plants.

Cleaning up this mess was one of the main reasons that I came to office in 2018—and I agree, most of you came to office due to this reason. I don't agree that this is best achieved through Bill 172.

Bill 172 proposes to set up a new crown agency, Affordable Energy Ontario, to be responsible for energy-efficiency programs and retrofits, but the province already has agencies responsible for this: the Independent Electricity System Operator, or IESO, and the Ontario Energy Board, or OEB, which decides which programs that Enbridge must provide to natural gas customers.

In January, before I was appointed as parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Energy, I had the opportunity to join him and the Premier and many of our colleagues for a tour of the main IESO control room in Clarkson, in my riding of Mississauga–Lakeshore. I want to thank the team at the IESO again for all the work they're doing to promote energy efficiency in Mississauga and across the province.

In total, in partnership with the IESO, the government is investing over a billion dollars over four years through the Save on Energy program, which will provide funding for new energy-efficient appliances like fridges, air conditioners and new home insulation, and we recently added heat pumps as well.

**1500**

In partnership with Enbridge, we are investing another \$525 million over three years on natural gas efficiency programs, including new windows and doors, furnaces, and smart thermostats. Adding another layer of bureaucracy to deliver these programs would only add red tape

and duplication. I know that this is not what my friends opposite intend, but this will actually increase, not decrease, our electricity bills.

Bill 172 would also require the Premier to publish a community energy affordability plan, including an expansion of distributed energy resources, or DERs, which are basically just small-scale, local energy generation and storage projects, like rooftop solar panels, EV batteries, or responsive air conditioners and water heaters. But again, these are projects that our government is already promoting. The Powering Ontario's Growth plan released by the minister last year and a recent IESO report recognizes the great potential of DERs.

We have already funded pilot projects in London, Essex, York region, Pickering, Ottawa and several locations in Toronto. The Ontario Greenhouse Alliance will be here at Queen's Park next month, and I know they're grateful that we are funding the DERs, including solar panels and batteries at greenhouses in my friend's community of Essex and right across the province.

In London, we are supporting the West 5 development, a new 70-acre mixed-use community that includes solar panels, EV chargers and green roofs and many other creative, innovative ways to help lower energy costs for families and businesses.

Some of these same elements will be part of the 177-acre Lakeview Village in my community of Mississauga–Lakeshore, on the site of the former OPG coal plant. As I said here just a couple of weeks ago, it was our former PC Minister of the Environment, Elizabeth Witmer, who joined us in Lakeview 23 years ago, on March 26, 2001, to announce our plan to close Ontario's six coal-fired power plants. The Ontario Power Authority confirmed that this was the single-largest greenhouse gas reduction measure in North America, the same as taking seven million cars off the road.

Madam Speaker, we already have a plan and we're working every day with the IESO and the Ontario Energy Board to expand DERs in ways that maximize the value for Ontario families and businesses.

Respectfully, instead of introducing more redundant bills, the opposition should support the work that our government has been doing since day one to make energy affordable again in Ontario.

I would like to take the opportunity to give you a few examples. Last fall, we increased the Ontario Electricity Rebate from 11.7% to 19.3%, saving the average family about \$26 each month, or \$312 each year.

We're extending our gas and fuel tax cuts until at least the end of 2024, saving the average household another \$320—savings that Bonnie Crombie has already said she would cancel, if she even gets a chance.

Last month, we invested another \$50 million to expand eligibility for the Ontario Electricity Support Program. The Ontario Energy Board provided rebates to support the families who need it most, between \$35 and \$113 each month, or \$420 to \$1,356 each year.

In partnership with Enbridge, we launched the Clean Home Heating Initiative, which provides homeowners up

to \$4,500 to install a hybrid heating system that uses both a heat pump and natural gas furnace.

Bill 165, the Keeping Energy Costs Down Act, which is now at the Standing Committee on the Interior, will allow us to continue to spread out the cost of new natural gas connections over 40 years, preventing an average of \$4,400 from being added to the price of a new home, and tens of thousands of dollars in rural and northern Ontario.

And, of course, we ended the Liberal cap-and-trade carbon tax, which cut gas prices by 4.3 cents per litre. Speaker, cap-and-trade would have cost Ontario families and businesses over \$2 billion every year and sent billions of dollars out of Ontario to the American jurisdiction of California for little or no environmental benefits.

In her news release on November 30, 2016, the Auditor General wrote that the former Liberal government did not study whether cap-and-trade would actually contribute to reducing emissions in California. In other words, she wrote, "These funds may be leaving the Ontario economy for no purpose other than to help the government claim it has met a target." But just last month, the queen of the carbon tax, Bonnie Crombie, told Global News that this was a great program. Obviously, Speaker, the people of Ontario didn't agree.

The experts in the field don't agree, either. University of Toronto law and economics professor Michael Trebilcock said that the Liberal record on energy is one of the biggest boondoggles in the history of this province. They sold off Hydro One and created many new long-term costs for the energy system. They signed over 33,000 contracts to buy power for over 80 cents per kilowatt hour, when we had our nuclear fleet providing us with nine cents per kilowatt hour.

As I said here two weeks ago, the 2015 report of the Auditor General confirmed that Liberal energy policies would cost consumers and businesses at least an extra \$170 billion, which was about the same as the GDP of Portugal, Greece and New Zealand. Speaker, when Bonnie Crombie promises to bring back the failed Liberal energy policies of the past, this gives us a sense of what the costs would be: roughly the size of the entire economic output of a medium-sized European country.

The Globe and Mail put it this way: "This isn't a \$16 glass of orange juice. It's you and your family buying 85 of those \$16 orange juices, this year and next year and every year after, forever."

I want to thank the Premier again for coming to Mississauga–Lakeshore in February to announce important new measures to protect Ontarians from any future Liberal carbon tax. I also want to thank the official opposition for joining us in supporting motions 70 and 82, which called on the federal government to cancel their carbon tax.

Madam Speaker, in closing, while I will not be supporting Bill 172, I want to assure my friends opposite that the Ministry of Energy will continue working with OPG and the IESO and all our partners to ensure that Ontario families and businesses have access to safe, reliable and affordable energy for now and in the future.

**The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly):** Further debate?

**Ms. Jessica Bell:** I'm very proud to be speaking to this bill today, the Affordable Energy Act, because it provides practical steps to reform and improve our electricity grid to ensure that our energy is affordable, reliable and sustainable. I think this is very timely because the demand for electricity is growing, especially as we transition our cars and trucks and transit systems to an electric fleet. I also think that this bill is timely because fixing the climate crisis depends upon getting to a net-zero electricity grid as soon as possible. The health of our economy, the quality of our lives and the lives of our children and our grandchildren are relying on us to transform our energy grid, our homes and how we travel, and this bill is part of it.

When I look at what the Conservatives are doing on electricity, I've got to say, it looks really reckless. I see a government that is making decisions about the electricity grid that are based on ideology, not pragmatism and not affordability. This government has no meaningful climate action plan. This government has cancelled wind farm projects and then spent taxpayer money defending that decision in court. They are making astonishingly expensive decisions, where this government is spending up to \$7 billion a year on subsidies. This government is investing in fossil fuels and gas-powered electricity, even though it is imperative for affordability and for our ability to transition to a sustainable society to make far greener choices, which most other countries are doing, most other provinces are doing. What's also very worrying is that, despite the subsidies, this government is predicting that energy prices are going to go up by 30%. Who can afford that?

**1510**

There is also very little transparency. When I see and hear about the press announcement that this government is making about the future of our electricity grid, I'm like, "Where's the facts?" How much is this going to cost? How much is this going to cost homeowners and renters when they pay their energy bills? All that is secret; it's very quiet.

Why I like this bill and why I'm proud to co-sponsor it is that it presents a very practical solution to fix our energy grid. It's called the Affordable Energy Act for a reason. This act sets up a very practical framework to allow local energy generation and local energy retrofits. So what does this look like? This looks like solar panels on roofs powering a home and then possibly feeding excess electricity into the electricity grid. This looks like more financing and investment and support to help homeowners and landlords green their homes with better insulation, energy-efficient windows and greener heating and cooling measures, like heat pumps. It will actually lower the cost of your energy bill because you will be using less electricity, and there is nothing bad about that. It is all good.

We know that a focus on local neighbourhood-based renewable energy and conservation will build an energy grid that is more affordable, more resilient, more reliable and more sustainable. That's why I'm supporting this bill,

and I'd like to thank the MPP for Danforth for working with stakeholders and making this bill a reality. I'm proud to co-sponsor it.

**The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly):** Further debate?

**Mr. Ted Hsu:** I wanted to listen to the speeches before deciding what I would say, and it looks like the member for Mississauga–Lakeshore has actually provided a lot of things to comment on.

I want to just respond to one of the things he said. He said that the government is working through the IESO in order to figure out how to deal with the contribution of our electricity system to climate change. The difference between the IESO and what's being proposed today—one of the differences—is that the IESO does not go and finance projects, and this affordable energy agency that's being proposed, one of its mandates is to help with the financing, because as we know, a lot of things, even though they save you money in the long run, they prevent damage in the long run, you have to finance them upfront, and that's an important thing to remember. It's a hurdle that a lot of people have trouble getting over.

One of the easiest ways to save money is conservation and in doing the retrofits of our building stocks. We waste a lot of money, we waste a lot of energy in our existing older buildings, but to fix them, you've got to have money upfront. This idea that you invest money upfront and you get it back, and more, over time, is something that I don't think the current government pays enough attention to—just look at our health care system or our education system.

So I want to emphasize that the difference between just working with the IESO and with the agency that's being proposed today is the financing piece. It's so important to help people get over that initial financing hump.

I don't think the government has a plan on climate change. It may say, "Oh, we're providing some incentives for heat pumps." But in politics they talk about swords and shields. There are some policies that are swords—you really want to do it. It's like a sword and it's a strong policy, and then there's other things that you don't want to do, but a lot of people are going to be upset if you don't do them. So you have a little shield; you do a little bit of something. You can say, "Oh, I'm doing something on climate change." That's what they call a shield.

The government's efforts when it comes to protecting the environment, when it comes to climate change, these are just little shields where they can say, "Climate change: Oh, we're protecting land. We're making a national park up north." I've heard that happen in Ottawa. These are these little policies that don't really accomplish the massive changes that we need to make to our energy economy in order to deal with climate change.

So that is my answer to the remarks of the member from Mississauga–Lakeshore, from the government caucus.

As I said earlier, conservation and demand management, those are some of the cheapest ways of reducing energy use and reducing greenhouse gas emissions. One of the places where we should be emphasizing that more is behind the meter; that is, if somebody's home has, say,

a battery or a solar panel or maybe they have an electric vehicle or maybe they have other appliances at home that can be used at different times, these can all be combined to minimize the usage of electricity and to save money, and to minimize the use of electricity when everybody else is using it, like at peak times.

We spend a lot of money in different systems—in transportation, in telecommunications, in our electricity system—to make sure that we meet demand at peak times, so most of the time, we actually don't use up a lot of our infrastructure. So a lot of the easiest savings come from what they call peak savings: Just stop using electricity when everybody else is using it. It's an idea that applies to transportation and all sorts of things.

One of the things that I like about this bill is that it's talking about distributed generation. I want to emphasize that there's a lot of distributed generation—a lot of things you can do under the framework of conservation and demand management behind the meter, and we want to encourage that. In fact, it's kind of an entrepreneurial thing. Some of the people that I know who have done a lot to manage their own electricity consumption have done it in their homes, and a lot of them are off-grid. They're up north somewhere and they're kind of enthusiasts. They want to do something about climate change. They live in a rural area, and they have an electric vehicle and they have a heat pump and they're first movers on a lot of this technology. I think that we should be passing this bill in order to give these people the backing that they deserve.

**The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly):** Further debate?

**Ms. Sandy Shaw:** I always say that I am always enormously proud to be part of this caucus, and one of the reasons that I'm so proud to be part of this caucus is that, whatever we do here—bring forward bills and suggestions—it's about people, and this bill is no different. At the centre of the Affordable Energy Act are people in the province of Ontario, people that are staring down the face of two impending crises—actually, they're experiencing them; they're in the middle of them—and that's the affordability crisis and it's the climate crisis.

I have to say, the government's response to this bill, and in fact the government's actions to date, really leave me wondering whether this government thinks that the climate emergency is real—you have to wonder if they think that—whether the government thinks or understands the magnitude of the impacts that the people of the province will suffer when it comes to climate change. We're talking about flooded basements. We're talking about brownouts. We're talking about extreme weather events, heat-related events. Does the government really—

**Miss Monique Taylor:** Forest fires.

**Ms. Sandy Shaw:** Forest fires. Is this something that the government understands the magnitude of? And finally, I have to question whether or not the government believes it is their job to do anything about it. Because when we bring bills forward, we talk about the consequences for people.

With all due respect to the member from Mississauga–Lakeshore—we talk a lot. I too could talk about the OEB and IESO and the energy policy in the province, and I may do that, but fundamentally, we need to talk about how we are going to help people in this province.

This Affordable Energy Act is brought forward. It's reasonable, practical, responsible and it is a solution. It is an opportunity for us as legislators to step in and help people that are facing these crises, feeling like they're facing them alone, because the government has done very, very little, if not nothing—and I don't mean to be so dismissive—to help people with the affordability crisis. But I can say very confidently that they've done nothing—nothing—to help people deal with the impending impacts of the climate crisis.

As I said, we'll keep bringing these bills forward that show that we understand what people are struggling with, and we're hoping, eventually, the penny might drop on the other side.

One of the things we've said is that the cost of energy is going up and is predicted to go up by 30% in the near future. One of the things about the cost of energy—here's a suggestion: Let's help people use less of it. There is an opportunity. So what does that do? Two things: It helps people save on their bill, and it helps us address the impact of climate change. Really, it's a win-win solution.

**1520**

And so what we're bringing forward may not be a particularly flashy discussion when we're talking about deep retrofits, but it is exactly how we need to do this work: one step at a time, one heat pump at a time, one set of glazed windows at a time. We need to do the work. It is work, actually, that we're proposing—not exactly policy, but actual work that needs to be done.

There's a way out of this, and this is what we're proposing. Can we not turn away from the profitability of billionaire energy companies like Enbridge, and look at a way that we can start putting money into the pockets of people by saving on energy bills and helping them to retrofit their homes?

I will say, in Hamilton, we understand this. The city of Hamilton has a Community Energy and Emissions Plan. In that plan, they did a survey of the people of Hamilton, and 70% of respondents felt retrofitting existing homes should be a priority action. So people that own homes or people, even, that rent, they know this should be a priority action, because they've got to pay their bills every month. They get that Enbridge bill, that electric bill. They know that this is a priority action.

Evidence has shown—from the same Community Energy and Emissions Plan—that energy-efficiency retrofits have the potential to reduce household energy bills by over 80% by 2050. That's significant money savings for the people of the province of Ontario. This bill really helps us to focus and target a solution, a clearer solution that I was hoping the government would be putting forward when it comes to practicality.

I want to say that we just went through committee hearings on the—I call it the Enbridge bill. As we know,

the government overturned the Ontario Energy Board ruling, which was there—the Ontario Energy Board was there—to protect consumers, to save them money. What essentially happened is that the government overturned the ruling of the Ontario Energy Board.

Essentially, when it comes to new infrastructure, Enbridge and their shareholders don't want to pay. Apparently, developers don't want to pay. But the government and Enbridge seem to have gotten together to decide, “We're going to make the people pay for this infrastructure.” So if you wonder why we are falling so far back in our climate goals, it's because we have this kind of collusion behind the scenes to retain profits and not help people—the people that are the heart of this crisis.

I want to end by saying that this is a highly supportable bill. There is nothing in here that's controversial. And my guess is the only reason this government would vote against it is because it's a good idea and they don't want to give credit for a good idea, and my guess is, even ideologically, they don't think it's their role as government to help people. I'm really hoping—but I heard that the government is not looking to support this bill. It's a real disappointment.

But I can assure you, we, on this side of the House, will continue to see these crises through the eyes of everyday Ontarians, which is what you should do, and every day, we will come to this House and bring forward excellent bills like this: clear, researched, evidence-based solutions. That's why we are here and that's why I'm proud to be part of this caucus. I hope that this government, eventually, will see the light.

**The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly):** Further debate?

**Ms. Peggy Sattler:** I'm proud to rise in support of this bill from my colleague the member for Toronto–Danforth, and in particular as a representative of a community that has one of the very first—actually, it was the very first—community net metering pilot projects in the province of Ontario. That's the West 5 development in my riding of London West. Net metering allows people to use energy from renewable sources that they generate themselves, and then they get credit on their hydro bill because they get to stay on the grid. In a community like West 5, which is Canada's first net-zero community, the benefits of distributed energy are shared by all of the residents in the community.

This bill, by establishing a new agency—Affordable Energy Ontario—with a mandate of looking to give all Ontarians opportunities to benefit from distributed energy resources, would be a huge win for all the people in this province. Ontario spends billions of dollars on our electricity system. We should be always looking for ways to spend smarter, to be able to save people money, to be able to save our climate.

I want to commend the member for this bill. Deep retrofitting is a way that would enable low-income consumers in particular the opportunity to reduce their hydro costs, and it's something that this government should be supporting.

**The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly):** Back to the member now for his two-minute response.

**Mr. Peter Tabuns:** My thanks to the members for Mississauga–Lakeshore, University–Rosedale, Kingston and the Islands, Hamilton West–Ancaster–Dundas for their comments this afternoon.

I'll focus on the comments from the member from Mississauga–Lakeshore—no surprise to you, Speaker, I'm sure. There are a few points. First of all, the member suggested that there would be a duplication of efforts because we already have the IESO handling energy efficiency. I don't think there would need to be any duplication. We would move the focus on efficiency, on distributed energy to this new agency. The IESO has more than enough on its plate. We need an agency that is very focused on expanding the realm of energy efficiency in distributed energy as broadly and as deeply as possible, as rapidly as possible.

The second thing I want to note is his comments about the 2001 Progressive Conservative plan to shut down coal in Ontario. I will note that the current plans of the government that he is part of are destroying those efforts that were carried out, because the current projection for the emissions from the gas plants that you're building will eliminate at least half the savings in GHG—or greenhouse gas—reductions that came about by shutting down those

coal plants. We spent many millions of dollars to move past coal, and now we're going to spend many millions, hundreds of millions to actually increase our greenhouse gas emissions and eliminate the steps forward that were taken by the Harris government. I find it extraordinary that the Harris government was actually environmentally further ahead than this one, but that's the reality.

Speaker, I appreciate the opportunity. I urge everyone to vote for this bill.

**The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly):** The time provided for private members' public business has expired.

Mr. Tabuns has moved second reading of Bill 172, An Act to improve energy affordability through distributed energy resources and deep retrofits. 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.

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

*Second reading vote deferred.*

**The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly):** All matters relating to private members' public business having been completed, this House stands adjourned until 10:15 a.m. on Monday, April 15, 2024.

*The House adjourned at 1528.*





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Rae, Matthew (PC)	Perth—Wellington	
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Smith, David (PC)	Scarborough Centre / Scarborough-Centre	
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<b>Smith, Hon. / L'hon. Todd (PC)</b>	Bay of Quinte / Baie de Quinte	Minister of Energy / Ministre de l'Énergie
Stevens, Jennifer (Jennie) (NDP)	St. Catharines	
Stiles, Marit (NDP)	Davenport	Leader, Official Opposition / Chef de l'opposition officielle Leader, New Democratic Party of Ontario / Chef du Nouveau Parti démocratique de l'Ontario
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West, Jamie (NDP)	Sudbury	
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Wong-Tam, Kristyn (NDP)	Toronto Centre / Toronto-Centre	
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Vacant	Milton	