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Mercredi
15 novembre 2023

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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
OF ONTARIO

Wednesday 15 November 2023

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE
DE L'ONTARIO

Mercredi 15 novembre 2023

Report continued from volume A.
1658

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

Continuation of debate on the motion for second reading of the following bill:

Bill 146, An Act to implement Budget measures and to enact and amend various statutes / Projet de loi 146, Loi visant à mettre en oeuvre les mesures budgétaires et à édicter et à modifier diverses lois.

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

Ms. Jennifer K. French: I'm glad to be able take my place in this House and address Bill 146, which is called the Building a Strong Ontario Together Act—and one would hope that with a title like that, there was going to be the kind of weight behind those words that folks in Ontario are so desperate for. They are really in a state right now of such need.

Whether we're talking about the increased food bank use, whether we're talking about wait times still in our hospitals and in our health care system, whether we're talking about folks who cannot find housing that they can afford that is safe, that is appropriate, there are lot of people in crisis right now. And, Speaker, I am hoping to be wrong, but it feels like it's getting worse, and I feel like there's a lot of harm looming as we're seeing prices continue to go up and people continuing to struggle. And so I would say it is incumbent upon governments—specifically this one, because they are the government I have the distinct pleasure of sitting across from. I would say that it is incumbent upon them to make headway, to make a difference, to make things better. Coming from that place, I want to share many of the voices from my community with the members here tonight. There is such challenge out in our community, and I think that puts it mildly.

But adding insult to the injury that people are feeling is the fact that they cannot trust this government; that we have a government right now mired in a criminal investigation; that the RCMP is not just banging on the door but is interviewing more and more folks.

Interjection.

Ms. Jennifer K. French: I hear the sounds coming from the backbenches. Maybe they're tired of hearing this one. Well, so are the folks in Ontario. It's bad enough that people have had it up to here with governments or politicians in general, but when their worst fears are borne out and they can see proof of that in what they read and what they hear and what they're realizing, like an RCMP investigation and another Auditor General probe into Ontario Place—it just never ends with this government. We have all of these challenges in the province, and then they turn their eyes to Queen's Park and they hear a lot of stuff and nonsense that does not resonate with them and their families. They hear a lot of promises that do not bear out in terms of the actual felt reality.

Speaker, there are things that we would hope to see in the fall economic update, in kind of that chance for the government to show, "Here's how things are going economically; here's how things are going in our communities." But we don't see a government that is getting back into the business of building homes. This government really ought to take a long, hard look in the mirror and get it right in their head that they have a responsibility to provide services to help folks find housing. If that means to get back in the business of building it, then by all means; you would have our support.

People need to be able to afford where they live in communities that they want to live and work in. When we hear from the business community—and I know they hear it too—that businesses cannot employ people in their own communities, or that people can't find housing where they want to work, that's a real challenge for folks. We need to raise wages. We need to end price gouging; tackle real estate speculation that is driving up costs. We would like to see the government invest in stronger public health care that is there when they need it, to reduce wait times and make sure that people have a family doctor. We all, I hope, recently met with the family doctors who came to the table with a lot of really basic suggestions—like, big picture thinking, but also just, "Here's what we can start tomorrow. Here's how we can try to keep more students on the path to becoming family doctors." But, again, we also have to focus on cleaning up the challenges the government keeps laying at our feet—we, the province. This bill is an opportunity. I'd say, unfortunately, though, that it does miss the moment.

Speaker, I did a survey. I put it out to the community, and I asked folks, "What message can I share from them or from their family to the Premier?" And so they gave me their concerns in their own words, and I want to read some of those.

Darrah Barry wrote, when I asked what their concerns were, “Greenbelt land swap and Hwy 413, Ontario Place plan, privatization of health care, underfunding of health care and education, private long term care and lack of accountability, not spending millions (or is it billions?) of the budget essentially starving public services so that they fail all in the name of making the budget books look good even though major damage to society is the end result, removal of rent control and other renter protections and we see what that has done to make the housing shortage even worse, not listening to government staff planning experts on how best to address the housing crisis and responsible development of land, lack of commitment to the hard choices needed to address the climate emergency and continuing to mislead residents regarding efforts like the carbon tax, too much policy based on the wants and desires of the elite.”

Darrah goes on to say, “We have major concerns about all of the above. We are not naive. He is not For the People, not the regular people, and he does not treat us like friends, so stop referring to us that way. We acknowledge when this government gets things right like co-operating with other levels of government during COVID but we will never support a party that puts the short-term needs and wants of themselves and their cronies first, and worse, causing major damage to our public institutions and the long-term sustainability and strength of them, our economy and our environment. They need to immediately listen to the experts and appropriately fund education, health care, long-term care and the like and hold private landlords and corporations accountable for their roles in contributing to many of our current crises.”

That’s someone who took the time to fill in a survey that said, “Hey, what would you like me to share with the Premier?”

Landy Anderson, in Oshawa, says:

“Dear” Premier,

“I write to express my deep disappointment and growing outrage over the recent ... government’s involvement in the greenbelt housing scandal. The revelations surrounding this issue have shaken our trust in your administration and raised grave concerns about the integrity and transparency of your government’s operations.

“It is disheartening to see a government that was elected to serve the best interests of Ontarians now mired in what appears to be nefarious and corrupt behavior. The very essence of democracy and responsible governance relies on elected officials working diligently and transparently to uphold the welfare of their constituents. However, recent events surrounding the greenbelt housing scandal suggest a troubling departure from these principles.”

He has more to say, but goes on:

“In conclusion ... I call upon you to address these allegations. The people of Ontario deserve nothing less. Only by rectifying this issue and recommitting to the principles of open and honest governance can we begin to rebuild the trust that has been eroded.”

These are just folks who have an understanding of what is unfolding. My colleague earlier had talked about this—how did you say it? It was like “constant victims.”

Ms. Chandra Pasma: Perpetual victims.

Ms. Jennifer K. French: Perpetual victims, which was an interesting thought. It’s interesting that for every challenge we raise, everything that we say, “Hey, here’s a problem,” we hear, “Well, that’s not our fault,” or “We inherited this,” or “Let me tell about that time Bob Rae”—or whatever. That’s history, sure. It has a way of coming back to haunt all of us, like the RCMP investigation may shortly for them. However, all that to say that we in this House have a responsibility to the people we serve, and this government needs to take that responsibility and not constantly be shifting the blame but actually look in the mirror and recognize where they could do better.

We have had some conversation in this room about the fact that the fall economic statement was used to launch the province’s new infrastructure bank, and I’m interested in this. A lot of people are. There are questions we’ve heard from the CBC article that—I’ll read the quote from Brian Lewis, a former chief economist for the province. He says, “Ontario’s challenges with getting infrastructure built have always been about completing projects on schedule, never with financing them.” He says, “The current [financing] system seems to be working pretty well in Ontario, which leads us to the question of, what’s the problem this [infrastructure bank] is going to actually solve?”

Apparently, when the Minister of Finance was asked “if establishing the bank opens the door to big investors profiting off public infrastructure projects,” he said, “I don’t think profiting is the right way to think about it,” he replied. “Think about it in terms of revenue streams.”

I just find the wordplay and the wording dance always interesting in this space, but I’m putting the question at this point. I would be interested in how it will operate. So there are questions—like, it’s a big deal, right? This is a big deal. The government has talked about it in positive terms. As the infrastructure critic, I am eager to better understand, because as your critic or as this government’s critic, I have raised a number of challenges in this House on the infrastructure and transportation file, and it’s about building—building and accountability and contracts and P3s. The financing piece is a new approach, and I think we’re all eager to better understand it. I’ll leave that there, though, because there has been some good discussion today, and I’m hoping that that information will be forthcoming.

Speaker, the fall economic statement didn’t mention the word “affordability.” The members on the government side have talked about what page this and what page that is on in the fall economic statement—the shiny book—about measures that they say will make life better. Okay. But I will remind the government that that fall economic statement document, really, is what’s in the window; this bill, Bill 146, is what is in the legislation.

1710

There’s a difference between what you guys put on display and say, “Look at what we’re promising,” and then, “Look at what we’re going to deliver in the actual piece of legislation.” So you can tell me what shiny page a shiny detail is on, but then I want you to be able—I want the

government to be able to back that up by pointing to it in legislation, that shows us how this is actually going to happen.

Speaker, I want to talk a bit about housing. This is a government under RCMP investigation. They've been fuelling speculation. The greenbelt grab has grabbed the attention of folks who don't even know what the greenbelt is or where it is—but they know darn well that this government has mishandled this. The government, for a long time, said that the need for housing was what was driving us. Well, they've backed that up pretty quick. Nobody was ever believing that it was about housing.

I want to talk about housing, in terms of what people are saying out in the community of Oshawa.

Darlene wrote to me: “The population of individuals and families experiencing homelessness in Oshawa is growing. There is very little affordable housing stock in our community and ODSP and OW shelter portions are inadequate. We need government to build and maintain affordable housing units now and not at the expense of the greenbelt. Market solutions are clearly not working.”

Brian Arscott wrote to me: “Bring back rent control! Housing needs to be affordable for those in need.”

Erin Munro said, “My family and I just had our offer accepted on a home in central Oshawa, after being outbid by investors who came in with all cash offers, far over asking on five other homes. We realize how fortunate we are that our offer was accepted on this house but we still had to overbid and forgo an inspection on the house to ensure that our family would have a place to live and grow. This needs to end, there needs to be restrictions on investors and how many properties they can own. Young families like mine cannot compete with these all cash offers and cannot invest in our economy if we are never given the chance.”

Lisa Craig wrote, “Mr. Premier, please stop catering to your rich friends and help the people who are most in need of it. Each passing day there are more and more homeless and affordable housing is hard to come by if at all.”

Claudette Kennedy wrote, “Why can't the government use its surplus to do something concrete for the homeless, invest more into health care and education? For the people? Premier? “Prove it!”

Dave Musgrave wrote, “Focus on housing for the disadvantaged and not profit for the advantaged.”

These are what folks just took the time and wanted to share, in their own words—that's their experience and understanding. And I know that the government members are hearing it too. I think some of them forget that they—well, we've talked about the phone use. But I do think that most of them wake up in the morning and are interested in doing the job and probably carry a bit of guilt and have a sense of responsibility. And this is what you must also be hearing from your constituents—a version of it.

This is a government that voted against real rent control. Their priorities are this fancy-schmancy luxury spa. Are luxury spas still going to be a thing in 95 years? Is that going to be the technology? I don't know. It's a massive commitment, and that's their priority.

The Auditor General now is probing the Ontario Place redevelopment. That's good news for Ontarians, because information has not been easy to come by—I've been chasing it—but not good news for this government again.

I want to share this letter from Jeff Burbidge—and I won't read all of it, because I'm running out of time and I have a truckload of emails from folks. My office is very worried about Jeff and his family. Jeff has reached out to just about all of the agencies in our community. No one has been able to offer real assistance, as he said. He said, “I am becoming increasingly depressed as a result of all of these brick walls.”

Here's what he said:

“I am writing this email in the hopes that someone can help my family of four find affordable, sustainable housing.

“My family of four have been living and paying taxes in Durham region for over 15 years now and we have never once had to worry about housing, until a few years ago. In 2021 we were paying \$1,500 per month for the top floor of a bungalow.

“When COVID hit and the real estate market skyrocketed ... our landlord asked us to vacate the property so he could sell his house. We were unaware of our rights as tenants at the time and we started looking for a new residence.

“At that time the average rental price for a suitable dwelling was around \$2,450 per month, which is around \$1,000 more than we had ever paid.

“Out of desperation we signed a lease for a property we could not afford but we needed a place to live, so I did what I had to do. One thing I have not mentioned yet is that both of our children, 18 and 13 now, have special needs.

“My daughter has been in and out of SickKids for the majority of the last five years and this has cost me quite a few good-paying jobs. Our current housing situation has resulted in her having another episode of cyclical vomiting syndrome and has required me to miss a significant amount of work recently.

“As everyone is aware, COVID and our housing situation has severely impacted both mine and my wife's credit scores, making it virtually impossible to find housing in these difficult times. We are both ... working ... dedicated parents and citizens.”

They are currently residing in a Motel 6 through one of our community agencies, Cornerstone, but as he said, “This is not a permanent solution to our problem.” And, in all caps: “My family is homeless. This is beyond unacceptable in our country. Please help us.”

Speaker, this is what keeps my staff up at night, that we've been talking to Jeff and we can't find him housing. He's working with every agency, and as he said, “Our caseworker at Cornerstone made it very clear this morning that our stay ... at the Motel 6 Whitby is time-sensitive. I don't know what else I can do. As I have mentioned we have two special needs children and I myself struggle with mental health issues.” This is a dad with two kids who just wants to keep them housed and can't. And that's looming.

I got a letter from his mother, from a worried grandmother, but I realized that that was about Jeff's same family, same situation. Homelessness affects a community.

Speaker, I met with a woman when we were home during our constituency weeks. She's on OW, and she has the maximum benefit of \$733, but her rent is \$1,000. And she needs her phone and internet to access online services to check housing availability, to check out housing and jobs. She needs gas in her car. Both of those services have now been cut from OW, and our office hadn't realized that. We didn't know that that was a thing, because benefits change, and as most of the members who do casework know, we have to do our best to chase those changes.

From the OW office, they have been communicating with folks that because the employment services transformation, or EST, is happening—they have said their benefits will still be there, but they might be called something slightly different. Other benefits will no longer be available through Ontario Works, but similar benefits will be provided by the Employment Ontario agencies they are eventually referred to.

This is a massive change for people already struggling to put one foot in front of the other, and to pull the benefits away and put them behind door number 1, door number 2—you have to get lucky and know where door number 3 is—is really going to hurt people in our communities. That's at the foot of this government. That's a change that's coming, and it is a really heavy one that is, again, looming for folks.

Speaker, that's my time, but I'm happy to take questions, and I wish I had another 20.

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

Mr. Anthony Leardi: I want to address the member from Oshawa. I know that Oshawa has received a fantastic automotive investment of \$1.2 billion made possible through the efforts of the Minister of Economic Development and also through the efforts of the Premier. The future of Oshawa is bright, thanks to the work done by this government. But do you know what that's going to mean? It means that we're going to have a huge demand in Oshawa for skilled tradespeople—hundreds, perhaps even thousands—and what we have set out here in the building a strong Ontario together plan is a whole series of skilled trade programs designed to develop more people in the skilled trades to meet the demand that's going to happen in Ontario, such as in Oshawa.

My question to the member is this: How many hundreds, or perhaps even thousands, of skilled trade jobs does the member think are going to be created in Oshawa as a result of this government's historic efforts to bring automotive investments to the province of Ontario?

Ms. Jennifer K. French: In answer, hopefully a lot, and we have excellent post-secondary institutions in Oshawa. There are a lot of needs that the students have. We have talked about student debt being an inhibitor. There are lots of pieces that I hope the government also factors in as we are talking about the future of those young students, when it comes to their education, first—also, the economy. Also, they need places to live so that they can continue to work in the community.

1720

You are absolutely right, sir; the future of Oshawa is bright but not unchallenged—and this is where I would like the government to take that responsibility and say, “We are going to build affordable housing. We are going to prioritize the futures of those young people in all directions.”

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

Mr. Terence Kernaghan: I would like to thank the member from Oshawa for her presentation today, and I listened intently.

There is very much a disconnect between what this government says and what it does. We heard for months that the greenbelt grab was about housing, when evidence has borne out that it really had nothing to do with housing and really had more to do with enriching wealthy speculators.

You mentioned the infrastructure bank. They talked about how they're using this \$3 billion to not make a profit, but to create new revenue tools—interesting choice of words—in particular, about housing.

If the government really cared about keeping people housed, such as the constituents you were discussing in your remarks, what could they do to ensure that those folks were able to have truly affordable housing?

Ms. Jennifer K. French: I feel like I need a list of the initiatives that the NDP has put forward, different motions looking for support from this government when it comes to tenant protections or—and I have written a letter to the new minister. But the former minister, the one who—I don't remember having seen him. Wait; we're not allowed to say that. Anyway, the minister who is no longer a minister—okay. Backing up: A number of us have been writing to the current minister about the experience of people trying to buy a new home and the unbelievable mess. When I talked to the then-Minister for Municipal Affairs and Housing, the current minister—this is not a partisan issue. We've all been on the same page about, what is happening is not okay, and yet it hasn't been fixed.

So there are a number of things in the weeds and big picture that we can work together on. Let's get them done.

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

Mr. Amarjot Sandhu: Thank you to the member opposite for her remarks on this very, very important bill.

The opposition will often stand in this House and give long speeches on affordability. But when it comes to making life affordable for the people of this province, what do they do, colleagues? They will vote against those measures.

Mr. Mike Harris: Every single time.

Mr. Amarjot Sandhu: Every single time the government has brought measures to make life affordable, the opposition will vote against those measures.

Can the member opposite tell this House, will they do the right thing and support this bill that will make life affordable for the people of this province?

Ms. Jennifer K. French: I only had 20 minutes today, but the member is accusing us of giving long speeches. I wish I had had more time to give you all that I have here on health care, on education, on the challenges faced by people.

You voted against rent control. And when we see record lineups at food banks, it's kind of fascinating to hear your version of affordability.

In terms of what we voted for, or not, it was my private member's bill that I was proud to table before the government to take the tolls off of the 412 and 418—I see the former Minister of Transportation. She will know that I was an enthusiastic supporter of that initiative, and I am glad, as are the people across Durham region, that that was done. But that is one tiny thing, and that only affects those who drive those roads. We need so many more affordability measures for people across the province.

Come up with something substantial—and many and varied—and yes, we would be glad to support that.

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

Ms. Peggy Sattler: Thank you to my colleague the member for Oshawa for her remarks. She does a lot of research to prepare for her speeches, and I suspect that she reviewed the report from the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives that looked at Ontario's program spending over the last five years compared to today and adjusted the amounts for inflation and population growth. That analysis showed that real per capita spending on post-secondary education has declined by 11% since 2018, programs for children and social services have gone down 12% since 2018 and an 11% decline in education. That's not because those needs have decreased; it's because the government is deliberately under-spending.

What does the member think the government should be doing in those sectors?

Ms. Jennifer K. French: Thanks for asking. I will say that what I've heard from members in my community is really tangible and very specific. I'll read a few of them, because I didn't have a chance to delve into education.

Here is Heidi, who says, "We want to know that our schools are safe places for everyone to learn. We want to know that if we need to see a doctor and go to the hospital, we can get high quality care."

Another, Brian, says, "Our teachers are struggling. They have too much on their hands, increasingly less support. This hurts them, and ultimately our students and our children."

Someone else has said, "I currently work for the government of Ontario and cannot find space in licensed daycare centres to care for my daughter before and after school. I'm 71st on the list at my daughter's school for before- and after-school care. I find it incredibly difficult to work the mandated three days a week without supportive child care."

The government can spin it that they're spending record amounts on X, Y and Z, but when inflation is going up, when the cost of everything is going up, it is not enough. It may be more than yesterday, but it's not nearly enough to get us through today.

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

Mr. Andrew Dowie: I want to thank the member from Oshawa for her remarks.

About a year ago, I was at Ontario Tech University—what an institution, certainly to be proud of. It was such a tremendous opportunity to go visit your neck of the woods. One of the things that I learned on that trip was that access to capital was a very serious issue raised by many people in manufacturing, and I think we're finding that across the board, that access to capital has been limited.

The infrastructure bank—you touched upon it in your comments—is seeking to find those kinds of investors that are otherwise investing elsewhere. I think of when the Canada Pension Plan invested in Neiman Marcus and lost \$6 billion on it. I was hoping you can elaborate on your thoughts on the Ontario Infrastructure Bank and your concerns with it.

Ms. Jennifer K. French: Thank you. I had raised the same questions that the government is hearing about: "What is the need for this actually about?" Because it hasn't been a challenge for financing in the province. The province has been able to get the money to build. The problem seems to be that the government isn't building or delivering on schedule.

I'm happy to have a sit-down and talk about the nonsense with a lot of the P3 contracts and some of the challenges the province enters into, knowingly, time after time. That is about the cost and the schedules and the inability to—I'll use the term "to police," but to have transparency in that process.

So the infrastructure bank, at this point, I'd say, is kind of a curiosity, because I'm interested to hear what the members have said during debate, but that's more information than we've had. This is the launch; this is the time for us to talk about it—

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

Mr. Deepak Anand: Madam Speaker—

Interjections.

Mr. Deepak Anand: Thank you to my colleagues.

Madam Speaker, it's always a pleasure to rise in this House and debate on important things for the people of Ontario. I always usually say the only thing certain in our life is the uncertainty. When I came here this morning and I found out I'll be speaking on Bill 146, I couldn't stop myself from saying yes to the wonderful work the government is doing.

As always, Madam Speaker, I want to start with thanking my family for their never-ending support; to my staff, for the hard work you do; and especially to the people of Mississauga-Malton, who gave me the responsibility and the opportunity to represent them. I'm thankful for your trust. Madam Speaker, when I came in the morning and I found that I'll be speaking, I absolutely rushed to my OLIP intern to help me, so I want to say thank you to Bridget for your hard work in helping me in putting together these remarks.

1730

As I rise today to speak in support of Bill 146, the Building a Strong Ontario Together Act, in its second reading, our party has shown again and again and has a proven record of taking a responsible and targeted approach to governing in order to build a stronger Ontario. It's not me; it's the data that shows it.

This government has continued to create jobs with good pay for the workers of Ontario and has attracted investments in key industries. Every time I go to Windsor to meet my daughter, I see the progress happening. The member from Essex can say that, and the member from Windsor can say that as well. You see real dollars coming into the province of Ontario. And why are they coming? Very simple, Madam Speaker—you don't need rocket science. When you have a business which is having a revenue of \$10 and expenses of \$12, what does the business do? They leave; they close; they move. They cut costs. But if you have a government who comes with measures to reduce the cost of doing business—I'm talking about reducing \$7 billion a year—when they're supporting workers, what happens? Your revenue goes up, your costs go down, and you become sustainable. When you become sustainable, what happens? The people who are creating jobs want to take that money and invest back into their businesses. People around the world look at Ontario—an amazing place to invest. And that is why they're coming and investing here in Ontario.

Madam Speaker, we have shown that we are creating jobs. Just for an example, this year alone, we have created almost 170,000 jobs in Ontario and over 700,000 jobs since our election in June 2018.

Interjection.

Mr. Deepak Anand: You can definitely clap.

Last year alone, we saw 18,000 businesses opening in Ontario, an amazing 41% of the businesses that opened in Canada.

By the way, look at the contrast: If you look at the last 15 years, 300,000 jobs leaving; and you see, from 2018, 700,000 more jobs coming. And what does that mean? That means prosperity for the people of Ontario.

Madam Speaker, while we're excited by these great things, we also know that Ontarians are feeling the effect of the economic challenges and the uncertainties caused by high inflation, high interest rates, geopolitical uncertainty—of course, I need to add to that the high carbon tax. And with the rapidly growing population, our government knows that as we continue moving towards our approach to building a strong Ontario, we need to be flexible and we need to adapt to a plan that can keep making the lives of Ontarians better, even within the slowing global economy.

This is the test of life. I always say, when the exam is easy, anyone can clear it. If you make the exam a little bit difficult, you will see only some people who will clear it. When the exam is extremely difficult, very few will clear it. But those who will clear that exam will clear any exam, and that is an example of what Ontario is about. We have seen that there are economic challenges, uncertainty, but we are there to force—we are here to support our

Ontarians to build a better, stronger Ontario. And that is exactly what this 2023 fall economic statement is doing.

We also understand the reality of the difficult global economic situation, and our government has always thought outside the box, and asked ourselves what else we can do to support our Ontario by presenting new tools that will make the lives of Ontarians easy.

I want to speak to some of these tools. Anyone who knows about Mississauga–Malton knows the importance of reliable infrastructure. From our airports, to roads, to highways, good infrastructure is crucial. Why? Because those who are investing to create jobs need the infrastructure. Those who are working on those jobs need to go back to their families so that they can enjoy a work-life balance—they need infrastructure. That is why we are making sure that we are building infrastructure, as we are going to welcome over 500,000 more people to the province of Ontario.

Some of the things which we're doing in this is that we're making sure that we're leveraging Ontario's critical mineral advantages, and we're working for our workers. For many of these investments, the benefit will come back to Canadians who contribute to the public sector plans, and then we're talking about starting an infrastructure bank.

Madam Speaker, by investing this money through the infrastructure bank, we'll be able to build infrastructure to support our growth. As you know—I was looking at the data—over \$60 billion by the pension funds is being invested in countries like India. Why? Because they see the growth of the money, because they need to pay back to their members. What if we produced an equal, similar opportunity right here in the province of Ontario? What we're doing: We're having a wonderful cycle. The pension funds have money. We need money to build this infrastructure. We go to the pension fund through the infrastructure bank, they utilize that money and invest into the infrastructure in a stable economy like Ontario. They reap the benefit and give back to Ontarians, the members of their pension fund. What we just did: We helped Ontario by growing the investment of the people and providing them the service. This is the way we are thinking out of the box.

Our government has a record of creating innovative ways of supporting businesses and contributing to the competitive Ontario economy. I'm talking about the voluntary clean energy credit registry announced earlier this year, allowing companies in Ontario to showcase their commitment to green energy goals. This government is making sure to make the health of our economy core to our work, and our increase in funding by \$100 million to Invest Ontario shows how serious we are. These extra funds will support businesses across Ontario and help bring more companies to Ontario.

Madam Speaker, it's not just the money; it is the health of Ontarians as well. I am passionate about health care and the health of our communities. That is why I'm pleased to say that the women in our life will become eligible for the Ontario breast screening program as young as the age of 40. This is because, starting in the fall of 2024, we'll

expand provincial eligibility for people between 40 and 49 to be screened for breast cancer. More than 305,000 individuals will be able to access this detection and receive diagnosis. For some of these people, their access to detection may be life-saving.

Madam Speaker, I always talk about the same example: When we talk about something—say there is 10%; this will help 10% of X number of people. But for that person, it is 100%. So when we're helping even one person, we're helping one life, and through this, we are actually helping over 300,000 individuals.

The people of the province are also concerned about affordability, with high inflation rates and the Bank of Canada's rapid increase of the interest rate. That is why our province, our government, is going to make sure that we are extending the cuts to the tax rates on gas and diesel fuel until the end of June 2024. By doing so, we are making sure that the average saving to Ontario households who are struggling will be now over \$260. That will add to our government's record of lowering the cost of transportation for Ontarians.

These are some of the measures. As we are going through this, some of the things which we've done are to make sure that we're investing in the safety of the people of Ontario. The people of Ontario have concerns, especially in the region of Peel, for an example, about the crime in their communities. Our government knows this, and that is why our fall economic statement included multiple initiatives for addressing and stopping crime, and investing to make sure that we can remove those who are doing the auto theft.

Our government wants to build a stronger Ontario, not just for our community but for future generations and for our children as well. That is why we're making sure that we are investing an additional \$75 million in the Skills Development Fund, so that we have workers ready for future growth. These are some of the things we're doing.

Lastly, to conclude, I want to say, Madam Speaker, we have a responsibility. As we are going through uncertain times, we want to give our children, our families, our seniors a stronger, healthier Ontario, and that is what we're doing through the FES. We are making sure there are enough measures for everybody so that we can all come together, we can grow our economy, we can build our businesses and we can take care of our Ontarians. As we do this, we want to thank them for their trust in us.

1740

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

Mrs. Jennifer (Jennie) Stevens: It's always a pleasure to be in conversation about affordability, but there isn't any mention of it in this motion.

However, Speaker, I just want to ask the member from Mississauga–Malton: Considering the removal of rent control has led to significant rent gouging, I have a building in my community that raised rent at 20%, essentially removing all the old tenants. Because of the rent decontrol policy, the units are now \$3,000 in St. Catharines. How did the rent decontrol plan contribute to making housing

more affordable, and why isn't it being fixed in your fall economic statement?

Mr. Deepak Anand: I want to thank the member opposite for asking that important question about affordability. I'm just going to go through some of the things which we're doing through this bill on affordability: We are proposing to extend the cuts to the gasoline and fuel tax rates so that they remain at nine cents per litre until June 30, 2024. As you all know, this government has a commitment to the people of Ontario, who are working hard, by increasing the general minimum wage from \$15.50 to \$16.55, which is a 6.8% raise. These are some of the things which we're doing to ensure that the people of Ontario have a better life as they're fighting with the cost of living and they have an affordable life.

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

Mr. Logan Kanapathi: Thank you to my colleague from Mississauga–Malton. He's so excited about this bill. He's enthusiastically talking about this budget and the fall economic statement.

Madam Speaker, when talking to my constituents in Markham–Thornhill, I hear about the concerns they have with paying their bills, and I know many of them have concerns about economic uncertainty. We know that there are many different global impacts that affect our economy, but there are still things we can do here at home to assist our constituents and our residents.

I ask the member, my colleague: Please explain what the fall economic statement 2023 will do to improve the life of Ontarians who are struggling with paying their bills.

Mr. Deepak Anand: Thank you to my colleague for that important question. Yes, Madam Speaker, affordability and cost of living are important, not only for the people of Ontario but for this government as well. That is why we are making sure that we are taking new measures as we implement the Ontario Seniors Care at Home Tax Credit in 2022. It will provide an estimated \$115 million in support this year, or about \$550 on average to over 200,000 low-to-moderate income seniors with families with eligible medical expenses, including expenses that support aging at home.

It's not the only thing we're doing. We've actually increased minimum wage from \$15.50 to \$16.55 per hour, helping more than 900,000 workers with a 6.8% raise, which means up to \$2,200 more in workers' pockets per year. That is exactly what we're doing to support our—

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

Ms. Jennifer K. French: Earlier in the debate, we heard that the real estate folks at OREA have identified student debt as the number one challenge to young people getting into the housing market. So my question to the member is, why does the government want to remove provisions for notice of default on student loans?

Mr. Deepak Anand: Madam Speaker, as I was talking about, creating over 700,000 jobs—and I know, as we criss-cross the province from one coast to the other, we see a lot of signs saying, "Help wanted." And I always say,

when we talk about jobs, people need jobs and jobs need people. What is the missing link? It's providing them the skills required. This is exactly what we're doing through the FES. We're supporting Ontario by investing in the Skills Development Fund as we help those young people attain those skills so that they can have those skills and go back and make more money and be able to pay back their debt. So I just want to thank the Minister of Labour, Immigration, Training and Skills Development for helping and supporting the province of Ontario.

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

M^{me} Dawn Gallagher Murphy: I'd like to thank the member for his remarks today. As we have heard reported, there are nearly half a million more people who have come to our province this year, and there are 4,400 more businesses operating in our province today compared to last year, which is good news. Our population is growing, jobs are being created and companies are choosing Ontario as a place to do business. But we cannot take this good news for granted. We know that in our world today, there are so many different geopolitical and global economic uncertainties, so now, more than ever, it is important to remain fiscally disciplined.

So my question to the member is: Can you please explain what the government is doing to ensure that Ontario is well prepared moving into this future of ours?

Mr. Deepak Anand: I want to acknowledge the member from Newmarket–Aurora for being a passionate representative of your riding. I know you're working hard to bring more resources, especially for the youth of your riding, whether it's a sports facility—so congratulations. And I want to say thank you to the residents for choosing and electing you as a passionate member.

You said it so well: Yes, we must continue with our plan to build a stronger Ontario. And we cannot do it alone. We have to do it together. That is why, as I said many times before in my remarks, we must continue to build while maintaining a responsible fiscal plan for our province. I'm happy to share with the member that we are maintaining a path to balance by following a projected \$5.3-billion deficit in 2024-25, and our government is forecasting a surplus of \$0.5 billion in 2025-26. We're doing all this while making historic investments into health care, building new highways and making sure Ontario continues to be the best place to come and work—

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly): Questions?

Ms. Chandra Pasma: Thank you to the member for Mississauga–Malton for his comments on this bill.

The member from Oshawa just asked a question about the provisions in this bill on student loans, which is a measure that I'm very curious about as well since we know that student debt is an incredibly challenging issue for people. Obviously, nobody wants to fall behind on student loans, but unfortunately, that is a position that people find themselves in, and the provisions in this bill seem to put students who have defaulted on their loans in an even worse position. But, unfortunately, the member for Mississauga–Malton's answer to the member from Oshawa

didn't even contain the words "student" or "student loan," so I still don't understand what the member's thoughts are on why the government would want to remove provisions for notice of default. So perhaps the member could actually clarify why the government wants to remove those provisions.

Mr. Deepak Anand: Thanks to the member opposite for that question. Talking about our youth, I have two children, and I know how important it is for our youth to have an education. Madam Speaker, if you remember, that's what our government did: We reduced tuition fees by 10%. And we are making sure we are investing in the future of our youth by investing \$75 million into the Skills Development Fund. In addition, we are making—another \$244 million to the capital stream, wherein the institutions can come together and build training facilities for our youth. By providing them the tools to learn a new skill set, they can not only get a six-figure salary, they can give back to Ontario and build a better, stronger Ontario.

So, Madam Speaker, I want to encourage everyone to go read in Building a Strong Ontario Together how our government is supporting a bigger, a better, a stronger Ontario.

1750

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

Mrs. Jennifer (Jennie) Stevens: It's always a pleasure to rise in this chamber on behalf of the residents of St. Catharines. I know my mother is tuning in, so I'm going to say: Hi, Mom. Hope you're enjoying your dinner.

While I recognize that I rise in this chamber to debate the legislation and the fall economic statement that frames the priorities of this government, I must admit that I find it puzzling how it fully missed the opportunity to address the affordability crisis in this province of Ontario.

I applaud the opening words of my colleague the member from Kitchener that asked the important questions about who this government actually spoke to. Who was consulted? Whose needs are being met when drafting a plan and a direction for this province? I can tell you that it really is not that difficult to find or hear the stories about the affordability crisis here in Ontario. You cannot throw a stone without hitting someone who is feeling the affordability crisis right now. Just ask the burnt-out nurse to understand what is at stake; or the young family being pushed out and pushed to the brink in the rental market; or those being gouged so much on food that they have to rely on food banks; or families without child care spots; with parents heartbreakingly watching their children stuck on endless waiting lists for mental health. Or just go to the hospital emergency rooms or talk to someone in the intimate partner violence sector calling out for help.

This is just it, Speaker. The single underlying issue that is at the heart of members in my community of St. Catharines—frankly, across this whole province—is the deepening affordability crisis. It is a part of every conversation in the coffee shops, community centres, seniors homes and living rooms.

We are at a juncture where the cost of living has not risen—it has soared to unprecedented heights, leaving a trail of financial insecurity and despair. In Niagara, this crisis is not just numbers on paper, it is the story of young families unable to afford their first homes, of seniors burdened by skyrocketing rents, of students choosing between education and basic necessities.

I was born and raised in St. Catharines. Niagara is my home, and yet I recognize that I am fortunate to have chosen to stay in the community I grew up in because I could afford that home. This is the crux of the issue with housing right now. I need the government to talk to the parents in the neighbourhoods of Fitzgerald, Grantham, Port Dalhousie. We've got Facer Street, Merritton, Glenridge, Port Dalhousie and Port Weller. They are heartbroken at the prospect that without personal and significant help to buy a home, their children are looking at housing markets that they'll never, ever be able to afford. The opportunity to choose to stay in the community they grew up in—near your family, your loved ones—is being taken away. Yet this crucial issue finds little more than a passing mention in this legislation before us.

Speaker, let me tell you the housing story in Niagara and then contrast it with the actions of our provincial government. This government took office in 2018; the average house price in Niagara was \$397,000. Today, it is just under \$700,000. The average rent for a one-bedroom when this government took office in 2018 was \$822; today, it has skyrocketed to \$1,600. In five years, the cost of housing, to buy or rent, has increased almost 100%. In that same time period, median after-tax income for families increased by 10.2%. Housing prices have increased at 10 times the rate of income in Ontario. That is the story of affordability in Niagara. It's one where we all need solutions.

Speaker, this fall statement had an opportunity to set it right. Instead, it is more of the same. This is the Conservative record on housing in Ontario. It started five years ago, when Ontario was already in a housing crisis—a serious issue unaddressed, missed chances for real actions, repeating past mistakes in housing.

Five years ago, in the midst of a housing crisis, the Conservative legacy in Ontario began: In 2018, rent control abolished; in 2019, eviction laws relaxed amidst a global crisis. Skip to 2022: No moves for affordable housing until December, six months before an election—imagine that—a housing affordability task force populated by the elite real estate agents, bankers and CEOs. Despite task force advice, the greenbelt is sold off to insiders. In 2023, new legislation downloaded costs to municipalities—no public housing, no grants for non-profits, but yes to private developer incentives. Promises unmet, realities twisted.

We are in a housing crisis, and one where at every juncture the government has made affordability worse. This statement could have included solutions like my legislation with my colleague from University–Rosedale on strengthening the rules for renovations or other solutions my caucus has proposed: stop abusing AGIs, staff the LTB

properly, bring back rent control and—thanks to my colleague from London—a plan for Ontario to start building affordable housing again, because it really is time.

Housing is a fundamental human need. It has become a luxury in our region. Renters in St. Catharines and beyond are facing evictions, uncontrolled rent hikes. Madam Speaker, I laid out the numbers already in Niagara. This legislative body must act to reintroduce rent control and provide immediate relief to these families.

In fact, I recently hosted a round table on housing in Niagara. Its attendees find it baffling why the government would remove rent control, just flat out setting an explosion to affordability in the rental market. Who are we trying to help in Ontario when we tackle housing if it's not making sure young families get a leg up and seniors are not exploited?

This fall economic statement fixed none of the problems that were there before. Some of those problems have been created by this government.

I was proud to table legislation alongside my colleague from Rosedale—a strong, solution-based advocate for housing. To that, we should all count ourselves fortunate to have her as our colleague and have her in this chamber. We addressed renovations and ensuring seniors are not pushed out of their homes unfairly and young families weren't gouged. None of those measures—real solutions, ones that will directly affect affordability issues, protecting our seniors from being bullied in the housing market—are in this fall economic statement.

Speaker, public policy introduced in this chamber makes fundamental differences in the lives of people in Ontario. We all know this. When we make changes that address affordability in a positive way, we see the examples in our communities. However—I'm going to hang on this point for a moment—when we create public policy that actively damages affordability for families and residents in our community, it is our duty to go back and fix that.

Speaker, it is with deep sadness that I have to provide a very sad Niagara story, the story of 177 Russell Avenue—an example of what the Conservatives' public policy means—

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly): My apologies to the member from St. Catharines, but it is now 6 o'clock.

Second reading debate deemed adjourned.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' PUBLIC BUSINESS

EPILEPSY

Ms. Natalie Pierre: I move that, in the opinion of this House, the Ministry of Education should call upon Ontario school boards to implement a comprehensive epilepsy policy, which includes training to teachers and staff on the administration of emergency epilepsy medication to stu-

dents having an epileptic seizure, promoting a safe and healthy learning environment.

1800

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

Ms. Natalie Pierre: Good evening. I rise today to discuss my motion calling for Ontario school boards to implement a comprehensive epilepsy policy, which includes training teachers and school staff on the administration of emergency epilepsy medication to students having an epileptic seizure, promoting a safe and healthy learning environment.

Before I begin my remarks, I would like to welcome Monica Diaz-Greco and Daniel Greco, who are here in the members' gallery, along with board members from Epilepsy Toronto and representatives from the Hospital for Sick Children. It is because of their hard work and dedication that I rise to speak about this. I'd also like to thank Minister Michael Ford's office for bringing this important issue forward.

Earlier this year, I had the honour of meeting Monica and Daniel, and speaking with them about their lovely daughter Emma. In 2017, after many tests and trips to SickKids, Emma was diagnosed with epilepsy. Emma is now nine years old and is attending school, just like other children her age. However, unlike most students in her class, Emma carries emergency epilepsy medication in her backpack.

The dose in Emma's backpack is available and can be accessed during the after-school program. There is a separate supply of her medication that is kept in the school office for use, if needed, during regular school hours. Should Emma ever experience a seizure during class, Emma's teacher would call down to the school office and have an administrator—either a principal or a vice-principal, if the school had a vice-principal—retrieve the medication from the office and bring it to Emma's classroom and the principal would administer the emergency medication.

Earlier this year, Emma's grade 3 class was going on a field trip to a local conservation area. Emma's paperwork and safety plan were signed and submitted well in advance of the trip. The night before the school trip, late in the evening, Emma's parents, Monica and Daniel, were called by the school principal. They were told that Emma's teacher was not comfortable with Emma participating in the field trip because the teacher was uncomfortable with the possibility of having to administer emergency epilepsy medication.

Speaker, this is indeed unfortunate, because students should be able to attend field trips and take part in all school activities if it is within their capacity. Fortunately, Monica and Daniel spoke up and insisted that the principal find a way for Emma to attend the class trip. Ultimately, the school was able to find an educational assistant that was trained on how to administer the emergency medication and who was willing to accompany Emma on the school trip.

Could you imagine the feeling of disappointment that Emma, or any child, would feel if they weren't allowed to go on a school trip with their friends and classmates? The feeling of missing out on an educational experience, not being able to contribute to class discussions regarding the field trip, not to mention the feeling of being different, the hurt and frustration, and that's on top of the stigma already associated with having epilepsy.

Speaker, I would not want to be in the position of a parent who would have to tell their child that they can't attend a school trip with their friends out of fear that no one would be able to help them if they were to have a seizure. As a parent I would be just as upset as Emma's parents were if I received a call late at night advising that my child wouldn't be able to attend a school activity the next day. Emma had been held back because of a condition she has no power over.

It may come as a surprise to many of you that epilepsy affects one in 100 people, and yet, still, there is so much stigma surrounding it. The best way to destigmatize a subject and bring awareness to it is to be educated. If Emma's teacher was properly trained on how to administer emergency epilepsy medication, there wouldn't have been an issue with Emma attending the field trip.

The health and well-being of students continues to be a priority for our government, and just because a student has epilepsy, they shouldn't be excluded from experiencing school activities to the fullest. Policy and program memorandum 161 in the Ministry of Education identifies epilepsy as one of four prevalent medical conditions. The expectation from the Ministry of Education is that all school boards should develop and maintain a policy to support students with or at risk for named conditions—those conditions are asthma, anaphylaxis, diabetes and epilepsy.

Out of the four identified conditions in PPM 161, two of them have laws which support the administration of life-saving medication. Sabrina's Law and Ryan's Law allow students to carry medication with them and allow for school employees to deliver medication to students in the event of an emergency. Under Sabrina's Law and Ryan's Law, school board employees are trained to administer EpiPens and puffers in an emergency. Unfortunately, Speaker, training came too late for Ryan and for Sabrina, but we will not allow that to happen to Emma or any other child in school that lives with epilepsy.

Unlike students who need a puffer or an EpiPen, Emma is not permitted to carry her medication with her. Her epilepsy medication is in the office. If she or any other student with epilepsy were to have a seizure, once again, the teacher has to call the office and wait for a principal or a vice-principal—if there is one at that school—to come and administer the medication. Now, could you imagine what could happen to a child if an administrator was not available, or not available in time? What could happen to a child if they didn't receive their medication on time or if they had to wait for an ambulance because there was no administrator available? Irreversible damage, Speaker, or in more extreme cases, loss of life

Speaker, we can prevent loss. We do not and should not have to wait for a student to die to train staff and train teachers on how to administer emergency medication.

I want to go back briefly to Emma's field trip. Another reason that was given for Emma not to attend the trip was because emergency services would not be able to get to Emma fast enough if she were to have a seizure. That would have also been true for any other student with another prevalent condition, like asthma or severe allergies. However, because all school board staff, including teachers, are trained to administer these medications, those students are allowed and permitted to attend the school field trips.

Unlike an EpiPen, administering medication to a student having a seizure is not invasive. It's simply a small, dissolvable tablet or pill inserted inside the cheek. There is no risk of an overdose with standard medications. The worst that could happen with the medication is the student would be sleepy. Personally, I would much rather a student feel drowsy than have them rushed to a hospital because there wasn't someone available to give them the medication they needed.

Speaker, epilepsy is a prevalent medical condition outlined in PPM 161, and our school boards need to make sure our students are safe. Parents should feel confident when they send their children to school.

Monica and Daniel have done the right things. They've made sure that Emma has a safety plan in place at school, with instructions. However, if a teacher or staff member is not comfortable administering emergency medication because they haven't received training, then a child's life could be in danger. School boards need a comprehensive plan to train and educate staff on the signs of epilepsy and how to administer epilepsy medication to a student or even a colleague who may have epilepsy—because one in 100 Canadians have epilepsy, and that is a staggering number.

1810

Epilepsy is a condition that is characterized by recurring seizures, with most new cases occurring in young children. That's why it's so important for school boards to train their staff and to have a comprehensive plan that is actionable so that in the event a student has a seizure, any staff member—a teacher, a principal, a custodian or office staff member—can administer emergency medication to a student with confidence. This confidence could have positive impacts on the mental health and well-being of both teachers and students, empowering them with the knowledge to prevent unnecessary harm that may occur if a student doesn't receive the medication they need.

Students have a right to enjoy a school year filled with field trips, school activities and experiences. We all know participation in experiential learning is an important part of the educational experience, and it should not be hindered by a medical condition that can be treated on site, like other common conditions.

The health and well-being of students in Ontario is a priority and it is essential that students, parents, teachers and staff are confident in their ability to keep children safe

so they can learn and enjoy school, knowing they are safe and supported in their school environment.

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

M^{me} France Gélinas: Thank you to the member for her presentation. The motion that she has brought forward, I want to read into the record: "That, in the opinion of this House, the Ministry of Education should call upon Ontario school boards to implement a comprehensive epilepsy policy, which includes training to teachers and staff on the administration of emergency epilepsy medication to students having an epileptic seizure, promoting a safe and healthy learning environment." I can assure you that the NDP will be voting in favour of this motion, and we will be working really hard to make sure this motion becomes a reality—the sooner, the better.

I have been in this House for 16 years. I was here in 2015 when the then-executive director of Epilepsy Ontario, Paul Raymond, came to Queen's Park. Do you know what the number one ask of Epilepsy Ontario back on October 27, 2015, when they came to Queen's Park was? I'll read it to you: "Protection for students with epilepsy in Ontario schools. Epilepsy Ontario would like to continue our work with the Ministries of Education and Health and Long-Term Care and our community partners to ensure that students with epilepsy are safe while at school and have the opportunity to be part of Ontario's education success story." Unfortunately, none of that happened, but I am hopeful that today things will change for the better.

We have over 100,000 people in Ontario, right here, right now, who live with epilepsy. For 30% of them, they do not have effective seizure control. While recurrent seizures are the most obvious effect of epilepsy, epilepsy can impact all parts of a person's life, including their family, including their education, including their employment, including their mental health. It is also associated with other conditions. We have, as legislators in this House, the opportunity to change all of this. The care that a person needs if they happen to have a seizure is something that all of us can learn to do.

There are 14 agencies that exist in Ontario that do just that: They offer people training. They offer training to school boards, to schools, to any type of agencies, to workplaces, to gyms, to anywhere where people gather. Those agencies have not seen stable funding from this government since they were elected. They used to get a little bit of money from the provincial government so that they could make that training available to any group who requested it. They were very active in my area of the province. I represent the riding of Nickel Belt which is a big northern riding in eastern Ontario, and we had an epilepsy group that was quite active. They went to our different schools. They went to seniors group. They went to the 4H and all sorts of groups to teach.

And once you've taken the teaching and you know a little bit more about epilepsy, it makes for a better community. Unfortunately, Speaker, there's still a lot of stigma against people that have epilepsy. There are a lot of

people that don't know—if they see somebody having a seizure they will get scared and run away, not because they're bad people just because they don't know what to do. We can change all of that with the motion that the member brings forward. We can make sure that everybody that works within our schools is ready and able to help every single child who may need their help. I would add that the bus driver should also know. I would add that anybody that comes into contact with children, whether they work in a daycare or they work in a playground or they offer swimming lessons or whatever else, that training should be available to them.

That means that this government has to fund not only our school boards to be able to get that training but fund those 14 agencies that exist right here, right now, in Ontario that have the knowledge that are asking this government for, really, a little bit of money so that they can teach all of us so that as we all learn a little bit more about epilepsy, we realize that they are people like you and I. There are people who, yes, have an issue, but that doesn't define them. It just means that we need to know and we need to be ready to help them when they find themselves in times of need. The rest of the time, they are human beings who want to be loved and want to be a part of our community and want to be active and want to be part of our lives, just like everybody else.

So I don't know if I'm assuming our visitors all know Dr. Carter Snead. He's the staff neurologist at the Hospital for Sick Children right here in Toronto. He wrote to the Minister of Health:

“Physicians do not have the capacity to deliver the 60- to 90-minute education session after diagnosis and the information is most appropriately delivered in the community. However, unlike other chronic diseases, community-based education and support programs have not been integrated into Ontario's health care system.

“Across Ontario, 14 community epilepsy agencies do the same work as many health charities that receive government funding, providing this key information to patients, families and the community about how to manage the situation, recognize when a situation is, and is not an emergency, and how to respond appropriately. Larger agencies provide support groups and first-line mental health assistance through counselling and group programs.

“These agencies are in a constantly precarious financial situation, relying on charitable fundraising efforts and short-term grants. Even prior to the COVID-19 outbreak, agencies were chronically under-resourced, and many parts of the province do not have a local agency serving their community.

“These agencies are in a constantly precarious financial situation, relying on charitable fundraising efforts and short-term grants. Even prior to the COVID-19 outbreak, agencies were chronically under-resourced, and many parts of the province do not have a local agency serving their community. The economic and social impact ... continues to constrain their capacity to fundraise. Many agencies have been forced to lay off staff just as others report an increased demand for services. There is a very

real risk that services could be lost in” many “parts of the province.”

1820

He goes on to advocate for this government to do the right thing, fund those agencies that know how to offer the programs, the teaching. The teaching that we want to happen in our schools is not just going to happen out of the sky. There are epilepsy agencies right here, right now in Ontario that have the knowledge, that have the skills, that are more than willing to go into each and every one of our schools where there's a child at risk and do the training—do the training for the sports teams, for the people who drive the buses; do the training for everyone, because we can all learn, we can all help. But this will only happen if this government answers the requests for that little, wee bit of funding that will change the lives of thousands of children who have epilepsy, and thousands more who live with it for the rest of their lives.

I will add to this that there are new, effective seizure control treatments that exist. Some of them are available in other provinces but are not available in Ontario. Why not make those treatments available to all? If you have a disease such as epilepsy, if you are still facing seizures and there are treatments available, those treatments should be available to the people of Ontario, like they are available to the people of Alberta, where the government decided to fund those services and those therapies. Why is it that this government is not willing to help?

And then they also ask to ensure funding for a strategy rollout, so that we make sure that—the government has, in the past, said that they wanted a strategy to deal with epilepsy. They have said that they would put a certain amount of money towards that strategy. None of that has taken place. We don't have a group working on that strategy. We don't have money to support any of that.

So I thank the member for bringing this forward. This is something that I hope all of us vote in favour of. We can help children have normal lives. We can help children make sure that they go on school trips, just like all of us wanted to do when we were kids, and just like our kids and grandkids want to do. They want to be part of the fun that happens within our education system. I know that the school trips also serve a role in teaching and education, but they can be a lot of fun too. They can be an opportunity to create new friendships and discover new things—all of this must be available to every child, and that means children who have epilepsy, and that will happen when this government funds agencies that do the teaching and make sure that every school board gets that teaching.

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

M^{me} Dawn Gallagher Murphy: I am pleased to speak this evening on my colleague's private member's motion number 68.

Based on data released in fall 2023 for the Canadian Chronic Disease Surveillance System in Ontario, there were over 150,000 individuals living with epilepsy, with 9,100 new cases reported during 2020-21. For those 19 years of age and under, over 20,000 were living with the

disease, with over 2,000 newly diagnosed during the year. The Ministry of Education's policy and program memorandum 161 identifies epilepsy as one of four prevalent medical conditions. It states that the Ministry of Education expects all school boards to develop and maintain a policy to support students with or at risk of anaphylaxis, asthma, diabetes and epilepsy. My colleague has previously mentioned about the two of the four identified medical conditions that have laws that support the administration of the life-saving medication.

But in the case of epilepsy, medication is kept in the office and students are not able to carry medications on their person. If a student were to have a seizure, they would need to wait for an administrator to come and administer the medication. If there is no one available to provide medication, irreversible damage or even death could occur. There is no risk of overdose with standard epilepsy medication. It is a small, dissolvable pill inserted in the inside of the cheek. One in 100 people live with epilepsy, and to ensure students are safe at school, all school board employees should be trained on emergency administration of medication to students experiencing an epileptic seizure.

We heard from the member from Burlington about the case concerning Emma Greco. I would like to share some feedback I received from Claudia Cozza, who is the executive director of Epilepsy York Region. At the time when I reached out to Ms. Cozza regarding this motion, she noted, "It is quite remarkable how the timing of things fall into place. I received your email yesterday on my way home from a high school in Aurora where I had the opportunity to provide needed education to staff on seizure safety and the administration of emergency medication. This came after a student had a seizure three weeks ago and the response from staff regarding administering the emergency medication was met with much confusion and hesitation." Ms. Cozza continues to note that, "In York region, we have many schools that are refusing to administer emergency medication, denying students the opportunity to participate in field trips, and of course, not having a proper emergency seizure plan in place to allow them to feel safe and included. Allowing for a mandatory education in school will provide an immense sense of uniformity."

Speaker, I know that I am very proud to support this motion 68 and, from what I hear, the members of the opposition will be supporting it, so that's wonderful news. I'd like to thank the member from Burlington for bringing this motion forward.

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

Mr. Logan Kanapathi: I am happy to rise today and talk about supporting the wonderful motion to implement a comprehensive epilepsy policy for school boards across Ontario. Thank you to my colleague the member from Burlington for your passion and dedication in bringing this motion to this House. Every student deserves to feel safe and included in their school environment, regardless of their medical condition. This policy would ensure that

school board employees, including teachers and staff, receive regular training on the administration of emergency epilepsy medication to a student experiencing an epileptic seizure.

Speaker, I was incredibly touched by the story of Monica and Daniel Greco and their daughter, Emma Greco, a little girl who was diagnosed with infantile spasms in 2014, when she was just seven months old. Infantile spasms is a rare but serious form of epilepsy that can lead to developmental problems and other forms of seizures later in life. Her parents are truly fighters for those who are suffering from epilepsy. Monica and Daniel Greco founded Emma IS, a non-profit organization dedicated to raising awareness and donations from the community to help fund research projects at SickKids to combat infantile spasms. They have raised well over \$30,000 to date, to help the medical community and the wonderful doctors at SickKids to fight this rare form of epilepsy.

1830

Speaker, epilepsy doesn't just affect a child's physical, mental and emotional quality of life, it also impacts their day-to-day life, both inside and outside of school.

For example, last March, Emma's grade 3 class was scheduled to attend a field trip to a conservation area to learn about nature and the outdoors. Emma's parents did their due diligence. They signed the paperwork and made sure there was a safety plan in place well in advance, in case anything should go wrong. Unfortunately, the day before the field trip, Emma's parents received a phone call from the principal informing them that Emma couldn't attend the field trip because the teacher didn't feel comfortable taking her due to the possibility of a seizure and the need to administer Emma's emergency medication.

No parent wants to be told that their child cannot attend a field trip or made to feel different because of a medical condition that is completely outside their control.

Our government is dedicated to a fully accessible, safe and healthy learning environment for every student, no matter their medical condition. We must work together to implement the necessary changes to ensure that children like Emma feel included at school.

In Ontario, Sabrina's Law and Ryan's Law require that all school boards must have policies to support students at risk for anaphylaxis and students with asthma. A similar law doesn't exist for students with epilepsy.

Today, teachers and school staff receive regular training and may administer emergency medications to a student in case of an asthma attack or anaphylaxis—but not for epileptic students like Emma. This needs to change.

Like with Sabrina's Law and Ryan's Law, I fully support this motion that would ensure that students with epilepsy, like Emma Greco, are treated with the same dignity and respect that students with asthma and anaphylaxis are.

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

Mr. Nolan Quinn: It is with great pleasure that I rise today in support of the motion brought forward by the member from Burlington. The safety and well-being of students

is something that is near and dear to my heart, as I have three young children of my own, and my wife is a teacher of elementary-aged students.

This motion brought forth by the member from Burlington calls upon Ontario school boards to implement a comprehensive epilepsy policy, which would also include training for teachers and staff on the administration of emergency epilepsy medication to students experiencing an epileptic seizure.

Epilepsy is a lot more common than one might think. In Canada, about one in 100 people are living with epilepsy. It's no surprise, then, that epilepsy has been identified through policy and program memorandum 161 as one of the four prevalent medical conditions, with the other three being anaphylaxis, diabetes and asthma. PPM 161 expects that all school boards develop and maintain a policy that supports students with or at risk of anaphylaxis, asthma, diabetes and epilepsy; so far, only two have legislation that supports the administration of their respective life-saving medications.

Through Sabrina's Law, students can carry medication and school board employees are regularly trained on EpiPen usage. Similarly, through Ryan's Law, students with asthma are allowed to carry their puffers with them in school. As a result of these laws, students can be protected from both asthmatic attacks and events of anaphylaxis because both the students and staff can be properly equipped with the right medications.

With epilepsy, it's a little bit different. Medication is kept in the office and students are not able to carry their medications with them. In the event of a seizure, the student would need to wait for an administrator, which would be either the principal or vice-principal, to come and administer the medication—and being that my wife is a teacher, I'm well aware that the principals are usually very busy, so there could be some challenges to be able to administer that. If no one is available to provide the medication, irreversible damage or even death could occur.

Typically, epilepsy medication is a small, dissolvable pill inserted on the inside of the cheek and there is no risk of overdose from the use of this medication.

We need to ensure that all students are safe at school, especially students living with epilepsy. All school board employees should be trained on emergency administration of medication to students experiencing an epileptic cluster, or seizure.

Additionally, students with epilepsy may not receive the same opportunities when compared to other students. Some can be excluded from field trips or extracurricular activities due to educators not knowing how to identify if a student is having a seizure or how to administer the medication.

This was the case with Monica and Daniel Greco's daughter Emma, who was excluded from a field trip because her teacher was uncomfortable administering Emma's medication. Having three children of my own, I would know that would be devastating, to miss a field trip, especially coming out of the pandemic with the lack of socializing that my children did. It would really set my daughter

back. She would feel isolated and I know that would have lasting effects.

This is a clear form of discrimination against Emma and other students living with epilepsy. Emma must stay behind while her classmates get to go out and have fun on a field trip. She is forced to miss out on a great learning experience and must also bear social ramifications, as she misses an opportunity to socialize with her peers. I proudly support my colleague from Burlington with motion 68.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly): The member from Burlington has two minutes for a reply.

Ms. Natalie Pierre: Thank you to my colleagues the members from Newmarket–Aurora, Markham–Thornhill and Stormont–Dundas–South Glengarry for their thoughtful comments and support for my motion. I would also like to thank the Minister of Education and his team for all of the support and assistance they have provided.

I'm a huge supporter of advocating for children and students. As I mentioned in my remarks earlier this evening, no child should miss an opportunity to learn and have fun with their classmates during school activities. We need to be able to send our children to school knowing they will be fully supported and that educators and school staff are confident in their ability not only to educate our children but to keep them safe in an emergency, like an epileptic seizure.

Training and educating all school board staff can help save lives, the lives of students or even other staff members who live with epilepsy. Having a comprehensive epilepsy policy will ensure that all staff members can identify if a student is having a seizure and they will know how to administer emergency medication. Children with epilepsy, like Emma, deserve to go on field trips with their classmates without having to worry if their teacher feels comfortable helping them if a seizure were to occur.

Thank you again to Monica and Daniel Greco—you are an inspiration—for sharing your story with me so that we may be able to support students with epilepsy for generations to come.

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

Ms. Pierre has moved private member's notice of motion number 68. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? I declare the motion carried.

Motion agreed to.

ADJOURNMENT DEBATE

ACCESS TO JUSTICE

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly): The member for Toronto Centre has given notice of dissatisfaction with the answer to a question given by the Attorney General. The member has up to five minutes to debate the matter, and the minister or parliamentary assistant may reply for up to five minutes.

I recognize the member from Toronto Centre.

MPP Kristyn Wong-Tam: I am happy to rise tonight to speak to, specifically, a question I'd asked the Attorney General earlier this morning. The answer was, unfortunately, very unsatisfactory for a host of reasons.

My question to the minister at that time was specifically around the court backlogs and why we are not seeing adequate investments to ensure that the courts are adequately staffed so that the administration of justice can happen in a timely fashion.

The minister cited that he had been making some one-time announcements for funding, but he did not necessarily talk about the \$80 million that has been slashed as a base funding cut to his ministry in the fall economic statement. It just so happens to be one of the only ministries that's seen such a base funding cut.

1840

We are seeing survivors and victims in Ontario all hurting. It takes an incredible amount of strength and bravery to be able to face your alleged abuser and rapist in court, and it's quite gut-wrenching for these individuals to have to relive the trauma as they prepare for that day in court, and they hope that they have it. Being forced to see your abuser and your rapist and your predator walk free because the administration of court and justice is so slow is only a second time of punishment.

I want to be able to highlight a few things because it's very important and this is a very serious issue that I'm quite gripped with. We have now seen cases thrown out in Ontario courts because there has been a delay in justice. We've seen assailants who have sexually assaulted minors who have been able to walk free from the new courthouse, just a few hundred metres from here, close to city hall, because they haven't had their day in court. Of course, there is a process that has to take place because we all recognize that everybody should have their day in court, but it takes a long time for someone to actually mount a case. That means that Toronto police, or any police outfit, has to go off and do the investigation. There has to be enough evidence collected, oftentimes from the body of the individual, which is now the active crime scene, to then be able to file that police report, and then they have to be able to speak to a number of first responders, then they have to be prepped for trial. All of that has a harrowing effect on the person who has been violated.

We are seeing predators, rapists, people who have engaged in violent sexual crime walk. I cannot tell you how absolutely maddening it is to learn that we have spent almost \$1 billion on a brand new court to amalgamate six different courts in the city of Toronto on behalf of Ontario, and those courts aren't open—because four of the 12 courtrooms on March 23 were sitting dark. And when they were open, about 15 minutes of court time was actually allocated to the particular sexual assault that I just mentioned. The very next day, on March 24, five of the 12 courtrooms were actually closed, and then the matter was only addressed for one hour.

The individuals that are affected most deeply and profoundly are the ones who have been assaulted, and their

families and their communities are providing those supports. The justices are actually declaring, quite openly, quite loudly, with a lot of dissatisfaction on how things are being managed in Ontario's court system. The justices are literally laying the blame at the feet of this government because there have not been adequate staff provided to those courts.

So when I ask the Attorney General a serious question affecting people's dignity, trying to get their day in court, and I'm hearing about this one-time funding for a little bit of COVID recovery and perhaps \$72 million to clear some of the criminal backlog, and within the same time, simultaneously, we've seen this government cut \$80 million—\$80 million—of base core funding from the Ministry of the Attorney General, I can't take this seriously. It is an absolute insult to those survivors. It's an absolute insult to their families, to their communities. It's a waste of police resources. It's a waste of court time. Everyone is frustrated. They want solutions, and they're ready to work to get those things done. So I need to have answers. We all need to have answers, because you cannot get smart on crime unless you get smart on fixing the courts first.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly): Response?

Mr. Brian Saunderson: It's a pleasure to rise tonight on this important topic that affects Ontarians interacting with our justice system across this great province. As both a lawyer and a former mayor, I know how important the administration of justice is for Ontarians, whether it is in downtown Toronto, rural Ontario or communities like my own in Simcoe–Grey.

The public needs to know that courts are and continue to function for the administration of justice. This is critical to ensure that justice is being delivered, that victims are being protected, that offenders are being held accountable and that justice is being seen to be done.

In terms of the member's questions related to funding, I am quite happy to provide some clarification on this. To be very clear, the fall economic statement is not a complete or accurate summary of the Ministry of the Attorney General's expenses. The fall economic statement provides an important update to our government's plan to build this province while examining our economic outlook and fiscal situation now and into the future. I would refer the MPP opposite, as well as all MPPs, to the Ministry of the Attorney General's general estimates for the 2023 year for a more complete picture of the government's spending. That is where the ministry's spending is outlined in detail. I know my friend opposite sits on the justice policy committee, and we heard recently from the Attorney General on his estimates for this upcoming year.

Our government recognizes that court staffing shortages are a serious issue. As a member of this government and as the PA to the Attorney General, I cannot comment on any specific court cases, judicial decisions or decisions made by crown attorneys in any particular matter. What I can say is that court staff play an essential role in the administration of justice, and without them, court hearings cannot proceed, matters cannot be scheduled and legal

documents cannot be filed, impacting the lives of everyone who needs access to the justice system.

This government is working to make sure that courts remain open and available to ensure that justice is delivered for anyone involved in the justice system, regardless of where they are in the province. We are making significant investments to ensure that we have sufficient staff to support courthouses, and this includes increasing the number of full-time court staff across the province through almost \$6 million in additional funding.

Following discussions between the Ministry of Attorney General and justice stakeholders, we are offering full-time employment opportunities to existing on-call court and client representatives. We are also recruiting new permanent full-time staff. These new permanent staff will help with the administration of justice and help to ensure that our courthouses and courtrooms are functioning at full capacity across the province. This builds on our previous \$72-million criminal court backlog strategy and our March 23 compensation increases for over 1,500 of our full-time court staff. To be clear, this includes both court and client representatives, and both do important work, and valued work, in supporting our justice system.

We will continue to prioritize the staffing of courtrooms and work closely with judicial officials to ensure that matters can proceed as scheduled, and we will continue to recruit and on-board new staff to ensure victims have access to justice and that offenders are held accountable.

As the Attorney General said in this House earlier today, “I will reiterate that any lost trial and any closed courtroom are not acceptable to this government.” I agree with those sentiments, and I am quite sure that members throughout this House, on either side of the floor, agree with it as well. And this government, under Premier Ford, is committing to making this happen. That is why we are making the necessary investments while working with our justice partners to ensure that our system works, that victims’ voices are heard and that offenders are held accountable.

I would hope that it is clear that this government, under the leadership of Premier Ford, has been very strong on promoting public safety in our province. Whether it is auto theft, bail reform, human trafficking or intimate partner violence, keeping Ontarians safe is one of the priorities of this government.

While we are facing staffing shortages, like all jurisdictions in Canada and around the world, we are working to address those shortages. The common themes across our jurisdictions that make staffing issues so complex include attraction and retention in today’s challenging labour market and staffing shortages, resulting in constant turnover and burnout. That is why this ministry is continuing to review and update approaches to recruiting new staff, reviewing current training models to identify areas for improvement and streamlining processes.

Madam Speaker, this government is committed to making the investments and necessary changes needed to make this goal of providing justice and access to justice for all Ontarians—

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Thank you.

There being no further matters to debate, pursuant to standing order 36(c), I now call orders of the day.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

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

Resuming the debate adjourned on November 15, 2023, on the motion for second reading of the following bill:

Bill 146, An Act to implement Budget measures and to enact and amend various statutes / *Projet de loi 146, Loi visant à mettre en oeuvre les mesures budgétaires et à édicter et à modifier diverses lois.*

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): I recognize the member from St. Catharines.

1850

Mrs. Jennifer (Jennie) Stevens: It is with deep sadness that I have to provide a very sad Niagara story: the story of 177 Russell Avenue, an example of what Conservatives’ public policy means for affordability.

In 2020, medium-priced units were built. People moved in. They called it home. Fast-forward to last year: a crushing 20% rent hike; tenants unite, request to negotiate. Their ask? A fairer increase. The aftermath? Original renters forced out; three staring down eviction hearings right now. Of 16 units, five stand empty. Why? Likely a tactic for the investor to try to refinance with the bank; they know it makes them look more valuable. This is your legacy in Ontario: an investor-tenant dynamic, predatory at its core.

Exploitation and price gouging are our community’s reality—outside investors that do not pay taxes, that do not create jobs or buy goods in Niagara—and that displaces residents. It could have been the turning point, a chance to right wrongs amidst soaring costs, yet this government stands idly by policies, like this one, that wreak havoc in our communities. What do we need? Housing policies that foster affordability, not aggravate it.

These units on Russell Avenue were originally rented for \$2,200, two years ago. Today, they are rented for \$3,000. This is not prioritizing affordability. It’s not prioritizing affordability, what it’s doing is prioritizing the pockets of wealthy investors—people with influence and donors over regular people.

We have consistently advocated for measures to stabilize the housing market and protect tenants, yet this government’s response has been tepid at the best. The lack of urgency in addressing this crisis in the proposed bill is not just disappointing, it is a disservice to the people of Ontario.

Madam Speaker, Ontario’s health care system—once the pride of our province—is now teetering on the edge of collapsing. The situation in Niagara mirrors the provincial

trend: an acute shortage of health care professionals, over-stretched facilities and mounting wait times.

The government's approach, as reflecting in this bill, is asking to apply a Band-Aid to a gaping wound. It is a continuation of a disturbing history of ignoring the advice of front-line staff and experts to do what is best for the wealthy few. This was an opportunity to invest in public health care and repeal the for-profit health care plans like Bill 60. Instead, time and time again, we see the priorities of this government are not the priorities of the front-line nurses; the mothers worried about getting their sons and their daughters mental health care; the son worried about their grandparents getting through the ER or waiting endlessly for surgeries. Instead, it was an excuse to privatize, not invest. In return, we see a marginal increase in health care spending. It does little to address the systemic issues plaguing our system, while the government holds back billions and billions in shortfalls each year for health spending.

Madam Speaker, only last week, when experts actually analyzed the government's plan like the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives did, they found the privatization of some services is being considered in provinces like Ontario actually did the opposite. "Expanded outsourcing is likely to worsen public hospital staffing shortages that causes longer waits." The problems of creating more for-profit health care include higher costs, less staff in the public system, as well as upselling, self-referrals and unnecessary procedures. Why do we need experts to uncover the truth time and time again, Madam Speaker?

So, I ask again, who does this help? We need a robust investment plan that prioritizes the recruitment of health care professionals, one that addresses the administrative burdens that currently suffocate our health care workers.

The state of education and child care in our province paints a bleak picture of neglect and underfunding. Schools in Niagara, grappling with overcrowded classrooms and a lack of resources, reflect a system in distress.

This bill, while extensive, falls short in addressing the critical need for investment in education infrastructure, support for educators and reduction in class sizes.

Working with the government, we have seen a positive step in the first-time increase in funding for school nutrition programs in Ontario and Niagara in over a year. However, this is definitely not enough. More than that, it should not have taken myself, my colleagues and the sector to ring the alarm bell for children going hungry for any action to happen. It should have already happened. It should be proactive. It is why it was disappointing when the fall economic statement came out without a full commitment to increase permanent funding for our school nutrition programs. Ensuring that children do not go hungry is the minimum obligation the province has when it comes to educating our youth—the minimum.

Food prices are up. Affordability is down. So it's time to step in. It is that simple. And, yet, nothing but crickets on such an important matter—an issue that impacts not just Niagara, but every community of every member of this chamber.

Furthermore, the child care sector, essential for the economic well-being of countless families, receives no significant support in this legislation.

We cannot claim to build a prosperous future while our education and child care systems are on the brink of crisis—actually, in possession of a triage.

As we deliberate on this bill, let us not forget that behind every statistic, there is a human story—stories of Ontarians who are struggling to keep up with the rising costs of living. Our role, as representatives of the people, is to craft legislation that addresses these challenges head-on.

This is a call to action for all of us in this Legislature. Let us work together to pass a bill that truly reflects the needs and aspirations of the people of Ontario—a bill that moves beyond mere rhetoric to provide real solutions to the pressing issues of affordability in housing, health care, education, child care.

Madam Speaker, today we stand at a crossroads, examining the economic and fiscal policies that shape our province's future. The recent budget, reflected in this bill, shows a bewildering increase in the contingency fund, now standing at \$5.4 billion. This move raises critical questions about the government's priorities. Are we truly allocating our resources to address the urgent needs of Ontarians? The projected deficit has quadrupled to \$5.6 billion, yet we see a reluctance to invest meaningfully in sectors that directly impact the citizens in Ontario.

Ontario's agricultural sector, a crucial part of our economy and a lifeline for many in rural communities, has been ignored in this piece of legislation. Our farmers in Niagara and across this province are grappling with soaring costs, yet there is no mention of supports for agriculture or farming in nearly 200 pages of this report. How can this government claim to be addressing affordability when we overlook the very sector that feeds us? We need concrete plans to support our farmers, tackle price gouging and safeguard Ontario's food security, which this government has regrettably neglected.

Madam Speaker, let's talk about the newly proposed \$3-billion Ontario Infrastructure Bank. While innovative financing models can be beneficial, they also pose risks if not managed sensibly. We have seen concerns raised about the effectiveness of similar federal initiatives. I ask for my residents in St. Catharines: What problem is this infrastructure bank solving for Ontario? Is it the best use of our resources, or are we opening doors for private investors to profit off of public projects? There is a lack of clarity and accountability on how this bank will operate and contribute to the public good.

1900

Lastly, let's address the pressing issue of student loans and education funding. This proposed legislation removes provisions for notice of default of student loans. The government approach to education funding with a real per-capita decrease hinders our youth's prospects and weakens our education system's foundation.

Finally, this bill, as it stands, fails to address crucial areas, economical and financial management, agriculture

and food security, infrastructure investments and student loan policies in a way that benefits all Ontarians. We need a government that prioritizes the well-being and the future of its people above all else—

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Thank you. Questions?

M^{me} Dawn Gallagher Murphy: I do have a question for the member opposite. In the fall economic statement, our government is addressing the rising rates of auto theft, and we are fighting auto theft through an investment of \$51 million in new measures to help police identify and dismantle organized crime networks and put those responsible behind bars. The funding also supports first-of-their-kind auto theft prosecution teams to investigate and prosecute criminal organizations that profit from stolen vehicles.

So my question to the member opposite is, will you support us in addressing the rising rates of auto theft and support Bill 146?

Mrs. Jennifer (Jennie) Stevens: If auto theft is on the rise—I read that my car, my Honda Civic, is one of the ones that is actually one of the most stolen cars.

In saying that, we do not see within the fall economic statement anything about affordability, and I think that's what I spoke on. I spoke about people in my community that can't afford their rent, that can't afford to feed their families, that are working two jobs. They're going to nursing homes, they're starting off at the hospital, then they're going to long-term-care homes and they're trying to make a living so that they can feed their families. The main thing that people in Ontario want to know right now: How is this government going to make life affordable and not feeding the mouths of rich wealthy developers?

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Further questions?

Mr. Terence Kernaghan: I'd like to thank the member from St. Catharines for her presentation. It's shocking to think that this government is really cutting to the bone our already underfunded social services and then sitting on a \$5.4-billion slush fund.

I'd like to ask the member: What improvements would you like to make to this fall economic statement? What would you like to see this government spend that \$5.4 billion on to improve the lives of your residents in St. Catharines?

Mrs. Jennifer (Jennie) Stevens: Thank you for the excellent question from my colleague. There's so much that is not in this, I don't even know where to start, that would make a difference to the people in St. Catharines. I think the main thing, as I mentioned in my remarks, is about our health care and our overworked health care workers. At the beginning, I had said if you really want to know what the people of Ontario want to see within the fall economic statement, ask a health care worker who is burnt out and sees the wait-list in her emergency room and people sitting for hours and hours. It's not because they don't want to get to them, it's because they're overworked and they're at the brink of collapsing.

So I think mainly to make sure that we have good-paying jobs so that we can retain our nurses and our doctors

and make sure that our health care is supported. I think that's really important.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Questions?

Hon. Lisa M. Thompson: I heard the member opposite talk about agriculture in her remarks. Clearly, she's just following talking points, key messages from a party that's completely out of touch. Because if she truly knew about the agri-food industry in the province of Ontario, she would know that, earlier this year in Vineland, I joined the federal Minister of Agriculture, and we signed a historic deal for \$1.7 billion to be invested in Ontario's agri-food industry over the next five years.

Just a couple of weeks ago, I was back in the Niagara region announcing a program to introduce new varieties of tender fruit, apples and grapes. I'm not going to say the amount, because I would like to know: If the member chooses to talk about agriculture in her remarks, can she please share with me what she knows about the amazing programming that we've been rolling out all year? We didn't have to wait for the fall economic statement. We are listening to our farmers in this province of Ontario, and we're delivering.

Mrs. Jennifer (Jennie) Stevens: Welcome to Niagara, may I say. Finally, you guys came, after five years. But the agriculture and food security infrastructure investment was not addressed in this fall economic statement.

You can talk to the precious fruitlands that we have in Niagara. You guys almost built homes on them. That's why the RCMP are investigating you. But those are our fine, precious food—our soils that make our grapes, that grow our fruit, to make sure that we have apples, peaches, and a great food supply for the people of Ontario. Because we have people in food bank lines that are lined up—I think our numbers tripled in St. Catharines—for fresh food to be served to them.

So there's nothing about affordability. There's nothing here about how you're going to feed people that are standing—

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Thank you. Further questions?

Ms. Peggy Sattler: I want to congratulate my colleague the member for St. Catharines on her remarks and her focus on the government's lack of attention to the real crisis facing this province, which is one of affordability.

Certainly, we know that housing is one of the biggest financial pressures that people face in my community. The price of a single-family home has almost doubled in the last four to five years. The cost of rent in the city of London has risen 90% over the same period.

So I want to ask the member: Did she see some promising news in this financial statement to address the housing affordability challenges that Ontarians are facing?

Mrs. Jennifer (Jennie) Stevens: Thank you to my colleague. You know, a serious issue was unaddressed within this fall economic statement. It was a missed chance for real actions. All I see is them repeating past mistakes in housing.

We need to make sure that we have laws put in place so that we can have true affordable and sustainable housing

within our communities. I mentioned about 177 Russell Avenue in St. Catharines. It was bought by an investor from out of town. Of course, like I said, these investors don't buy in St. Catharines. They don't pay rent in St. Catharines. They don't even help in any way whatsoever but raise the rent. Rent control was abolished by this government. Eviction laws were relaxed amongst a global crisis. So real solutions are not—

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Thank you. Further questions?

Mr. Mike Harris: It's a pleasure to be able to rise to debate in questions and comments here tonight.

On page 53 of the fall economic statement, it talks about how our government is building hospitals across the province. The member from St. Catharines will know, I'm sure, that there is a new hospital being built in Niagara region that's going to have 156 net new beds. Construction has already started, shovels are in the ground and we're getting this done after many years of neglect from the Liberal government when it came to the region this member resides in.

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I was wondering if she might talk a little bit about what this means to her community. I know it's not directly in St. Catharines, but it certainly plays a big role in Niagara region as a whole.

Mrs. Jennifer (Jennie) Stevens: St. Catharines does have a hospital that was built about 10 years ago that is under the same structure that you're thinking of building a hospital in Niagara Falls. The taxpayers of St. Catharines pay an extra \$68 a year on their property taxes. They can't afford to live anymore, and governments like this one, which is putting pressure on already a brink of a crisis within our health care—you have nurses that are going to two jobs because they're underpaid. There's no affordability mentioned in this bill. That's a really nice, shiny book you've got over there, member, that you keep pulling up and showing and bragging about, but—

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Thank you. Further debate?

Hon. Victor Fedeli: I look forward to having an opportunity—is it for the next 10 minutes? I have 10 minutes that I will speak on this fall economic statement.

We've really seen a change in Ontario since our government was first elected. We saw previous governments, supported by the NDP, that drove jobs away. We lost 300,000 manufacturing workers in Ontario. We saw taxes being raised. We saw an investment climate that had soured on business. We really were shielded from an opportunity to do business around the world.

When we took office, Speaker, we saw this remarkable change, and it all stems from reducing the cost of doing business by \$8 billion a year. You've heard me almost every day in this Legislature talk about that \$8 billion a year, and that includes things like reducing the workplace safety insurance premiums without touching the benefits. That's a reduction of 50%, \$2.5 billion a year.

We put an accelerated capital cost allowance in place. That means businesses can write off their new equipment in-year. That's \$1 billion a year in savings, and that list

goes on and on, including remarkable work by our Minister of Red Tape Reduction, where businesses are saving almost \$1 billion a year from the pieces of red tape that have been reduced. This is year over year over year—every year it continues.

And because of that new and exciting business climate, we were in a position to open a new agency a couple of years ago called Invest Ontario. That brings us to this fall economic statement, because Invest Ontario will have an injection, hopefully with the support of the opposition, of \$100 million, and that will bring the total investment at Invest Ontario to \$500 million.

Speaker, they have secured \$2.3 billion in outside investments since Invest Ontario was created. The companies they have funded have created 2,571 jobs here in Ontario, and for every dollar that Invest Ontario invested through our fund, they have secured \$26 in private sector investments. So this is really an exciting fall economic statement that is putting \$100 million more.

Investment Ontario has landed some exciting companies, like Magna's expansion: \$471 million invested by Magna, 1,000 new jobs; VueReal: \$40 million invested, 75 new jobs. Nokia: This is a \$340-million investment they're making in Ottawa, and they will attract up to 2,500 jobs when all of their investments are in place. We were at a great opening just a few short weeks ago at Mitsui High-tek—\$102-million investment, 104 jobs created.

You've heard me, Speaker—almost every time I get up to speak, we talk about the Premier's one-a-day, and it is the text that he gets every night from myself and our department. We send him the name of a company, the community they're expanding in, how many millions they're investing here in Ontario, how many people they're hiring and whether we have any skin in the game, like through Invest Ontario or some of our other programs. The reason I mention that is because, rain or shine, it doesn't matter, every single day of every single week, a company has made a major investment here in Ontario. The Premier gets these texts 365 days a year, year over year over year over year.

Think of all of the thousands of companies that we have attracted to Ontario. This fall economic statement, with \$100 million that, if passed, will end up being able to be invested in those companies. Think about the possibilities of the jobs that will be created. Again, for every dollar that they invest, \$26 in investment comes back; so multiply that by \$100 million now, and that gives you a pretty good sense of what to expect in terms of the success from Invest Ontario. More and more leading companies are going to end up here in Ontario because of what is being put in the fall economic statement to ignite growth and to ignite these companies.

I would say, not only as economic development minister, but as trade minister, we've had a lot of travel this year to companies in Japan and Korea and Germany, who have ended up here, like LG Energy in Windsor—at a \$5-billion investment—like Volkswagen.

Speaker, when Volkswagen's building is built, it will be 1.6 kilometres long, one kilometre wide, 16 million square feet. The fourth-largest building on planet earth will be

here in Ontario just a couple of hours down the street from us. That is something that we should be celebrating.

Going forward, Invest Ontario is on track to secure an estimated \$11 billion in new investment, with 6,000 new jobs being generated. Again, those numbers are backed up by the success that has happened. Remember, we've landed \$27 billion in new electric vehicle battery components in three years. This is why we need to continue to have an investment attraction agency such as Invest Ontario.

As we travel around the world, we hear two things, almost universally from every country we are in, from every company that we see—they tell us two things unprompted. The first thing is, they say, in this very tumultuous world today, where we are out of the pandemic but the business community hasn't fully recovered yet, we may have people who are still away, we still haven't got back like it was before—this is pre the attack on Israel. They would talk about Russia's illegal war in the Ukraine and how that is making things more uncertain globally. You've got, post-pandemic, this uncertainty globally. Then—sort of the elephant in the room—they talk about the broken supply chains because of China.

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All of this has created a lot of questions in the world. In this very tumultuous world, they look across the sea and they see this shining light, and it's Ontario. It is a place that they say you can do business in because it's stable, it's reliable, it's dependable—almost boring, but in a good sense. That's a good thing for businesses. They like that predictability.

The other feature they talk about, Speaker, is the fact that it's safe. Here in Ontario, it's safe for their employees. It's safe for their executives. It's a safe place for them to be and to do business. We hear that over and over and over. That is exactly why we need to pass the fall economic statement, put the 100 million new dollars into Invest Ontario so that they can generate that increased growth, create those 6,000 new jobs that will come from that \$100-million investment and give employment to more people right across Ontario.

Thank you very much for the opportunity to speak for the last 10 minutes, Speaker. I hope that illustrates part of why the fall economic statement needs to be passed by this Legislature.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Questions?

MPP Kristyn Wong-Tam: Thank you to the minister for his presentation. I'm curious about the infrastructure bank. There has been a lot of criticism from the federal Conservative Party about the Liberal infrastructure bank, and I remember that the leader of the Conservative Party specifically identified it as a waste of money and said that the first thing they would do when they came into power was they would scrap it altogether. I'm just curious to understand the deviation of strategy here. Why are you now proposing the creation of an infrastructure bank modelled after the federal Liberal government's infrastructure bank?

Hon. Victor Fedeli: We have seen such unprecedented growth in the province of Ontario in the last five years.

We've had 700,000 new jobs created in Ontario since our government took office, a marked difference from the previous government, which lost 300,000 jobs. We are investing almost \$200 billion in new infrastructure. That is going to be important, laying the foundation for the companies that we're attracting here. They need the roads, the bridges, the buildings. They need that infrastructure built. This is a great opportunity for the infrastructure bank to be one of the organizations, one of the groups that helps us move this \$200 billion worth of new infrastructure.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Further questions?

Mr. Mike Harris: I'm just looking through the fall economic statement here. On page 57, it talks about the brand new Maple View Public School, which was built in my hometown, North Bay, and where the—

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): My apologies to the member from Kitchener–Conestoga.

Pursuant to standing order 50(c), I am now required to interrupt the proceedings and announce that there has been six and a half hours of debate on the motion for second reading of this bill. This debate will therefore be deemed adjourned unless the government House leader directs debate to continue.

I recognize the deputy House leader.

Mr. Trevor Jones: Please continue, Speaker.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Back to the member from Kitchener–Conestoga.

Mr. Mike Harris: It's great to see capital being invested through our education system. I wonder if the minister would like to take an opportunity and just highlight what this means to the community of Graniteville and, of course, North Bay as a whole.

Hon. Victor Fedeli: Thank you to the member for that great question. You remember—because you were from North Bay as well, so you know exactly where Fricker school used to be. This is a brand new school called Maple View, and this is exactly what we're talking about. This is infrastructure that's being built. Where the previous government was closing down schools, we're building schools, we are building highways, we are building court-houses, we are building continual investment into our highways, our roads and our bridges. I can't wait to have the Minister of Education come up to North Bay, where we can stand at Maple View, the brand new school, and cut the ribbon at that new facility.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Further questions?

Ms. Jennifer K. French: I'm glad to be able to ask the Minister of Economic Development, Job Creation and Trade a question. There was something in Bill 146 that I've been seeking clarity on. I've asked other members, and they dance because I don't know that it's clear.

Right now, when we're talking about student loans, currently, when a borrower defaults on their student loan or their medical resident loan, the ministry requires that notice be provided to the borrower setting out the information related to enhanced collection tools and that the borrower may require the minister to remove the notice.

This bill would remove the notice and review requirements. Basically, nobody wants to default on their loans, but there has been a notice to tell them that, and then they have an opportunity to—I won't say appeal, but to have the minister review it. That no longer exists. Can you walk us through why that was decided?

Hon. Victor Fedeli: We've always provided significant resources to our students, and I will use this opportunity to be able to talk about both Canadore College and Nipissing University in North Bay. They are home to 7,000 students, and we see a significant change.

I want to talk about electric vehicles for a second and how the college has changed to be able to participate in that market. They used to have auto mechanics courses that we helped fund. We have now seen the college adapt to bringing EV technician courses, which we fund. At the university, we've seen the Learn and Stay program, which we fund. Over 300 men and women have signed up to be either a paramedic or a nurse practitioner—free tuition, free books for two years. That's the growth that we have in providing our resources to our students.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Further questions?

Mr. Dave Smith: One of the things that hasn't been talked about very much in the fall economic statement, and I'd like to get the Minister of Economic Development, Job Creation and Trade's slant on this, is that we know that in order to have green industries thrive, the mining industry in Ontario also has to thrive. We know that there is so much critical minerals and things like lithium that we need to have for the electric vehicles.

I feel like I'm putting this ball on a tee for him to knock it away on, but there's a change in the fall economic statement around flow-through shares. That is all about junior exploration and having those mining companies going out to find those deposits for critical minerals and rare earth elements. To the minister: Can you explain why this is so important to the supply chain for the electric vehicle industry?

Hon. Victor Fedeli: In the province of Ontario, we have every single item we need to make an electric vehicle lithium ion battery. We have every critical mineral in Ontario's north to be able to do that. Through the fall economic statement, and hopefully with the support of the opposition, we will be able to provide flow-through shares for our junior mining companies. These are the companies that are going to continue to explore for new lithium finds in Ontario, who will continue to explore for new nickel finds in Ontario.

There are a couple of great brand new nickel companies looking to get in the ground. One is north of Timmins, the gold territory. One is south of Timmins. This is an exciting opportunity for our junior mining companies to be able to attract the capital that they can begin to explore, and pretty good for the city of North Bay too, my hometown, because we are one of the world's leading manufacturers of exploration products.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Further questions?

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Ms. Jennifer K. French: I'm glad to have a second run at the same question because, even though it's a small piece of this bill, it's kind of sticking with me that members on the other side don't know this one, and that's fine, but I'd like to find out.

Why does the government want to remove provisions for notice of default on student loans? Who asked for that? What came up earlier in debate was that OREA—familiar, of course, to this government—has identified student debt as the number one challenge for young people to afford housing. There are a lot of intersections here, and the Minister of Economic Development, Job Creation and Trade well understands those intersections.

It's a small thing, but why did the government want to remove provisions for notice of default on student loans? Where did that come from, what does it accomplish and how does that make the road clearer for students?

Hon. Victor Fedeli: What I will talk about is where you don't need student loans—again, back in North Bay and at all institutions, we are providing programs, much like our police services, where you can have free tuition. To address the housing shortage, we have programs now at Canadore College—free tuition. We have other programs that have apprentices for carpentry, apprentices for electricians. These are all new programs.

Again, I will say that there are over 300 men and women who have signed up for the Learn and Stay program, where you get free tuition, free books for two years to become a nurse practitioner, to become a paralegal. This is the kind of investment that we're making in our young men and women here in the province of Ontario.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Further debate?

MPP Kristyn Wong-Tam: It's always an honour to rise in this House and, in particular, today to speak to the fall economic statement. I have to be honest: Reading this statement, I'm disappointed by the legislation. I know some of the members will not be surprised by that. Really, what I want to add to this debate is, what else is not there? What I want to be able to highlight is that the conditions that are facing the residents of Toronto Centre, my community in downtown Toronto, are of a magnitude that is actually quite alarming.

I have the distinct honour of representing some of the hardest-working people I know. They come from places around the world. They speak over 120 different languages, and they really are the salt of the earth. Unfortunately, they also have three of the poorest census tract postal codes in the entire city, all residing right here in Toronto Centre. When I speak to my constituents on a regular basis, I hear about their dreams, their struggles and aspirations, and what they're telling me is that they're facing sky-high, record bills and uncertainty about their economic and financial future. They're struggling to achieve a sense of community safety and justice, and housing is a big challenge. More and more people are finding themselves at food banks, and I'm learning that, literally, in communities in Toronto and, I suspect, right across Ontario, because

the data is pretty clear, people are starving. They're going to bed hungry. Children are waking up with their bellies grumbling, and they're going to school sometimes without adequate meals.

The challenge we have is, how do we rise as parliamentarians here, doing the good work of the people of Ontario with the powers we have, which is the power to collect revenues and the power to invest money so that it can reach the communities that we serve and that we love. So what's missing from the economic statement is really what's glaring right now. What we do know is that there's a contingency fund that's been set aside that has now grown to \$5.7 billion, and in this economic statement there's another \$2.5 million that's been squirrelled away. This has all been accounted for by the Financial Accountability Office.

Imagine what that money could do for the communities we serve. Imagine what it could do for the people who are going to bed hungry and the children who are going to bed hungry. Imagine what it could do to alleviate the surgical backlogs. Imagine what it could do to ensure that people have access to decent, safe, affordable housing. Imagine what it could do if we were able to properly fund the courts so that we don't see those I've talked about recently who are abusers, who are predators, who are rapists, walking free because literally the clock ran out on them and their charges were stayed. I think about how we can use our power here to actually invest in the services and the programs so we can actually make life better for Ontarians—everyday, hard-working Ontarians, and not just for the wealthy, not just for those who are wealthy enough to be corporate boardroom titans or captains of industry—people who don't actually have a trust fund—people in my community.

There's an opportunity here to actually address the housing crisis, and you know it. We are seeing tents pop up right across Ontario in average parks, and people there are quite ordinary. They have fallen upon bad times, and they cannot get themselves up, because there is no ability to survive in a city like Toronto when you make \$40,000 a year. My parents could have done it, but it's not possible anymore. In fact, \$40,000 a year in Toronto on a salary means that you are lined up at the food banks. It means that you are probably shacking up with four or five different types of roommates with curtains creating new, impromptu bedrooms. That's what it means to have a wage that's substandard when the city is now so expensive.

There's nothing in this fall economic statement that speaks about providing supports for francophone affairs. There's no mention of services for the 60,000 kids who are on the wait-list for autism services. There's no mention about meaningful, deep engagement and consultation with First Nations, before we do anything else on their territories. There's nothing here about treaties. There's nothing here about making sure that we right the historical wrongs and we follow that path to reconciliation.

There's nothing in this fall economic statement, this mini budget, that actually even addresses or acknowledges the climate emergency. This is one of the biggest existen-

tial threats to our human survival right now, and it doesn't say a word. But I know that people care about these issues, Speaker. I know that our communities are marching to make sure that governments can pay attention to those existential threats.

There's really not a lot in here for agriculture. There's nothing in here for farming support. We need to be able to do more. We need to be able to do significantly more.

Speaker, I'm going to speak about the challenges that we are having in our court system, because this is an issue that's deeply personal to me. I hope it's a deeply personal issue to you as well because, as the government likes to brag and boast about being tough on crime, I want them to get smart on crime. Getting smart on crime is recognizing that unless you have a judicial system that is operating smoothly where you can get cases to trial in a timely fashion where the charges are not stayed, you're not going to make our communities safer and you're going to create more havoc and chaos, which is what we are finding out right now. We have trial lawyers that are extremely frustrated. We have crown attorneys who are frustrated. We have justices who are frustrated. We've got court reporters who are frustrated. And we've got survivors, victims of crime, who cannot get their day in court.

So what are we seeing, Speaker? We saw an impaired driver walk out of court in August under this government's watch. In September, we saw a sexual predator who sexually assaulted a minor walk out of court—the downtown \$1-billion courtroom. In November, we saw rapists walk out the door, out of the same billion-dollar courtroom. The level of frustration for those who work in the judicial system is at an all-time high and, as I've noted in my previous questions to the minister today, what are you going to do about it?

What we know is that there is an \$80-million cut in the fall economic statement. So although the Attorney General has said there is one-time funding for clearing the backlog—\$72 million in previous one-time announcements, and then there's another \$6 million that was announced about dealing with the COVID challenges—when you cut \$80 million from the Ministry of the Attorney General, that amounts to not investing in the courts and not properly staffing it, which is exactly what the justices are calling for, which is exactly why we have people who have been reported as rapists and predators walking the streets again.

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A member asked my colleague here from St. Catharines about the fact that there's some money going into auto theft and stopping auto theft. I commend that, Speaker; I do. But what's the point when you arrest the criminals and they can't get their day in court? Guess what? The charges are going to be dropped. So that multi-million dollar sting operation that the Toronto police just conducted that allowed them to apprehend some criminals—well, those guys are going to be walking on the street again very soon, because there's been no history now demonstrated to us that this government has the court system under control. And from what I can tell, there's no fix.

Bail reform: I'm frustrated that we are now still talking about bail reform and getting the government to fix a bail system that doesn't work. This government has written letters to the Prime Minister. They've pointed the finger to the federal government when they actually have some tools right here. And we've actually heard from those who are experts in bail compliance and bail enforcement on what it would take for them to set up investments to ensure the bail system runs efficiently in Ontario. That means resourcing the courts, including setting up bail courts so that they can assess risk properly, so those who actually need to stay behind bars are there and those who pose less risk to communities can go into the community with a pathway to supportive services to help them rehabilitate. That would be smart—smart on crime. But instead, we have a wasted system with a revolving door, where investments are not being made, and the system is getting more and more backlogged.

There's a crisis in our tribunal system. Again, it's not being adequately addressed here. We know that there are some instances where technology would allow us to facilitate those hearings, absolutely. But forcing every tribunal to be heard electronically, online, is going to create additional barriers that we have spoken about numerous times in this House. When you have seniors and newcomers, people who are speaking English as a second language, they are at a massive disadvantage if you force them to only appear virtually. And because there are very few in-person hearings, it tells me that those structural systemic barriers are wide and broadly distributed.

This government also failed to renew the contracts of experienced adjudicators into the hundreds, and instead, they appointed people that are not qualified to oversee the tribunals. So we have a tribunal system, as we know, in the Landlord and Tenant Board, that is now in massive crisis. The government likes to blame the previous Liberal government—and, sure, please go ahead; assign some blame to those folks. But it's been five years. You don't get to blame the previous government for five years when you've had five years to fix the problem, five years to address the chronic challenges.

Small businesses are struggling in Ontario. And as much as I want to hear about the investments being landed in Ontario—and that is important, I will give you that. It's important for us to be open for business. But we cannot neglect the needs of small businesses, and this government does that time and time again. They're not standing up for the small business owners on the main streets. I do not hear about these incentives or the programs that are going to support them. So not only are we facing a housing crisis of residential proportions—guess what? If homeowners can't make their bills because of soaring interest rates, soaring fuel costs, neither can the small business owners. That's what we're seeing: small business owners under the crushing weight of debt. So I was proud to stand alongside the Canadian Federation of Independent Business calling on the federal government for additional supports and to make sure that the forgivable portion of the CERB loan was going to be extended by another year—very easy to do.

And I recognize that the Premier did that by signing a joint letter with all the other first ministers—because that CEBA loan deadline is coming up in two months, and over 50% of those loan recipients are not going to be able to pay it back. And the majority of the CEBA loan recipients live and work in Ontario. Ontario was the biggest benefactor of the CEBA loans. So it's simply not good enough to just write a letter. We wrote a letter about bail reform. We wrote a letter about the CEBA loan extension. Now we need to take some action, and that's what the fall economic statement does—it gives you an opportunity to take action.

There's really nothing here that actually addresses the struggle of small businesses on the main streets, and that's unfortunate, because I know they would love to hear about the resources that can come their way, especially since two thirds of those Ontario small businesses with the CEBA loans were here and they've already identified that they cannot repay. One third of them will be forced to take a high-interest bank loan, and then one third of them will have no way of paying. Our small businesses on our main streets are begging for some assistance, and we need government not just to speak up, but we need them to step up. You're very enthusiastic about stepping up for big business, now I want to see that same level of enthusiasm for small business.

We need to be able to address intimate partner violence in Ontario. It is an epidemic. The Renfrew inquest, the largest femicide in Ontario's history, produced a report after months of speaking to survivors and their families, speaking to subject-matter experts in the criminal justice system, speaking to law enforcement. They laid out a plan of action on how to address intimate partner violence, which is entirely preventable. Their top recommendation was very simple: Declare it and name it as an epidemic, and allocate the resources that are needed in order for the government to act on those recommendations.

Do yourself a favour and listen and follow the outcome of that report, because as far as I can tell, 45 cities in Ontario have already adopted that declaration. They've named IPV an epidemic. They're waiting for the provincial government to do the same. And women and girls, in particular, are the ones who are being impacted—and I should say children; women and children are the ones that are being impacted. Because we know that when intimate partner violence happens in a home, chances are, it's being witnessed by the children. Chances are, there are children who are deeply impacted, if not already part of the cycle of violence and on the receiving physical end of that violence. So implementing the Renfrew inquest could actually come out of the fall economic statement, but again, it's quiet.

We have seen an alarming rise of transphobic and homophobic violence in Ontario. We saw that this House stood quiet while teachers and students and families were under attack, especially those who are trans and non-binary identified. This is absolutely shameful, that we don't see any resources in this budget that addresses that issue. But it's not just the trans and queer community that's

under attack. We're seeing an alarming rise of Islamophobia and anti-Semitism, and it is not coincidental that we're seeing the same jump around hatred for those different issues at the same time. We can't be dividing Ontarians. We must be uniting Ontarians to that effect.

So why don't we have an anti-hate strategy mentioned in the fall economic statement? Why don't we see the investments to actually counter hate? Because it's so essential now, more than ever before. Just as much as I hear the Premier labelling peace rallies as hate rallies, conflating the Palestinian flag with the Hamas flag, why be so divisive when you can use your power to unite and call for peace? Speak to the people where they're feeling hurt. These strategies can be funded right here in the fall economic statement. There's no reason why you can't address the far-right extremism that is actually taking hold in this country.

Speaker, I'm actually quite surprised that the government has focused a lot on the carbon tax in their remarks. They've spoken about it, and there's an echo chamber coming from Ottawa. But I'm actually quite surprised that we're not seeing anything here that specifically helps address that.

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Home heating relief: There is really not anything here, but yet at the same time, they keep talking about it. So there must be a plan somewhere else that's coming down the pipeline, which I would love to see.

The NDP has proposed a few solutions that we believe are helpful, including:

- creating free heat pumps to low- and middle-income households;
- creating energy-efficient retrofit grants for homeowners; and
- providing zero-interest on-bill financing to make sure that everyone can install a heat pump, lower their energy costs and reduce their carbon footprint.

These are things that governments can do, and this is what incentives can look like, and we would certainly support that.

Speaker, I want to talk about hunger, because this is a very important issue in my community, along with housing. There's a food insecurity crisis in Toronto. We have seen 2.53 million food bank visits in Toronto alone—it's a 51% increase over the last year, and it has now become the highest annual number of visits we've ever seen in the history of our city. One in 10 Torontonians are relying on food banks—and twice as many as the prior year. One in three food bank clients have been going a full day without eating. We should be addressing issues like that.

And the fact that we've got 10,000 people sleeping in shelters in Toronto every night and more who can't get in—this is a missed opportunity.

We need to be able to do a lot more for Ontarians. They expect more of their government, and I think it's time for us to act.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Questions?

Mr. Anthony Leardi: The member from Toronto Centre made comments about protecting vulnerable people.

Of course, when you want to protect vulnerable people, the first place you call is the police. But the member from Toronto Centre, on June 8, 2020, when she was a Toronto councillor, co-sponsored a motion to defund the Toronto police by 10%, resulting in an effective reduction in the number of police officers on the street. The president of that police association said, "It appears not to be a very well-thought-out motion...."

So my question to the member from Toronto Centre is this: When she put the motion to defund the police and cancel 500 police officers in Toronto, did she think that was a well-thought-out motion or a not-well-thought-out motion?

MPP Kristyn Wong-Tam: Thank you for that important question. I appreciate the opportunity to clarify here.

The call for the 10% reallocation of the police budget was to actually specifically move it into social services and support, to address and divert people away from crime. Of course, the police chief is going to say, "Don't do it," or the association is going to say not to do it. But do you know what came out of that? We got greater accountability, and the Auditor General at the city of Toronto now goes into the police budget. We now have a line-by-line police budget that we can review, which has never happened before; it's the first time ever. The other thing that came out of that is that we now have the alternative community crisis diversion unit that covers the entire city, which would have never come about if we didn't have that honest discussion about whether or not the police can solve every single problem—and even by their own admission, they could not.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Further questions?

Mrs. Jennifer (Jennie) Stevens: Speaker, through you, to my colleague: You mentioned how children are going to bed at night hungry and getting up in the morning and not getting the proper nutrition.

How important is it to advocate for and secure permanent, increased funding for school nutrition programs, recognizing their importance in the context of the affordability crisis?

MPP Kristyn Wong-Tam: Thank you very much for that question, to the member from St. Catharines.

I grew up incredibly poor, as a child of working-class immigrants, and I can tell you that my parents did the very best that they could to provide the essentials for my sisters and I. But I can honestly say that if I did not receive the breakfast program at the Toronto board of education at that time, if I wasn't able to have breakfast at school, I would probably not eat until I got home later on in the evening. It was just a reality of life.

I don't think that my story is so uncommon. It's happening to tens of thousands of children. If there was a program specifically in this budget to actually provide food and nutritious meals for students, you would certainly have my vote.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Further questions?

Mr. Andrew Dowie: I thank the member from Toronto Centre for her comments. I'm actually delighted for my apartment to be in your beautiful riding while I'm here in Toronto.

I know where I come from, we don't have public transit options. We don't have the density that we have here. Actually, I think there was a poll about how many drivers do we have versus public transit users, there's about an 85-15 split over on CKLW radio.

So when it comes to the cost of living down our way—in many parts of rural Ontario, especially—the price of fuel is something we hear over and over and over again. It's certainly something I heard at the door last year, prior to the dramatic increase in pricing that we've seen the last number of months. With that in mind, I wanted to ask the member opposite if you support the government's decision to extend the gas tax cut into next year?

MPP Kristyn Wong-Tam: I think that any type of initiative that will actually put more money in the hands of hard-working Ontarians is worthy of exploration and probably worthy of support, but I want to be able to point out that we need to be able to help the most vulnerable. There are those of us who have enough means to own a vehicle, and we drive that car—that's granted. But there are other needs in Ontario that are overlooked in this fall economic statement. I've highlighted just a few of the topics and a few of the ways that we can really help struggling working families in Ontario—food insecurity, affordable housing—to make sure that they have access to the essential basic needs. That would really help.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Further questions?

Mr. Guy Bourguin: Thank you to my colleague for her presentation. We know that there's going to be \$5.4 billion put away, aside, in contingency funds. We know how Ontarians are struggling right now. You mentioned it in—ton allocution—your speech. How much would that money help to address the homelessness, the food, people going to bed hungry, not to mention living in tents? How much would that money—what could we do with this money to address some of these situations that our families are living in and people are struggling with?

MPP Kristyn Wong-Tam: Thank you very much for that opportunity and question. In communities in Toronto and, I'm sure, in communities across Ontario, we have families who are just on the edge. We know that the next time it's time to renew their mortgage, they're probably not going to be able to make the payment. I'm hearing more and more people going to the secondary mortgage sector because they can't afford what they can right now. We know that people are facing demoviction. We're seeing people struggling with the high cost of housing. There are so many ways that this government can help those vulnerable communities, but it's not here.

So that \$5.7 billion that's put aside in this contingency slush fund for that rainy day? That rainy day is here, and it's pouring—just torrential downpour on the residents of this province, and they're looking for some relief now.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Further questions?

M^{me} Dawn Gallagher Murphy: As part of the fall economic statement, it has been noted that a working group created by Premier Doug Ford and Mayor Olivia Chow will aim to find a sustainable funding model for Toronto.

I know the member opposite is from a great riding here, Toronto Centre. I know for sure you understand that there are ongoing operating and capital budget pressures that Toronto has over the next decade, so the province and the city have established a working group with a mandate to make recommendations to improve the long-term stability and sustainability of Toronto's finances. So, to this end, understanding that this is part of the fall economic statement, I would have to think that the member opposite would vote in favour of Bill 146, which looks to establish this working group.

2000

MPP Kristyn Wong-Tam: Thank you to the member across for that question. I think that it's important for us to actually have those ongoing conversations with municipalities across Ontario whether it's locked into and embedded into the statement or not. This is a relationship that you have as government with all municipalities, and the city of Toronto is the largest city in Canada. You should be on their doorstep every single week talking about how you can help, because we're the economic engine of this province. We drive the economy, and we would love to have a working partner in this House.

I say the word "Toronto" a lot. It's because it has often-times been a place that's forgotten, and we're this political football. So I do welcome the opportunity for collaboration.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Further questions?

Mr. Anthony Leardi: The member made comments about how she's concerned about anti-Semitism in her speech. I think we've made our position in the PC caucus quite clear. I don't think the NDP caucus have made their position clear.

My question about anti-Semitism is this: I understand that the member from Hamilton Centre was kicked out of the NDP caucus for her anti-Semitic statements. Am I correct about that or is there some other reason why she got kicked out of the caucus?

MPP Kristyn Wong-Tam: The member for Hamilton Centre is an independent member now, as you all know. If you want her to answer that question, you can bring her back to the House to specifically—

Interjections.

MPP Kristyn Wong-Tam: I just answered the question. I'm trying to answer the question. You just cut me off.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Further debate?

Mr. Anthony Leardi: We're dealing with the fall economic statement tonight. I have before me the Building a Strong Ontario Together document. It's over 200 pages long, and I don't imagine that every single member of this House has read this document, but I have. And what I'd like to do is start at the point where probably no member

of the NDP caucus has read, and that's at page 83, and I'm going to deal with gross domestic product.

Gross domestic product is the total sum of all the goods and services produced in an area in a given period of time—gross domestic product, GDP. In 2023, the first two quarters of this year, Ontario's gross domestic product—everything we produced in the province of Ontario, be it goods or services—exceeded Canada's average for the first six months of this year. You know what that means, Madam Speaker? It means Ontario is the economic engine for the Dominion of Canada. That's what it means.

And you know what? I have a little story to tell. It's not a long story. In 2008, General Motors shut down their trim plant in Windsor. Two years later, in 2010, General Motors shut down their transmission plant; 1,500 people lost their jobs. Over the course of the 15 years of Liberal government, we lost 20,000 jobs in the Essex county region, including General Motors, and we thought they would never come back. We thought we were done. We thought we were on the edge of the hill going downwards.

Then, you know what happened? Doug Ford got elected. That's what happened. And you know what's back? I'll tell you what's back, Madam Speaker. Jobs are back—so many jobs we can't even hire enough people to fill all the jobs that are being created in the Essex county region.

I'm looking at the fall economic statement, and it has a section about skilled trades. Just on Monday, a young man named Jacob called my office. Jacob wants to get into the skilled trades. He's got a high school diploma. I said, "Jacob, you called the right guy." I called LIUNA right away and I called the carpenters' union right away. Within 24 hours, Jacob is on his way to an apprenticeship and he's going to have a fabulous career. He's going to have good pay, he's going to have good benefits, he's going to have a pension and he's going to have no debt—no debt whatsoever—which is a little unlike the province of Ontario, because at the end of 15 years of Liberal control, we became the most indebted sub-jurisdiction in all the world, the number one most indebted sub-jurisdiction in all the world—more debt than California, more debt than Quebec, if you can believe that.

How did we get there? The answer is easy: the Liberal government got us there. The Liberal government gave us the number one largest tax increase in the history of the province of Ontario, and simultaneously gave us the most indebted sub-jurisdiction in the entire world. Fifteen years brought us there, and thank God that government is gone. Thank goodness we now have a government in this PC caucus that's creating jobs.

In three years, the Minister of Economic Development has brought \$27 billion worth of automotive investment to this province: Oshawa, Alliston, St. Thomas, Windsor—the list goes on; thousands and thousands of jobs being created by the billions of dollars of investment being brought to this province. If you'd have told me in 2010, when GM left my region, that all these jobs were going to come back, if you'd have told me that \$27 billion worth of automotive investment was going to come to the province of Ontario, I would have said, "I don't believe you. It's done. We're done."

The Liberals, even, were saying it. They were saying, "We have to transition." Remember that? "We have to transition from an economy that produced things to an economy that"—did what? Produced nothing? Well, that's what was going on in the province of Ontario under the Liberal government: We were producing nothing. We were not producing nurses; they laid off nurses. We were producing fewer doctors, because they funded fewer positions in the universities to produce doctors. We were producing fewer apprentices, not like we are now.

Let me give you the stats now. We have a 24% increase in the number of people enrolled in apprenticeship programs in the province of Ontario, from 21,971 individuals to 27,319 individuals—a 24% increase in the number of people enrolled in apprenticeship programs. Do you know what that means? I'll tell you what it means. It means these guys are going to have great jobs. They're going to have great careers. They're going to have skills for life. They can port those skills anywhere they want. If they want to go to New Zealand, they're going to have those skills to go to New Zealand—but they're not going to go to New Zealand. Do you know why? Because they're going to have great jobs right here in the province of Ontario, jobs with pensions and benefits and interesting careers. This is where they're going to stay, because Doug Ford made it happen; that's why.

Now, imagine if we had continued down the road of the Liberal government. Fifteen years was bad enough, but imagine if that had happened even more. We lost 300,000 jobs in the course of 15 years. That's 100,000 jobs for every five years. Another five years of government would have made that total 400,000. What would we have transitioned to? I challenge the members of the NDP, I challenge the members of the independent Liberal caucus—what do they think we were transitioning to? Producing nothing? Is that what they think we were transitioning to? No.

I'm proud to be in the automotive capital of the world, Ontario. I'm proud to be in Ontario. Do you know why? Because we make things in Ontario. And we don't just make things, we make the best stuff in the world.

We're going to make EV batteries, and do you know how we're going to do that? Well, we're going to start in the north. We're going to start in the north. We're going to mine critical minerals in the north, and then we're going to process those minerals. We're going to process them right here in the province of Ontario, because we're not going to box it and ship it like we used to. We're going to process it right here. Then we're going to take those critical minerals and we're going to turn them into batteries. Then we're going to take those batteries and put them into electric vehicles that are going to be built in areas like my riding of Essex, and awesome places like St. Thomas. It's going to create thousands and thousands and thousands of jobs, a perfect domestic supply chain.

We don't have to rely on the Russians for critical minerals, and we don't have to rely on the Chinese for critical minerals. We have critical minerals. We have critical minerals, and we're going to mine them, and we're going to process them and we're going to use them. Then we're

going to create vehicles and we're going to export those vehicles all around the world, all of which is happening because of the policies enacted by this government under the premiership of Doug Ford.

2010

Now, it wouldn't be happening at all if we followed any of the policies being suggested by the opposition. We hear their policies. We hear them, we just don't agree. They say, "Oh, listen to us. Implement our policies." You implemented your policies for 15 years under the Liberals and destroyed 300,000 jobs, including 20,000 jobs in the region of Essex. You had a chance. You implemented your policies. You failed, and they failed miserably. They failed fantastically. I saw their policies. Their policies were wanting, their policies were bad, and their policies brought this province to its knees. That's not happening again. It's not happening again because this PC government won't let it happen.

Let me end by getting back to gross domestic product, GDP, something that the opposition parties have never read about. It's on page 86 and 87 of this statement. Let's take a look. We have private sector forecasts for Ontario real GDP growth. Then, we have private sector forecasts for Ontario nominal GDP growth. You don't need to know the difference; it's growth. It's gross domestic product, the total value of goods and services produced in a given area for a given period of time.

Look at those pages. Look at those numbers. Every single forecaster says we are going to have positive GDP—every single one. There's not one forecaster—not one—that says we are going to go into the negative. They are all forecasting total positive gross domestic product. I have never seen that before. I would invite any member of the opposition to tell me another period in history when they saw those numbers, if they bothered to check, which I doubt.

Now let me finally say this: I didn't anticipate giving an impassioned speech tonight, but I'm a patient man. I'm looking at the clock; it's 8:10. I've listened to all of the speeches given by the opposition. They are wanting. They are vacuous. They are without value. I reject them all. I am so grateful to be part of a government that is implementing these policies. Now, I invite the opposition to ask me any question they want.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Questions?

Mr. Terence Kernaghan: I'd like to thank the member from Essex for his inspired performance. As a student of history, as he purports to be, I think it's important that the member is made aware that Doug Ford waved goodbye to GM in Oshawa. I think it was said in this chamber that he folded "like a cheap suit" rather than engaging with the company. In fact, the Premier himself said that that ship has sailed—

Ms. Jennifer K. French: No, he said, "The ship has left the dock."

Mr. Terence Kernaghan: "The ship has left the dock." Thank you.

I would like to ask the member, would the member like to thank the actual heroes, the union and the hard-working

GM workers who stepped in in the breach, when the Premier sat down, and saved GM Oshawa?

Mr. Anthony Leardi: GM walked away from my region, and now you're trying to explain a piece of history which is absolutely, 100% tied to the policies enacted by the Liberals.

You know what? I asked a question before, tonight, and I'm going to ask it again. I invite any member of the opposition to try to answer this question: How many years do you think it's going to take for us to disentangle the disaster that the Liberals left behind? Highest tax increases in the history of the province of Ontario coupled with the highest debt of any sub-jurisdiction in the entire world: That's their legacy. How many years will it take us to disentangle that mess?

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Further questions?

Mr. Matthew Rae: Thank you to the member from Essex for his impassioned speech. I know all of us on this side of the House really appreciate his remarks.

Speaker, I had the privilege of attending an event in Windsor a couple of weeks ago, and I got to drive by the NextStar plant there. Obviously, you can ask my staff, Speaker; I was in shock. For my colleagues in the place, really, you should go to Windsor and see it. It is flabbergasting how much investment this is, how big this investment is, how many jobs—they've just posted some jobs, I read in the media, and they were over-subscribed for these jobs.

The member from Essex mentioned 700,000 net new jobs since this government formed government in 2018, and we can't even fill those jobs, Speaker. Can the member please explain some of the initiatives we are putting forward in the fall economic statement to continue to train the workforce for the 21st century?

Mr. Anthony Leardi: I thank the member for that question. A little bit of trivia I'll offer him regarding the NextStar plant: There's two things you can see from outer space: the Great Wall of China and the NextStar plant in Essex county. Those are the two things you can see.

Here are some of the initiatives that this government is bringing forward to train all the skilled tradespeople that we need to bring this province forward. Let's talk about the Level Up! career fairs for young people. One was held in my riding, in LaSalle; it was packed. Lots of young people are interested in the skilled trades, as they should be.

Let's talk about investing in skills training through the Skills Development Fund. These projects help people. It's over \$680 million in the Skills Development Fund training stream since it was launched in 2021, getting people into the skilled trades.

Here's another one: Increasing representation of women and young people in the construction trades. That's one I really love, because it's subscribed by the Women's Enterprise Skills Training in my area; we call it WEST. I spoke to those nice ladies. They're wonderful, and they are very excited about being in the trades.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Further questions?

Ms. Peggy Sattler: To the member for Essex, he talked in his speech about numbers. I wanted to share some of the numbers that Ontarians were shocked to hear about yesterday because of an FOI request from CBC. The privately owned Don Mills Surgical Unit was paid \$1,200 to do cataract surgeries in their for-profit clinic while public hospital cataract units were only paid \$500 for the same procedure. The for-profit clinic got \$4,000 for a meniscectomy, and the public hospital got only \$1,200. Can this member explain why his government is willing to pay private, for-profit clinics 333% more than what public hospitals are being paid for the same procedures?

Mr. Anthony Leardi: As typical, the member has her numbers dead wrong, because public hospitals get funding not only for the procedure but, in addition to that, they get funding for capital and operating costs in excess of anything that is paid to any of the community health care clinics.

And God help us if we didn't have the community health care clinics. I want to once again remind this House of Dr. Tayfour's cataract surgery clinic in my region. He has rescued the eyes of thousands of people. He is number one in the world, and he saved eyes in my riding and in my community by the hundreds. Thank goodness we have Dr. Tayfour. Thank goodness we have the foresight of this government and this Minister of Health to have empowered those clinics to do what they do and to do it fast—twice as fast as it could be done at a hospital. In fact, my friend Michael Greenaway got his surgery within four weeks of his first referral. That's service and health care when and where you need it.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Further questions?

Mrs. Robin Martin: I want to thank my colleague the member from Essex. Thank you, first of all, for getting me awake again, because I was a little bit fatigued from a long day and your speech was impassioned and got us all going. I love to hear about what's going on in Essex, because it sounds like there's so many great news stories, and you were giving us a narrative about what's happened there with 20,000 jobs etc.

We also just now were talking about health care, and there are community clinics, I know, in Kitchener-Waterloo—down in that neck of the woods—that have now provided 14,000 cataract surgeries that wouldn't have been provided but for those clinics. So I just wanted to ask you: Where does Anderdon county fit into this narrative, because I was hoping to hear something about Anderdon?

Mr. Anthony Leardi: Anderdon township, where I grew up, fits into every single story. Anderdon township is where Anderdon Public School is, and Anderdon Public School gave us great home builders, home builders like Norbert Bolger, who has Nor-Built Construction, and he's building homes across Essex county—nice homes, good homes. Under the guidance and encouragement of this government, he has the confidence to keep going.

2020

Let me tell you about Terry Jones. Terry Jones was educated at Anderdon Public School, just like me. Terry

Jones graduated and opened up a demolition company. He had the greatest slogan in the business: "Demolition Is Progress." Now Terry is building homes in Essex county, right in the town of Amherstburg, my hometown—multi-residential units. There are more units, probably, being built in my town than in any of the NIMBY towns that the NDP representatives want to stop building in in their ridings.

I encourage my builders to keep building because we need homes. I think every member of this House should do the same.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Further questions?

M. Guy Bourgouin: J'écoutais le débat quand j'ai entendu le député dire que nos propositions n'ont pas de valeur. Quand on vous amène des propositions, ou qu'on vous amène des projets de loi pour adresser l'ébullition d'eau pendant 30 ans, ou qu'il y a des loyers où il y a deux ou trois générations qui vivent dedans, ou encore, qu'il y a une jeune famille qui est morte à cause qu'il n'y avait pas de « fire hall » ou bien qu'il n'y avait pas de « truck » à feu dans la communauté.

Tu viens de me faire accroire à moi aujourd'hui, toi, à soir, que mes concitoyens n'ont pas de valeur. Je peux te dire qu'ils ont autant de valeur que n'importe quoi. Vos projets de loi, comme c'est là, ne reflètent pas leurs besoins. J'aimerais t'entendre encore dire que mes concitoyens n'ont pas de valeur.

M. Anthony Leardi: Le député de Mushkegowuk—Baie James a parlé de quelques idées offertes par le NPD, mais laisse-moi parler au sujet d'une idée offerte par le NPD : une réduction sur le prix du pétrole, proposée par le NPD en 2021.

Ici, dans notre document, dans notre programme, nous avons proposé une réduction ou une diminution du taux de pétrole 10 cents par litre. Le NPD a voté contre. Qu'est-ce que ça veut dire? Ça veut dire que même quand nous offrons, même quand nous faisons exactement ce que le NPD demande, ils votent contre. Ils votent contre. C'est pour ça que je dis que leur conseil n'a pas de valeur.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Further debate?

Mr. Terence Kernaghan: It's an honour for me to rise today to add the great voices of the wonderful people of London North Centre to our debate on Bill 146, or the fall economic statement.

As I frame my remarks today, it comes down to vision. It's whether this government has a global vision or whether they have a myopic tunnel vision, a short-sighted neglect of the true issues that face the people of this province. What it comes down to is their views on social impact, whether they want to protect and advance public interests or whether they would really like to ingratiate themselves to a select few or to line the pockets of well-connected donors and insiders.

Right now, Speaker, we are embroiled in an incredibly difficult cost-of-living crisis. We have people who are afraid of losing their homes. They're on the brink of losing their housing. We have people who are living in their cars.

In my riding of London North Centre, there are wonderful people. There's a great development in the Cherry-hill area. It was once owned by a fantastic developer, who created wonderful community amenities. It was eventually sold to another investor-developer and you saw the conditions going down. It's been sold yet again and my constituent Pauline writes to me—I speak with her fairly frequently—and she is concerned that she, as a senior citizen, having lived there for decades, will have no other choice but to live in her car. That is on this government.

We see within the fall economic statement that affordability is not even mentioned once. There are so many metrics by which this is an utter failure as a response to the needs of people in Ontario right now.

Since this government took power, we've seen that post-secondary education funding has been down 11% since 2018. We saw this government tinkering around the edges and really harming students with their changes to student loan repayments. It's incredibly frightening that they are not only not following the federal government, which has removed the interest on the portion of their loan, but in fact they're making students pay it back right away. They removed that six-month grace period, as though students who are graduating from post-secondary education are going to have a job—like that. It would be wonderful if we lived in a place where that were so, but that is not the economic reality of this province nor the experience of students within Ontario.

Children in social services—funding is down 12%.

Education itself is down 11%. We know that funding is down \$1,200 per student since this government took power in 2018. In 2019, thankfully, the public were able to push back against this government and their reckless cuts to education. They wanted to eliminate 10,000 teaching positions by 2023-24, by having bigger classes and by forcing online learning. They would claim that online learning is a new invention. Meanwhile, I'm here to inform them, as a former educator, that online learning has always been an opportunity for Ontario students. They did not invent it. It has always been there. But forcing them to do it is quite something else.

I recently had a meeting, with the MPP from London West and the MPP from London-Fanshawe, with the Thames Valley District School Board. And there are a number of educational issues that this government has ignored, one of which is the legally required benefit expenses—the increases to CPP and EI. They have called and asked this government for increased funding to offset the statutory benefit increase—the shortfall related to the CPP and EI rates and amounts. This letter was sent in June 2023. This amounts to \$12.2 million that is being taken from education and being paid in a way that they are legally obligated to do so. But this government hasn't met its legal obligations. It's rather disturbing.

We heard the member from Toronto Centre talk about the incredible dysfunction that is happening within the justice system. This government has seen fit to cut funding by 2%.

They would pat themselves on the back for what appears to be an increase in health care funding, which is up 2.9%, but as has been mentioned in this chamber many times today, this government is content to line the pockets of private clinics and provide shareholder value rather than looking after health care itself. With cataract surgeries—with the province funding \$1,264 to a private clinic, whereas they're funding the public system \$508. It's unconscionable. This government is failing to miss the moment because it is not addressing the needs of Ontario's aging population. We know that our per capita spending on health care has long been under the Canadian average, and this government is content to continue with that slow suffocation of our public services.

A constituent of mine wrote to me recently and spoke about their experience getting cataract surgery, and what happened is completely disgraceful. Terry told me that the doctor pushed laser-assisted cataract surgery. Terry is a former educator and knows their rights. They went for their second consultation, and it was moved to a different location. There were extensive tests done. There was a meeting with an optometrist who was very curt and uninterested in exploring all of the options. And then Terry was told that they could have the surgery quickly, but it would cost \$7,300 for both eyes.

That is the problem. That is the way that this government has changed health care in the province of Ontario. It's all about shareholder value. Once upon a time, people used to say that the customer is always right; this government, instead, seems to want to say that the shareholder is always right. They've changed the entire ethos of health care, making it more about profit than about care. That is disgraceful.

2030

Now, I wanted to, in the brief moment that I have, speak about the government's new bank, their infrastructure bank. They've mentioned that this government is going to offer a return, but the concerns about this are that it's going to have to be better than Ontario bonds and it's going to be higher than what the government currently offers. Now, what's curious to me is that this is modelled after Justin Trudeau's 2016 or 2017 Canada Infrastructure Bank. It's been called a \$35-billion boondoggle by the Federal Conservative Party—this party's cousins—and yet the Ford government is pointing to the Trudeau bank as an example, or as a model, for the Ontario version. You couldn't make this stuff up, Speaker. It really makes us concerned on the side of the official opposition because, quite frankly, this infrastructure bank looks almost as though it's P3s on steroids. Jay Goldberg, the Ontario director of the Canadian Taxpayers Federation, calls the Canada Infrastructure Bank “a complete failure,” yet this government wants to model Ontario's after it—very odd, Speaker. Further to that, we heard that the finance minister told CBC radio that he consulted widely about this infrastructure bank, but there's no record of those consultations and no examples of those consultations.

Speaker, when we look at what this government has done, I also wanted to return to some of the recommenda-

tions from Thames Valley District School Board—and health care as well. Within the Thames Valley District School Board, educational assistants earn \$6 less per hour than at Catholic school boards. It has resulted in many positions not being filled throughout the educational day, which results in chaos for students with special needs, chaos for educators, chaos for all the students who are attempting to learn within that environment. This is something that this government could address with quick one-time funding, yet they seem to choose not to. But further, some of this government's policies on education are so incredibly outdated, whether it's the special incidence funding or so many more.

Speaker, overall, this government had an opportunity to show their vision: to show what they cared about, to show what their priorities were. While we had hoped, on the side of the opposition, to have an all-encompassing vision—one that meets the moment, that discusses the affordability crisis, that meets people where they are—instead we see something that really fails to impress anyone. It's unfortunate.

Speaker, I look forward to questions.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Questions?

M^{me} Dawn Gallagher Murphy: Thank you to the member from London North Centre for your remarks today. As part of the fall economic statement, our government has noted that we will be further helping municipalities. It's important for us to have close relationships with our municipal partners, because this is really critical as we continue to build the Ontario economy together during a time of economic uncertainty. In the FES, we're launching a new Housing-Enabling Water Systems Fund that will invest \$200 million over the next three years for the repair, rehabilitation and expansion of core water, wastewater and stormwater—

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): That was a little too long.

The member from London North Centre.

Mr. Terence Kernaghan: Thank you to the member from Newmarket–Aurora for her question. It does strike a tone of irony that this government talks about helping municipalities. When we saw Bill 23, which stripped funding from municipalities, we saw a lot of insults, a lot of negative speak. In fact, we heard the member from Essex calling rural towns and places NIMBY towns.

We don't need this sort of terrible behaviour towards our municipal partners. In fact, we need to make sure that this government, with the money that they're promising, is not based upon shovels in the ground because we know many municipalities don't have the building capacity themselves. We need the money that this government has promised for municipalities to be based on the permits that are issued. They're not in control of building things. This government probably doesn't want to make that change because they want to withhold as much money as they can from municipalities. They have insulted them, they've demeaned them, and I think that's unfortunate. Municipalities are our partners, and we need to work together.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Further questions?

Ms. Jennifer K. French: I'm glad to ask the member from London North Centre a question. He talked about health care and folks being able to access timely health care without having to pay for it, without having to get hit with surprise fees or additional costs and whatnot.

I heard from a senior in my riding. Her name is Charlotte. She had had a number of years without a colonoscopy and called the doctor she was referred to, to make an appointment. They said it was going to take her a year, but if she paid a \$75 fee, then it might be sooner. She doesn't have that kind of money but came up with it, paid it and was able to have the colonoscopy within two weeks. There's no one to say that it was going to even take a year. That's just what she was told. That's the line she was fed on the phone to fleece her for an extra 75 bucks. That's what's going on in the province. Is there anything in the bill to protect people from creeping privatization?

Mr. Terence Kernaghan: Thank you to the member from Oshawa for an excellent question. We see creeping privatization enabled by this government. It was first started by the Liberal government, but it's really accelerated at a ridiculous pace under this government, and it's shocking to think that we live in a province where people would be charged for their basic and vital health care.

To be barred from accessing life-saving procedures—it is absolutely unconscionable that this government has allowed this to go on, but we see that the former Minister of Health, Christine Elliott, is now registered as a lobbyist for Clearpoint. It's no surprise that we saw this government making lots of moves towards privatization in the Legislature and now we see exactly what is happening. It's almost like what happened with long-term care under the Harris government. We saw that there was privatization allowed, and now where does that person sit? They sit as the president of Chartwell.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Further questions?

Mr. Matthew Rae: Thank you to the member from London North Centre for his remarks. Just building off my colleague's comments from Newmarket–Aurora, a simple question to the member for London North Centre: Do you support the housing-enabling infrastructure fund, \$20 million, which our municipal partners—which I agree we need to work with—have asked for? It would be great if you called your friend Jagmeet to ask the federal government to help out as well, but, yes or no, do you support what the province is doing?

Mr. Terence Kernaghan: As I indicated in a previous answer, the government of Ontario needs to make sure that they're working with municipalities as a partner. Instead, we've seen this government using metrics to deny them funding, to not allow them access to the provincial money that has been promised, based on something that is out of their control: shovels in the ground. This government loves their slogans. They love sloganeering, they love their little catchphrases, and they must love "shovels in the ground," but unfortunately, municipalities are not in control

of those shovels going in the ground. They are in control of those permits that are issued. If the government was releasing funding based on the permits that were issued, many more municipalities would qualify, but unfortunately, those shovels in the ground are not the responsibility of the municipality, and goodness knows, the government doesn't want to do the heavy lifting of building either.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Further questions?

Mrs. Jennifer (Jennie) Stevens: In light of the significant rent increase and the issues of renovictions, like the 92-year-old senior the member from Kitchener mentioned in her opening statements, what specific legislative measures do we need to take to protect tenants and stabilize the rental market? I'm sure you're seeing it in your community. I know I am in my community, and I'm seeing an awful lot more encampments coming, too.

Mr. Terence Kernaghan: I'd like to thank the member from St. Catharines for an excellent question. Clearly, we have an example of a member who is actually listening to their constituents.

I suspect all across the province we are hearing the same stories of people who are being gouged, people who are being renovicted, people who are being moved out for landlord's own use and then finding that it is simply because of vacancy decontrol, which the Liberals allowed, which has been continued under this government, which has created an unfair system of exploitation.

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But if that weren't bad enough, in 2018, this government removed rent control from all new buildings, so people who moved into these buildings thinking they had a wonderful new place—they had budgeted a certain amount—they found that they didn't have any respect or care from this government because they are in a place with no rent control. The rent could go up 10%, 20%, 30%—you name it. The sky is the limit.

This government could pass NDP legislation to reinstate rent control for all of those buildings first occupied after 2018. They could also pass the Rent Stabilization Act to plug that hole of vacancy decontrol, making sure that the new tenant pays what the last tenant paid, leading to stability across the rental sector and affordability, so people aren't homeless.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Further questions?

Mr. Anthony Leardi: In my comments, I touched on the remarkable efforts being made by this government to recruit people into the skilled trades. I even told this House about Jacob who contacted my office, and within 24 hours, we had him in touch with not one but two unions that are going to put him on the road to a remarkable career in the skilled trades.

I want to ask the member: In his riding, is he assisting young people the way I am in taking advantage of these awesome government programs in order to get into the skilled trades, which offer great pensions, great pay, interesting work and benefits?

Mr. Terence Kernaghan: I would like to thank the member for Essex for the question. I absolutely support the skilled trades. I loved seeing former students of mine engage in those excellent, lifelong careers.

Unfortunately, back under the Harris government, we saw that there was a real problem with their attitude towards the skilled trades. In fact, they removed all the shop classes from elementary schools. They led to the Liberals sort of sticking their nose up at skilled trades, and that's unfortunate.

But what does concern me as well is that the member from Essex as well has been in many publications, indicating that that member would like to see fewer teachers in the classroom because that would somehow contribute to student resilience. Now, I find it strangely ironic that the member is talking about education but actually wants to remove educators from Ontario students. That concerns me. That seems to be a little bit of—sort of talking out of both sides or something along those lines. That concerns me very much, Speaker.

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): The member will withdraw.

Mr. Terence Kernaghan: I withdraw.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Thank you. Question?

Mrs. Jennifer (Jennie) Stevens: I've got 12 seconds, so hopefully we can get it in.

How important is it to advocate and secure permanent increased funding for school nutrition programs in Ontario?

Mr. Terence Kernaghan: Very important.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Further debate?

Mr. John Yakabuski: It's interesting, Madam Speaker, and of course I'm getting lots of texts about the thousands and thousands of people—millions, actually—that are tuning into this broadcast. They've turned off CBS, NBC, ABC, ESPN, all of it because they want to listen in. But you know why they wanted to listen in? Because my friend from Essex—his address earlier. I got to tell you, it reminds me of that—I'll paraphrase a little—and it's a different subject matter, obviously, but you remember the movie *When Harry Met Sally*? Well, when the member for Essex was speaking, I almost was wondering what they were serving in the cafeteria because I was going to say, "I'll have what he's having." Because, Speaker, he was on fire. I mean, absolutely burning it up. I'm not sure what got him riled up like that, but I hope it's nothing that I said.

But what does get us riled up sometimes on one hand, but on the other hand it kind of makes us chuckle a bit—because here we are, debating the FES, the fall economic statement, which—I think I can lift this up because that's not a prop; it's a piece of literature that is produced by this Legislature.

Interjections.

Mr. John Yakabuski: No, no, I'm not going to tear it up. Oh, it's the things they remember, eh? Everything else, they forget. But what I remember—and it's the same thing over and over again—we have a budget, or we have a FES,

and the NDP get up to speak, and they have this weird idea that somehow their priority is going to be our priority. The reality is that our priority is the people of Ontario, and they live in some fantasy world over there that just doesn't actually exist.

But what does exist is the electoral districts in the province of Ontario. We went to them with our plan in 2018, we went to them with our plan in 2022 and won massive majority government as a result of it. But the NDP still sit over there dreaming that somehow Ontario wants to see the policies that they continue to advocate. And I'm sorry, folks, but they don't. They just are not buying what you're selling. What they are buying is the vision of Premier Ford and our government.

And every time since 2018—do you know what's been the common word? Building, because we saw this province torn down by the previous Liberal government, which was supported every single step of the way by their friends who are now the official opposition. What they don't understand there is that it didn't work very well for the Liberals, and you guys are just going to flip sides. In 2026, you're going to have that little corner, and the Liberals are going to have your seats, because you're just doing the same thing that they were doing.

But there is one priority, led by the Premier of Ontario, which is not losing sight of the goal, and we're already making tremendous progress. As my friend the Minister of Economic Development, Job Creation and Trade said—

Interjection.

Mr. John Yakabuski: That guy, yes—700,000 net new jobs. And we came through a pandemic in the middle of that. So it's not like it's just been this smooth sailing all the way along; we came through a pandemic which took massive adjustments by governments in every jurisdiction and at every level. We understand that. But in spite of that, we were able to create the climate and the circumstances and the conditions here in Ontario to lead to the creation of 700,000 net new jobs.

Essentially, I want to thank Minister Bethlenfalvy for presenting this crucial economic update. That's what it is: It's an update as to the fiscal situation here in the province of Ontario and how we are doing with our priorities and the impacts that they are making. Every day, as much as the media doesn't like us—and that's a fact—they have to report every day about the progress we're making.

And I get a kick when I hear about this wannabe government on the other side talking about health care. When you really look at the progress that we've made—more nurses signing up and taking jobs here in the province of Ontario than ever before; surgery backlogs going down every single day; building new hospitals in ridings that you represent and, in fact, you vote against. You have to ask yourself: Do you want that progress, or are you so boldly committed to being the opposition that you can't even recognize when somebody is actually doing the right thing? And that's what is a bit perplexing about this opposition today: Everything is negative, negative, negative, no. And yet, Speaker, they keep digging their own—I

don't want to say that word here because my grandfather was an undertaker, but you know what I'm going to say.

On one end, not that long ago, they nominate a candidate in Hamilton Centre who's an anti-Semite, and then that comes back to bite them right in the you-know-what. What does it do? They end up having to throw that person out of the caucus. Now they're nominating a candidate, Mrs. Chapman, in Kitchener Centre, who is known as the NIMBY queen, or the queen of NIMBY. She's against everything that we're trying to do and that you purport on that side that you actually support the building of new homes, the increased supply of housing, which—no matter what government you're talking about today; if you're talking about Canada, all across the country, the number one single issue is the supply of housing here in the country and here in the province of Ontario. Then you're nominating a candidate who is against building anything in her community, yet she wants to be the MPP, the New Democratic MPP.

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My question is, I say to the leader: Are you so intimidated by the people in Kitchener Centre that you can't even nominate a candidate who stands for the needs of Ontario today? I know you've got a letter from them that wants you to resign and all of this and all of that, but you're the leader. You've got to stand up and do what's right for the people of Kitchener Centre and what's right for the people of Ontario.

But back to the feds—

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): I'll remind the member to make your comments—

Mr. John Yakabuski: Thank you very much, Speaker. This time I beat you to it.

All of the tremendously wonderful things that we're doing in the fall economic statement for the people of Ontario that I heard the Minister of Economic Development, Job Creation and Trade talking about earlier, and I had a chance to speak about it a little bit earlier today. You don't hear about it from the other side, the \$8 billion annually that we have reduced the cost of business here in Ontario—\$8 billion. That is no small amount, \$8 billion. You know and I know and everybody out there who understands the first thing about being in business knows, if those \$8 billion are your costs, you have two choices: pass them on to your customers or go out of business.

Well, they're not passing them on to their customers, so what are we doing to help the vulnerable, the consumer and everybody else? We've reduced business costs by \$8 billion. That gets passed on to the consumers, because those costs would otherwise be passed on. So we're saving the public. That is magnified, by the way, with the multiplier concept, to the families.

Plus, we're continuing with the reduction of the gas tax, lowering the cost of getting to and from work here in the province of Ontario, particularly in rural Ontario. We're fighting the federal government on the gas tax on not only gasoline but home heating fuels, all kinds of home heating fuels, so that we can reduce the cost for families here in the province of Ontario.

We've taken I don't know exactly how much off provincial taxes entirely by removing them from the provincial tax rolls to help the vulnerable. It is one thing after another.

We're taking away the cost of licence plate stickers to reduce the cost of living for people here in the province of Ontario. It is absolutely one thing after another.

They talk about the cost of living. We're the single government—not the federal government—we're the government that is actually doing things that will reduce the cost of living to families here in Ontario. And what do we get from the opposition? Every single time we come up with an initiative to make life easier for people, they will stand there and vote no and then pretend that they're the party that actually cares for people.

Speaker, our party is not only the party that cares for people, it's the party in government, and will continue to be in government because they keep helping us every step of the way.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Questions?

Mr. Sol Mamakwa: Thank you to the member from Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke. I try to listen when each of the members speaks about the fall economic statement. Sometimes he's throwing out words like “weird idea” and that we are in a fantasy and we are dreaming.

I went home on Saturday to my home First Nation. We buried a young girl who died by suicide, 11 years old, on Saturday. I saw her friends crying, supporting each other. My dream is to save those girls. That is the work that we have to do. It's not a fantasy; it's real. That's the real life that's happening in Ontario. This is in the north. There's a suicide crisis happening. There's a mental health crisis happening. When will you address this so we save somebody like Elaina Beardy, that 11-year-old? What are you going to do to give her hope, so others can live like the rest of us? Meegwetch.

Mr. John Yakabuski: I thank the member from Kiiwetinoong for the question. I hardly think I'm in a position to answer directly, but my heart goes out to the family and those who you would know in your home community who would obviously have some closeness to that young girl's family.

But I think our Minister of Mental Health and Addictions has addressed those issues on a very consistent basis. Our Minister of Indigenous Affairs has addressed those questions on a continuous basis. I can't speak to the individual circumstances, nor would I be aware of them, but I do know that our government is committed to doing everything we can to improve the conditions not only for everyone in the north, but particularly those on First Nations, because we know those are challenging communities that do not have the resources that some of us will take for granted. They don't live in the kind of living circumstances that we live in.

But I can assure you, the member for Kiiwetinoong, that our government is committed to continuously improving the lives and the living conditions of our people on First Nations.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Further questions?

Mr. Anthony Leardi: The member was speaking eloquently about various issues, and I have a very important issue that I would like to ask him about in my area. We have a spectacular eye doctor. His name is Dr. Tayfour and he routinely does cataract surgeries at a community health clinic. He does these and gets all those surgeries out of the hospital. They don't have to go to the hospital. The people who talk to me say they don't want to go to the hospital either; they want to go to Dr. Tayfour's clinic. They want to get their cataract surgery done like that, and they want to get on with life.

I've had plenty of people contact me. Most recently, Mr. Greenaway told me that from the date of referral to the date of surgery only took four weeks. He's extremely happy with what happened. And the CAOs of the hospitals are happy too, because they don't want those surgeries in the hospital. They have more complex stuff to deal with.

So I would like to ask the member: What are his views of this situation, and what does he think happens in his riding? Is it helpful?

Mr. John Yakabuski: I want to thank the member for Essex. I appreciate his insight on that, and obviously the relationship he has with Dr. Tayfour in his area.

That, quite frankly, is exactly what the people of Ontario are looking for: access to the medical services that we are working hard to ensure that we can provide. Surgeries such as cataract surgeries, in this day and age—at one time they might have been complicated; they're not considered complicated today and they can be easily done in a clinic. We are taking the pressure off our hospitals so that our hospitals can concentrate on the much more complicated surgeries that are needed, as well, because we need surgeries of all kinds.

So if we can have some of those surgeries that are less intrusive and don't require hospitalization—we can have them done much more effectively, much more efficiently in a private clinic, and the people are happy because they can get in much quicker and have the issue dealt with much quicker, to greater satisfaction.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Further questions?

Ms. Catherine Fife: I know the member from Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke knows full well the impact of a coroner's inquest into domestic violence in this province, and I'm sure he's just as concerned as I am to see over a 2% reduction in the justice file in the fall economic statement.

I know that he's just as concerned as I am that Emily, who on November 7 had—who was a victim of sexual assault, one of the most violent kinds of sexual assault that you can find. She was raped. The crown called her and said, “I believe that you were raped,” yet her case was thrown out of the court system, because the court system is so underfunded that her alleged rapist was allowed to walk free in the province of Ontario.

So how can you, as a member who knows full well the impact of domestic violence, given the coroner's inquest into violence against women, support a fall economic

statement that embeds and discriminates against women who have been violently—

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Thank you. Response?

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Mr. John Yakabuski: That was a big stretch. Thank you very much, Speaker, and I thank my colleague from Waterloo. In 2026, a lot of them are going to meet their Waterloo, by the way.

Speaker, I really have to ask why she's asking me that question, which has really little to do with the fall economic statement, because we haven't changed the numbers in the statement. But I do want to say this: The Attorney General is taking every step possible, and he's been lauded for this by many of the people in the justice system for trying to ensure that we can remove some of that backlog in our court system. We know they're clogged. They were clogged when we got here. COVID even clogged them to a much higher degree because we couldn't move things through the system as quickly as we would have liked to. We would have made a lot more progress without the pandemic.

But our Attorney General, Mr. Downey, is doing everything he can to clear that backlog so that we won't have situations where those cases that should have been dealt with by the courts are dismissed because they couldn't deal with them in a timely fashion.

Continue to work with our Attorney General, don't say no to everything he asks for, and we'll continue to make progress on that file.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Further questions?

Mr. Anthony Leardi: The fall economic statement has some fantastic programs in it, fantastic programs being promoted by this government to get people, especially young people, into the skilled trades. I mentioned earlier a fantastic group of individuals that are being trained through WEST, Women's Enterprise Skills Training. They're a fantastic group of women. I met them personally, and they are very excited to be getting the training and the experience that they're receiving.

In the riding of my honourable friend and member, does he have similar experiences? Are there people who are very, very excited to take advantage of these government programs and get into the skilled trades so that they can have great jobs and careers with pensions and benefits? What does he feel about that?

Mr. John Yakabuski: I want to thank the member for Essex again for his question. You know, you can't build Ontario if you don't have the skilled trades. No government ever has made the kind of progress—even the NDP probably has to concede that we're doing a tremendous job in encouraging people to join the skilled trades, especially women, who maybe weren't as comfortable joining those kinds of careers in the past. We're making it more welcoming to them.

My son is a skilled tradesperson in the construction industry, and we talk about it all the time, how absolutely vital it is to get more people to remove that stigma of this

being a job that isn't quite as highfalutin as maybe all the university-educated jobs are. But I'll tell you, they're so darn necessary for us to be able to build Ontario, and we're doing everything we can. Some 25,000 new tradespeople registered last year under our program.

We're making progress because we are committed. Premier Ford won't rest until we reach our goal of building Ontario.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Further debate?

Mr. Sol Mamakwa: It's always an honour to be able to get up and speak for the people of Kiiwetinoong, and today on Bill 146, the Building a Strong Ontario Together Act.

I've spoken about many budgets over the last five and a half years, and it's always like I'm repeating myself. I'm always feeling that this government doesn't listen, or you're always hopeful that they will listen. A lot of what I tend to talk about are how small changes, how small cuts have a big impact on small towns like ours. I know in a past example, Red Lake received funding for seven physicians through the Rural and Northern Physician Group Agreement, but now there's just funding for six physicians—that one funding for one physician is having a devastating impact on the town's ability to recruit and retain physicians. Because of the cut, Red Lake Clinic has to advise residents and those living in the surrounding area to anticipate shorter doctor appointments and much longer wait times. That's the reality in the north, and that's something that we continue to see in the north, where we are forgotten, as if we are not there.

Recently, Red Lake Medical Associates was told by the Ministry of Health that their funding through that agreement decreased from, again, seven to six funded physicians, retroactive to May. I know that health leaders in Red Lake have said that the move makes the existing challenges worse. Again, they cannot recruit doctors; they cannot recruit locum physicians—it continues to fall short.

Dr. Lisa Habermehl, a rural family physician who works in Red Lake, has called this cut a huge cut to morale.

Sumeet Kumar, the CEO of Red Lake's Margaret Cochenour Memorial Hospital, called the decision a blow to the community. He said, "We were already struggling before in terms of keeping our ER doors open and serving the population. So it is really unfortunate this has happened. This is going to create a lot of negative impact in terms of how this will be construed within the community, and it will hamper the services provided at this point in time."

These are the realities in Red Lake.

Due to retirement and other personnel changes, Red Lake is on track to only have four full-time-equivalent physicians, according to the numbers provided by the chair of the town's health care committee.

I know that one of the retiring doctors, Dr. Andrew Gloster, took part in a video conference shortly after the announcement of the cut, in which doctors serving the community met with those who had made the decision. He said, "I was just explaining why we needed more doctors,

not less. But they basically were sticking to their guns, that they had a formula, and they'd done the calculations, and this was their determination. And so at the end, I said, "Well, if you go through with this, I quit."

He went on: "The system is slowly collapsing. And the trouble with a collapsing system is that mistakes happen because there's not enough people to do an adequate job. And I don't want to be part of a collapsing process."

Speaker, the government has continued to ignore the north—the urgent calls for more doctors across the north—and acts as though there are no consequences for these funding cuts. These consequences are real. The people who suffer are real. The people in Red Lake are real.

I want to talk about ambulances. We have a very vast region in northwestern Ontario. In July of this year, I wrote the Minister of Health about the ongoing crisis in ambulance services across the north. In June, the paramedics of Kenora district shared on social media that Dryden, Sioux Lookout, Ignace and Ear Falls would have reduced or no ambulance service due to staffing shortages. It's an ongoing issue. But this message is not unusual. They are regularly reporting on shortages in the region.

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One of the paramedics had said this: "The problem is there is just no staff and trying to convince new medics from other parts of the province to move here for work is a losing battle when all services across the province have the same staffing issues. Sadly, there is no quick fix to this problem, unless we have an influx of locals start taking the paramedic program. Those of us who are working still need days off—working non-stop is not sustainable, as much as it hurts us to leave our communities understaffed."

Bailey Hickey of Ear Falls asked, "I'm just curious in the instance of like Ear Falls, Ontario, where we don't have a hospital any less than an hour away from us, without a paramedic in emergencies such as a heart attack or stroke, or severe allergic reaction would we be told when we call 911 that we don't have anyone coming to help and we need to fend for ourselves?"

Speaker, paramedics in the region have a challenge of ensuring ambulance coverage in a region that has 10 ambulance bases spread across hundreds of thousands of square kilometres—and this is just the area where there is road access. When we don't fund these services properly, we are playing games with the lives and the health of people in northern Ontario.

Long-term care is another issue in Sioux Lookout. I want to quote Mrs. Aileen Urquhart. The Premier was there in 2017, before he got elected. "He stood right here and said to all of us in attendance that if he was elected Premier that he would come to this community and personally turn over the first sod of earth for the 76 long-term care beds." That was six years ago. Speaker, these beds are long overdue, and it's about time that we make good of this promise this government made to the people of Sioux Lookout. The seniors have not forgotten.

These issues I have raised today: I bring them up but I do not see them being addressed in this budget. There are gaps, and it's not enough to close them. I know we need to

do better. This government needs to do better. I am hopeful that we can have a good dialogue on this. Meegwetch.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Questions?

Mrs. Jennifer (Jennie) Stevens: I want to thank my colleague for touching on some really important issues that are happening not only in your community but we see all across our province. I think one of the key points that you brought forward this evening to this House is a really important point about ambulance drivers and EMS workers. I know in my community people are waiting to get to the hospital, and they're being taken by cabs sometimes through Niagara Falls. What do you think we can see within this fall economic statement that would help alleviate the burdens that are put on the front-line workers within your community and maybe across Ontario, as well?

Mr. Sol Mamakwa: Meegwetch for the question. I know that ambulance is one piece—we were just talking about the road access to communities. We have to understand that there are 24 fly-in First Nations in my area. The ambulance is Ornge, the fixed-wing aircraft that takes time to be able to respond to crises.

I think any type of ambulatory services is so critical in the north, whether it's on-reserve or whether it's more ambulances in northwestern Ontario and in more of the rural northwestern Ontario. It's really critical that we have the infrastructure, but also the paramedics. We've got to start teaching our own people to be part of that system.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Further questions?

Mr. Andrew Dowie: I want to thank the member for his comments. The empathy that you have for the people of your community is really something that I find very touching, so thank you for that and for demonstrating it here in this House.

My question for you really relates to some of the opportunities in the north. We have discussed the Ring of Fire and mining. I wanted to get your position on whether these are true contributors to the economy of the north that can help the people of the north, or if they're a detractor from the success of the north.

Mr. Sol Mamakwa: I think it's important to invest in the First Nations that are up there. First Nations can be the foundations of change. I mean that in a way where we have access to high schools, where we have access to paved runways, where we have access to hospitals, where we have access to proper mental health services. Because without it—it's been done by visitors. It's been done by settlers where they come over and take whatever resources we may have. An example would be the fur trade. Our people were always promised the fur trade: "It's going to be your livelihood. You can live on that." We cannot even live on that anymore and the trapping anymore.

I think we need to be able to build on the foundations of where you work with us. You work with the people that are affected, because land is part of who we are. The language comes from the land. Meegwetch.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): The member from Oshawa.

Ms. Jennifer K. French: I'm glad to be able to ask a question of the member from Kiiwetinoong, as we're discussing the interestingly named Building a Strong Ontario Together Act.

The member talked about the need for investment in health services, whether it's paramedics, family doctors, hospitals, certainly the mental health crisis. I appreciate that he shared an important experience from the weekend with 11-year-old Elaina, who was lost to the community, who died by suicide, and the need to invest in supports and what happens when there isn't that investment.

So when we know there is a \$5.4-billion contingency fund, slush fund—maybe we don't know. We don't know what the government wants to use it for. They certainly haven't shared. What would the member from Kiiwetinoong suggest that the government use some of that money for in his community and in northern communities?

Mr. Sol Mamakwa: I think one of the things I believe is happening is there is so much intergenerational trauma that happens because of the oppression and colonialism that we see on a daily basis. I know a healing lodge is so important to be able to have in any of the communities.

Remarks in Anishiniimowin.

I'm not even allowed to speak in this House in my language. We are slowly losing our language, and I think it's important that we start teaching our languages in our classrooms. There's no investment on the real history—our history. We know your history. I learned your history. I never learned my own history. I think what's important is that education is the key, is the path to reconciliation. I'm a believer of reconciliation until—that's the only time we can start coming together as people to become a great province, a great country and a great society.

2120

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Question? The member from Essex.

Mr. Mike Harris: Kitchener—Conestoga.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Kitchener—Conestoga. My apologies.

Mr. Mike Harris: I understand how you might get the two of us very confused.

A question for the member from Kiiwetinoong: On page 45 of the Building a Strong Ontario Together fall economic statement booklet here, it does talk a little bit about four-lane expansion projects of Highway 11/17 from Thunder Bay to Nipigon. While I know it's quite south of the member's riding, it is still in northwestern Ontario. I wondered if you would touch a little bit on how you think that will help move people around better in northwestern Ontario. Obviously, you have a lot of fly-in communities and roads aren't always an option. But for people who are living a little bit south of your community, how will the expansion project impact them?

Mr. Sol Mamakwa: The rest of Ontarians have the liberty of accessing provincial and municipal roads; we don't. I mean, it's such a small step, right? I think the twinning of the highways is a very small step. I don't know—is it reconciliation? Is it safe travel? Yes, most definitely, because I know Highway 11/17 is one of the

most dangerous highways every winter. Even in the summertime—sometimes when I'm travelling down here—you're delayed for a closure. Like in August, there was a closure for 24 hours. Those are the struggles that we have.

It's a little bit of change, but we can do more because the biggest room in the world is the room for improvement, and we need to do better. Meegwetch.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Further questions?

Mr. Guy Bourgouin: Thank you to my friend from Kiiwetinoong. We have very similar ridings, dealing with First Nations on the James Bay coast and of course your communities also. When I see a title like Building a Strong Ontario Together Act, do you feel that First Nations feel part of a title like this and a bill like this?

Mr. Sol Mamakwa: That's a very good question but also an interesting question. For me, where I come from, the way we are treated by the government of Ontario, this is not together, this is not stronger. It may be stronger for some people, but it's not stronger for us. I think the system that's here right now—I know all they want is the resources that we have. We're one of the richest people in the north. We are rich in culture. We are rich in ways of life. We are rich in the resources that we have, the lakes, the lands and the animals that we have, but we don't have the resources that you talk about, the prosperity that you talk about.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Further debate?

M. Guy Bourgouin: Ça me fait toujours un plaisir de me lever et de parler pour représenter mes commettants, mes concitoyens de Mushkegowuk—Baie James, puis avec un projet de loi intitulé « building a strong Ontario together », bâtir un Ontario plus fort ensemble. Mais, on se pose la question, quand on regarde le « economic statement » qui est devant nous—on ne voit pas grand mention d'abordabilité.

Quand on parle des communautés du Nord ou qu'on parle, quand on est par chez nous au nord de North Bay, on a beaucoup de petites communautés où, veut, veut pas, on est obligé de se déplacer. On est obligé de se déplacer pour aller voir des médecins ou aller voir des spécialistes. C'est depuis que—ça va être ma cinquième année que je suis élu, deuxième terme, puis, je sais que ça se parlait avant moi aussi. On parle des « travel grants ». On a besoin de réviser les « travel grants ». Je ne sais pas combien de questions ont été posées à la ministre ou au gouvernement. Encore, on ne voit rien dans ce projet de loi, ou qu'on parle du « fall economic statement », on ne voit pas que c'est adressé non plus.

Encore, il n'y a pas une semaine où il n'y a pas de commettants qui viennent—puis, je suis convaincu que les autres députés du Nord font face à la même situation. Donc, il y a du monde qui vient dans leur bureau du comté, et qui disent : « Écoute, est-ce qu'ils vont l'ajuster? » Parce qu'ils payent 100 piastres pour une chambre de motel. Moi, je ne connais pas de place où on a une chambre de motel pour 100 piastres. Alors, ça fait belle lurette qu'il

n'y a plus de chambres de motel à 100 piastres, mais ils peuvent seulement payer 100 piastres.

Comment tu veux que le monde puisse arriver à se déplacer? Ils sont obligés d'aller se louer une chambre de motel qui coûte bien plus proche de 250 \$, 300 \$. Les 100 piastres, ça ne couvrent pas. Ça, c'est sans mentionner que, veut, veut pas, on vit dans des—puis j'ai des commettants qui ont eu des problèmes de vue. Là, ils ont perdu leur licence. Il fallait qu'ils retournent passer un examen. Ils sont obligés de retourner encore à Sudbury. Ça, ça veut dire qu'il fallait qu'ils payent un chauffeur pour les conduire là, parce qu'ils ne pouvaient pas conduire—ils n'ont pas leur licence—mais ce n'est pas couvert. C'est pour ça qu'on demande au gouvernement de réviser ce « travel grant ». C'est un besoin dans le Nord. Il y a une raison pourquoi ça existe : parce qu'on n'a pas les services. On n'a pas les services, les spécialistes. On est obligé de se déplacer pour aller pour ces spécialistes-là.

On est obligé de se déplacer à Timmins. Des fois on n'est pas couvert à cause que ce n'est pas assez loin. Si tu restes à Kapuskasing, tu es à peu près même pas à deux heures et 200 kilomètres, mais des fois ce n'est pas couvert. Pour Hearst, c'est couvert; nous autres, on ne l'est pas. Ça dépend de ce que t'es envoyé pour voir, quel spécialiste, et les conditions que tu as. C'est tellement important que ça a l'air peut-être—tu sais, dans le Sud, on n'a pas ce problème-là. Vous avez les médecins. Vous avez les spécialistes. Vous avez les gros hôpitaux. Mais, pour nous, les hôpitaux régionaux sont éloignés de nous.

Moi, j'ai dû me faire opérer mes genoux. À Timmins, il n'y avait pas de place. J'ai été obligé d'aller à Thunder Bay. Mais quand tu penses qu'il y en a beaucoup qui n'ont pas les moyens, mais ils sont obligés de se déplacer—il y en a beaucoup qui n'y vont même pas. Ils ne vont même pas se faire opérer parce qu'ils n'ont pas les moyens d'aller loin de même et payer, parce qu'ils savent que le « travel grant » ne couvre pas les coûts pour se déplacer. Ça, vous trouvez ça normal? Je ne pense pas.

C'est pour ça qu'on plaide avec le gouvernement d'au moins—on a essayé de toutes les manières. On a même dit : « Écoute, il est temps de réévaluer. Mettez un comité à réévaluer le “travel grant.” C'est un besoin pour nous dans le Nord ». Ça tombe dans l'oreille d'un sourd. C'est qui qui paye? C'est encore—oui, ils ont fait des améliorations. Tu reçois ton argent plus vite, mais c'est beau d'avoir l'argent plus vite quand que ça ne couvre pas les dépenses. C'est pour ça qu'on demande. On veut que ça reflète les coûts actuels pour que le monde puisse aller voir le spécialiste et aussi être capable de répondre à leurs besoins.

Le temps passe vite, je peux vous dire, quand on parle.

La question de loyer puis de maisons : écoute, vous savez que, nous, dans le Nord, on paye le prix pas à peu près. Les maisons subventionnées : j'ai beaucoup de commettants qui viennent chez nous et qui disent : « Écoute, je ne suis plus capable de payer mes loyers. Je suis sur un salaire fixe, sur une pension. Je ne suis plus capable. J'ai besoin d'un loyer subventionné. » Il n'y en a pas. C'est pour ça que même les personnes qui bâtissent

disent : « On ne peut pas répondre à tous les besoins que la province demande. »

C'est pour ça que le NPD a fait une proposition que le gouvernement doit se remettre à bâtir des loyers abordables avec des adaptations, parce que—écoute, je vous ai parlé souvent dans la Chambre d'un jeune qui est autiste et dont la famille a été obligée de déménager à Cochrane pour essayer d'avoir les services. Ils ont pris une chance, là. Ils ont déménagé pour essayer d'accommoder leur garçon qui est un jeune adulte autiste. Il y a tellement une pénurie. Je pense qu'il n'y a rien que huit lits à Kapuskasing pour répondre au besoin de la région. Si on en avait six ou huit autres, ils répondraient aux besoins, mais on n'est pas capable de convaincre le gouvernement d'en bâtir dans la région. Pourtant, ce n'est pas un gros nombre. Vous dites : « Hé, six lits, ce n'est pas gros. » Mais pour nous, ça fait toute la différence, parce que ça répondrait au besoin des familles autistes qui ont besoin de ce soutien-là.

2130

Je veux en revenir aussi aux Premières Nations. Quand on parle des Premières Nations—je sais que mon collègue en a parlé dans son allocution aussi—c'est qu'on a tellement de besoins; ils ont tellement de besoins. Comment est-ce qu'on vous expliquerait ça? Vous ne pouvez pas—c'est un peuple qui est oublié, parce que vous ne réalisez pas les conditions qu'ils vivent dedans. C'est ridicule. Je n'ai jamais vu, en Ontario, une communauté qui a eu 30 ans à devoir faire bouillir l'eau—30 ans. Il y des gens qui ne connaissent même pas boire d'un robinet. Ils vont en dehors des communautés; ils ne boivent pas du robinet parce qu'ils n'y font pas confiance, fait qu'ils achètent des bouteilles.

Pourquoi est-ce qu'on vit ça? Puis ils disent qu'on passe la—tu sais, c'est du fédéral. Ce n'est pas du fédéral; on est signataire des traités.

On a un surplus de 5,4 milliards de dollars—pas des millions, des milliards. Quand on pourrait répondre, prendre un montant d'argent et répondre aux besoins des communautés qui n'ont—moi, j'ai une communauté où l'eau a tellement de chimiques dedans que, quand ils prennent une douche, il vient une rougeur. Fait que, ils sont obligés de garder les vitres ouvertes, les portes ouvertes pour que l'air circule. Mais s'ils prennent une douche trop longtemps, ils viennent avec des rougeurs sur leur peau. C'est normal, ça? Pas dans mon monde à moi. Mais dans leur monde, c'est normal. Pourquoi est-ce que c'est normal, quand on a les moyens, on a l'argent, on a des milliards qu'on dit qu'on va garder en cas de—tu sais, quand les temps sont durs. Mais pour ces communautés, ça fait des générations que c'est dur.

Mon collègue vous a parlé d'un enfant de 11 ans qui a commis le suicide. Ce n'est pas en dehors du commun, là, et on trouve ça normal? On normalise ça? Tu ne peux pas normaliser ça.

On parle de Ornge, et il faut reconnaître ce que le gouvernement a fait de bien : ils ont investi de l'argent pour moderniser les flottes, les avions et tout. Ça, c'est bien, mais il faut tu aies le monde; tu as besoin du monde pour être capable de donner les services de paramédic.

Je parlais avec l'un des paramédics de Ornge. Il dit : « Guy, on est après de se brûler sur l'overtime. Ça n'a pas de sens. Quand on va dans le Nord, on a de l'overtime à plus faire; on est obligé d'aller remplir les shifts là. » Mais il dit qu'il a eu 60 personnes qui ont été engagées dans les derniers trois ans. De ces 60 personnes, 50 % ont fait la coupe, la coupure—c'était encore trop : 50 % de ces 60 personnes ont été capables d'être engagées. Il nous expliquait qu'ils étaient déjà dans une pénurie avant la pandémie. Fait que, il y a un problème quelque part, là. C'est beau d'avoir les beaux avions et tout ça, mais on a besoin de monde pour répondre au besoin.

Moi, sur Ornge—dans la communauté de Constance Lake, il y a une femme qui est décédée parce que, quand Ornge est venu, les paramédics n'étaient pas qualifiés. Ils sont allés à l'hôpital, et ils ont dit : « Bien, elle est beaucoup plus malade »—parce qu'elle avait un drip. Ils ont dit : « On va repartir. » Mais l'hôpital a dit : « Non, on va vous donner une infirmière pour partir avec. » Il y a eu un call qui s'est fait du dispatch, parce que le pilote était rendu à la fin de ses heures. Il a été obligé de retourner. Mais, quand l'avion est revenu—l'autre avion—pour venir ramasser la patiente, elle était décédée.

Comme le docteur me l'a expliqué : « Guy, je ne te dis pas qu'elle l'aurait fait—mais au moins, elle aurait eu une chance de vivre. Arrêter de transférer à Sudbury, et peut-être qu'elle aurait survécu. » Mettons les chances sur le bord du patient.

Depuis quand est-on rendu au point que le patient n'a plus de valeur? Ça ne fait aucun sens. Fait que, on doit réviser ce qu'on fait, sérieusement, quand il y a des vies qui se perdent. Il y a eu une autre vie de même—pas à Constance Lake, mais dans le Nord, encore une communauté. Mais c'était un bris d'avion. C'est pour ça que j'ai dit que c'est bon qu'on a amélioré nos flottes. Mais pourquoi est-on sujet à ça encore? C'est encore le Nord qui paye, parce que le Sud—on compétitionne pour le Sud.

J'aimerais en parler bien longtemps, mais je n'ai plus de temps.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Questions?

M. Stéphane Sarrazin: J'apprécie les commentaires du député de l'opposition. Je me demandais, avec ce projet de loi qui parle de—qu'on veut donner des solutions pour atteindre le niveau de logement qu'on voudrait avoir en Ontario. On propose justement de canceller la taxe harmonisée sur les nouveaux projets locatifs. Je me demandais si c'est quelque chose que tu supportais, toi, en tant que député?

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Response?

M. Guy Bourgouin: Le problème qu'on a : même les développeurs nous disent qu'ils ne sont pas capables de fournir la demande. Nous, dans notre région—je ne peux pas parler de dans ta région; je ne la connais pas assez pour ça. Mais je sais que pour nous, que ça soit des loyers subventionnés ou adaptatifs ou même abordables, ça devient problématique. C'est pour ça qu'on a fait une motion pour demander que le gouvernement doit aider. Parce que ce n'est pas nous que le disons; ce sont les développeurs qui le disent. Fait que, en quelque part, si les

développeurs ne peuvent pas le faire, le gouvernement, il faut qu'il entre dans le portrait pour essayer d'adresser ça.

On l'a déjà fait dans le passé, même les gouvernements conservateurs l'ont fait dans le passé, avec succès : on parle de coopératives. C'était une bonne solution. Ça fonctionne. Pourquoi ne peut-on pas le faire aujourd'hui pour répondre aux besoins des communautés? Il y a tellement de communautés qui en ont besoin que ça répondrait—quand je parle aussi d'adapter, écoute, on a besoin de loyers adaptés pour répondre aux besoins parce qu'il y a des familles dans le Nord qui sont prises, puis elles n'ont aucun recours à d'autres places où aller.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Further questions?

Mr. Terence Kernaghan: I'd like to thank the member from Mushkegowuk—James Bay for his eloquent presentation about the struggles that northern Ontarians face accessing health care. He also spoke about the inadequacy of the northern Ontario travel grant.

My question, though, is, how would expanding funding for nurse practitioners benefit northern communities that don't have access to primary care?

M. Guy Bourgouin: Merci pour la question. Les « nurse practitioners », c'est une solution qu'on devrait explorer beaucoup plus, puis on devrait en avoir beaucoup plus dans notre région. Ça répondrait à un gros besoin qu'on a dans le Nord. J'ai une communauté, moi, où il y a 3 500 orphelins qui n'ont pas de médecin parce qu'il a des médecins qui sont retraités. Quand on aurait des « nurse practitioners » qui pourraient remplir ce vide-là—si le gouvernement finançait plus les infirmières praticiennes, on répondrait aux besoins de nos communautés. Puis les communautés le demandent, mais elle manque de financement. On les a rencontrées cette semaine, justement; on était là, et j'ai vu plusieurs de vous autres qui étaient là. C'est ça qu'elles demandent : plus de financement pour aider à répondre aux besoins.

Ce serait une très bonne solution pour nous dans le Nord. J'ai des communautés qui pourraient répondre aux besoins—sans être obligés de sortir de leurs communautés—s'il y avait des « nurse practitioners » qui pouvaient pratiquer dans leurs communautés.

Quand tu parles de Hearst, le 3 500, puis qu'il y a un manque de médecins, je pense que ça serait une très bonne solution qu'on doit explorer et que le gouvernement doit explorer.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Question?

M^{me} Dawn Gallagher Murphy: L'énoncé économique de l'automne mentionne qu'on va investir 900 000 \$ additionnels sur trois ans pour mobiliser la communauté d'affaires franco-ontarienne et promouvoir la francophonie comme atout économique.

Donc, ma question pour le député : est-ce que vous pouvez supporter cet investissement qui va augmenter l'économie des Franco-Ontariens et Franco-Ontariennes?

M. Guy Bourgouin: Écoute, je ne suis pas ici pour dire qu'il n'y a pas de bonnes choses dans l'énoncé économique. Ça serait faux de dire le contraire. Il y a des bonnes choses, mais il y a bien des choses qui devraient être aussi faites. J'ai juste parlé du « travel grant ». Pour vous, peut-être que

ce n'est pas grand-chose un « travel grant » quand vous avez l'accès, que tout est accessible et près de vous autres où vous êtes capables de le faire, mais pour nous dans le Nord, c'est important. Quand j'ai parlé des Premières Nations ou même Ornge, le staffing, pour nous, c'est important parce que—mon collègue vous l'a dit—nous autres, on n'a pas de routes. Il y a bien des communautés qui sont isolées. On a besoin de ces services-là.

C'est sûr qu'il a des bonnes choses dans ce projet de loi, et ça, c'en est une; je suis le premier à le reconnaître. Et il faut reconnaître les bonnes choses. C'est pour ça que j'ai dit que le gouvernement a fait de bonnes choses quand c'est venu à Ornge. Ils ont investi pour avoir une meilleure flotte. Il faut avoir l'investissement astheure pour être capable d'avoir les personnes de soutien qui viennent avec ces avions-là, parce qu'on a vu dans le Nord—j'ai vécu, dans ma communauté, une personne qui est décédée à cause que le staff n'était pas qualifié. Ils ont été obligés de retourner à Toronto et revenir, mais il était trop tard. La personne avait décédé.

2140

Ça, c'est inacceptable. Je suis sûr que—moi, je trouve ça inacceptable puis je suis convaincu que le gouvernement trouve ça inacceptable, mais il faut faire les investissements—

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Thank you. Further questions?

Mr. Sol Mamakwa: Thank you to the member for Mushkegowuk—James Bay. I know a couple of things that you talked about are the BWAs, boil-water advisories. And you talked about Attawapiskat. We know that Attawapiskat had a diamond mine, the Victor mine. It was a diamond mine. There's actually a diamond on this mace that belongs to that mine. I have been to Attawapiskat a few times, even though it's not part of my riding, but there were a couple of times when I was able to visit. When I watched them get water, they were hauling water by truck, wheelbarrow. The mine had closed already. Then they were running out of space as well—their community—because their airport is just right in the reserve.

When we talk about economic prosperity for economic reconciliation, when the government talks about the Ring of Fire that way, do you think the Ring of Fire communities that support the Ring of Fire will end up like this or will be prosperous like the way they describe?

Mr. Guy Bourgouin: Thank you for the question, and that's a good question. When you look at Attawapiskat, somebody got rich, but definitely not the community. And the chief was telling me, "They got rich using our names, our community names, when they were not even related."

When you think about that community that is still carrying water, well, that's the community, I'm telling you, where they don't drink the water because they get rashes. Of course they won't drink the water, because it's got too many chemicals, because the lake is dying. That's why there are so many chemicals in that water. But you cannot blame First Nations in the Ring of Fire for being cautious or making sure they protect their interests or making sure that whatever happens—and that's why they want to transfer. That's why they want to be part of every-

thing that's going to happen when it comes to mining, from day one to the last day, to make sure they protect their ancestral territories and make sure their community thrives. But if they're not part of it from the beginning, of course they're going to be—because of the stories that you just asked about, Attawapiskat.

M. Andrew Dowie: Je veux remercier le membre de Mushkegowuk—Baie James pour son discours et ses commentaires. Dans le Nord, je sais que les distances sont pénibles et souvent on doit conduire pendant des heures pour accéder aux services et pour tous les essentiels de la vie.

Dans le Nord, l'essence c'est essentiel, effectivement. Dans ce projet de loi, on continue de relaxer la taxe harmonisée. Est-ce que c'est quelque chose que tu supportes pour le peuple du Nord?

M. Guy Bourgouin: J'aimerais voir que ça soit harmonisé, que ça soit le prix du gaz à la grandeur, à la même place que l'Ontario, comme un projet de loi que mon collègue qui était ici avant, Gilles Bisson, avait proposé, parce qu'on paye des prix extravagants—bien trop—dans le Nord.

Tu sais, pourquoi est-ce que le gaz n'a pas le même prix à la grandeur de la province? Pourquoi, quand je viens dans le Sud ou que je voyage dans le Sud, je vois des prix beaucoup moins élevés, et des fois c'est 10, 15, 20 cennes de plus parce qu'on vit dans le Nord? Écoute, quand tu vas encore plus au Nord—si tu vas dans la Baie James, là, on parle de trois ou quatre piastres de plus. Des fois, c'est ridicule les taux qu'ils payent en gaz.

Mais si on dit que le prix va être le même prix à la grandeur—que votre taxe que vous faites ne bénéficie pas rien que certains individus, mais qu'elle bénéficie tout le monde. Fait que, si on est pour faire de quoi, on est bien mieux de dire qu'on va faire ce que l'ancien député Gilles Bison proposait. On met ça le prix à la même grandeur, puis on évalue ça à chaque mois pour dire c'est quoi qui va être le prix, parce que ça c'est beaucoup plus juste que ce que vous proposez.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Further debate? Further debate?

Mr. Bethlenfalvy has moved second reading of Bill 146, An Act to implement Budget measures and to enact and amend various statutes. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? I heard a no.

All those in favour, please say "aye."

All those opposed, 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.

Second reading vote deferred.

TAXATION IMPOSITION

Resuming the debate adjourned on November 15, 2023 on the amendment to the motion regarding taxes on fuels for home heating.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): The member from Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke.

Mr. John Yakabuski: It's a pleasure to rejoin the debate, as I left off this morning when I ran out of time at the clock of 10:15. Of course, we are debating my colleague from Lanark–Frontenac–Kingston's absolutely tremendous motion that shows how much he recognizes and cares for families here in the province of Ontario. His motion for the federal government, plain and simple, is just do the right thing: Treat all Canadians the same. That's what his motion is all about.

Let's forget for a moment what the motion actually says and then think about the principle behind it: that the federal government, the government of Canada, the national government—what a novel idea. We're suggesting to them that they treat Canadians, from coast to coast to coast, equally. Boy, who would have thunk it, eh? And yet we are being told by the federal government that they're not going to do that.

That was when the Premier wrote a polite letter and the Premiers, in their conference, asked the Prime Minister to do the right thing. Well, now there's a motion before this Parliament—this Parliament that represents 15 million people here in the province of Ontario—to say to the federal government, “You've got it wrong.”

How can you, in good conscience, enact a regulation or a piece of legislation—whatever they're doing there—that singles out one part of the country for special treatment and leaves out all of the rest? There is nobody in Canada, even the people down east—even the Premiers of those provinces are saying, “We're happy. We appreciate what you're doing to help our citizens. But you should be extending the removal or the suspension of the carbon tax for three years—what you're doing to home heating furnace oil, you should be extending that to all forms of heating homes.”

When I left off—I think I remember when I left off: Who can live without heating their homes? It's just not possible. So here we are again, asking the government of Ontario. We're going into winter, and when winter comes—it's Canada, and you're the government of Canada, and we get winter in every single square mile of this country. People heat with natural gas; a lot of people in rural Ontario heat with propane; and still some in Ontario—but not a high percentage—do heat with furnace oil, which I do.

It's not hard. We're telling the federal government to do the right thing and extend that exemption to all forms of home heating. Because it's not just the carbon tax on home heating that is killing people, it is the cost of living—and he talks about it. The Prime Minister talks about it; his ministers talk about it; the Premiers talk about it. Our Premier is front and centre on it. The cost of living is hurting big time. It's on the news every night. One in 10 people in Toronto, apparently, have visited a food bank. One in 10 people have visited food banks.

2150

It's because of the cost of living: not just the cost of food, which of course has experienced high inflation rates

over the last couple of years, but it's the cost of everything else. When you put it all together, if you can't heat your home, you can't pay for your taxes. You can't pay for the cost of operating your vehicles. You can't pay for the kids' sports or anything else. Everything has gone up.

We've been giving people a break here in the province of Ontario, doing everything we can as a government to make life more affordable, and here the federal government decides, “Well, we're going to make life a little more affordable, but just for the people in Atlantic Canada, because most of those seats, we own, and we're concerned that if we go into another campaign in 2025, we might lose those seats.” If this is the way you're going to govern in Canada or any democracy, that you are actually going to punish people that you represent as well as the government in order to politically advantage yourself, we are in a sorry state. But that's the state that Justin Trudeau and his gang in Ottawa have found themselves in, because they know they've dug their own grave.

Treat Canadians all across this country fairly and equally. We're calling upon our colleagues to support us on that.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Further debate?

Hon. Kinga Surma: Madam Speaker, as you know, we are building Ontario like never before, with historic investments in infrastructure to support priority projects such as transit, highways, schools, hospitals and long-term care. However, we realize we cannot build alone and recognize that the sector has been facing new challenges over the past several years.

It is clear that labour shortages, inflation and ongoing supply chain disruption are driving up costs globally, and this is having a profound impact on many businesses. Cost escalation is affecting families and businesses not only here in Ontario, but across Canada and the world. In the face of this growing problem, our government is looking toward solutions that keep costs down for the sector and for consumers.

Here is one solution that will help keep costs down: removing the carbon tax. We said in 2018 that a carbon tax would be a challenge for the people of Canada and an extraordinary challenge for the people of Ontario. We have fought that tax tooth and nail because we knew it would lead to poorer outcomes for our province. We said federal policies of high taxes, red tape and the carbon tax would hurt the Ontario economy. The carbon tax has contributed to inflation, high taxes and big spending, which is leading to higher interest rates and is forcing thousands of people out of the housing market.

Simply put, the carbon tax is making the things we rely on more expensive. We can fight for the environment and treat climate change seriously while working with industry. We will not need to pass down the cost to the consumer. We have repeatedly called on the federal government, and the NDP who keep them in power, to eliminate this inflationary tax. We have asked them to help us remove the carbon tax, to put even more money back into the pockets of the people of Ontario. And what have the Liberals and the NDP done in the House? Absolutely nothing.

Since our government came to power in 2018 under the leadership of Premier Ford, we have cut taxes, reduced red tape and brought hundreds of thousands of jobs back to Ontario. Fifteen years of Liberal government, supported by the NDP, brought Ontario to its knees, with 300,000 jobs fleeing the province. Our government has spent five years untangling the mess left behind by the Liberal-NDP coalition.

The Liberals and the NDP continue to vote against measures we have introduced to make life more affordable for the people of the province, but we won't let the NDP and Liberals stop the relief and investments we're delivering to communities across Ontario. As outlined in our 2023 fall economic statement, our government is moving forward on the most ambitious capital plan in Ontario's history. The government has dedicated more than \$185 billion over the next decade, including almost \$21 billion in years 2023-24, to build highways, transit, hospitals, long-term-care homes, schools, child care spaces and other infrastructure. The increase primarily reflects progress to deliver on our committed projects and programs as they move through further government approvals and planning, procurement tendering and construction.

At a time of economic uncertainty, we are investing in local infrastructure that supports jobs and improves vital services. By building these projects, we will finally build a subway system that will help residents travel across the city more easily and affordably, build more highways to ease congestion and help with the delivery of goods and address capacity challenges faced by our health care and long-term-care sectors, laying the foundation for a stronger and more productive Ontario.

To help meet the needs of the province's growing communities, Ontario's Plan to Build is not only getting key critical infrastructure projects built but helping to attract historic automotive and clean steel investments. As many know, earlier this year, Ontario and Canada secured a historic investment from Volkswagen, Europe's largest automaker. VW is investing \$7 billion to establish its first overseas electric vehicle battery manufacturing plant in St. Thomas. This is the largest electric vehicle related investment in Canadian history and a strong vote of confidence in Ontario and Canada's highly skilled workers and its competitive business environment. It shows that many see Ontario as a great place to invest.

But, Mr. Speaker, carbon taxes take away Ontario's ability to be a strong contender for competition. They drive costs up and makes investment potential weaker. We need the federal government to end this burden on families and on businesses.

We urge the Ontario NDP to call on their federal counterparts, who hold the balance of power in Ottawa, to demand the federal government remove the carbon tax. We urge the Ontario Liberals to call on their federal counterparts to end this tax that is making everything more expensive. The delivery of every product we have in the province is being affected by the worst tax this country has ever seen, and that's the carbon tax.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to use the remaining portion of my time just to speak about how this impacts my

constituents directly. Let's take it back a few years. We know how difficult it has been for families throughout COVID. There were restrictions. There were difficult measures in place. At times, children could not go to school. Many families had to work from home. You couldn't see your loved ones who were in hospital or long-term care. It was an incredibly difficult time, and families suffered financially during that time as well.

Coming out of COVID, we're faced with difficult economic circumstances. The cost of living is going up. The cost of all of products is going up. I feel that pain myself as the Minister of Infrastructure when we know the cost of construction is going up, the cost of materials, the cost of delivery. So the average constituent feels all of that pain when they go to the store to buy their children books or when they go to the store to buy food for their family.

The carbon tax is making everything more expensive because everything that our constituents buy—whether it's at Costco or at Walmart or at the local community store, the local business—is all transported by commercial truck drivers. The carbon tax makes that more unaffordable, which therefore is passed on to the product, and then it makes it far more difficult for families to afford the things that they need.

Going through COVID, such a difficult time, and coming into a difficult economic time, I just believe that right now is not the time for a tax of this nature, because I truly feel that the public has gone through a lot. I truly feel that families are hurting financially and it's our job to make sure that we ease those financial pressures as much as possible.

2200

Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for the time today.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Matthew Rae): Further debate?

Hon. Victor Fedeli: I appreciate this opportunity to be able to talk about this carbon tax motion.

I was thinking throughout the day what I would talk about tonight. To me, it really boils down to a different interpretation or a different understanding of what taxes do. I look at what Premier Ford and our government have done: We have, in five years, reduced taxes, lowered the cost of doing business by \$8 billion. I've said it almost every day in this Legislature since that happened. You just can't emphasize that enough, that lower taxes have created opportunities here in Ontario. We lowered the cost of doing business by \$8 billion, and that put 700,000 people to work in five years. That is the result of what happens when you lower taxes.

The Liberal government, their idea is to raise taxes. They believe that raising taxes is the solution. Raising taxes does not give you more revenue. It sounds counter-intuitive, but lowering taxes has actually increased the revenue in the province of Ontario. By lowering those taxes, the companies have put 700,000 people to work. Those 700,000 people now pay income tax. The companies pay a share of their employee health tax. All of the taxes that are collected from the employees and from the corporations for increasing the value and the size of the businesses have increased our own provincial revenues. By lowering taxes, we have increased revenues.

We lowered taxes on everything. You have not seen any increase in taxes. When we got elected, there was a legacy of the Liberal government to bring in a new tax in January. It was about \$465 million worth of taxes that would have come in six months after we were elected. We said no to that. We left those taxes where they were. We did not collect that additional tax. Yet our revenue actually went up, because we created jobs. We lowered the cost of gasoline in Ontario, first by 5.7 cents a litre and then by an additional 5.3 cents a litre. We've lowered those costs for families. We've lowered those costs for businesses, for farmers, for the distribution companies, for all of the trucking firms. We've lowered that cost.

What did the Liberals do? They raised the cost of gasoline by 14 cents a litre—right now, on its way to 37 cents a litre. That's what they understand. They only understand looking for more revenue so they can spend. We look for reducing taxes so that you, the public, have money to spend. It's a different ideology. Who gets to spend the money? We believe that the people of Ontario know best; they know what their money should be spent on, not the government.

That's really a fundamental difference, and that's why we looked, again, at that reduction of \$8 billion a year. That has helped us bring companies from all over the world here into Ontario. That's the result of lowering the cost of doing business. You bring businesses here.

One of the impediments that we have is the carbon tax. Companies that come here, when they ask us, "What the heck is this carbon tax all about?" it's very difficult to explain it to them, because to us, again, lowering taxes is the way to bring wealth and prosperity to the people of Ontario. We have proven that.

The Liberal government continues to increase the burden on families by increasing the carbon tax. You've heard it from everybody here. They all say the same thing, because it's true. You start at the farm. When you have fertilizer that costs more because you have a carbon tax on it, the cost of your produce at home, your vegetables, your food at home, is increased. You have all of the farm implements that run on gasoline—all more expensive. It makes all of the cost of your food more expensive. You have to take that food out of the ground and ship it. Every vehicle that you are shipping it in costs more money because of the price of gas through the carbon tax. All of that food needs to be put in a warehouse, which needs to be refrigerated. All of that adds cost to people when they go to buy their goods and services. When you look in those warehouses, when they get shipped to the retail stores, all of that adds more cost to the cost of goods.

Everything from Paul's suit here to his socks, everything he is wearing, everything he consumes, everything—

Hon. Paul Calandra: Everything.

Hon. Victor Fedeli: Everything, you're absolutely right.

Everything for everybody costs more money because of the carbon tax. Whether it's what you're wearing, what you're driving or what you're consuming, everything costs more because of one thing: the carbon tax.

We have tried here in Ontario to lead by example. We have shown the people of Ontario that when you lower taxes, you create employment. You have a better way of life, a better quality of life that we have created for the people.

We have lowered the price of gasoline. The federal government, again, does the opposite. They raise the price of everything. We've seen inflation as a direct result of that. Because when you put a carbon tax on the fertilizer and everything else at the farm, inevitably all of the food you consume costs more money. It has created an inflation that has made goods cost more money.

It has made it far more difficult for us to attract businesses here as well. We have this remarkably clean energy grid here in Ontario. We have 65,000 STEM grads every year to help us attract businesses. We have all of these great things going for Ontario and when we sit with these companies, whether it is companies from Japan or Korea or Germany, and they ask about this carbon tax, again it is so hugely difficult to explain to them something that is inexplicable. It makes absolutely no sense that you purposefully add costs—and, as the member from Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke said, what turns out to be it indiscriminately add costs. Some people in some areas of the country now have more of a bargain than others, so it's not even an even playing field. It is indiscriminate and it just continues to boggle the mind of people who are in the business of trying to attract companies here. It makes no sense, other than being very painful to not only the people, but to all of the companies who are trying to continue to hire the more than 700,000 people that are working today.

We are doing our share. We are asking the federal government to do the right thing, to do their share. We're asking the NDP to support the axing of the carbon tax. We are going to continue to work hard to attract businesses here, despite the federal government and the carbon tax. We will continue in the fall economic statement to keep the cost of gasoline reduced. We just ask that the opposition here and the federal government in Ottawa realize the true pain that they're causing the people of Ontario.

2210

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Matthew Rae): Further debate?

Mr. Anthony Leardi: The topics of tonight's debate is the federal carbon tax—a tax which has been imposed on every province in this federation by the federal government. Of course, as we all know, the federal carbon tax was a genesis of the federal Liberal Party. I like to say that Justin Trudeau is the father of the carbon tax in Canada, so what I did is a little bit of research into this issue and I got the background of all of this stuff, and I'm going to present that tonight in a very clear and cohesive manner so that everybody knows that this carbon tax came from Justin Trudeau, imposed on all of the provinces by the federal government, and that's where we stand today.

I'm going to start with this quote from the *Globe and Mail* of February 6, 2015. It says, "Liberal leader Justin Trudeau has vowed to pursue a national carbon pricing

plan to combat climate change if he becomes Prime Minister.” Now, that’s important to note, right? Let me read that again because I want everybody to understand where I’m coming from: “Liberal leader Justin Trudeau has vowed to pursue a national carbon pricing plan to combat climate change if he becomes Prime Minister.”

Hon. Andrea Khanjin: Has it worked?

Mr. Anthony Leardi: I see the member from Barrie–Innisfil knows exactly where I’m going with this. She is three moves ahead in this chess game. But I’m going to slow down because I want everybody to come along with us. Not everybody in this House is travelling as fast as the member for Barrie–Innisfil.

So that’s where we start. We start with the Liberal plan, of course, to save the planet, right? And how are the Liberals going to save the planet? Taxes. That’s their plan to save the planet. They’re going to save the planet through taxes. And do you know why that’s the Liberal plan? Because that’s always the Liberal plan. Taxes are always the Liberal plan.

Let me just illustrate exactly what I mean when I say that. You know what, Mr. Speaker? You’re relatively young; I’m relatively young. Some other members of this House make reference to a previous Premier, Mike Harris. I am not old enough to remember Mike Harris. Some other members of this House refer to Bob Rae. I’m not old enough to remember Bob Rae. But I remember Dalton McGuinty. I am old enough to remember Dalton McGuinty, and I remember the very first thing the Liberal Premier—Liberal, so you know where I’m going with this—the very first thing the Liberal Premier Dalton McGuinty did when he got elected—

Interjection: Taxes.

Mr. Anthony Leardi: Taxes. He introduced the biggest tax in the history of the province of Ontario. Dalton McGuinty, Liberal Premier, introduced the biggest single tax in the history of the province of Ontario. It was called the employer health tax. Remember what the Liberals said the employer health tax was going to do, because taxes—according to Liberal philosophy, they fix everything, right? Remember what the Liberals said it was going to fix for a generation?

Mr. Robert Bailey: Health care.

Mr. Anthony Leardi: The member from Sarnia got it right: health care. The Liberals said that with the biggest tax increase in the history of the province of Ontario, they were going to fix health care. And in the next 15 years, they laid off nurses, trained fewer doctors, reneged on their promise to build a hospital in my region and pretty much drove the province into the biggest debt in the history of the province of Ontario, making us the most indebted sub-sovereign jurisdiction in the world. That was the Liberal plan, and that’s what happened.

They said taxes were going to save the health care system. That’s what they said. And in 15 years, they couldn’t even build a mere 600 long-term-care units for elderly people—couldn’t even do it. And yet they introduced the biggest tax in the history of the province of Ontario, under their philosophy to save the health care system.

True to Liberal philosophy, now they want to save the planet. So what did they do? They introduced a tax, because taxes, according to Liberal philosophy, fix everything. So they introduced a tax.

“Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau is Betting His Re-election on a Carbon Tax.” That comes from a report from October 24, 2018. The same report says, Doug Ford “declared undying opposition to a federal carbon tax, and now plans to sue the feds.”

So the stage is set. We have Liberal philosophy: Tax, tax, tax. We have PC philosophy: Tax is bad. So that’s where we are. The stage is set, and we go off and we have a court case.

We’re at 2018—“Justin Trudeau has shown great climate leadership in following through with this carbon tax.” See, it’s Justin Trudeau’s carbon tax. That quote comes from probably not a newspaper that anybody in the PC caucus reads, but I know that people in the NDP caucus read this newspaper, the Guardian. On October 26, 2018, the Guardian confirmed clearly and without question that this is Justin Trudeau’s climate change carbon tax. It’s his tax. It is not anybody else’s tax. It’s Justin Trudeau’s tax.

Then, it goes to the Supreme Court of Canada. In the Financial Times of March 25, 2021, we have a report that says, “Canadian Supreme Court Upholds Justin Trudeau’s Carbon Tax.”

So, all along, we knew it was the Liberal philosophy that implemented the taxes—just like Dalton McGuinty, just like every other Liberal tax. This is a federal government, Liberal, Justin Trudeau carbon tax.

So let’s take a look. What does the Supreme Court say? “Parliament passed the Greenhouse Gas Pollution Pricing Act in 2018, based on the consensus that greenhouse gas emissions contribute to global climate change.... In Canada, the federal government passed the act to implement its commitments.” So that was done by the federal government. There are some people in this House who are still contesting that—but it’s not me saying that; it’s the Supreme Court of Canada saying that. The Supreme Court of Canada said, “In Canada, the federal government”—that’s the federal Liberal government of Justin Trudeau—“passed the act to implement” it. That’s what the Supreme Court of Canada said. Do you know what? You can argue all you want with me, but you can’t argue with the Supreme Court of Canada. That issue is settled.

Now we get to another interesting part. I’m going to turn to some statements made by Gudie Hutchings. She’s the federal rural economic development minister.

Interjection.

Mr. Anthony Leardi: She’s from Newfoundland, I’m told. She’s a Liberal—

Mr. Dave Smith: She’s the one who said that if they elected more Liberals, then they would get—

Mr. Anthony Leardi: See, the member from Peterborough–Kawartha knows exactly where I’m going with this. He’s three steps ahead in this chess game. He has to slow down and let the rest of us catch up.

Gudie Hutchings, the rural economic development minister from the federal Liberal government, was doing an interview with CTV. She said, “This isn’t about polls;

this is about people.” What was she referring to when she said that? What she was saying is—they took the carbon tax off of oil heating in Atlantic Canada, but they left the carbon tax on all the other heating here in Ontario. I want to repeat that, because I don’t want anyone to miss the importance: They eliminated the carbon tax on oil in Atlantic Canada. Where do you think most of the oil in Atlantic Canada comes from? Do you think it’s domestically produced from a great Canadian domestic oil refinery, like in Alberta, maybe from Newfoundland? I don’t think so. I’m still researching this issue, but I suspect that the majority of the heating oil out in the Atlantic provinces probably doesn’t come from Canada.

2220

Mr. Dave Smith: It comes from Saudi Arabia.

Mr. Anthony Leardi: My friend from Peterborough—Kawartha believes that it might come from Saudi Arabia.

Mr. Dave Smith: It does. It’s processed in the Irving plant.

Mr. Anthony Leardi: He indicates that it’s imported from Saudi Arabia and that eventually it finds its way into the pipeline. And now, what does that mean, Mr. Speaker? I’ll tell you what it means: You and you and you—all of the people in this room, everybody who lives in Ontario is now paying a carbon tax, but the people who are using foreign oil are not paying the carbon tax. In other words, we are now subsidizing the importation of foreign oil.

I overstated that a little bit. We’re not actually subsidizing it, but we’re giving it a tax holiday while the rest of us have to pay a tax on the consumption of whatever cleaner energy we’re using—because natural gas is cleaner than oil; propane is cleaner than oil—and Saudi Arabian oil, being used, according to my colleague, in Atlantic Canada for their heating needs, is now not paying a tax that we’re paying.

Now, I wonder how Canadians feel about that. I wonder how our colleagues—maybe in the NDP caucus, and I’m definitely wondering how our colleagues in the independent Liberal caucus—who I know are listening very carefully to everything I say. I’m definitely wondering how they feel about the fact that their Liberal cousins in Ottawa have given foreign oil in Canada a tax holiday, while the exact same Prime Minister who just awarded that tax holiday to foreign oil is the same Prime Minister who blocked oil refineries and pipelines in our province of Alberta. And why did he do this? Why did he block pipelines in Alberta? Ostensibly to save the planet. So we have the exact same Liberal Prime Minister giving a tax holiday to imported oil and at the same simultaneous time denying the production of oil here in our own domestic oil supply.

Now, I want to turn to a different topic. We are a provincial Legislature; we do not have the power to force the federal government. We don’t have the power to force the federal government to get rid of that carbon tax. But we were talking about phones earlier. There was a great speech given earlier about phones. Today, this morning, the government House leader was talking about this, the ability to use a phone or actually talk to people face to face.

Let’s talk for a minute about the federal NDP caucus. The federal NDP caucus—we know they’re never going to form the government, just like they’re never going to form the government in Ontario. But do you know what? They hold the balance of power in Ottawa. The federal NDP caucus, the cousins of our colleagues across the way here, they hold the balance of power. That means they can bring down the government tomorrow morning if they want to. They are more powerful now than they will ever be. They hold the balance of power. If they wanted to get rid of the carbon tax, they could get rid of it tomorrow morning. Our NDP caucus in this Legislature could exercise influence on that caucus in Ottawa. They could call their cousins in Ottawa, they could tell their cousins in Ottawa, “Get rid of the carbon tax.” I invite them to do so. Maybe during the course of this debate they will stand up and they will give us their opinion on that.

I turn now to our colleagues across the way in the independent Liberal caucus, who I know are listening very carefully to everything I’m saying. They are also in a very powerful position, because, of course, their cousins in Ottawa are their party cousins. Justin Trudeau is the federal Liberal leader in Ottawa. He could kill the carbon tax; he could do whatever he wanted with it. I wonder if the Liberal independents in this Legislature will contact their Liberal counterparts in Ottawa and try to exert some kind of influence on them to see if they will get rid of the carbon tax. I invite them to do so, and if they don’t intend to do that, I invite them to stand during the course of this debate and explain to us why they are disinclined to do that.

I had made some reference to the federal rural economic development minister, Gudie Hutchings, and I’m going to return to that. See, she says, “I can tell you” the Liberals’ “Atlantic caucus was vocal with what they’ve heard from their constituents.” And then, when Ms. Hutchings was talking about other parts of Canada that didn’t receive the same treatment, she had this to say: “Perhaps they need to elect more Liberals in the Prairies so we can have that conversation as well.”

I mean, we get pretty partisan in this House. I have to admit, I’m a fairly partisan individual myself. But you know what? Even I have never said something this partisan. I’ve never said that somebody should be denied equal treatment simply because they don’t have a Liberal member of Parliament or they don’t have a representative of such-and-such a party. There are Canadians who pay taxes right across this nation. Everybody in this room probably pays taxes. And they are people who deserve equal treatment, so if people in Atlantic Canada are getting a carbon tax holiday even if they’re using foreign oil, it stands to reason that people in the other parts of Canada should get the same tax break.

But Gudie Hutchings doesn’t feel that way. The federal Minister of Rural Economic Development doesn’t feel that way. She thinks that the only way you should get a tax break is if you vote her way, if you vote for her. But wait a minute: I think she contradicted herself, because here in Ontario, at the federal level, there are many Liberal elected MPs.

Interjection.

Mr. Anthony Leardi: Somebody has suggested there might be over 70 of them. So how is it that the Liberal MPs at the federal level in Atlantic Canada got a tax break for their ridings, but the Liberal MPs here in Ontario failed to get exactly the same tax break for Ontario? How is it that all those Liberal MPs failed? It's not just one MP who failed. It's like the whole Ontario Liberal caucus just blew it; they just failed. This tiny group of Liberal MPs from Atlantic Canada—there can't be more than a few of them—got a tax break for Atlantic Canada.

Interjection.

Mr. Anthony Leardi: How many? They got a tax break. Why didn't these Liberal MPs from Ontario demand the same consideration for Ontario?

I'm going to turn my comments now to quote the member from Waterloo, who I hope hears my comments, and I'm actually quoting directly from Hansard. Hansard, of course, is the official record of the things that get said in this chamber. I would never come into this chamber and say somebody said something when they didn't actually say that. I would never come into this chamber and ascribe to somebody words they never said. Other members of this House might do it; I would never do it. I think that's highly unparliamentary. So I come in here and I have Hansard; I have the official transcript of what actually got said.

This is what the member from Waterloo said about the carbon tax during the debate on October 29, 2019. She said, "The moral imperative has to be the revenue-generating tool around pricing pollution and tackling the climate crisis with a price on carbon." I have purposely concentrated on the words "revenue-generating tool," and therein lies the philosophy of the NDP. You see, the Liberals believe that taxation solves all problems, but the NDP believe that the purpose of the carbon tax is to generate revenue. Let me read that quote to you again: "The moral imperative has to be the revenue-generating tool around pricing pollution and tackling the climate crisis with a price on carbon."

2230

The NDP treat it as a revenue-generating tool. I want to make my position on this absolutely clear: I reject the NDP position. A carbon tax should not be treated as a revenue-generating tool. It is a bad thing. A carbon tax is a tax on everything and increases the cost of everything from food, clothing, transportation, heating and housing. It is not a revenue-generating tool, as stated by the member from Waterloo, and it should not be used that way.

That's why we need to pass this motion, make our position known and put pressure on the federal government, the independent Liberals and the NDP opposition to scrap the carbon tax.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Matthew Rae): Further debate?

Mr. Mike Harris: Do it again.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Matthew Rae): You can only speak once, as the member from Kitchener—Conestoga knows.

To the member from Chatham-Kent—Leamington, please.

Mr. Trevor Jones: I want to first would thank my fellow colleague the member from Lanark—Frontenac—Kingston, who's a gentleman who serves and lives with integrity, for bringing forward an important motion which, like him, is responsible, common-sense and prudent, calling on the federal government to eliminate the carbon tax on fuels and inputs on home heating for everyone—not just a select group of people or a regional group of people but for everyone.

The recent exemption offered by the federal government that benefits only those using home heating oil raised this issue to the top of mind for all Canadians, particularly since this benefit will never reach the majority of Ontario homes, including those of the families and individuals who live in my riding of Chatham-Kent—Leamington.

A few weeks ago, I brought forward a similar motion calling on the federal government to eliminate the carbon tax from grocery items, an attempt to put more money back into the pockets of individuals and families all across Ontario. This motion—common sense, integrity, prudent, responsible, like the member who supported it—seeks to accomplish this very same goal.

Mr. Speaker, the delivery of almost every consumer good across this province—the fresh and processed food we enjoy—is affected by the worst tax this country has ever seen, a tax that's harmful to hard-working Canadians and Ontario families, individuals, farmers and small businesses. It provides no value other than taking money from families. This is the carbon tax.

And although I can't tell the story as animated as my friend the member from Essex, I'll tell a story that, like the sponsor of this motion, is prudent, responsible and full of integrity. This carbon tax is a price levied on emissions from fossil fuels, such as natural gas, coal, gasoline and oil. The current carbon tax rate is set at \$65 per tonne of emissions, with a \$15 increase built in every year, like the revenue-generating tool that my friend the member from Essex commented on, until the year 2030 when Canadians will be paying \$170 per tonne.

The carbon tax was introduced by the federal government back in 2019 with a goal of reducing Canada's greenhouse gas emissions. Only four years later, the carbon tax has clearly made no progress on that front—all against a backdrop of the reality that Canada contributes around 1.5% or less of global carbon emissions.

The carbon tax makes things we rely on more expensive, and that it does do. It's costing the people of this province, across Ontario, more on every single thing they do and every single thing they buy.

The carbon tax is both unaffordable, unsustainable and ineffective. The federal Liberal government admitted as much when they removed this tax on home heating oil, a move that largely benefits constituents from Liberal-held federal ridings in Atlantic Canada. The federal Minister of Rural Economic Development fully admitted this move came after sustained pressure from Maritime Liberal MPs to support affordability by putting money back in the pockets of Canadians. Why don't all Canadians deserve the very same treatment?

There are 76 federal Liberal members who represent Ontario—45% of their caucus—who all voted against a pause on the carbon tax for home heating oils. If 23 Liberal Atlantic members can advocate for tax relief for their constituents, why can't the federal Liberal members across Ontario do the same?

The clear majority of Ontarians believe the carbon tax should be removed on all home heating, so why isn't our federal government listening? If the federal government can eliminate the carbon tax on just home heating oil, thereby eliminating tax on probably a higher contributor to greenhouse gas emissions, then why not extend it to all home heating fuels, like cleaner, more widespread propane and natural gas?

Some 3% or so of Canadian homes rely on heating oils, almost all of them concentrated in Atlantic Canada. But 65% of the homes across Ontario and in my riding of Chatham-Kent-Leamington rely on natural gas and propane to heat their homes, something more responsible, something less pollutant and less of a contributor to greenhouse gas emissions. In the midst of a true affordability crisis, when families are actually struggling to pay bills and deciding which bills to pay, the federal government committed only to tax breaks on some of their Liberal-held member ridings and has ignored hard-working Ontario families.

This motion is about affordability, which is why we're presenting it and why we're urging our members from across the aisle to support us and come and speak in a united voice to champion this cause for all of Ontario's families. Canada's inflation rate has risen around 3.8 % per year, year over year, increasing the cost of food by over 10%. Canadians are truly struggling to make ends meet. The increase in global conflict and unrest has already tested fragile supply chains and increased the prices of goods such as oil and gas.

Our government is truly committed to combatting this affordability crisis by introducing a number of initiatives aimed at making life more affordable for all of Ontario.

The LIFT—Low-income Individuals and Families Tax Credit—provides tax relief for low-income families. It's common sense. It's prudent and responsible. Similarly, the Ontario Childcare Access and Relief from Expenses—CARE—initiative is a tax credit to support families with child care expenses—prudent, responsible and full of integrity. The Seniors' Home Safety Tax Credit helps seniors live safely in their homes longer and in a more accessible way.

Most recently, our government cut the tax on gas by 10 cents a litre. We removed the provincial HST from purpose-built rental housing to make homes more affordable, particularly those in the rental category.

Our government is committed to making life more affordable for everyone, and we need the federal government on our side. Very recently, Premier Ford, along with the Premiers of Alberta, Saskatchewan, New Brunswick and Nova Scotia, wrote an open letter to the federal government asking to extend the carbon tax exemption and remove the carbon tax on all home heating inputs. I'm proud to be part of a government that's committed to

working for workers. Removing the carbon tax from all home heating inputs would provide much-needed relief for all of Ontario's families.

The carbon tax will cost Ontario and those who use natural gas an additional—at minimum—\$300 this winter alone. The Prime Minister has consistently stated that Canadians will be better off due to rebates in the carbon tax. However, the Parliamentary Budget Office shows clearly the carbon tax will cost the average Canadian household at least \$710 this year, even after these so-called rebates. At a time when all of Ontario is already looking to cut costs and spending, this carbon tax is truly ill-natured.

The federal government cited the reason for this exemption on home heating oil was because it was four times more expensive than natural gas. However, natural gas prices have increased by 50% in the past five years and are continuing on that same trajectory, not to mention the fact that natural gas is cleaner.

2240

Heating is expensive for all Canadians, and all heating fuels should receive the same carbon tax exemption. Madam Speaker, heating your home is not a luxury; it's a necessity, and Ontario should not be punished for this necessity. I have heard from many of my constituents across Chatham-Kent-Leamington about the negative effects of the carbon tax on their home heating bills and their daily lives. Most of the homes in Chatham-Kent-Leamington, like much of southwestern Ontario, use natural gas to heat their homes—a fuel that's 40% cleaner, more efficient and sourced in Ontario. Yet they continue to pay more for home heating because we lack that exemption.

In Chatham-Kent-Leamington, fresh food producers and growers make up a large percentage of my community. Not only does the carbon tax plague their home heating costs, but also the cost of heating their barns, their greenhouses and their grain-drying facilities. Natural gas and propane are used to heat the barns which house our livestock. They're essential in the grain-drying process—and that process is used for the food, the feed and the biofuels—and they maintain the heating and cooling systems across Ontario's greenhouses, which ensure year-round, close-to-home local production.

One example from our area is the story of a real Durham region chicken farmer, a farming family. This farming family—our neighbours, our friends, our constituents—saw a 26% increase in their gas bill. Similarly, a mid-western-Ontario hog farmer would have seen a 38% increase; the cost of the gas essential to heat the very farms that house and protect our livestock, their livestock and their livelihoods rose dramatically and immediately upon introduction of this carbon tax.

Greenhouses across the province and across my riding of Chatham-Kent-Leamington rely on natural gas to produce fresh, nutritious, affordable produce year-round. Close to home, fewer food miles—you know where your tomatoes, cucumbers and peppers came from: an Ontario farm. Yet this carbon tax punishes them for producing

fresh food in our backyard—our neighbours, our friends, our colleagues and our hard-working farming families.

The heating bills producers in my region are forced to pay are detrimental in business and detrimental to food security and food sovereignty. For example, a 30-acre pepper farm in my riding will pay one third of their energy bill to the carbon tax; 30 acres of fresh bell pepper production will pay \$11,000 a month on the carbon tax, which comes on their bottom line. That margin compression that our economic scholars talk about, that's their livelihood shrinking, their profits shrinking, their ability to scale, to invest in further production, to pass on a sustainable farm to their family shrinking. This very farm, at the end of the life cycle of this carbon tax, will pay \$150,000 in this tax alone—fresh food production impacted.

Heating a home and a greenhouse or a barn is costing us all too much. Greenhouses that are growing highly sustainable, clean, fresh food are actually sequestering carbon—key features that are part of controlled-environment agriculture, the very agriculture system that Ontario is pioneering and leading the world in. Yet we're punishing our very innovators, the ones that use natural pollination, bumblebees, less water, recycled nutrients, recycled water, and supplemental heating and lighting so we can have fresh food produced in Ontario year-round. A farm that can produce 25 times the yield of a conventional farm is punished.

Despite all the positive steps that greenhouse growers and farms have taken to reduce their carbon input and their carbon footprint to produce sustainable produce year-round and invest in innovative technology, they're being punished by a government that's not listening to them.

If the federal government will eliminate the tax on home heating oils in eastern Canada, why are food producers not afforded the same exemptions? We can fight for the environment and treat climate change seriously while working with our industry. We will not pass down costs to the consumer. The most recent carbon tax exemption is divisive. It's meant to be divisive. It's meant to be inequitable. If our federal government is willing to pause the carbon tax on one form of home heating, they must be willing to pause the carbon tax on all forms of home heating across Ontario and across Canada. The recent exemption seeks to pit Canadian regions against one another, pitting Canadians and families against one another, all to isolate and support local voting potential in an election in the near future.

But not only does this move divide Canadians; the carbon tax is actually proven to be wholly ineffective, other than perhaps as a revenue-generating tool, as my friend from Essex so eloquently stated. Pausing the carbon tax on home heating is not recoiling from our commitment to environmental responsibility; it's actually putting a plan in place to heat our homes, keep money in our pockets to grow food—the common-sense things we do responsibly, in a prudent way and with integrity.

The federal environment commissioner found that Canada is actually the worst performer on greenhouse gas emission reductions out of all G7 nations and that Canada will clearly not reach this 2030 emissions target deadline

despite this punishing, cruel and unfair tax. Overall emissions are up actually around 14% since 1990. The carbon tax is actually not an effective climate plan. It's accomplishing one thing: making life more affordable and generating revenue for someone somewhere for something, but that remains to be seen, what that is.

Remember, Canada has an output for greenhouse gas emissions, contributes just less than 1.5% of all global emissions. There's clear evidence that emissions can be reduced without a punitive carbon tax. We should be incentivizing Canadians to move to greener and more sustainable choices, like perhaps buying Ontario-grown food, grown right here in ridings like Chatham-Kent–Leamington—close to home, fewer food miles, more sustainable. It's not an option for Ontarians to heat our homes this winter, and implementing a carbon tax on essential fuels burdens low-income households, middle-class households and forces all families to cut costs on basic purchasing and basic goods.

Our government is committed to making life more affordable for all of Ontario, but to do so, we need our partners in Ottawa, our federal government, to be on our side and actually work toward cutting all costs for all of Canada and all of Ontario. The refusal to support this motion proves they're committed to removing taxes for some Atlantic Canadians in the hopes of gaining those seats in a future election. We must be unified in our approach. We must be unified and demonstrate one voice and speak in sync to scrap this tax.

I truly hope my colleagues across the aisle are listening and they'll also weigh in on their counterparts in Ottawa and stand united for all workers, all families and all individuals across Ontario.

Please vote yes to responsibility, to true sustainability. Like the sponsor of this motion, a person with integrity, stand with integrity, stand with responsibility and stand with working for workers across Ontario. Stand for cutting costs of an unnecessary, punishing tax that truly is doing nothing to help sustainability.

Speaker, I look forward to members considering this—my words, the words from our colleagues and the words from the sponsor—to support the passing of this motion.

I thank you for your time.

2250

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Further debate?

Interjections.

Mr. Deepak Anand: I want to give you a second for the clapping. Thank you so much for the standing ovation.

Madam Speaker, thank you so much for giving me an opportunity to talk about something very important for the people of Mississauga–Malton and Ontario. As always, I would like to start by thanking my family for their never-ending support and my staff for their hard work, especially my OLIP intern, Bridget, who has been supporting me today. And especially to the people of Mississauga–Malton for giving me the opportunity to represent them: Thank you for your trust. That is the reason I'm here debating and talking on this important motion, brought by my colleague

MPP John Jordan, the MPP from Lanark–Frontenac–Kingston—I got it right?

Mr. John Jordan: Correct.

Mr. Deepak Anand:—calling on the government of Canada to take immediate steps to eliminate the carbon tax on fuels and inputs for home heating.

Thank you to the leader of our party and this province, Premier Ford, who did not hesitate to take a strong stance for the people of Ontario in his letter to the Ontario Liberal caucus. He has simply urged the federal Liberal government to follow up on their pause of the carbon tax on home heating oil and do the same for the federal tax on natural gas and home heating.

Why are we doing it? In supporting this motion today, which goes one step further in its call to eliminate the carbon tax, I echo our government's suggestion for the federal Liberals to take action to make life less expensive for families in Ontario. It is the right thing to do. It is the only fair thing to do.

Madam Speaker, I'm quite positive that if I talked to each and every member in this House, everyone on both sides will agree on one thing: that the people of this province are struggling, and the main concern that we hear from our constituents is the high cost of living and the lack of affordability. What is this carbon tax doing? It's actually adding more, making it more expensive for the people of Ontario, who are trying to meet their needs. Passing their extra costs to our constituents is not the only solution. It's not the solution for climate change, but it is hurting them.

Typically, when we talk about the carbon tax, for example on gas, you would say, "Oh, it's 14 cents, and the gas price is about \$1.40, so it's about 10%." But it's not just 10%. It's not that when I'm filling up the gas in my Bronco it's 14 cents, 10%. No, it's a domino cycle. What's going to happen when a restaurant owner is going to buy gas? It's going to add the cost to that restaurant owner. When a producer is producing, it's going to add the cost to that.

As our minister was talking about, everything we build, the cost of that is going to go up. Everything we consume, the cost of that is going to go up. In other words, who's going to pay for that cost? The end user. So when the producer's cost is going up, the end user's cost is automatically going up, and that means lower affordability and higher costs to the consumer. That is how it is impacting everyone.

I said it earlier: As a member from our communities, it is our responsibility to listen to the residents, and the residents are asking us to reduce their cost of living. So while I'm sitting across from members of the Ontario NDP and the members from the Liberals, you always talk about helping your residents. You always talk about how you want to make their life more affordable. Here's the chance you have.

So I want to ask them to join us and talk to the federal members of their riding. They don't even have to go far; all they have to do is pick up a phone, or whenever they go out to an event and meet their member of Parliament, take him or her to the side. Just simply ask one thing: "Our people have elected us to represent them, to take care of

them. We're the voice of the people. The voice of the people right now is that they are hurting, they need affordability, they need to reduce the cost of living, and you have a tool right in front of you. All you have to do is call the Prime Minister and ask him to remove the carbon tax."

Mr. Amarjot Sandhu: Call him right now.

Mr. Deepak Anand: Or you can meet over the weekend at an event; you can do that—or maybe ask your constituency staff to make a phone call. And if you have a cellphone, you can even text them. It's as simple as that.

Madam Speaker, I truly believe that—for an example, in the riding of Mississauga–Malton, it is my responsibility to make an appeal to my counterpart who represents Mississauga–Malton at the federal level to do the right thing. Don't leave Ontario families—and especially Mississauga–Malton; we are here to represent them—out in the cold. Families in our riding and across Ontario are counting on us to do our job. Stand up for them. Cut the carbon tax on all home heating. Give them a break.

I want to be clear on the government's record, Madam Speaker: This is not the first time we've asked the federal government to eliminate the carbon tax. In 2018, we warned that the carbon tax would be a major challenge for Canadians—especially for the people of Ontario—and damaging for our province's economy. We were right. We have asked repeatedly for this tax to be eliminated. Never mind that it was not done in the past; no problem. We're giving another chance, so let's do the right thing now.

I want to remind everyone that the government has proved that we do understand the challenges Ontario households and businesses are facing. That's why we have taken action. This government has taken action to provide affordability and reduce the cost of living of the people of Ontario. We didn't just use the words; we took action. We took action by announcing that we're extending our provincial gas and fuel tax reduction by six extra months, to June 30, 2024, because we are working for the people of Ontario, and Ontario families need a break.

Madam Speaker, this is just one of the many efforts to make life more affordable for the people of Ontario. Along with cutting taxes, we have brought hundreds of thousands of jobs to Ontario, reduced red tape, created so many innovative initiatives, which I just spoke of a few hours back, through supporting Bill 146.

I know my colleagues in the PC caucus agree that when we call for the elimination of the carbon tax—and I encourage everyone concerned about the cost of living to speak out with us to say that it is time that the federal government stop treating the people of Ontario unfairly and do their job. Instead of making people's life better, they are making it more challenging.

Madam Speaker, another thing which—you know, typically when we talk about removing the carbon tax, somebody will say, "Oh, wait a second; how about our planet?" So apparently there is a myth that the carbon tax is going to save the planet. So as we all know, the Paris accord says, "30% reduction in emissions by 2030." I want to break this myth. We're already at 27%, Madam Speaker. Right now what is happening is that we are punishing the

people of Ontario, who are already doing a great job. We're already ahead of many, many provinces or many, many countries in this world. We are ahead of beating our own targets of ensuring a 30% reduction by 2030. So we are a government who believes in the environment. We are a government who believes that we have to fulfill our responsibility of the Paris accord.

So this carbon tax is not making us go away from our responsibility. We are going to fulfill our responsibility. But at the same time as we fulfill our responsibility, we should not be penalized through this kind of tax.

2300

I was looking at the data: 14% of Canadians find themselves grappling with inadequate heating in their homes. One in 10 individuals has been forced to forgo paying a heating bill within the past year.

Heating is not a luxury; in Canada, it is a necessity. And when we know there are people who are struggling, we can't afford to add more costs to them.

As I said, this government believes in the environment. We have taken steps, and I'll give you some examples. We're here to provide positive solutions to protect the environment and make life more affordable. At the same time, we don't really need a carbon tax. We have tools.

Let me take a moment to outline some of the initiatives the government has launched to promote environmental protection.

When it comes to energy, Ontario boasts a world-class grid, fuelled by a mix of diverse sources: hydroelectric, nuclear, natural gas, solar, wind, and bioenergy.

As we heard from the Minister of Energy so many times, Powering Ontario's Growth, the latest instalment in the province's green energy initiative—the plan outlines our commitment to delivering dependable, cost-effective and environmentally friendly power to both households and industries. Not only that, we have invested \$91 million to expand public EV charging infrastructure beyond urban centres.

When it comes to lowering home heating emissions, our government has implemented clean home heating initiatives, allocating \$4.5 million to bring hybrid heating to thousands of households in various Ontario cities.

These are some of the examples. This government believes in climate—it believes in working; it believes in environment. We're already ahead of the curve.

To say this carbon tax is actually going to save the environment—this is a myth. What this carbon tax is actually doing is causing inflation. We already know we have high inflation, a high Bank of Canada interest rate. Ontario households right now are looking for ways to save money, to help manage their budgets, and they deserve better than to have to worry about a useless carbon tax.

So to the people of this province and all my colleagues who sit in this chamber: We were elected by the people to be their voice, and their voice right now is saying to reduce their costs—help their affordability. And to do that, let's all stand together, and let's support the member's motion calling on the federal government to eliminate the carbon tax on fuels and inputs for home heating. Let's defend the

interests of the people of Ontario, of the people who have sent us, of the people who want us to help them to grow, to build a better, stronger Ontario.

Through you, Madam Speaker, I want to ask each and every member, before you go home, pick up your phone or send a message to your federal MP and tell them to do what we're doing—to support the elimination of the carbon tax.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Further debate?

Mr. Dave Smith: I was sitting here and listening intently to everything that everyone has been saying tonight, and I got thinking back to our last government—when we were first elected back in 2018. I recall our first night sitting. Some of you were here for that, at that point. We didn't start at 6 o'clock and go through until midnight. We actually came in at 12:01 and went through into the morning, and there was a little bit of goofiness that went on that night because it was so late. I recall at the time, in the House leader's office, Mitch Heimpel was chief of staff, I guess. Mitch had a great sense of humour. The reason I'm bringing this up is, I was a really new, naive member at that point, and I liked to go off the cuff on some things. Mitch insisted that I had to recite some lyrics from a song. That kind of started, in some of my other speeches later on, why I was reciting some lyrics to different songs. I bring it up because we're at 11 o'clock tonight and the likelihood of people watching us on TV right now is probably pretty small. But Mitch wanted me to recite the lyrics to I Like Beer, and I read all the lyrics to that song as part of my speech.

What's that got to do with what we're talking about tonight? Beer is carbonated. That's why I tie it back into the carbon tax side of it here. It was one of those things that we did to try to kill some time and try and have a little bit of fun when we were stuck here till really long hours of the night. Which leads me into some other lyrics that I thought I should start out with tonight. If you can indulge me for just a minute, it's one of my more favourite Rush songs:

And the men who hold high places
Must be the ones who start
To mould a new reality
Closer to the heart
Closer to the heart

Mr. Guy Bourgoin: “The blacksmith and the artist.”

Mr. Dave Smith: “The blacksmith and the artist,” yes: “Reflect it in their art.”

But sticking with that first line of it, why do I bring that up? I bring it up because the federal Liberal government has decided that they're going to remove the carbon tax on home heating oil in Atlantic Canada. It's not a large group of people who are using it. I think the estimate is that roughly 3% of the population heats their home with heating oil. Why are they doing it? Because the cost of living has gone up significantly, and in Atlantic Canada they're struggling with the cost of living. You could say that Trudeau was one of those men in high places who was trying to mould that new reality and really make it closer to the

heart of those people in Atlantic Canada who will have trouble this year paying some of their heating costs.

I got looking at what it would be in Ontario. The taxpayers federation of Canada has taken a look at what the carbon tax is, and they have suggested that the increase in the carbon tax that came in April of this past year would mean just a shade under a \$300 increase in heating costs for somebody in Canada. Obviously, that's going to be a little bit higher depending on what you're using for heating your home, but on average about 300 bucks more is what it's going to cost the average person to heat their house this year.

We've seen inflationary pressures. The cost of everything has gone up. The cost of living has gone up. We know that with the interest rate rises that have happened—I'll be very honest; I've got two mortgages on my home. We ported the one mortgage over when I sold the previous house when we moved into this one because it made sense to do it. My mortgage rate at the time was 1.78%. I just renewed at seven and three quarters. Now, I'm in a position where I've got a healthy income, my wife has got a healthy income. About 55 bucks a week more is what my mortgage is going to cost me, and what am I getting for it? Absolutely nothing. I'm in a spot where I can absorb that additional cost. Not everybody can.

We've got a lot of people across Ontario who are going to be in a similar position where their mortgages are coming due. They signed three-year mortgages or five-year mortgages when interest rates were low, in and around 2%. They're going to get hit with a sticker shock now where it's going to go up significantly as a result of what has happened with interest rates. Then, on top of that, they're going to be tacked on with another 300 bucks or so, the cost to heat their house.

2310

My mortgage isn't all that high. I've only got a couple of years left on it. There is not an awful left of interest that's actually being paid on that because it's not a big dollar amount. But mine is going up by almost \$250 a month. You tack on another \$300 on top of that for your heating cost and somebody who doesn't have the income that I have is going to find it really difficult to make ends meet this year.

Going back to 2018, one of the things that we campaigned on was the cost of living. One of the things that we campaigned on was the cost of electricity and how parts of rural Ontario were being significantly disadvantaged because they had to heat their homes with electricity, they had to heat their homes with oil, they had to heat their homes with propane, wood pellets and wood, because things like natural gas weren't an option for them.

I know that there are some rural and northern members here in the room right now, and anyone who's on the Canadian Shield knows that you're not running a natural gas pipeline through the granite to make inexpensive heating at a lot of those places. So we still see a lot of people in Ontario who are heating their homes through other means—again, a small percentage with oil, propane, electric, wood, wood pellets. All of that is going up in price

this year because of the carbon tax. And what is the average resident in Ontario getting as a result of that? Nothing—no benefit whatsoever. They're just paying more. They don't have an option to switch to something else that's going to be a lot less expensive for them.

What the carbon tax really is is a punitive tax. The concept behind it is that you're going to change some of your behaviours to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, but the gap between theory and practice is much larger in practice than it is in theory, and this is a perfect example of that. How many people are heating their home with what they have available to them and they don't have \$5,000 to \$7,000 to go out and change their furnace to something else? So they're going to get stuck with \$300 more to heat up their home. They get nothing for it, but that's what they're stuck with. And the theory behind the carbon tax was you're going to curb people's behaviour. If you don't have another option, you can't curb behaviour. If you're heating your home with propane, you're paying \$300 more to heat it this year because of the carbon tax. What's your option to change to a less expensive form of heat? Drop \$5,000 to \$7,000 on something else. People are already struggling to make ends meet, so they're not going to be able come up with the money to make that change.

Now, one of the things that I think is really interesting here about some of our colleagues from the NDP—I'm going to talk about one of our previous colleagues, the former member from Timmins. He always made me laugh on this because he was a guy who was a fierce defender of the carbon tax. He thought that this was something that was going to be great to reduce carbon emissions all across Canada. And he was in favour of the federal government's plan of increasing it to \$165 a tonne. But then, he'd also stand up here and he would rail on the price of gasoline up in northern Ontario because it's just too expensive to buy gas in northern Ontario. And yet he would also stand here and say we've got to increase the carbon tax to \$165 a tonne. How do you square that circle? You can't.

So, on one hand, they stand up and say the cost of living is too high, and on the other hand, they say we've got to increase the cost of living through this carbon tax. And when I was first elected in 2018, I had some special interest groups—I'll refer to them that way—who came to see me about the carbon tax and about our plan to scrap cap-and-trade. I had one gentleman say to me that the carbon tax is proven to be the most effective tool for fighting climate change, and he cited British Columbia as a perfect example. What we saw was British Columbia had an increase in their greenhouse gas emissions and they had a carbon tax—and yet he was citing that as the example of how this was going to save the world. But what we've seen, in practicality, is that's not the case.

I'm sure that when we look at what's going on right now with the federal government, when you take a look at the polling numbers, Justin Trudeau looks like he's in a lot of trouble. When you look at what's happening in Atlantic Canada, that was part of his base. They've done this to try and shore up some of the votes there, though they're going to argue that, no, that's not the case, that it wasn't for

political reasons. If it was about what's in the best interests of people, then they would extend that tax break to everybody, but they're not. They're doing it on a regional basis.

I've heard people say Justin Trudeau needs to step down. Justin Trudeau needs to step down; the Liberals need a new leader. And we were joking about it, myself and a couple of colleagues earlier tonight, that if Trudeau stepped down, who could step in? They don't have an heir apparent. I pointed out that we've got somebody in Ontario right now who would make an excellent interim leader, because he's done it twice already, and that would be John Fraser. I'd nominate him in a heartbeat to lead as an interim leader for the federal Liberals. If Justin wants to step down, we've got a guy right here—who's in Ottawa, so it's not a big stretch for him to make the jump and go and lead the federal Liberals on an interim basis. That might be a great solution for us, a great solution for John and a great solution for the federal Liberals, although John has said that he's in favour of—I'm sorry; I can't refer to him that way. The member from Ottawa South has professed his love of the carbon tax as well, so maybe that's not really a great idea.

At the end of the day, what we're really looking at is how do we find ways to make it easier for people to meet their monthly bills. How do we find ways to make it more affordable, when we've got so many things that are conspiring against us on the affordability side?

I think back to 2016-17. I think it was actually February 2017, when there was a press conference where Kathleen Wynne was talking about cap-and-trade and talking about carbon tax. She made the statement that it was only going to increase the cost for the average person by about \$5 a week, and that was really only three trips to Tim Hortons. If you could cut out a trip or two to Tim Hortons to buy coffee, then you were going to break even on this, and this was going to do so much for the environment if we implemented this. Again, I'll come back to my earlier statement that the gap between theory and practice is much larger in practice than it is in theory. We never saw that modest increase of just \$4 or \$5 a month for everyone. We've seen a massive increase on everything and—

Interjection.

Mr. Dave Smith: Sorry, the member for Kiiwetinoong was just making a little fun of me here.

We've seen a significant increase. What the carbon tax has done is it's increased the cost of everything. The Liberals have made the statement that no, it was just going to be on the things that pollute, so it's on gasoline; every single thing that comes to a store is shipped into that store. Whether it's groceries, whether it's clothing, whether it's toys for your kids, every single thing that you buy in a store has had to have been brought to that store. The carbon tax affects the price of every single thing because that input cost has to be recovered.

We've talked about it on the side of farming, and there are some things in farming where the carbon tax doesn't apply, but it's not applied equally across it.

The member from Chatham-Kent-Leamington talked about greenhouses in his riding and how greenhouse food

producers are paying additional costs because of the carbon tax, and that gets passed on to the cost of food for you. That food then gets put into the back of a truck, and they're paying the carbon tax on the fuel for it, to get it to the grocery store, who's paying a carbon tax on their heating and cooling at the grocery store. And all of that gets reflected, then, in the cost of your food.

2320

I go back to what Kathleen Wynne said, that it's really only \$4 or \$5 a week—but it's not, because it's really only four or five cents on each item, each time that carbon tax gets applied. The carbon tax is applied at production, at supply and at retail. So all of those things start to add up.

Let's do a little bit of simple math on it. Let's say, for interest's sake, that it's really only a nickel each time we have one of those inputs, and we've established that we have at least four of them, so it's about 20 cents—how many things to sell and purchase when they're buying groceries for the week. So it's not just that nickel; it's that nickel times four times probably 50 items that they have in the grocery bin. All of that adds up, and there's no added value.

The Minister of Economic Development, Job Creation and Trade talked about how many jobs were lost in Ontario because the Liberals added more taxes. He talked about how you actually increase revenue for government by reducing tax, because you get more disposable income for those individuals, and that money then gets recycled by going through the system multiple times.

I've had different people say to me, "Well, if I have \$5 more a week, I'm not making a difference. Someone is not hiring someone else because I'm spending \$5 more a week." And they're right, if you look at it from the individual's standpoint. But we've got 15.7 million people as of last year in Ontario. How many of them are consumers? Probably close to 10 million or 12 million, and 10 million or 12 million spending \$5 more is a massive influx of money going into the system. Just five bucks more, 10 million people—that's \$50 million going into the economy. And \$50 million coming into the economy means that—different stores are busier, so they have to hire more staff, and when they hire more staff, they're paying them, and those members who are getting paid have money to go out and spend on other things. So you see the multiplier effect for it.

When you reduce the taxes that people pay, you actually give people more money to spend, and they go out and they spend it, and that helps the economy. When the economy is booming, there's more retail sales tax that comes into the government coffers. There's also more income tax that comes into the government coffers, because more people are working and more people are making money. When you increase tax, you reduce all of that.

So not only does the carbon tax make it more difficult for you to live, but it also makes it more difficult for the government to do the things that it needs to do to support the people, to make life easier for them. And all of this comes back to that simple concept that there is no such thing as a good tax.

I've had people say to me multiple times, "Government spending, government spending." Government doesn't make money. The only money the government has is what it takes from you, and if we take less of it, you have more, you can do more with it, and you live a better life as a result of it.

What we need is for every member in this chamber to vote in favour of this motion to have the federal Liberals drop the carbon tax.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Further debate?

M^{me} Dawn Gallagher Murphy: I have had the distinct pleasure of being here today, listening to my various colleagues speaking on this topic; specifically, about the carbon tax and how it has made life harder for Ontarians to pay for fuels and inputs for their home heating, and it makes the things we rely upon and depend upon more expensive. It is costing the people of Ontario more on the basic things they need, including energy and heating.

In 2019, the carbon tax started at \$20 per tonne of carbon dioxide-equivalent emissions. Now, as of April 1, 2023, the tax increased to \$65 per tonne. The Canada Revenue Agency said that the carbon tax currently increases the price of gasoline by 14 cents per litre, the price of diesel and home heating oil by 17 cents per litre and the price of natural gas by 12 cents per cubic metre. In addition, the Bank of Canada states that if the charge were to be removed from the three main fuel components of the consumer price index—gasoline, natural gas and fuel oil—it would reduce the inflation rate by 0.4 percentage points. This is a critical statement, given the Bank of Canada is the federal government's central bank and is tasked with keeping inflation low.

Comme mes collègues l'ont mentionné précédemment, cette taxe carbone a rendu plus difficile pour les Ontariens l'achat de carburants et de produits pour le chauffage domestique, et elle rend les articles dont nous dépendons plus coûteux. Elle coûte aux habitants de l'Ontario davantage sur les articles de première nécessité, y compris l'énergie et le chauffage.

En 2019, la taxe carbone a commencé à 20 \$ par tonne d'émissions équivalentes de dioxyde de carbone. À partir du 1^{er} avril 2023, la taxe a augmenté à 65 \$ par tonne. L'Agence du revenu du Canada a déclaré que la taxe carbone augmente actuellement le prix d'essence de 0,14 \$ le litre, le prix du diesel et du mazout de chauffage de 0,17 \$ le litre, et le prix du gaz naturel de 0,12 \$ le mètre cube. De plus, la Banque du Canada indique que si la taxe était supprimée des trois principaux composants du panier de consommation—essence, gaz naturel et mazout—cela réduirait le taux d'inflation de 0,4 point de pourcentage. C'est une déclaration cruciale, étant donné que la Banque du Canada est la banque centrale du gouvernement fédéral et a pour mission de maintenir l'inflation à un faible niveau.

Looking to the future, the carbon tax will continue to increase by \$15 per year until it reaches \$170 per tonne. By 2030, when the fuel regulations are fully implemented, Trudeau's two carbon taxes will increase the price of gas by about 55 cents per litre and cost the average family more than \$2,000 every year. And yes, to clarify, the federal

government imposed a second carbon tax through fuel regulations. The second carbon tax does not come with rebates, and it is layered on top of this federal government's original tax.

We have repeatedly called on the federal government and the federal NDP to eliminate this disastrous inflationary tax. We need to put money back in the pockets of the people of Ontario—the people who elected our government officials to help them, not make their life harder for them.

En regardant vers l'avenir, la taxe carbone continuera d'augmenter de 15 \$ par an, jusqu'à atteindre 170 \$ par tonne. D'ici 2030, lorsque les réglementations sur les carburants seront entièrement mises en oeuvre, les deux taxes carbone de Trudeau augmenteront le prix de l'essence d'environ 0,55 \$ le litre et coûteront à la famille moyenne plus de 2 000 \$ par an. Oui, pour clarifier, le gouvernement fédéral a imposé une deuxième taxe carbone par le biais de réglementations sur les carburants. La deuxième taxe carbone n'est pas assortie de remises et s'ajoute à la taxe originale du gouvernement fédéral.

2330

Nous avons, à plusieurs reprises, demandé au gouvernement fédéral et au NPD fédéral de supprimer cette taxe inflationniste désastreuse. Nous devons remettre de l'argent dans les poches des habitants de l'Ontario : les personnes qui ont élu nos représentants gouvernementaux pour les aider, pas pour rendre leur vie plus difficile.

There are examples worldwide where other nations are taking bold action to help their citizens. For example, in the United Kingdom, they announced billions of dollars of fuel tax relief. Australia cut its tax in half. South Korea cut its tax by 30%. The Netherlands cut its tax by 17 cents per litre. India cut its tax to "keep inflation low, thus helping the poor and middle classes."

According to the World Bank, Canadians are now paying two carbon taxes, whereas more than 75% of countries don't pay a national carbon tax. I say this because one of my colleagues mentioned—I think it was my colleague from Mississauga–Malton—we should be speaking with our federal Liberal counterparts and speaking to them to advocate for our community members. Well, I know I did that recently, and I know the response I got: "Why would we do that?" That was the response I received.

In the news article released by newmarkettoday.ca, on October 4, a local reporter mentions that in preparation for Thanksgiving, food insecurity continues to prevail and affects the lives of those in York region. The Food Bank of York Region shared that the factors driving food insecurity are high inflation rates and food price hikes.

Public Health Ontario estimates that the number of people experiencing food insecurity in York region has grown by 4% in 2022, which amounts to more than 15,600 households, including households in my community of Newmarket–Aurora.

The trend of rising food insecurity has not slowed down in 2023. As a result of Ontarians struggling to afford the rising cost of living, the food bank usage in York region continues to increase. Yet my federal Liberal counterpart said, "Why would we do that?"

The Newmarket Food Pantry and many other food pantries in the York region have been experiencing increases in demand for food assistance. This goes to show the need to cut down on costs and taxes in Ontario, one of them being the carbon tax. When people make decisions on choosing less nutritional food due to soaring costs this will lead to potential health issues, which impacts our health care system.

As the parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Health, this causes me great concern. After having met with several primary care providers across the province over the past few months to discuss how they can provide better care for their patients, one of the common themes through these round table discussions was preventative health measures that patients can be assuming. Eating healthier food options is one of the choices Ontarians can make to prevent diseases and negative health outcomes. Having to choose between the more nutritious foods and those that are not so nutritious, like processed foods, will have ramifications on the health and well-being of Ontarians—consequently, implications on our health care system. They will require greater care which then creates greater demand on our health care system, and this can be prevented if we make life more affordable for people to make better lifestyle choices without having to think twice given the cost.

Speaker, 15 years of provincial Liberal government supported by the NDP lost Ontario 300,000 jobs. Since our government came into power in 2018, we have cut taxes, reduced red tape and brought hundreds of thousands of good-paying jobs back to Ontario. We said back in 2018 that a carbon tax would be a challenge for the people of Canada and specifically for Ontarians.

A study done by the Canadian Energy Centre concludes that the carbon tax will increase business costs for many Ontario industries, including public electricity and heat production, manufacturing, residential, agriculture and forestry, transportation and more, which will in turn continue to hike up prices for consumers. The same study says that the carbon tax will raise the intermediate input cost and thereby increase production and business costs. Intermediate input costs affect the final price of goods and services sold to consumers, which in turn have an effect on the business's profitability.

We are constantly hearing and witnessing the negative effects of the carbon tax in the daily lives of our community members. I listen to the constituents of my community complaining about the hiked-up grocery prices. Standing in the aisle at the grocery store, we're always looking at one another, saying, "Oh my God, look at the price of this"—expensive rent increases, unaffordable cost of living and the unending sighs whenever they go shopping to purchase anything. Every dollar counts when it comes to the cost of essentials, particularly for those with low income. An analysis from the department of the environment shows the second carbon tax will "disproportionately impact lower- and middle-income households," including Canadians "currently experiencing energy poverty ... single mothers" and "seniors living on fixed incomes."

In fact, in February 2022, a private member's bill, Bill C-234 would exempt natural gas and propane used on

farms for essential tasks such as drying grain, preparing feed and heating barns. In March 2023, the bill was passed in the House of Commons with support from the CPC, the NDP, Bloc Québécois and the Green Party but no Liberals. Now, this bill is stuck in the Senate. The Parliamentary Budget Officer estimates that Bill C-234, if enacted, would save farmers nearly \$1 billion by 2030.

At a time when the cost of essentials is on the rise, we need to be helping Ontarians, not hurting them. This is why I agree and support motion 70: "That, in the opinion of this House, the government of Canada should take immediate steps to eliminate the carbon tax on fuels and inputs for home heating." We are asking the federal government to join us in providing relief to Ontarians.

Additionally, small businesses are struggling, specifically restaurants. The increase in the cost of food is placing great pressure on them to increase their menu prices. I held a round table in my riding with restaurateurs and it was very clear: People are not coming out to restaurants compared to pre-pandemic numbers. This and the rising cost of food is presenting a negative impact on these small businesses, putting them at risk of closure.

2340

The carbon tax increases both direct and indirect business costs. Industries such as food services and restaurants, financial services or retail stores that are not subject to the tax directly may still experience significant cost increases if the sector relies on inputs that use energy-intensive production processes. The carbon tax is not helping.

Speaker, the carbon tax has contributed to high inflation, high taxes and big spending, which is leading to higher interest rates and is putting thousands of people out of the market for homes. The Liberals and NDP continue to vote against measures we have introduced to make life more affordable for the people of Ontario.

I would like to reference David Kreutzer, an economist at the Institute for Energy Research. He notes some modelling of the revenue part of a carbon tax with some colleagues at the Heritage Foundation: "Even a carbon tax of \$25, \$30, growing by the rate of interest, generates hundreds of billions of dollars a year in revenue. It also does hundreds of billions of dollars of economic damage to the economy each year."

We can fight for the environment and treat climate change seriously while working with industry. We will not pass down the cost to the consumer. I support this motion 70 put forth by my colleague from—

Mr. John Jordan: Lanark—Frontenac—Kingston.

M^{me} Dawn Gallagher Murphy: Thank you. And I really hope that all the members of this Legislative Assembly will support this motion. Let us stop this tax.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Further debate?

Mr. Matthew Rae: It's wonderful to rise at this hour in the Legislature. As one of my colleagues commented this evening, 16 hours we've been working today, and I know many of us in the government caucus are happy to do that work.

Mr. Andrew Dowie: Keep it going. Keep it going.

Mr. Matthew Rae: The member from Essex tells me to keep it going, and don't worry, to the member from Essex, I will keep it going. I always think, working these long hours, of my father, who, as many of you know in this place, is a farmer. He works 16 hours a day, usually every day, gets up before the sun rises and then works until the sun sets. And so I know our government caucus, we are with those workers.

Mr. Mike Harris: The sunrise is six hours from now.

Mr. Matthew Rae: The sunrise is six hours from now, as the member from Kitchener–Conestoga mentions.

The hard workers across Ontario, whether it's in the north, whether it's down in Windsor, and everywhere in between, are continuing to build this province, and I know our government stands with those workers and will continue to support them. Tonight's debate on this motion is just an extension of that, Speaker.

For many Ontarians, as we all know, the cost of living is increasingly unaffordable in Ontario, despite all the great things our Minister of Finance and our Minister of Economic Development, Job Creation and Trade do to attract businesses, reduce costs—this is across our cabinet and government caucus. We're still seeing it, and obviously that is partly due to the federal Liberal carbon tax.

Whether it's buying groceries, building homes, filling up the tank, or heating your home, Speaker, everything is becoming more expensive. And we don't live in Florida or Texas. I hate to break it to everyone who likes warm weather: Winter is coming. It's always coming in this country, and we will all have to heat our homes, Speaker. It's not a choice. We must heat our homes, and the federal Liberal carbon tax makes it more expensive to do that.

But we have a provincial government caucus here in Ontario which I am proud to be part of, where each and every member takes every opportunity to stand up for their community and be the voice of their constituents, because that's what we were elected to do in this place. I wish the federal Liberal caucus—or, as we call them on this side of the House, the minivan caucus—would do their job in the same way. Nearly half of the federal government's caucus currently comes from Ontario. While our government has shown time and time again a willingness to work with all governments, no matter their political leanings, with our colleagues, to decrease costs for Ontarians, unfortunately the federal Liberals do not want to work with us on this.

Speaker, the carbon tax is absolutely not in the interest of the people of Ontario. It is welcome news that the Liberal government federally finally realized just how damaging their carbon tax has been on hard-working Canadians. By carving out their signature carbon tax policy to provide relief to those who use home-heating oil, the federal Liberals have admitted their failure. But Speaker, those efforts only go so far when we have a federal rural economic development minister telling the rest of the country that we should elect more Liberals if we want our constituents to be able to live through the winter. This is shameful.

Unfortunately, this federal minister is not the only current member of that Liberal caucus that shares that view, Speaker. As members in this House will know, our Premier wrote to the Ontario federal Liberal caucus, encouraging them to advocate for the same breaks that the Prime Minister gave to Atlantic Canada. The chair of that Ontario Liberal caucus for the federal government is the former member in this place for Don Valley East, Mr. Coteau, and he sent a letter back to the Premier. I found it very enlightening, because it shed some light on what we all knew from the McGuinty-Wynne Liberals, but publicly admitted it. In that letter, Mr. Coteau said that by cancelling cap-and-trade when it came in, we gave up a revenue source, Speaker, that we could invest in education and health.

Now, this government is investing historic amounts in education and health already, but it just shows the fact it was never about the environment—never. They see it as a revenue tool. It goes to the general coffers of the federal government. We don't know if it goes to any environmental projects to reduce our carbon emissions, which we all agree is very important. I know our Minister of the Environment, Conservation and Parks continues to work on that and work with our Premier to ensure that we have reliable clean energy.

Ms. Andrea Khanjin: We're meeting our Paris targets.

Mr. Matthew Rae: We're meeting our Paris targets, as the minister has—

Interjection.

Mr. Matthew Rae: Some 27%—which is great news. As a young person in this place, I will ensure we leave a healthier environment for the next generation.

But again, to the current member of Parliament for Don Valley East, it just really shows the Liberal mentality. A Liberal never finds a tax they don't love. If it moves, they want to tax it, basically. They want to tax you going to get groceries, you picking up those groceries, those groceries when they are grown, produced and harvested; they want to tax it—everything. If they could tax the air we breathe, they would tax it, I'm sure.

I know it's great to represent a rural community in this place. As I mentioned, economic development across Ontario is thriving, but especially in southwestern Ontario. Whether it's in St. Thomas, whether it's in Windsor, and all communities in between, we continue to attract investments.

But as the Minister of Economic Development alluded to earlier this evening, it's hard to explain the carbon tax to international investors when they come to Ontario. It really is inhibiting those investments. I know the Minister of Natural Resources talks about it at length during question period, about how that adds to the costs of building homes. And as the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing knows, because of interest rates and everything else we're dealing with, it is harder and harder to build homes. But the carbon tax is just hurting that, Speaker. It doesn't allow us to get those homes built because it raises the cost on everything that goes into those homes.

2350

It's clear they won't listen to us and it's times like these that it's clear they don't care about us Ontarians. In an effort to buy back votes—because, let's be honest, it was a vote-buying exercise by the Prime Minister—the federal government has demonstrated to Atlantic Canada, and not just to every Canadian, that we're not equal. But in Ontario, we believe we are equal, Speaker. You are all here, you can all work hard and get ahead in life. That is what we believe in our government caucus: You work hard, you have the education, you put food on the table for your family and we'll be there to support you.

It's disappointing that the federal Liberals do not support this position. Their actions speak loud and clear that those who heat their homes with natural gas and other fuels are not as important as those who heat their home with home heating oil. They have made it clear that those who did not elect a Liberal MP are less important than those who did. Our job as elected officials is to represent each and every one of our constituents, not just those who voted for us. My constituents, frankly, and all of our collective constituents in the province of Ontario are suffering as they face the prospect of a cold winter without the comfort of knowing whether or not they will be able to afford the heat for their homes or to put food on their table. In a country such as Canada, a G7 country, this is what Ontarian families will be facing this year. And it's not just Ontarian families, let's be frank. It's families in Alberta; it's families in BC; it's families in Manitoba and Saskatchewan; families in the Yukon, Northwest Territories and Nunavut; families even in Quebec. The federal Liberal government loves to do things for Quebec, but they are not there for Quebec either, Speaker.

I'm glad to see the member from Orléans, who is here this evening, demonstrate a willingness to recognize the harm that the carbon tax has on his constituents by supporting our efforts to scrap the tax on groceries. And I hope his colleagues will join him in supporting the motion we have before this House. It's disappointing to see two of the candidates for the Ontario Liberal leadership support the carbon tax.

Mr. Anthony Leardi: Who are they?

Mr. Matthew Rae: “Who are they?” the member from Essex may ask. Well, it's the ones that formed the coalition, as well, and also Ted Hsu. He's not really for you.

Mr. Mike Harris: He's not.

Mr. Matthew Rae: No, he is not for you.

Mr. Mike Harris: He is for the Liberal insiders.

Mr. Matthew Rae: He is for the Liberal insiders and the carbon tax, Speaker.

Since our government was elected in 2018—

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): I just want to caution the member.

Mr. Matthew Rae: I apologize, Speaker.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): I know you're on a roll.

Mr. Matthew Rae: It's been a long day. Thank you, Speaker. My apologies.

Since 2018, as the Minister of Economic Development mentioned earlier, we've cut taxes, reduced red tape, brought hundreds of thousands of jobs back to Ontario. I know my constituents in Perth–Wellington appreciate what our government does to ensure that we continue to build Ontario, continue to fight for the worker who takes a shower at the end of the day, continue to work for those people who put on work boots every day to go out and build our province: build the roads, build the hospitals, build the schools and build the homes that we all require in our communities. And Speaker, it's disappointing that the NDP across the way won't work with their federal cousins to get the federal Liberals to remove the carbon tax on home heating, as we are asking the federal government to do. They want to tax Ontarians to kingdom come as well. They want to turn around and claim that they can fix all of your problems but they just need to tax you one more time to fix them. Speaker, I know we as a government don't buy it, and I know Ontarians certainly do not buy it either.

I know they might not be one of the best teams, with all of their federal counterparts at the moment, not to mention each other, but there is no reason the NDP should let Ontarians suffer any longer. I urge them to muster the courage to pick up the phone and talk to their partners in Ottawa, to remind them that the people of Ontario are counting on them to give up on their hopeless loyalty to the federal Liberal government and the carbon tax.

To the members across the way, in the words of Jerry Maguire: Help me help you.

Speaker, the carbon tax is a failure, period. It threatens our industries, our trade, our economic development. It does nothing for the environment. It puts the ability of Ontarians to get through the winter at risk. To build a better life, the promise of Ontario, the promise of the Canadian dream—it puts it all at risk, just for Justin Trudeau's vanity project, essentially.

I know in this House our government will continue to fight for Ontario families, continue to build Ontario, continue to build the homes, the highways, the bridges, the hospitals, the long-term-care homes. We continue to get it done for Ontarians, and we will continue to stand up for them and continue to fight this carbon tax until it's the last thing we do.

With that, I move adjournment of the debate.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Mr. Rae has moved the adjournment of the debate. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? I heard a no.

All those in favour, please say “aye.”

All those opposed, please say “nay.”

In my opinion, the ayes have it.

It's a 30-minute bell.

The division bells rang from 2357 to 0027.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Mr. Rae has moved the adjournment of the debate.

All those in favour of the motion, please rise and remain standing to be counted by the Clerks.

All those opposed to the motion, please rise and remain standing to be counted by the Clerks.

The Clerk of the Assembly (Mr. Trevor Day): The

ayes are 1; the nays are 0.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): I declare the motion carried.

Debate adjourned.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): It being after midnight, this House stands adjourned until today, Thursday, November 16, 2023, at 9 a.m.

The House adjourned at 0028.

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ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

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Brady, Bobbi Ann (IND)	Haldimand—Norfolk	
Bresee, Ric (PC)	Hastings—Lennox and Addington	
Burch, Jeff (NDP)	Niagara Centre / Niagara-Centre	
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Cho, Hon. / L'hon. Stan (PC)	Willowdale	Minister of Long-Term Care / Ministre des Soins de longue durée
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Coe, Lorne (PC)	Whitby	
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Dunlop, Hon. / L'hon. Jill (PC)	Simcoe North / Simcoe-Nord	Minister of Colleges and Universities / Ministre des Collèges et Universités
Fedeli, Hon. / L'hon. Victor (PC)	Nipissing	Chair of Cabinet / Président du Conseil des ministres Minister of Economic Development, Job Creation and Trade / Ministre du Développement économique, de la Création d'emplois et du Commerce
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Flack, Hon. / L'hon. Rob (PC)	Elgin—Middlesex—London	Associate Minister of Housing / Ministre associé du Logement

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French, Jennifer K. (NDP)	Oshawa	
Gallagher Murphy, Dawn (PC)	Newmarket—Aurora	
Gates, Wayne (NDP)	Niagara Falls	
Gélinas, France (NDP)	Nickel Belt	
Ghamari, Goldie (PC)	Carleton	
Gill, Hon. / L'hon. Parm (PC)	Milton	Minister of Red Tape Reduction / Ministre de la Réduction des formalités administratives
Glover, Chris (NDP)	Spadina—Fort York	
Gretzky, Lisa (NDP)	Windsor West / Windsor-Ouest	
Grewal, Hardeep Singh (PC)	Brampton East / Brampton-Est	
Hardeman, Ernie (PC)	Oxford	
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Hazell, Andrea (LIB)	Scarborough—Guildwood	
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Holland, Kevin (PC)	Thunder Bay—Atikokan	
Hsu, Ted (LIB)	Kingston and the Islands / Kingston et les Îles	
Jama, Sarah (IND)	Hamilton Centre / Hamilton-Centre	
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Karpoche, Bhutla (NDP)	Parkdale—High Park	First Deputy Chair of the Committee of the Whole House / Première Vice-Présidente du Comité plénier de l'Assemblée législative
Ke, Vincent (IND)	Don Valley North / Don Valley-Nord	
Kemaghan, Terence (NDP)	London North Centre / London-Centre-Nord	Deputy Opposition House Leader / Leader parlementaire adjoint de l'opposition officielle
Kerzner, Hon. / L'hon. Michael S. (PC)	York Centre / York-Centre	Solicitor General / Solliciteur général
Khanjin, Hon. / L'hon Andrea (PC)	Barrie—Innisfil	Minister of the Environment, Conservation and Parks / Ministre de l'Environnement, de la Protection de la nature et des Parcs Deputy Government House Leader / Leader parlementaire adjointe du gouvernement
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Leardi, Anthony (PC)	Essex	
Lecce, Hon. / L'hon. Stephen (PC)	King—Vaughan	Minister of Education / Ministre de l'Éducation
Lumsden, Hon. / L'hon. Neil (PC)	Hamilton East—Stoney Creek / Hamilton-Est—Stoney Creek	Minister of Tourism, Culture and Sport / Ministre du Tourisme, de la Culture et du Sport
MacLeod, Lisa (PC)	Nepean	
Mamakwa, Sol (NDP)	Kiiwetinoong	Deputy Leader, Official Opposition / Chef adjoint de l'opposition officielle
Mantha, Michael (IND)	Algoma—Manitoulin	
Martin, Robin (PC)	Eglinton—Lawrence	
McCarthy, Hon. / L'hon. Todd J. (PC)	Durham	Minister of Public and Business Service Delivery / Ministre des Services au public et aux entreprises
McCrimmon, Karen (LIB)	Kanata—Carleton	
McGregor, Graham (PC)	Brampton North / Brampton-Nord	
McMahon, Mary-Margaret (LIB)	Beaches—East York	
Mulroney, Hon. / L'hon. Caroline (PC)	York—Simcoe	President of the Treasury Board / Présidente du Conseil du Trésor Minister of Francophone Affairs / Ministre des Affaires francophones
Oosterhoff, Sam (PC)	Niagara West / Niagara-Ouest	

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Pang, Billy (PC)	Markham—Unionville	
Parsa, Hon. / L'hon. Michael (PC)	Aurora—Oak Ridges—Richmond Hill	Minister of Children, Community and Social Services / Ministre des Services à l'enfance et des Services sociaux et communautaires
Pasma, Chandra (NDP)	Ottawa West—Nepean / Ottawa-Ouest—Nepean	
Piccini, Hon. / L'hon. David (PC)	Northumberland—Peterborough South / Northumberland—Peterborough-Sud	Minister of Labour, Immigration, Training and Skills Development / Ministre du Travail, de l'Immigration, de la Formation et du Développement des compétences
Pierre, Natalie (PC)	Burlington	
Pirie, Hon. / L'hon. George (PC)	Timmins	Minister of Mines / Ministre des Mines
Quinn, Nolan (PC)	Stormont—Dundas—South Glengarry	
Rae, Matthew (PC)	Perth—Wellington	
Rakocevic, Tom (NDP)	Humber River—Black Creek	
Rasheed, Kaleed (IND)	Mississauga East—Cooksville / Mississauga-Est—Cooksville	
Rickford, Hon. / L'hon. Greg (PC)	Kenora—Rainy River	Minister of Northern Development / Ministre du Développement du Nord Minister of Indigenous Affairs / Ministre des Affaires autochtones
Riddell, Brian (PC)	Cambridge	
Romano, Ross (PC)	Sault Ste. Marie	
Sabawy, Sheref (PC)	Mississauga—Erin Mills	
Sandhu, Amarjot (PC)	Brampton West / Brampton-Ouest	
Sarkaria, Hon. / L'hon. Prabmeet Singh (PC)	Brampton South / Brampton-Sud	Minister of Transportation / Ministre des Transports
Sarrazin, Stéphane (PC)	Glengarry—Prescott—Russell	
Sattler, Peggy (NDP)	London West / London-Ouest	
Saunderson, Brian (PC)	Simcoe—Grey	
Schreiner, Mike (GRN)	Guelph	
Scott, Laurie (PC)	Haliburton—Kawartha Lakes—Brock	
Shamji, Adil (LIB)	Don Valley East / Don Valley-Est	
Shaw, Sandy (NDP)	Hamilton West—Ancaster—Dundas / Hamilton-Ouest—Ancaster—Dundas	
Skelly, Donna (PC)	Flamborough—Glanbrook	Deputy Speaker / Vice-Présidente Chair of the Committee of the Whole House / Présidente du Comité plénier de l'Assemblée législative
Smith, Dave (PC)	Peterborough—Kawartha	
Smith, David (PC)	Scarborough Centre / Scarborough-Centre	
Smith, Hon. / L'hon. Graydon (PC)	Parry Sound—Muskoka	Minister of Natural Resources and Forestry / Ministre des Richesses naturelles et des Forêts
Smith, Laura (PC)	Thornhill	
Smith, Hon. / L'hon. Todd (PC)	Bay of Quinte / Baie de Quinte	Minister of Energy / Ministre de l'Énergie
Stevens, Jennifer (Jennie) (NDP)	St. Catharines	
Stiles, Marit (NDP)	Davenport	Leader, Official Opposition / Chef de l'opposition officielle Leader, New Democratic Party of Ontario / Chef du Nouveau Parti démocratique de l'Ontario
Surma, Hon. / L'hon. Kinga (PC)	Etobicoke Centre / Etobicoke-Centre	Minister of Infrastructure / Ministre de l'Infrastructure
Tabuns, Peter (NDP)	Toronto—Danforth	
Tangri, Hon. / L'hon. Nina (PC)	Mississauga—Streetsville	Associate Minister of Small Business / Ministre associée déléguée aux Petites Entreprises
Taylor, Monique (NDP)	Hamilton Mountain / Hamilton-Mountain	
Thanigasalam, Hon. / L'hon Vijay (PC)	Scarborough—Rouge Park	Associate Minister of Transportation / Ministre associé des Transports
Thompson, Hon. / L'hon. Lisa M. (PC)	Huron—Bruce	Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs / Ministre de l'Agriculture, de l'Alimentation et des Affaires rurales
Tibollo, Hon. / L'hon. Michael A. (PC)	Vaughan—Woodbridge	Associate Minister of Mental Health and Addictions / Ministre associé délégué au dossier de la Santé mentale et de la Lutte contre les dépendances
Triantafilopoulos, Effie J. (PC)	Oakville North—Burlington / Oakville-Nord—Burlington	
Vanthof, John (NDP)	Timiskaming—Cochrane	Opposition House Leader / Leader parlementaire de l'opposition officielle

Member and Party / Député(e) et parti	Constituency / Circonscription	Other responsibilities / Autres responsabilités
Vaugois, Lise (NDP)	Thunder Bay—Superior North / Thunder Bay—Supérieur-Nord	
Wai, Daisy (PC)	Richmond Hill	
West, Jamie (NDP)	Sudbury	
Williams, Hon. / L'hon. Charmaine A. (PC)	Brampton Centre / Brampton-Centre	Associate Minister of Women's Social and Economic Opportunity / Ministre associée des Perspectives sociales et économiques pour les femmes
Wong-Tam, Kristyn (NDP)	Toronto Centre / Toronto-Centre	
Yakabuski, John (PC)	Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke	
Vacant	Kitchener Centre / Kitchener-Centre	
Vacant	Lambton—Kent—Middlesex	