

Legislative  
Assembly  
of Ontario



Assemblée  
législative  
de l'Ontario

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**Official Report  
of Debates  
(Hansard)**

F-66

**Journal  
des débats  
(Hansard)**

F-66

**Standing Committee on  
Finance and Economic Affairs**

Estimates

Treasury Board Secretariat

**Comité permanent  
des finances  
et des affaires économiques**

Budget des dépenses

Secrétariat du Conseil du Trésor

1<sup>st</sup> Session  
43<sup>rd</sup> Parliament

Monday 23 September 2024

1<sup>re</sup> session  
43<sup>e</sup> législature

Lundi 23 septembre 2024

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Chair: Ernie Hardeman  
Clerk: Vanessa Kattar

Président : Ernie Hardeman  
Greffière : Vanessa Kattar

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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

**STANDING COMMITTEE ON  
FINANCE AND ECONOMIC AFFAIRS**

**COMITÉ PERMANENT DES FINANCES  
ET DES AFFAIRES ÉCONOMIQUES**

Monday 23 September 2024

Lundi 23 septembre 2024

*The committee met at 1000 in room 151.*

## ESTIMATES

## TREASURY BOARD SECRETARIAT

**The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman):** I call the Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs to order. The committee will now begin consideration of the estimates of the Treasury Board Secretariat for two hours. Are there any questions from the members before we start? If not, I am now required to call vote 3401, which sets the review process in motion.

We will begin with a statement of not more than 20 minutes from the minister.

Minister, the floor is yours.

**Hon. Caroline Mulroney:** Thank you very much. It's my pleasure to speak to the committee today in my capacity as President of the Treasury Board. In the spirit of transparency and clarity, we always welcome the standing committee's review of our ministry's estimates. As well, we will be available to answer any questions that the committee members might have about all the important and varied work we do at the Treasury Board Secretariat.

First, I would like to give an overview of several areas of work in our ministry.

At TBS, one of the most important priorities is fiscal transparency and accountability across the entire Ontario public service. Our goal is to ensure that every taxpayer dollar is treated with the respect that it deserves. This philosophy is embedded in all parts of TBS's mandate and responsibilities, and it informs every decision that our government makes to ensure that we deliver on the commitments that we made to the people of Ontario. Our government is committed to accountability, and TBS plays a critical role in this by sharing fundamental transparency and accountability documents for the province, including public accounts and estimates.

TBS also plays a critical role in supporting good governance and strong fiscal management through the important work of the Office of the Treasury Board, as well as through the Office of the Comptroller General, which leads enterprise risk management, comptrollership and internal auditing.

We are proud of our record of providing regular reporting to the public. It is a key part of being open, honest and transparent.

It is always important to be fiscally prudent, especially as Ontario faces the same economic pressures and uncertainty as the rest of the world. In this economic environment, our government continues to work hard to support families, businesses and workers.

At the same time, our government is laying a strong fiscal foundation for future generations by making critical investments. This was borne out in the 2023-24 public accounts, which was just released last Thursday. Members of the committee, we can all be proud of these investments, including year-over-year increases of 22.9% in infrastructure spending, 8.9% in health care spending and 7.6% in education sector spending. These investments are a tremendous financial asset for this province now and into the future.

Chair, as you know, Treasury Board Secretariat also assumes the role of the employer for the Ontario public service. This is a heavy responsibility and an area of focus for the ministry. There are more than 60,000 employees of the OPS. It is our duty to make sure that each and every one of them feels welcome, and that means fostering an inclusive and respectful workplace. To ensure that, I'm happy to give a brief overview of the OPS people plan that was introduced last year with this goal in mind. The plan is a carefully detailed and comprehensive human resources strategy for the OPS. It outlines how, over the next three years, the OPS will work towards improving talent management and organizational culture, to attract, develop and retain top talent. It's not just about recruiting and retaining talent; it is also about making sure that the OPS properly reflects Ontario's amazing diversity. The plan outlines three key people-and-culture priorities that will guide TBS's role as the employer over the next three years. These priorities will ensure that all OPS employees have a workplace that is modernizing and supportive of their growth and belonging. This includes more resources and attention to employees' mental health. In total, the OPS is working towards providing a more supportive workplace, and the people plan is a mechanism for instilling those values enterprise-wide. Developing the plan was done in partnership with leadership throughout the OPS and reflects feedback from OPS employee experience surveys. The plan's initiatives support attracting and retaining highly skilled, diverse talent, including through the OPS student and recent graduate programs.

The OPS is committed to ensuring that it remains an employer of choice in attracting top talent to ensure the

continued critical services that Ontarians rely on. There are a number of initiatives that support the desired outcome of attracting top talent, one of which is the OPS French Bilingual Human Resource Initiative.

L'Initiative relative aux ressources humaines franco-phones bilingues de la FPO est une autre étape importante dans les efforts déployés par la province pour accroître l'accès aux services gouvernementaux en français. Cela témoigne également de l'engagement du gouvernement envers la mise en oeuvre continue de sa stratégie pour la prestation des services en français.

Dans le cadre de cette initiative, toutes les offres d'emploi de la FPO destinées au public sont disponibles en français depuis le 18 janvier 2024. En affichant toutes les offres d'emploi dans les deux langues, la FPO vise l'atteinte de l'objectif du plan, relatif au personnel de la FPO, qui consiste à recruter des effectifs compétents et diversifiés dans la fonction publique, et ce, afin de mieux représenter et servir toute la population ontarienne.

Chair, the people plan is an important road map for the future of the OPS, and I'm proud of all the work my colleagues at TBS have done to make it a reality.

Another area of focus at TBS that is related to our role as the employer is labour relations and compensation. This work is spearheaded by the Centre for Public Sector Labour Relations and Compensation. It is a complex topic with many considerations, and one that demands skillful and creative thinking. It represents the crown as employer in collective bargaining and manages grievance resolutions in the OPS, and provides labour dispute contingency planning and strategic policy advice on total compensation, including pensions, benefits and pay. The centre also represents the employer when addressing issues related to organizational management and rendering job classification decisions. It is responsible for the management of legislative initiatives with respect to executive compensation in the BPS, as well as total compensation strategy initiatives; for example, overseeing the inclusion of agencies in the insured benefits umbrella. The centre also manages relations with external compensation stakeholders and benefits insurance appeals committees. The centre also supports Treasury Board and Management Board of Cabinet oversight of collective bargaining in provincial agencies.

Our government's approach aims to balance the needs of public sector compensation with the needs and the expectations of taxpayers. Chair, it is a delicate balance, and one that is always rooted in the principles of fairness. That balance is maintained through open dialogue and strong relationships with the OPS bargaining units that represent OPS employees working diligently across the province. As always, our goal with collective bargaining is to negotiate agreements that are fair to Ontario's dedicated public servants, in line with legislative requirements. It is our position that any new agreements must support long-term fiscal sustainability for the people of Ontario.

Finally, another component of the centre is the management of the OPS pension funds. All OPS employees participate in either the Public Service Pension Plan, for

which the government is the sole sponsor, or the Ontario Public Service Employees Union, OPSEU, pension plan, which the government co-sponsors with OPSEU. Currently, the two pension plans in the OPS are healthy and well-funded. Together, these funds offer an invaluable sense of security to OPS staff. They also illustrate how much our government values their contributions to provide public services to Ontarians.

Chair, it should be noted that TBS is also the ministry responsible for emergency preparedness and response in Ontario. Now, in order to describe the important work of that portfolio, I'm going to turn it over to my new colleague the Associate Minister of Emergency Preparedness and Response, Trevor Jones, who is going to give a brief overview of the important work that he and his team are leading within the Treasury Board Secretariat.

**1010**

**Hon. Trevor Jones:** Thank you, Minister Mulroney.

Good morning, Chair and members of the committee. It's an absolute honour to appear before you today as Ontario's first Associate Minister of Emergency Preparedness and Response. Today, I'll speak to the important work being undertaken by Emergency Management Ontario; for the sake of time, I'll refer to it as EMO.

Chair, as you know, EMO, supported through Treasury Board Secretariat, is the body that oversees the province's emergency management responsibilities; notably, planning, preparedness and response. We work across all provincial ministries with partners to provide ground-level coordination and assistance when needed. As an example, our colleagues at the Ministry of Natural Resources are the lead ministry responsible for responding to flooding and wildland fire. While their efforts are focused operationally, EMO is coordinating and liaising with the affected communities, ensuring they have all the proper supports.

Our government recognizes the vital role EMO serves to maintain a safe, practised and prepared Ontario to meet all future challenges. We take this responsibility seriously.

That's why, in 2023, our government released the provincial emergency management strategic action plan, or PEMSAP for short. The PEMSAP is the very first made-in-Ontario plan to ensure we do remain safe, practised and prepared before, during and after emergencies such as floods, wildland fires or emerging threats like cyber attacks. It's the first of its kind in Canada, because it requires annual public reporting and progress—reflects our government's ongoing commitment to transparency and accountability. The PEMSAP illustrates the importance of building collaborative partnerships and trust, including, for the very first time, engagement and input from First Nations partners in the emergency management framework for the province.

The PEMSAP is a living document that clearly defines three specific goals to keep Ontario ready and prepared. The first goal is setting up a one-window approach to ensure emergency management is coordinated quickly and efficiently all across the province. The second goal is proactive planning and monitoring that's grounded in data, analytics and knowledge. Lastly, the third goal is "practised

and prepared.” This type of emergency response is to have stronger emergency management through training and public education programs.

Just in February, Minister Mulroney released the first annual report on the PEMSAP—some of these highlights included helping to safely evacuate over 3,500 community members during a very challenging flood and wildland fire season. We did this in close collaboration and partnership with communities everywhere. Further, our government participated in 86 deployments of EMO staff to assist communities. In terms of preparation, we were able to deliver 335 emergency management courses involving more than 13,800 participants from all across Ontario. Similarly, we were able to lead 85 emergency exercises and drills with both government and non-government partners to strengthen emergency practice and preparedness, including Exercise Heatwave, which was conducted in May of this year. This provincial priority exercise included more than 450 participants from 12 Ontario ministries, six municipalities, three federal departments, and more than 50 private and non-governmental organizations.

Chair, these are just a few of the accomplishments by our staff and EMO. Progress on these goals will continue to be reported annually, with the next annual report slated to be released in 2025.

Our mission is to ensure Ontario is practised and prepared. EMO is our one window for provincial emergency management and coordination. Our staff works proactively with partners to update their emergency response plans and assist communities across Ontario with the unique supports they need to prepare for and respond to emergencies of all kinds. This includes providing supports to communities that need provincial assistance if a community evacuation is required. In these situations, like in the event of a fire, for instance, EMO works directly with impacted communities to identify hosts and help coordinate evacuation efforts, allowing other ministries, like MNR, to focus on operational aspects, like the firefighting itself. EMO maintains an extensive network of trained field officers who are prepared to be deployed at a moment’s notice to provide support to any impacted community. These dedicated professionals also liaise directly with the Provincial Emergency Operations Centre, the PEOC, to coordinate all efforts. True collaboration ensures that critical resources are in place, whatever the emergency, anywhere in Ontario.

Chair, to continue to meet our goal of a safe and practised and prepared Ontario, we’ve provided targeted investments through the Community Emergency Preparedness Grant, the CEPG. Through this grant, our government has invested \$5 million in communities across Ontario to help them prepare for and respond to emergencies. Since funding was announced, we’ve awarded 113 applicants with up to \$50,000 each for expenses or activities that promote emergency preparedness. These investments are helping communities and organizations purchase critical supplies, equipment, and deliver the vital training and services we all need. For example, through

CEPG, the town of Pelham received nearly \$50,000 to support the purchase of critical communications tools and backup battery packs to support their response to adverse weather events. Near me, the town of Kingsville was awarded \$50,000 to purchase a trailer-mounted generator to supply its emergency backup power to vital infrastructure in the case of a system failure during storms. This new asset strengthens their emergency preparedness and protects this community. This funding is part of a broader \$110 million that our government has earmarked over three years to strengthen emergency preparedness across Ontario. These targeted investments are designed to empower communities and organizations to enhance their emergency preparedness and response capabilities.

I’m pleased to report that applications have recently opened for another round of CEPG, so Ontario communities can continue to remain prepared and responsive to any future emergency. The due date for these applications is coming close: October 31.

To conclude, I’d like to discuss some recent work undertaken by our government.

Last spring, we announced that we had engaged with partners, stakeholders and members of the public on modernizing the Emergency Management and Civil Protection Act so Ontario can remain safe, practised and prepared for any emergency. To that end, we’ve held 40 targeted engagements with over 450 stakeholders who shared their experiences and perspectives on ways to improve, prepare for and, of course, respond to emergencies across the province. The reason is simple: We need to address the increasingly complex emergency landscape of this modern world. We must ensure Ontario has both the means and the ability to prepare for and respond to any emergency in any community. We’re examining best practices and engaging with partners to identify opportunities and challenges for today and for the future. To modernize this act, we began by launching and publicly posting a discussion guide to seek feedback from stakeholders across Ontario. The feedback we’ve received will help guide and inform opportunities for how Ontario can modernize this important emergency management legislation. Simply stated, this modernization is being undertaken to strengthen our ability to prevent, mitigate, prepare for, respond to and recover from emergencies. As we continue to build our modernization efforts, I look forward to being able to provide further updates later in the year.

**The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman):** One minute.

**Hon. Trevor Jones:** In closing, I’d like to thank our members of the committee today and the Chair for hearing about EMO’s efforts to keep Ontario safe, practised and prepared.

And to conclude, I return it back to Minister Mulroney.

**Hon. Caroline Mulroney:** Thank you, Associate Minister Jones.

It has been our pleasure to have the opportunity to outline some of the important work that our ministry has done to support the people of Ontario. As one ministry, TBS and EMO ensure that our government is responsive

and prepared to tackle the challenges that lie ahead in an ever-changing world.

1020

Thank you very much, Chair.

**The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman):** Thank you very much for the presentation. That concludes the time.

First, as a reminder to the committee, I will allow members to ask a wide range of questions pertaining to the estimates before the committee. However, it must be noted that the onus is on the members asking the questions to make sure the question is relevant to the estimates under consideration.

The ministry is required to monitor the proceedings for any questions or issues that the ministry undertakes to address. If you wish, you may, at the end of your appearance, verify the questions and issues being tracked with the research officer.

If any staff appearing today—when you are called on to speak, please give your name and your titles so that we may accurately record in Hansard who we have.

We will now begin the questions and answers in rotations of 20 minutes for the official opposition members of the committee, 10 minutes for the independent member of the committee and 20 minutes for the government members of the committee, for the remainder of the allotted time.

We will now start with the official opposition—20 minutes. MPP Fife.

**Ms. Catherine Fife:** Thanks very much for being here today.

I was listening to your opening comments—great enthusiasm, I might say, MPP Jones. Some words were mentioned: “fiscal prudence” and “principle of fairness.” I was looking at vote item 3401, ministry administration program, and there is a table there which highlights the minister’s salary, the parliamentary assistants’ and the associate minister’s. It came to my attention, though, that Ontario currently now has the largest government, the biggest government, in the history of the province. It needs to be noted that this Premier campaigned on small government and keeping the costs of government down. And you did reference some of these points in your opening comments, Minister Mulroney.

The fact of the matter is that since 2018, though, the cabinet has gone from 20 cabinet members to now 36 cabinet members. So it’s 36 ministers in cabinet; this is just one shy of the federal government’s, the Trudeau government’s cabinet. And now we have 32 parliamentary assistants. This is an increase of 72% since 2018. And only one PC MPP has no top-up; everybody else does have a top-up. So the cost of cabinet has gone from \$3 million to \$6 million.

The Premier’s office alone: Now we have an increase of—actually, 48 employees are now on the sunshine list, which has doubled since he has become Premier.

And this is actually twice as big as Kathleen Wynne’s government, when you took over in 2018.

So my question for you pertains to the sustainability of this trajectory, if you will. And in keeping with your

opening comments, Minister Mulroney, around fairness—because people in Ontario are struggling to pay their bills. They’re struggling, period. If you look at the table, there’s actually a small discrepancy that I had a question about, but can you speak to, broadly, how—you can’t get any bigger. So how are you going to keep costs down, from an administrative burden perspective?

**Hon. Caroline Mulroney:** Thank you very much, MPP Fife, for that question. It speaks to the core of what we were elected to do, which is govern for the people.

Since we were elected, we have been looking at ways to put more money back into people’s pockets, and we have consistently done that every year in our first mandate and in our second mandate, in cutting fees and keeping costs low, managing the overall size of the Ontario public service, even through a massive global pandemic. So we have managed to do that consistently year over year. We are managing the economy of the largest province within the federation, and from a value-for-money perspective, we’ve been able to restore Ontario back to a strong fiscal path.

We announced just last week that the deficit in Ontario is \$600 million, which—after 15 years of Liberal government, I don’t think people can even imagine getting this close to a balanced budget. And so, I think, from a value-for-money perspective—the people elected one of the largest, if not the largest, majority in Ontario’s history, and the two back-to-back majorities. I think that my colleagues and I have done a tremendous job, with the help of the Ontario public service, to deliver value for money and the results that the people of Ontario expect.

**Ms. Catherine Fife:** So you have no trouble or you don’t see any issue whatsoever with the size of the growing Premier’s office; the fact that every single PC MPP, with the exception of one, now has a top-up; and now we have 36 cabinet ministers—we now actually have a new ministry: the ministry for auto theft.

What’s actually happening here, by the book and by the expenses, is that—Ontarians are really struggling to make ends meet. They’re struggling to pay their bills. And yet, the Premier’s office has doubled in size and doubled in costs, and now we have 48 of those members who work in and around the Premier’s office on the sunshine list—a 72% increase in costs to cabinet.

Shouldn’t the government of the day be leading and demonstrating that we don’t need bloated governments to actually get the job done?

**Hon. Caroline Mulroney:** Well, as I said, since we were elected, the size of the Ontario public service has remained quite stable even though we governed through a global pandemic.

I think the people of Ontario are focused on making sure that their government delivers the results that they were elected to deliver—deliver on our mandate.

Every chance that we get, we’re always asking, how can we put money back into people’s pockets and deliver on that mandate of affordability and governing for the people? And we’ve consistently done that—



**Ms. Catherine Fife:** I think that's a good point that you've just made, actually, about the Ontario public service. It has remained status quo. So the people who are doing the work on the ground, across the province—those numbers haven't increased to meet the growing demand of Ontarians.

And yet, the Premier's office is bloated, the cabinet is—the fact that the federal government has 37 ministers and we have 36 in Ontario. Trudeau is in charge of the entire country; like it or not, it's true. Ontario has 36 cabinet ministers, and the federal government has 37. I have to say, for us, there's no good excuse for this, and it runs against brand as well. Even the Canadian Taxpayers Federation has said the gravy train has arrived here.

I'm putting it on your radar, though, because there is an imbalance here between the public service and the employees who serve the good people of this province—and then watching government just become larger and larger and larger adds insult to injury, in my view.

**Hon. Caroline Mulroney:** If I can just say—

**Ms. Catherine Fife:** Sure.

**Hon. Caroline Mulroney:** —you're contradicting yourself in your question, because government is not getting larger and larger and larger—

**Ms. Catherine Fife:** It is. Your cabinet is twice as big.

**Hon. Caroline Mulroney:** We're ensuring that we're delivering public services to Ontarians in the most efficient way possible.

**Ms. Catherine Fife:** How is that possible, with 36 cabinet ministers?

**Hon. Caroline Mulroney:** We've developed a people plan to make sure that we're retaining the best public servants, that we're drawing the best people to deliver those services to Ontarians, and I think it actually aligns perfectly with our mandate to deliver value for Ontario's taxpayers.

We are overseeing the largest economy in Canada. Basically—I don't think anyone in this room would challenge this—we are the motor of the Canadian economy, and we have overseen laying out the conditions for growth so that Ontarians can create jobs, so we can attract investment. We've attracted billions of dollars of investment.

**Ms. Catherine Fife:** Chair, I'm going to reclaim—

**Hon. Caroline Mulroney:** And the people in our cabinet and our government and the public service are overseeing the implementation of that.

**Ms. Catherine Fife:** Minister, we have the largest sub-sovereign debt in the world, of First World nations. We are not leading on the economy. Our unemployment numbers are at 7.7%, which is—when you took over from Kathleen Wynne in 2018, it was 5.7%. So there is a disconnect; I do agree with you.

Where we would see funding going and resources going are to the people who are actually working in the public sector, doing the work; not in ministry offices.

1030

So we're going to agree to disagree on this, which is unfortunate. I just want to say, it's not sustainable, and

having a government this big actually, in my opinion, causes more damage. That's what I'm seeing.

Chair, I'm going to move to vote item 3411 right now, and this has to do with government advertising.

Minister, on page 19 of the estimates book, you point out that the government indicates that it plans to spend \$51 million on the Bulk Media Buy Program this year, which is consistent with last year. Of course, Ontario's Auditor General has taken exception to this purchase. The quote from the AG's office: "Ontario's Progressive Conservative government spent about \$25 million—or three quarters of its total advertising spending—last year on ads the Auditor General believes are partisan." In the report, she actually pointed out and really tried to educate folks that the—she concluded that the primary objective of these ads and/or the information included was to foster a positive impression of the government. She went on to say, "The ads we took issue with included statements such as 'we're reducing wait times for surgeries,' 'we're building 3,000 more hospital beds' and 'we're adding and upgrading nearly 60,000 long-term-care beds,' without context or evidence to back up these claims."

We do know the Canadian Institute for Health Information found, in 2023, the wait-lists for hip and knee replacements and other priority procedures were longer than even before the pandemic. So you can imagine being an Ontario citizen; these commercials come across your TV; you happen to be one of the people who is waiting even longer for hip and knee replacements—or you're one of the small, rural or northern communities that saw almost 1,200 emergency room, health care services closed.

The Auditor General actually said 181 of the ads in this one campaign last year would have been classified as partisan for their content.

I remember that PC members were outraged when the Liberals changed and watered down the advertising act. In fact, the health minister introduced a private member's piece of legislation to undo these changes. And yet, when you got into power, you doubled down on these partisan advertisements.

Do you think it is an effective use of taxpayer money to pay for partisan advertisements, and does the government intend to use that \$51 million allocated under vote item 3411 for more partisan, self-congratulatory ads?

**Hon. Caroline Mulroney:** I'll just provide some technical context and clarify that the Treasury Board Secretariat administers the bulk media buy fund, but it's actually Cabinet Office that's responsible for the administration and for the overall coordination and the management of any government marketing plan or overall marketing plan, ministries' campaign budgets and tracking planned expenditures against that fund.

That said, with respect to that campaign or any other campaign that you raise, I would say that government has a responsibility to let Ontarians know how it is spending its money to deliver programs and services. Government advertising uses different media, which is practical in terms of getting the message out to inform Ontario residents about their rights and their responsibilities under the

law, and about the important work that we're doing to make life better for Ontarians. So it comes down to accountability and transparency and information.

The bulk media buy plan is outlined in the public accounts and, just last week, as you know, we announced that the Auditor General reviewed our public accounts, which does include information and details about the bulk media buy fund, and gave us a clean, unqualified audit opinion for the seventh year in a row, and so has therefore reviewed those plans.

**Ms. Catherine Fife:** But, of course, you know that the Auditor General has no choice but to approve those advertisements—because it was watered down by the Liberals and now doubled down by the Ford government.

I'm going back to your opening comments. You talked about being fiscally prudent. You talked about being fair to the taxpayers.

What value is it to the taxpayers of Ontario, for these commercials saying how great your government is, playing in the LA airport, during a Super Bowl game? How do you reconcile that? You keep the money; you are the holder of the funds. You have the most important job, I would say, in government. You must watch those commercials and ask, how is this benefiting the people of Ontario?

**Hon. Caroline Mulroney:** Well, in two ways: I think it lets Ontarians know, from a transparency perspective, how their government is spending their dollars on health care, education and other social services to make life better for them. The Auditor General reviews them and approves them—and I'll turn it over to my deputy to speak more directly about how we work with the Auditor General and how we follow the letter of the advertising act, so all of our advertising is done in accordance with the law. I will also say that, through our advertising, we've been able to get the message out about the great job that we've been doing in turning Ontario around. We have seen, and I'm sure that you have seen—

**Ms. Catherine Fife:** There's a tale of two Ontarios here, Minister. The people who can't find housing or who are going to the food bank or whose children don't access autism services—you're not advertising that. You're advertising the counterpoint of that.

**Hon. Caroline Mulroney:** I think the people in communities across southwestern Ontario would be able to say that because of the message that we've been able to get out about the work we're doing in Ontario, we've been able to attract investment which is creating jobs that otherwise would have left the province. Billions and billions of dollars in the automotive sector are here today. We're breaking ground on so many projects to create jobs for Ontarians that we would have lost otherwise, and you could say it's the result of making sure that we're getting the message out to investors and companies, manufacturers around the world, and they're saying, "After 15 years of Liberal government, Ontario was not a place where we thought it was worth investing our dollars, but today we know that the conditions are there and we're going to be able to create jobs for Ontarians." I would say that those

Ontarians would definitely support the work that we have done—

**Ms. Catherine Fife:** Imagine when they get here, though. Minister, imagine when they get to Ontario and they can't get a family doctor or their children's school is underfunded and under-resourced, and they have a special-needs child.

What I'm countering with is that those commercials are misleading, in my view, because they don't tell what's actually happening in Ontario—they are glossed over. They are part of a public relations campaign, sure, but then people get to Ontario and they face a very different reality.

What I've heard from you is that you don't have oversight. The auditor is still stuck with this very watered down piece of legislation, and the government of the day is committed to maintaining that flawed piece of legislation, which you at one point took great exception to.

Perhaps the deputy minister has something to add. Please go ahead.

**Ms. Carlene Alexander:** Thank you very much, MPP Fife, and thank you, Minister.

My name is Carlene Alexander. I'm the deputy minister at Treasury Board Secretariat and the Secretary of the Treasury Board and Management Board of Cabinet.

I want to address how ministries work with the Auditor General when it comes to government advertising. Ministries work very closely with the Auditor General to ensure that the Auditor General reviews and approves all reviewable government advertising before they can be used. Just for clarity, no government advertising that is reviewable under the act will be played, will be put into production for the people of Ontario, until the Auditor General approves. The Auditor General also reviews annually, in her annual report, reports on government advertising, including any contraventions of the act, and also reports annually on government advertising expenditures.

**Ms. Catherine Fife:** That is all well and good. I feel like we've been through this before.

That said, the auditor has said that 181 of the ads in the health care campaign, for instance, "would have been classified as partisan for their content."

The auditor has her hands tied behind her back because the act was watered down so strongly by the Liberals. It's unfortunate, because this is a lot of money, and right now, when we're dealing with agencies in our local ridings—ALS Canada, for instance. They're asking for \$6 million—\$6 million—instead of Super Bowl commercials telling people that everything is fine here, and when they get here, they can't get a doctor.

1040

**The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman):** One minute.

**Ms. Catherine Fife:** Their children can't get access to special education needs. The mental health wait-lists are long.

It is about priorities, so that is our goal—I want to find out if the Treasury Board is committed to maintaining this \$51 million, the bulk ad buy; I have heard that you are, and so as Ontarians, we will have to go through the painful

experience of paying to have these ads played in real time, when the reality for many Ontarians is very different.

**The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman):** We now will go to the government side. MPP Byers.

**Mr. Rick Byers:** Thank you very much, Ministers, for your comments.

My question is to the President of the Treasury Board. I really appreciate your remarks this morning. You commented on the important issues regarding expenditure management in government. Some folks may not find that a very exciting topic. I will tell you, I started off my career as an accountant, so I do find it extremely exciting—although admittedly, from the colour of my hair, that was a while ago. I really appreciate it, because these are very important and foundational principles, frankly, in the expenditure management.

The President of the Treasury Board works a lot with the Ministry of Finance in the reporting—and you mentioned it today—in public accounts, the quarterly reporting, the budget process and FES, of course. The audit opinions that the government has received are also a very strong signal of the clean record of reporting.

I wondered if you could comment on the ways that the government exhibits both transparency and accountability to the people through this reporting process.

**Hon. Caroline Mulroney:** Do you mean through the preparation of our estimates and the work that we're doing here?

**Mr. Rick Byers:** Yes.

**Hon. Caroline Mulroney:** Yes, absolutely. Thank you for that great question.

I also want to thank you, MPP Byers, for the great work you do serving as parliamentary assistant to the Treasury Board Secretariat, along with MPP Martin. I'm so grateful to you for the great advice and support that you provide to me, as minister, and to our government.

As you know, given the extensive role of the Treasury Board Secretariat throughout the fiscal cycle, it is a significant topic, and it's one that I and the deputy minister and all of our colleagues at Treasury Board take seriously. So I am very glad, actually, to have this opportunity to share an overview of the expenditure estimates process for everyone here today. I think it's good background. We all come to these committees, and it's good to provide the background of why we're here.

Expenditure estimates represent the government's official request to the Legislature for the legal authority that we need to incur expenditures during a fiscal year. There are two volumes of expenditure estimates. Volume 1 of expenditure estimates was tabled on April 22, 2024. It represents the estimates for the government, including government ministries. Volume 2 sets out the spending plans of the legislative offices, including the Office of the Assembly, the Office of the Auditor General that we were just speaking about, the Office of the Chief Electoral Officer and the Ombudsman of Ontario. They will be tabled at a later date in the fall.

I should also mention that Treasury Board Secretariat will table supplementary estimates if a ministry experi-

ences a substantial fiscal pressure that cannot be accommodated from within available spending authority, similar to volume 1 and volume 2 expenditure estimates. Supplementary estimates are also referred to legislative committees for their important review.

Following tabling, estimates and supplementary estimates are selected for a review by legislative committees, which is why we're all here today, and ultimately voted on at the committee stage.

Once all expenditure estimates from selected ministries are approved by their respective committees and then reported back to the House, the government seeks a concurrence motion to allow estimates from selected and unselected ministries to be voted on together as part of the supply act. Following the passage of the supply act, the expenditure estimates become the legal spending authority for government ministries, offices and the legislative offices.

In addition to the expenditure estimates process, it's important to highlight that all this ties into transparency and accountability in the management of public funds. The Treasury Board Secretariat is committed to ensuring that every dollar that is spent is accounted for and is used effectively to meet the needs of Ontarians. This commitment is reflected in the rigorous review and approval process that accompanies the expenditure estimates. By involving legislative committees and seeking concurrence motions, we ensure that there's thorough scrutiny and debate over the proposed expenditures. Transparency is a critical component of the expenditure estimates process. By tabling these documents and involving legislative committees in their review, we ensure that there is thorough scrutiny and debate over the proposed expenditures. This rigorous review process not only upholds the principles of good governance, but it also reinforces public trust in how government manages its finances. As such, this comprehensive approach ensures that every dollar spent is accounted for and is used effectively to meet the needs of Ontarians, maintaining a high standard of fiscal responsibility and transparency throughout the entire fiscal cycle.

**Mr. Rick Byers:** Thank you very much. It was a great outline of the process and very important.

**The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman):** MPP Hamid.

**MPP Zee Hamid:** Thank you to both ministers for making yourselves available, not just to answer questions now, but also for the incredible amount of work that went before this moment.

Minister, the cost-of-living crisis is being felt across the country, and Ontario is not immune. We all hear from our constituents who talk about how they have to carefully watch every dollar to make sure that their personal budgets work.

I had a community barbecue this weekend, and I had a conversation with some constituents who wanted to know that we, our government, were doing everything we could to reduce waste across ministries and provide programs and services as effectively and efficiently as we could.

Minister, just in a previous question, you talked about watching every dollar as we spend. I understand that the

Treasury Board Secretariat works with ministries to reduce waste and to improve programs and services. Can you talk about some of the work the Treasury Board is doing in this regard and why it's so important?

**Hon. Caroline Mulroney:** Thank you, MPP Hamid, for that important question. It's core to the work that we do at Treasury Board and across our government, as you know.

Our government recognizes the importance of respecting Ontarians' tax dollars. The cost-of-living crisis that you referenced is a pressing concern that affects every corner of our province. When I hear that constituents have expressed worries about how their hard-earned tax dollars are being spent, I want to assure you that their concerns are being heard and addressed.

Beyond the work being undertaken by my colleagues in cabinet to build a strong Ontario while providing real cost savings to Ontarians, the Treasury Board Secretariat plays a crucial role in ensuring that our government gets the best value for every dollar spent. TBS works diligently with ministries to reduce waste, improve programs and enhance services.

Let me share some of the important work that we do in our ministry and why it's so vital to the people of Ontario. I serve as chair of the Audit and Accountability Committee, a subcommittee of Treasury Board and Management Board of Cabinet that was established by our government in December 2018. The Audit and Accountability Committee plays a key role in supporting strong fiscal management, which in turn supports ensuring that we continue to ensure value for money in the programs and services that we provide to Ontarians every day. The Audit and Accountability Committee is supported by the Ontario Internal Audit Committee and sector audit committees, which provide advice and recommendations based on the important independent work of our Ontario internal audit division within the Office of the Comptroller General. I have many of the representatives of that division here today. They do a tremendous amount of work reviewing the programs and services that the Ontario government provides.

The Ontario internal audit division, within the Office of the Comptroller General, is responsible for conducting independent internal audit work to support the achievement of government priorities and ministry strategic objectives. The division employs and depends on an array of talented professionals. The division provides expert advice and recommendations for ministries to improve services and programs, with a focus on helping the government reduce risks, explore potential cost reduction and avoidance, and improve process efficiencies.

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Also within the Office of the Comptroller General is the Office of the Chief Risk Officer, who's here with us today. This division oversees enterprise risk management across the Ontario public service. Enterprise risk management is a proactive, systemic, organization-wide process to understand and manage risks, including possible threats or opportunities. The Office of the Chief Risk Officer reviews

and advises on ministry risk information and risk management practices. This allows ministries to avoid potential problems and thereby improve outcomes and reduce government waste.

The Office of the Comptroller General's office within the Office of the Provincial Controller Division also supports efforts to ensure prudent management of taxpayer dollars and safeguarding of the province's assets. They provide oversight and direction on the development, implementation and oversight of comptrollership frameworks and policies. They also drive enterprise reporting related to accounting, financial reporting, systems and controls, including delivering on the province's public accounts, which we did last week. They also provide critical accounting and financial management strategic advice to senior officials and the Treasury Board.

Finally, I would be remiss if I did not refer to the active work going on in the Office of the Treasury Board. The Office of the Treasury Board provides analysis, administrative and operational support to Treasury Board and Management Board of Cabinet. Their analysts do so much work in reviewing ministry submissions for new programs and initiatives, and they make recommendations as to whether these submissions align with the government's fiscal framework and overall priorities. These submissions will then form the backbone of initiatives launched in the following year's budget. So we couldn't do the important work of Treasury Board and the Management Board of Cabinet without the work that those dedicated professionals do every day.

So as you can see, the Treasury Board Secretariat plays a pivotal role in ensuring that the government operates efficiently and effectively, always with the best interests of Ontarians in mind. By maintaining rigorous oversight, promoting transparency and by fostering a culture of accountability, we work to ensure that every single dollar is spent wisely and that public services are continuously improved. With the dedication of our talented team and the support of partner ministries, we are building a stronger, more resilient Ontario that meets the needs of all its residents, including the constituents you had at your very well attended barbecue this weekend.

Thank you, MPP Hamid.

**MPP Zee Hamid:** Thank you, Minister. And the story about the barbecue wasn't just a story. I actually texted him, saying I would send him a clip, so thank you for making my life easier, and thank you for the detailed answer—accountant Byers had goosebumps hearing it.

I will give my time to my colleagues.

**The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman):** MPP Martin.

**Mrs. Robin Martin:** Thank you to my colleagues.

I was thinking the same thing—that MPP Byers was pretty excited about all the things you were talking about there. I was also kind of excited about it. And I think it will give the people of Ontario comfort—to understand the kind of work being done at Treasury Board and through the Audit and Accountability Committee, to make sure that all the money is being spent as wisely as possible. I know it gives me a lot of comfort to know we have a Chief

Risk Officer responsible for enterprise-wide risk—all very important.

I want to go to something that you talked about a little bit before, which is Treasury Board Secretariat as the employer for the Ontario public service. I think you mentioned that over 60,000 employees are in the Ontario public service. I'm sure many of us have public service members in our ridings who serve in the public service; I know I do, and they're very great constituents—they have a lot to offer in the constituency but as well, obviously, in the public service. These are the people, really, who ensure that Ontario receives very high-quality public services, no matter where Ontarians live.

I wondered if you could just outline a bit more how the government is going about ensuring that we have a very strong Ontario public service.

**Hon. Caroline Mulroney:** Thank you so much, MPP Martin, for that great question.

As you said, the Ontario public service plays a vital role in ensuring the effective delivery of essential services to the residents of Ontario. From health care and education to transportation, the OPS is a vital component of Ontario, working tirelessly to maintain and improve the quality of life for all of us across the province.

A strong OPS is essential for fostering economic growth, delivering high-quality services, and also building public trust and confidence in the government's ability to serve people. Because of this, the people of Ontario deserve to know that their tax dollars are being spent on a strong public service—one that is focused on bettering itself.

As the employer of the Ontario public service, Treasury Board Secretariat focuses a great deal of its efforts on improving organizational culture and ultimately on improving the workplace experience for everyone who works there. Fostering an inclusive workplace where everyone feels that they belong is always at the forefront of our minds, because a supported workforce means a strong OPS, which means a strong Ontario.

We also know that the only way we can attract the best of the best to the OPS is by creating an environment where Ontario's top talent can thrive, grow and be themselves. We are achieving these goals in a number of ways, including through the OPS people plan, which is the OPS human resources strategy. It outlines how the OPS is focusing its energy, efforts and investments on improving talent management and organizational culture. The overarching goal of this plan is to attract, develop and retain top talent that reflects Ontario's diversity. This translates directly into action, through a number of programs where the OPS is intentionally recruiting diverse and skilled talent to build the workforce of the future. I'll give you a few examples.

The OPS has a strategy to match the Ontario workforce in terms of the diversity of its leadership. This strategy is yielding results. To date, the organization has achieved parity for women, francophone, Indigenous and Black employees at all leadership levels, and for 2SLGBTQIA+ employees at the executive level.

In addition, the OPS created an Indigenous Internship Program, a paid 12-month program that provides recent Indigenous post-secondary graduates with an opportunity to gain work experience in the Ontario public service.

The Ability Internship Stream is for persons with disabilities, and the Black Internship Stream is for Black post-secondary graduates.

The OPS also recently launched the bilingual English and French public-facing job ads to help attract and retain bilingual talent, which, as Minister of Francophone Affairs, you know I am keenly interested in and I support.

The 2022-25 multi-year accessibility plan outlines how the OPS is promoting inclusion for employees with disabilities across the organization, while also providing more accessible public services.

With the OPS Leadership Pledge, the OPS is taking action to address the root causes of discrimination and harassment in the OPS. Initiatives from the pledge include the introduction of an enterprise-wide code of conduct and a program to identify and address systemic employment barriers.

The Indigenous Equity Branch is leading enterprise-wide strategies for the attraction, development, retention and success of Indigenous employees and leaders. They are developing policies, programs and initiatives to identify and remove systemic employment barriers and lead to meaningful change across the organization. To mark the National Day for Truth and Reconciliation this year, they've engaged Phyllis Webstad, whose personal narrative led to the creation of Orange Shirt Day, to speak at an OPS-wide event about her experiences and the intergenerational impacts of the Indian residential school system.

The Black Equity Branch leads enterprise-wide research, training and development of policies and programs focused on the elimination of anti-Black racism in the OPS. This includes the recent launch of an anti-Black racism mandate, as well as a career enhancement program targeted to Black women in administrative programs.

With different but complementary mandates, these branches are leading change to identify and remove systemic employment barriers and to deliver on the OPS people plan and the OPS Leadership Pledge. These are just a few examples of so many, of how the OPS is prioritizing and supporting an innovative workforce that reflects the people we serve all across this great province, and therefore can provide high-quality services to them.

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The OPS is also about to launch a new employer brand that will help demonstrate why the organization is unique and is also a very attractive place to work. To help the OPS compete in a competitive labour market, the new employer brand will showcase—

**The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman):** One minute.

**Hon. Caroline Mulroney:** —the OPS as an employer of choice, and it will help potential job applicants understand the organization, its mission, values and what a career in the OPS can offer them.

By fostering a diverse and well-supported workforce, the OPS can harness a wide range of perspectives and skills, leading to more innovative and effective solutions to the challenges that we face here in Ontario. This diversity not only enhances the efficiency of public services, but it also ensures that these services are inclusive, reflecting the diverse needs of all Ontarians.

Supporting a strong OPS means investing in a workforce that is motivated, respected and equipped to deliver high-quality services, ultimately ensuring that taxpayer dollars are respected and used wisely. Together, we can continue to build a more responsive and accountable as well as efficient public service that upholds the values and the expectations of all Ontarians across our province.

**The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman):** We'll now go to the official opposition. MPP Kernaghan.

**Mr. Terence Kernaghan:** Thank you, Minister Mulroney as well as Associate Minister Jones, for your presentation today.

I think that many people are concerned—it's a very simple, basic human concern—that when people come into power—they're worried that those people change.

When we look at the legislation that was tabled by Minister Sylvia Jones as well as being fought for by many people on the government benches, that end to partisan advertising, it's disappointing that the tune became changed once people came into government.

Just in thinking about partisan ads, it seems rather strange that this government would spend tax dollars to explain to Ontarians how they're spending tax dollars. It kind of reminds me of that kid back in school who would give themselves a nickname that nobody ever used and nobody ever wanted to use.

In particular, Minister, I'd like to turn to emergency management, vote item 3415.

Recent events, such as those in Mississauga where people were stranded in their cars because of flooding, or whether it's pedestrians—people were also stuck in elevators. We need to think about the increase in the severity as well as frequency of these really dramatic and terrible climate events.

The Treasury Board Secretariat leads the whole-of-government coordination of emergency management—that includes the preparation, the preparedness, the mitigation, the response, as well as the recovery. With interim actuals, it shows that this government spent \$82 million last year and this government plans to spend \$68 million this year. What will the impacts be of this \$14-million reduction?

**Hon. Trevor Jones:** Thank you for the question.

Our government understands that we're in a changing world. I respect that. We need to adapt our communities and truly be safe, practised and prepared. This is exactly why we've created a guiding document, a made-in-Ontario strategy called the PEMSAP. It's the first plan of its kind to ensure we are safe, practised and prepared before, during and after emergencies. These include floods, climatic weather events that we've all been accustomed to, wildland fires that are cyclical—but new emerging threats,

like cyber attacks, we talked about. Under the PEMSAP strategy, we've strengthened our preparedness for future extreme weather events just like flooding. We're getting this because we're receiving insights from communities across Ontario that are subjected to cyclical climatic events, and the experts who respond to them.

**Mr. Terence Kernaghan:** I'd like to ask, though: In the PEMSAP strategy, does it recommend cutting \$14 million?

**Hon. Trevor Jones:** Specifically, the importance of remaining responsive to ensure that all communities are safe and resilient in the face of climate change, in any eventuality—there's no dollar value, because we're getting input from around the province, from stakeholders, experts, in communities that are affected in remote and vulnerable areas. We're making that investment.

**Mr. Terence Kernaghan:** Well, I doubt any of those communities that are affected would recommend removing money from that plan.

I'd like to turn my comments next to COVID and, in particular, former Auditor General Bonnie Lysyk's report on COVID-19. The audit itself found delays and conflicts. It found that a consultant was paid \$1.6 million to develop an organizational structure for the COVID-19 response, which was called overly cumbersome. There were no top leadership roles given to public health officials. Laboratory testing, case management and contact tracing were not being performed quickly enough. Many people would call this crisis unprecedented, yet from the 2003 SARS crisis, it was well known that there were weaknesses in the public health lab information systems. They were repeatedly flagged, yet they were never fixed before the arrival of COVID-19. Auditor General Lysyk said that the response was more reactive relative to most other provinces, and slower.

We're now a few years out from the worst of this pandemic, and I'd really like to know what lessons were learned. The Auditor General found massive gaps in Ontario's preparedness. The Treasury Board Secretariat is cutting the emergency management funding in this year's estimates, and they're doing so without clear evidence that these issues identified by the Auditor General have been remedied.

Have the flaws in Ontario's communication, decision-making and management been identified and repaired?

**Hon. Trevor Jones:** I'll take that question.

This is exactly what we talked about as a one-window approach. EMO will be a clear conduit for communication, from communities, from needs across Ontario, to the ministry's response to them. EMO stands ready to support all municipalities and every eventuality. That includes First Nations communities—listening to First Nations, remote and vulnerable communities, for the first time ever, to prepare for, respond to, adapt to and mitigate emergencies. That support includes assisting communities in identifying hazards; drafting emergency response plans; training; practising those plans, which includes that critical communication you're talking about, so no stone is left unturned.

We detailed in the 2023 PEMSAP strategy that more than 3,500 people were safely evacuated during a flood and wildland fire season that was nearly unprecedented—successfully mitigated that risk.

I'll pass it off to my ADM, who can speak more specifically to operational guidelines and some of those investments.

**Mr. Eric Everett:** Thank you, Minister.

Good morning, Chair, members. My name is Eric Everett. I'm the assistant deputy minister of the emergency management strategy, monitoring, and intelligence division at Emergency Management Ontario.

MPP, thank you for the question.

There have been no cuts to Emergency Management Ontario's budget. There has been an \$10-million investment made over a three-year period, and it's just the nature of program spending that there are going to be ebbs and flows based on the situational needs on the ground. I believe also, if you take a look at the operating and capital expense budget together, it actually would show a bit of an increase.

I also want to turn to your question about lessons learned from past emergencies. In our Provincial Emergency Management Strategy and Action Plan, we have one window for coordinated planning, we have a practised and prepared emergency response, and we have proactive planning and monitoring. One lesson we've learned about the one window is to have an established government framework. That includes a cabinet committee for emergency management. It also includes a deputy ministers steering committee that could be activated in any type of emergency but that also meets regularly to discuss preparedness.

**Mr. Terence Kernaghan:** Very good.

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I'd like to also think now towards waste water management. The Ontario government recently shut down a proactive waste water surveillance program; it was an early warning for communities. It helped identify infectious disease threats such as RSV, monkeypox, polio and H5N1 in Ontario. It could actually predict when the RSV virus was becoming prevalent in communities and would allow public health officials to administer prophylactic medicine to make sure that community spread was mitigated; in fact, it has been shown that this allowed public health to identify 295 children. They kept them from being hospitalized. They, as a result, managed to stop 950 medically attended hospital visits. This saved the province \$3.5 million. The cost of this program was roughly 50 cents per child. This program is being closed fully, not partially, and it has been said by this government that it's to avoid duplication, while the federal program is significantly more limited. The program in Ontario was robust, and it was one that was widely celebrated by public health officials. The Treasury Board is responsible for emergency management, under 3415. I'm looking for the logic here of cancelling this program; it seems to be curiously absent from this decision.

Can you explain why this effective emergency management measure like waste surveillance was cut off?

**Hon. Trevor Jones:** I can answer that question—

**MPP Zee Hamid:** Just a quick point of order: How is this question related to estimates?

**Mr. Terence Kernaghan:** It's 3415, as I referenced in my question.

**The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman):** That's not a point of order.

Carry on.

**Hon. Trevor Jones:** Thank you.

Through you, Chair, I want to clarify what EMO does and what it stands for.

It's clearly a one-window approach, through Emergency Management Ontario. That's that one conduit that everyone goes to for one source of information, and that's now disseminated to the area of responsibility. In this case, it would be the Ministry of the Environment, Conservation and Parks—

**Mr. Terence Kernaghan:** So you're choosing to not gather more information from communities to provide to the broader public, in the forms of waste water testing. Like you were saying, this is the one portal, and yet, you've cut off information from coming to that portal.

**Hon. Trevor Jones:** Proactive planning and monitoring is what we do. That's done through decisions made through MECP.

**Mr. Terence Kernaghan:** Respectfully, Associate Minister, if you're proactively planning—proactive would be waste water management, which is the very program that you cancelled.

I think, as well, this waste water program was created to detect early threats, and it played a critical role during COVID-19 as an early warning signal.

Was there any sort of consideration, was there any sort of proactive thinking given to increasing the funding under vote item 3415 to reimplement waste water surveillance?

**Hon. Trevor Jones:** Through you, Chair: I know the Minister of Health has just pointed to this, because this is an overlapping responsibility from health and environment, conservation and parks, but if you would indulge, I can let the assistant deputy minister explain that operational side of the decision making.

**Mr. Terence Kernaghan:** In fairness, Associate Minister, the overlap was very minimal. Ontario's program was far more robust than the federal program. It was not reduplicative. In fact, it was identifying threats that the federal program does not identify.

**Hon. Trevor Jones:** Again, through you, Chair: I can have the assistant deputy minister talk about that operational component. There was overlap between health, MECP and our federal partners.

**Mr. Eric Everett:** Thanks again for the question.

The minister is correct when he speaks about our one-window role for emergency management. However, this particular initiative that you speak of in your question is a functional responsibility of the Ministry of Health. However, I will say that as part of the proactive planning and monitoring role—that is an important part of EMO. We

work with our ministry partners to get as much intelligence as we can to have a common operating picture and an up-to-date situational awareness of where we are.

One particular initiative in this area is, every season we work with the Ministry of Health and partners on respiratory readiness. For the fall respiratory season, we'll help share information that the Ministry of Health collects, and we'll work with non-health-care sector partners to ensure that they're safe, practised and prepared.

**Mr. Terence Kernaghan:** Next, I'd like to turn to the issue of appointments in vote item 3404.

There seems to be a growing and ever-longer list of failed candidates for the PC Party of Ontario who have become suddenly appointed to conduct government business. We can think back in their most recent history to Premier Ford's interference within the OPP, with the possible appointment of Ron Taverner, the Ford family friend. Recently, there has been the Ottawa regional office—which has even been called by the MPP from Nepean not a great idea. We also have seen the Niagara Falls Bridge Commission, the Niagara Parks Commission, the chairman of the Public Accountants Council for the Province of Ontario—but in particular, my questions will be about the Judicial Appointments Advisory Committee. Judges are meant to be qualified and impartial, and they are respected for those qualities. This has been called a direct partisan ideological intervention—

**Ms. Christine Hogarth:** Point of order, Chair.

**The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman):** Point of order.

**Ms. Christine Hogarth:** If you could explain to me how judicial appointments are part of estimates—

**Mr. Terence Kernaghan:** It is the Treasury Board's responsibility, and this is vote item 3404.

**Ms. Christine Hogarth:** But we seem to be doing a list of pet projects on that side, so I'm just questioning—

**The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman):** Points of order are not for a matter of debate.

I would remind all members that they refer their questions to the business at hand that is presently in the estimates of expenditures that we're hearing today.

**Mr. Terence Kernaghan:** Absolutely.

I think many folks have been concerned about this ideological interference and that it's short-sighted and cynical politicking. In fact, the Federation of Ontario Law Associations said that Premier Ford's comments, in particular, "reflect a juvenile understanding of the role of an independent judiciary...."

I want to ask, with lawsuits on constitutionality and concerns about the rule of law, is the taxpayer getting value for money on vote item 3404? Will the treasury be covering the legal costs to defend the government's political appointments that impact the judiciary?

**Hon. Caroline Mulroney:** Well, what I'd say is, the appointments to the judicial advisory committee are 100% within the mandate of the Ministry of the Attorney General. The defence of any ministry program or any issue within the courts comes from within MAG's budget or within the respective ministries' legal budgets. So I would

say it's out of bounds or out of scope of the work of Treasury Board.

**Mr. Terence Kernaghan:** So just to confirm, you are not responsible whatsoever for remuneration and for the appointment of anyone to the Judicial Appointments Advisory Committee?

**The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman):** On the previous point of order: I would just suggest that the question must be related to the estimates before us. I don't believe that the minister should be asked to answer if it does not apply to the estimates that are before us.

**Hon. Caroline Mulroney:** I'm happy to answer that question, Chair—and I'm happy to turn it over to the deputy—on how Treasury Board sets remuneration for members of agencies and boards across the government.

Each appointment comes from within each ministry to their respective boards that each ministry oversees.

Deputy?

**Ms. Carlene Alexander:** Thank you very much, Minister. I'm going to call up Associate Deputy Minister Matt Siple, please, to speak to this.

**Mr. Matt Siple:** Thank you very much.

My name is Matt Siple. I'm the associate deputy minister of the Centre for Public Sector Labour Relations and Compensation in the Treasury Board Secretariat. My area has responsibility for overseeing four provincial agencies that are responsible for setting judicial remuneration in the province.

We have four judicial groups that have their compensation determined through a unique process. Those four groups are independent bodies. The chairs are appointed by the government. Typically, those chairs are jointly agreed to by the associations that represent the judicial groups, and then it is a process akin to something like interest arbitration, but with unique elements to it. Both parties would make submissions before the chair or, in some cases, before a panel that includes a chair and nominees from both the government and the association representing judicial groups. That panel or the chair would take those submissions—sometimes, there might be in-person hearings where the positions are argued—and then the commissioner or the chair would write a report setting out their recommendations for remuneration that is then sent to the government for consideration. Depending on the group, that may or may not be a binding process, in which case the government would have to determine what its response to the commission was and have that sent through to the minister.

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**Mr. Terence Kernaghan:** It was this government that changed the way in which the judiciary was appointed, in fact, and this does come to the question of transparency and accountability in terms of governance.

The Federation of Ontario Law Associations chair, Douglas Judson, said, "We would expect this sort of commentary"—from the Premier, that he wanted to appoint like-minded judges.

**The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman):** One minute.



**Mr. Terence Kernaghan:** He would expect that sort of commentary from a MAGA Republican, not the Premier of Ontario.

Veteran Toronto criminal defence lawyer Frank Addario said, “Every judge that now takes the oath of office, people are going to look at that judge and go, what did they do to pass the litmus test of the Premier?”

So not only is this very questionable in terms of the rule of law, but it begs the question whether there is value for money, considering there will be eventual legal action on this.

I want to thank you very much for your comments at this time. This is a great concern, because political interference in the judiciary is something that should strike at the heart of everyone who really values the separation of powers as well as a free and democratic system.

**The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman):** That concludes the time. MPP Hogarth.

**Ms. Christine Hogarth:** Thank you, Minister and Associate Minister, for being here today. I really appreciated hearing your opening statements—and a really important file for the government.

I would like to tailor my questions around emergency management. I know my colleague MPP Kernaghan spoke a little bit about a public accounts item and our former auditor Bonnie Lysyk and her comments on emergency management—I was part of that public accounts session, and I just want to let you know that those questions were answered very ably by our deputy minister at the time, Di Tommaso, when this fell under the Solicitor General’s office. COVID was a big time when Ms. Lysyk wrote that report, and her comments were, as I said, very ably answered by the deputy at that time.

First of all, congratulations, Minister Jones, on your appointment. I know that you will do an excellent job.

I want to talk a little bit about the Provincial Emergency Operations Centre. We spoke about that before, over the last couple of years, especially when COVID was around. A lot of people don’t understand what the centre does, how it operates. I know it operates 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

I wonder if you can share with municipalities, with people watching—I’m sure that everyone is glued to their TV today to hear a little bit about this—a little bit about this operations centre. How does it help municipalities? How does it help when emergencies arise? I know you spoke about it briefly in your remarks. How does this operations centre work, and has it been activated in 2024?

**Hon. Trevor Jones:** Thank you very much for the question, and to the outstanding member from Etobicoke–Lakeshore, who has the heart of a champion for all things emergency management, for law and order, for security—and so we are like-minded that way.

The Provincial Emergency Operations Centre, under our mandate, will not be the best-kept secret in Ontario any longer, because it is the nerve centre. It’s staffed by exceptional professionals and analysts and duty officers 24/7, 365, which means it—in the instance of any eventuality, any concern, any emergency, anywhere in the prov-

ince, that one window, that phone is going to be answered, that monitoring is going to be answered. It’s state of the art, using the latest software and business intelligence cube sort of software applications. We’re watching in live time with the use of technology and on-ground reporting where there’s a fire that may or may not be controlled, where there’s a rising river somewhere that could potentially create a flood situation, and any other kind of social or natural kind of disaster. The staff there, as I said, work 24/7, 365, to take those calls. They’re the intake centre. So that’s who the police call, that’s who community managers call, that’s who fire departments call to get advice and get direction—“What are you seeing? Here’s what we’re seeing.” When you share intelligence, do you have some sort of guidance on expertise where you might be able to send someone in to monitor? Is this now a call to the Ministry of Natural Resources to deploy firefighting equipment, personnel, water bombing planes and things like that? So when we say that we have that at the ready, it gives communities across Ontario—even the most remote and the most vulnerable—that safe feeling, that someone is always going to be there to respond.

To talk about planning—we’re committed to communities to be truly safe, practised and prepared. Obviously, as you know, MPP Hogarth, prior to being elected as an MPP, I spent most of my professional career doing just that—protecting people in communities across Ontario, bringing offenders to justice. I was blessed to work in some of the most remote, vulnerable areas—communities like Kitchenuhmaykoosib Inninuwug, from which you can see the northern lights through most of the year. It’s accessible by plane only, so when there’s a fire event, a flooding event or any other social event, they feel alone. However, with the PEOC, the Provincial Emergency Operations Centre, as that coordinating body to have that line of communication, that clear conduit, someone from that beautiful community of KI can pick up the phone and say, “I have a concern. I see smoke in the distance. I know my community best.” We’re valuing people in those communities with that lived experience to say, “There’s smoke on the horizon. We want you to monitor it”—MNR goes into action; the OPP, who are the eyes and ears of communities across Ontario, step up operationally and go into action. Our ministry has the oversight, that 30,000-foot view. We deploy those operational resources, and through our civil servants, through our professional operational sworn officers on the ground, they deploy to avert and mitigate that disaster to keep communities safe.

Thank you for the question.

**Ms. Christine Hogarth:** Just for clarification, it is the municipalities that make that call?

**Hon. Trevor Jones:** Of course. Those are the people on the ground. So municipalities everywhere are part of that 13,000-strong cadre of people who, through the Provincial Emergency Operations Centre and through EMO, we’ve trained to have standards. We’ve listened, because different approaches apply differently to different areas—again, cyclical changes in the wildland fire season, cyclical changes to climate and to areas that are prone to

flooding. So we've listened to our municipalities, our municipal managers and those who are trained. Some of those wear several hats. You may have an elected council member in the far northwest of Ontario who also is a volunteer firefighter, who also is that emergency manager. So to have them access that one window through EMO to say, "I've got the training"—the people who are there—"I have that capability now through that training, that public education and that outreach. I can pick up the phone and call my colleague because I was there at that PEOC"—right here, near Yorkdale mall. It's there and it's ever-present; it's alive and well 24/7, 365.

I invite all members of government and opposition, all community managers and people interested in safeguarding Ontario from future threats to take the time to schedule a visit to our PEOC to see the people who are live-monitoring, actively engaging our communities and our municipalities, and responding.

**Ms. Christine Hogarth:** Thank you for keeping the community safe and our province safe.

I'll pass it on to one of my colleagues.

**The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman):** MPP Barnes.

**Ms. Patrice Barnes:** Thank you to the minister for your presentation.

I'm just going to expand a little bit on my colleague MPP Hogarth's question.

Understanding that emergency preparedness is such an important piece of a successful plan, a successful integration and expansion—and I know we've had, in the last four or five years, more than two million people who have come to the province, who are now here. We have also seen the change in weather and some of the activities that we've seen around forest fires and flooding. So I think it is very good that we have a central point for emergency preparedness, where somebody can actually have an area to call, that they know that somebody will execute—that there's somebody there who will actually take that call and help municipalities in knowing what to do when they come across a situation.

We've talked about the importance of planning and putting together a strategy and putting together a response when it comes to an emergency.

I'm just wondering, how does the province protect vulnerable populations during an emergency? What are some of the things that are executed? What are some of the lessons that we've learned that we're putting in place now that will benefit—having an emergency preparedness plan and centre?

1130

**Hon. Trevor Jones:** This is perhaps one of my most important questions and—it's one of my personal missions, because I have lived and served alongside vulnerable populations in remote areas where there's no one else but the community. So to have a central guiding document, that mission-driven document, you take the best input from the best, from all around our diverse province of over 15 million people and growing—a big jurisdiction, a unique jurisdiction with diverse people, diverse geography and diverse pressures. I'd invite everyone to try to take a

moment to read, digest and see how it's applicable—the provincial emergency management strategic action plan is that guiding document. It's that one-window approach. Ontario can do things differently. Ontario can lead Canada, Ontario can lead North America, and Ontario can lead globally by having this guiding document. It's where we can truly be prepared and be safe and be practised. Practising builds resilience. Practising starts with our communities and our homes—to talk about weather phenomena, weather patterns, things that are going on in the world. Speak to your children; speak through schools; speak to your communities, through elected, local community members who know their communities best—these are the people providing us input, providing us guidance on this document. As I said in my opening, it's the first homegrown plan to ensure everywhere and everyone in Ontario, especially remote and vulnerable populations, is safe, practised and prepared, because it's about being proactive—it's before the emergencies occur that we have a plan to adopt. We know who to call, and we know what to do. This plan outlines a true road map for emergency management in a modern context. It draws from past events across the province, and it focuses on our most vulnerable. It includes Indigenous populations, people with disabilities, seniors, racialized communities, and those experiencing poverty and homelessness. One of our core principles is to provide accessible and inclusive services, recognizing and responding to the unique needs of everyone in Ontario. As outlined in the PEMSAP, this serves as the central guiding document, a one-window hub for provincial emergency management that's going to be a global leader in this very diverse and unique context.

We'll proactively work with municipalities, with our partners all across Ontario, including, of course, our Indigenous communities, provincial ministries, the federal government, our organizations supporting vulnerable populations and other jurisdictions. We can learn best from people who've experienced emergencies, and that includes jurisdictions across North America and the United States.

Some of the things we've done, just in 2023 alone—as I mentioned, 3,519 community members were safely evacuated during a very busy wildland fire and flooding season, without the loss of life, without serious injury, because we have host communities prepared for and ready to have those wraparound supports to say that we know who we're welcoming in; we know what their needs are; we know who the elderly are; we know the language they speak, the customs they practise, the traditions, their food. We provide adequate shelter for them in times of need. This is what makes Ontario best.

Planning is exciting to me because, as I said, for many years, I lived and worked in response—I was the one who was activated and deployed to a situation of calamity to restore that calm.

I'm blessed to have a very strong civil service and a partner in the Treasury Board president, to say that we're going to invest strategically over \$110 million.

Again, that tranche, that new \$5-million Community Emergency Preparedness Grant, is open right now for people to access.

I'm excited because now we get to work on the preparedness, that proactive piece, that piece that says, "Let's safeguard. Let's anticipate what's happening. Let's make investments so we don't see things in a linear way; we actually can see by working together, to see around corners"—and that includes everyone in Ontario's Legislature, because that's everyone in Ontario's communities. I'm excited now about being able to prepare for, and not just respond to, emergencies.

Thanks for the question.

**Ms. Patrice Barnes:** Thank you, Minister. Your excitement does show through.

This is such great news. I particularly love the fact that we are being so prepared that people who are displaced are actually being hosted in areas that are welcoming and that cater to all their needs. Cultural responsiveness is so very important. When you talk about food and you talk about the culture and all of those being part of the host community, I think that is fantastic.

I'll just turn that over to my colleague.

**The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman):** MPP Triantafilopoulos.

**Ms. Effie J. Triantafilopoulos:** Thank you to both the ministers for being with us today on a very important topic.

I have a constituent named Susan who, quarterly, comes to see me in my riding office with a list of issues she wants to talk about. At the top of her list is this issue of emergency management in the province of Ontario. So I want you to know that constituents care and they see that our government actually does have an action plan.

One of the things I'd like to ask you, Minister Jones, to elaborate on is what role the federal government has to play here. We talked about the municipalities, our local communities. How do all three levels of government work together on these important issues?

**Hon. Trevor Jones:** That's a brilliant question, and it comes from a place that we have to listen to everyone, all three levels of government, from municipalities—and work closely with our federal partners.

We have exciting things on the horizon. We're making true investments, putting our dollars in the places we need them the most. And we're excited to bring those stories to life through new legislation—through Emergency Management Ontario, we're looking to modernize legislation, through the Emergency Management and Civil Protection Act. This takes into account everyone's stories.

Our federal partners obviously have a serious and important role to play.

And I have those same constituents who say, "Through Emergency Management Ontario, we hear there could be legislation on the horizon that's going to modernize, because we can't just think of things in the past, like a flood or cyclical fire seasons; we have to think of things in the future, like cyber attacks, like social disorder and serious concerns."

The Emergency Management and Civil Protection Act is over 15 years old. It doesn't take into account the pocket computer devices we have now and all the risks they pose. It doesn't take into account cyber attacks and all those new vulnerabilities. So this listens to the stories and experiences of many. The act, as we're going to invest in those stories and listen to our colleagues, establishes—it's going to establish a provincial legal framework for managing emergencies, and it does so by setting out various specific authorities and responsibilities to both our provincial ministries, our municipalities, what is the purview of the federal government, and of course, specific individuals, and most importantly, NGOs. It's a brilliant story—when we have something like what happened in the French River area. In French River, because we listened to people on the ground—"The river is swelling. What do we do?" We engage our NGOs. We engage our municipal partners. We engage the people who want to help, who are there. We bring those people in, and it becomes a non-story, because they're going to work together. We brought sandbagging equipment—invested through Community Emergency Preparedness Grants—from a nearby community. We brought that in, liaising with the federal partners, listening to municipalities and people on the ground, bringing NGOs in—everyone working together—and what could have been a disaster was averted. It became what I like to see as a page 16 story—by working together, utilizing those key investments, liaising with federal partnerships, NGOs, our municipalities and, of course, our provincial partners, it became a non-event. A flood that could have taken property and perhaps taken lives was averted; it was a non-event.

Again, everyone has a role to play. Respectfully listening to people who have the experience, acting on that experience—that's the best we can do, and that's what I hope for as I champion new legislation to modernize this act and to keep Ontario safe.

**The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman):** MPP Hamid.

**MPP Zee Hamid:** Just to switch gears a little bit, to give Minister Jones a break—I know that financial transparency has been a key pillar of this government. Minister, just to keep my question really short—can you please explain how the Treasury Board Secretariat supports financial transparency through public reporting on the government's financial status?

1140

**Hon. Caroline Mulroney:** I appreciate the opportunity to speak about transparency and accountability to the people we serve. TBS does this by focusing on fiscal responsibility across the whole of government, so that we can ensure financial transparency in all of our processes. I spoke about some of the divisions that we have within Treasury Board Secretariat that really allow us to deliver on that mandate.

The most direct way, though, that we promote financial transparency is through this—through the expenditure estimates process. The estimates provide the public with line-by-line details of ministry spending at a granular level, as we heard already today. This is accompanied by

published plans and annual reports that constitute the estimates briefing books provided to the legislative committees to support the estimates review process and that are posted annually on ontario.ca. As you know, the Auditor General reviews our public accounts at the end of the fiscal year. We work with the Auditor General throughout the year—the internal audit division, the Comptroller General—and then we publish those reports, and Ontarians across the province have a chance to review not only our expenditure estimates, but then our public accounts at the end of the year. So it's a collaborative process, and it's very transparent.

**The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman):** We'll now go to the official opposition. MPP Fife.

**Ms. Catherine Fife:** I'm going to go back to Associate Minister Jones. Your excitement around planning for emergency management scenarios is laudable, I'd have to say. I'm excited that you're excited, but I think I would even be more encouraged if I heard from you a basic statement about the value of being proactive. I've heard lots of general statements—but being proactive means that you have all the information that you need in order to address an emergency.

I'm sure you know that it was University of Ottawa engineering professor Rob Delatolla's lab that was doing waste water management and testing when they found COVID-19 back in April 2020. That was a pivotal moment for the province. It was good that we had that information, and it was good that we were able to plan for it. You need to have the information in order to plan for an emergency.

Important lessons need to be learned based on how poorly we planned after SARS in 2003. There was a study; there was some research; there was probably a round table, probably a report—but at the end of the day, we knew that we need to have our labs in Ontario up to standards and have active monitoring for pathogen threats. Even the Ontario public health emergency scientific advisory committee, which was set up by the province to advise the Chief Medical Officer of Health, urged the province to continue and even expand waste water surveillance, saying it has played a critical role in Ontario as an early warning signal of emergence of a pathogen or pathogen-related variants of concern.

The budget item for this is \$15 million, in an over-\$200-billion budget. Associate Minister, do you not see the value of investing in our lab system so that we can actually monitor the threats that are at play against the people of Ontario?

**Hon. Trevor Jones:** Thank you for the question.

Of course, we recognize critical investments are necessary, and under each respective purview, certain ministries have certain responsibilities to take action. In this case—

**Ms. Catherine Fife:** That's an interesting point. You've already made the point that this is the Ministry of Health that has made this decision. This strikes us as a very political decision that was made by the Ministry of Health. When do you, who are now responsible for emergency management, get to say back to the Ministry of Health, "Listen, we don't think that this is a smart move. We think

that in order for me to effectively address emergency management in Ontario, I need all the information that I can get." When do you get your chance to step in and say to the Ministry of Health that this is a dumb move and we should be investing in our lab system here in Ontario?

**Hon. Trevor Jones:** Thanks for the question, through you, Chair.

Investments like \$110 million into emergency preparedness—that's unprecedented; that's listening to our partners, monitoring sensitive intelligence and gathering the facts from every source. The capacity and the overlap is there—that we have a strong regime, and we have future capability through those investments to do just that. The Community Emergency Preparedness Grants are doing just that—only it's actually disseminating key investments across the province, heightening our ability to have eyes and ears everywhere, to listen to everyone.

**Ms. Catherine Fife:** So you are not going to be making this request of the Ministry of Health to reinstate the \$15 million for waste water testing? This is not a priority for you?

**Hon. Trevor Jones:** I'm going to focus, through my ministry and through our team, on a safe, practised and prepared Ontario. That includes listening and making no rash decisions—nothing definitive—until we have all the information.

**Ms. Catherine Fife:** With all due respect, though, you are not in a position of strength to respond to a growing crisis if you don't have that information. But you have given me my answer, and I appreciate that.

Moving on now to vote item 3402, please: This relates to labour relations and compensation. Obviously, the TBS has responsibility for negotiating collective agreements, and the labour relations and compensation program supports the government's commitment to positive labour relations. This went completely out the window, though, with Bill 124. This is a piece of legislation, I think, which will—even worse than Bill 115, which the Liberals brought in to override collective bargaining rights in 2012. Bill 124 capped salary increases for broader public sector workers at 1% for three years, during a pandemic, I might add. But after it was deemed unconstitutional two times—you went to court two times, to determine that this bill was essentially illegal—you did repeal it, and now we're dealing with the retroactive payments that are forthcoming. Based on public accounts but not on estimates, the estimation is \$6.7 billion thus far.

Do you foresee additional funds going out for the Bill 124 remedy? And can you please let us know, why did it take so long for the Ontario public service, and particularly AMAPCEO, to receive their remedy for Bill 124?

**Hon. Caroline Mulroney:** I'll answer the question and then turn it over to the deputy to answer some more specifics.

What I will say about Bill 124 is that we enacted it in 2019, after we were elected to address the situation we inherited from the Liberals, where we were on an unsustainable fiscal path. Bill 124, the Protecting a Sustainable Public Sector for Future Generations Act, was designed to

employ a fair and a consistent time-limited approach so that we could ensure that we could protect front-line jobs and services. The Bill 124—

**Ms. Catherine Fife:** Chair, I'm sorry—we're not going to play this game. You know that that piece of legislation created a massive out-migration of talented health care workers from Ontario. In fact, we're going to feel the negative impacts of Bill 124 for years to come. Just today, we learned that private nursing agencies, last year, garnered \$1.5 billion out of the public treasury for basic public health services. So we're not going to reframe Bill 124. It's unconstitutional. It overrode collective bargaining rights and charter rights. It was a deeply flawed piece of legislation which failed to do what you just said, which was stabilize the public sector. You don't stabilize the public sector by holding people down, especially during a health care crisis.

So would you say that Bill 124 was a wise policy decision? And would you agree that Bill 124 negatively impacted union-management relations?

**Hon. Caroline Mulroney:** Chair, I was asked a few questions, so I am going to turn it over to address your earlier—

**MPP Zee Hamid:** Just a point of order, Mr. Chair—

**The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman):** We have a point of order from MPP Hamid.

**MPP Zee Hamid:** Just for my own education—I'm new here—is a policy discussion—

**Ms. Catherine Fife:** It's a budget item, number 3404—

**MPP Zee Hamid:** The question was about a good policy decision, not estimates. I just wanted to get a ruling on whether a policy discussion is in scope or not.

1150

**The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman):** Thank you very much for the comments, but I believe that she is referring to the report. She has every right to the question—to ask.

**Hon. Caroline Mulroney:** Thank you, Chair.

Do you want me to—

**Ms. Catherine Fife:** Yes—future costs, because we're looking at estimates. How much more is Bill 124 going to cost? And then perhaps we can talk about the value of it.

**Hon. Caroline Mulroney:** You're right; in public accounts, we noted \$4.1 billion in retroactive costs related to Bill 124—the previous year was \$2.5 billion. The majority of retroactive payments under Bill 124 have been paid. I'll turn to the deputy in terms of the details, because there are some employers that may or may not have paid out. I think the vast majority have paid out those retroactive payments to their employees, so that money should have flowed, but I'll let her speak to the specifics.

What I will say is, going forward, all compensation-related costs will be built into the base compensation for employees within their respective ministries.

Now I'll turn it over to the deputy minister.

**Ms. Carlene Alexander:** Thank you very much, Minister.

Thank you very much for the question, MPP.

The minister is correct; the vast majority of payments have been flowed to employees already. To your question about why did it take so long—I just wanted to provide a little bit of context here. The payroll services division, which works in Treasury Board Secretariat, under my associate deputy Matt Siple's leadership, had tens of thousands of very detailed and complex calculations spanning multiple years, and also needed to take into account employees who would have moved jobs, sometimes moved bargaining units etc. So these calculations are extremely, extremely complex. We did put in place some additional staffing, temporarily, to help these payments get processed as soon as possible, recognizing that this was very important to our employees in the government. The vast majority of unionized workers should have received their payments. So far, their salaries have been adjusted, and we're in the process of doing all of the retroactive payments. So if they have not received them yet, they should be receiving them very, very soon. It was a very complex and labour-intensive process that we put a lot of attention and a lot of staff resources into, making sure that we did it as soon as possible.

**Ms. Catherine Fife:** That's actually very helpful for me. Thank you very much, Deputy Minister.

It seems to me that Bill 124 created more problems than it was worth—and to see the painful impact that it has had on staff morale, staff retention, health care outcomes for clients.

So I do go back to my original question. If you could do it again, would you do it exactly as the government did—around three years at 1%? Do you think it was worth it? I had the finance minister here last week, and he said he would do it all again—do it all over again, not change a thing. I wanted to give you an opportunity to comment on what was learned when you hold people down who are doing the very work that we value in society. The costs are actually more now than they would have been had we just negotiated fairly with employees in the Ontario public service.

**Hon. Caroline Mulroney:** As I said, when we brought in Bill 124, we had inherited a fiscal crisis; we were at a very difficult point, from a fiscal perspective. It was unsustainable. So Bill 124 was brought in a time-limited way to address our fiscal situation in Ontario.

As you saw with our public accounts last week, we have been able to make unprecedented, historic investments in health care and in education—but particularly in health care. We increased health care spending last year by 8.6% alone—

**Ms. Catherine Fife:** Sorry, Chair, just a question: Does my time go right to 12 o'clock, or am I on the clock for this?

**The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman):** You have 6.1 minutes.

**Ms. Catherine Fife:** Okay.

The government knew that the legislation was unconstitutional; it was deemed so in the lower courts, and then it went to the Superior Court of Ontario, where it was

deemed unconstitutional again. The government had no choice but to—you can't impose an illegal piece of legislation on workers. So my point is, there is a cost to bringing forward legislation like that. I hope all future governments of all stripes learn this lesson.

Given the fact that I only have six minutes left, I just want to get vote item number 3416 with regard to the supply chain program on the record, and my concerns around Supply Ontario. Page 19 actually reviews the estimates and their changes from previous years' estimates. Supply chain program shows a 452% increase, from \$17 million in 2022 to \$325 million in 2024-25—so there's a massive increase in estimates. Supply Ontario has been, quite honestly, racked with challenges; there has been serious turnover. When I was listening to the associate minister responsible for emergency management, when he was talking about this one-stop shop for emergency management—this was actually the original goal of Supply Ontario, as well. We were supposed to streamline, reduce red tape, reduce administrative burdens, and then also diversify the supply chain, which builds on some of the good work that's happening in the TBS around recruiting and attracting from BIPOC communities, for instance. This is a massive increase.

Can the deputy minister or the minister advise as to why we have seen a 452% increase in the supply chain program?

**Hon. Caroline Mulroney:** Sure, and I will turn it over to the deputy minister in a moment.

First, I'll just note that, going forward, Supply Ontario is under the purview of a different ministry, as you know, but for most of this fiscal year it was under Treasury Board.

Supply Ontario is doing great work in delivering on its mandate to centralize procurement for the Ontario public service and the broader public service within Supply Ontario. Just this past year, it took over and integrated the employees and the work of Supply Chain Ontario, which is another entity within MPBSD. So the work to consolidate our supply chain spending is ongoing, and we have done tremendous work in terms of delivering value for taxpayers—

**Ms. Catherine Fife:** Just on that point of delivering value for taxpayers—how would one know that?

**Hon. Caroline Mulroney:** Well, I'll tell you.

**Ms. Catherine Fife:** Okay, but you also—I look forward to that answer—issued another 2024-25 mandate letter to the agency, and I wondered if I could please get a copy of that, because I am very interested in procurement, and it is a key economic driver for many communities across Ontario. So with regard to the 2024-25 mandate letter, do you think I can have access to that?

**Hon. Caroline Mulroney:** Well, I'll turn that over, in terms of what's already public, but in terms of the value—first, I'll say, I think that the work that Supply Ontario is doing on behalf of Ontarians is twofold: to deliver value for taxpayers, but also, in the health sector, to deliver better health outcomes. So if there are better products or

products that we can be searching out to deliver a better experience within the health care sector for Ontarians—that's also part of the work. I did some round tables, shortly after my appointment to this role, with stakeholders from within the health sector, and I can tell you, just about every single person I heard from focused on making sure that we were delivering better health outcomes. Those would be more difficult to quantify. We will be able to hear back from stakeholders within the health care sector on how we're delivering on that part of the mandate—

**Ms. Catherine Fife:** I think if we got those innovative businesses that are so prevalent in Ontario into the hospitals down on University—that's the procurement piece, right? That's one way to measure—if we are actually supporting small businesses that are innovative and have better health outcomes, then that should be one of the benchmarks, I would believe.

**Hon. Caroline Mulroney:** In terms of value for taxpayers, let me tell you that Supply Ontario has oversight over the Vendor of Record Program, and they established a new mobile devices and services enterprise vendor-of-record arrangement for government ministries, agencies and also thousands of broader public sector entities. The new contract is expected to deliver \$2.5 billion in cost avoidance, which is the difference between the contract price and the retail price, and \$431 million in cost savings, which is the benefit when total cost—

**The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman):** One minute.

**Hon. Caroline Mulroney:** —is reduced from baseline cost, as compared to the mobile voice and data contract signed a decade ago. So the general assumptions related to these calculations for avoidance and savings include the projected consumption based on historical spend data available, projected cost avoidance and projected cost reduction, which are calculated based on marketplace and relevant information available as well as projections that are updated as VORs are replaced and new VOR arrangements are fully implemented. This is a very complex system to use to do this, but this is just one example—

**Ms. Catherine Fife:** Should I reach out to Mr. Smith for the mandate letter? I would like to see the mandate letter for Supply Ontario. Is it publicly available, in the spirit of transparency?

**Hon. Caroline Mulroney:** What I'll say is, the business plans for our agencies that we oversee are publicly posted. We want to make sure, through the work of Treasury Board, that they're posting those business plans—

**The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman):** Thank you very much. That concludes the time for the presentation, and it concludes our time for this section.

The time has expired for the committee's consideration of the estimates of the Treasury Board Secretariat. Standing order 69 requires that the Chair put, without further amendment or debate, every question necessary to dispose of the estimates. Are the members ready to vote?

Seeing no objection, shall vote 3401, ministry administration program, carry? All those in favour? All those opposed? Carried.

Shall vote 3402, labour relations and compensation, carry? All those in favour? All those opposed? Carried.

Shall vote 3403, Employee and Pensioner Benefits (Employer Share) Program, carry? All those in favour? All those opposed? The motion is carried.

Shall vote 3404, Treasury Board support program, carry? All those in favour? All those opposed? The motion is carried.

Shall vote 3405, Centre for People, Culture and Talent program, carry? All those in favour? All those opposed? Carried.

Shall vote 3409, central agencies cluster program, carry? All those in favour? All those opposed? The motion is carried.

Shall vote 3411, Bulk Media Buy Program, carry? All those in favour? All those opposed? The motion is carried.

Shall vote 3412, Office of the Comptroller General, carry? All those in favour? All those opposed? The motion is carried.

Shall vote 3415, Emergency Management Ontario, carry? All those in favour? All those opposed? Carried.

Shall vote 3416, supply chain, carry? All those in favour? All those opposed? Carried.

Shall the 2024-25 estimates of the Treasury Board Secretariat carry? All those in favour? All those opposed? The motion is carried.

Shall the Chair report the 2024-25 estimates of the Treasury Board Secretariat to the House? All those in favour? All those opposed? The motion is carried.

The committee is now adjourned until Tuesday, October 8, 2024, at 9 a.m.

*The committee adjourned at 1203.*

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