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Jeudi
31 octobre 2024

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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
OF ONTARIO

Thursday 31 October 2024

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE
DE L'ONTARIO

Jeudi 31 octobre 2024

The House met at 0900.

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

Prières.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

BUILDING ONTARIO FOR YOU ACT
(BUDGET MEASURES), 2024

LOI DE 2024 VISANT À BÂTIR L'ONTARIO
POUR VOUS (MESURES BUDGÉTAIRES)

Mr. Piccini, on behalf of Mr. Bethlenfalvy, moved second reading of the following bill:

Bill 216, An Act to implement Budget measures and to enact and amend various statutes / Projet de loi 216, Loi visant à mettre en oeuvre les mesures budgétaires et à édicter et à modifier diverses lois.

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

Hon. David Piccini: It's an honour to rise in the House here this morning, and I would like to, first, start by saying that I'm sharing my time with the member for Milton and the great member from Peterborough–Kawartha just to the north of me.

It's an honour to rise here this morning, as always. I'm honoured to rise on behalf of Minister Bethlenfalvy to lead off second reading debate for building a better Ontario for you act, budget measures, 2024. The second reading follows the minister, of course, introducing this in the Legislature yesterday, the 2024 Ontario Economic Outlook and Fiscal Review.

Today I'm pleased to lead it off, and let me start by saying a profound thank you to Minister Bethlenfalvy, to his team, to the ministry for their hard work and for the work that they continue to do for Ontarians. We have a plan to build Ontario, and it's a plan that's working. Everywhere you look in our ridings, we have so much more to do, but we are addressing decades of delay and inaction, studies and dithering and actually now are laser-focused on getting shovels in the ground.

What does that mean in particular for my portfolio? It means workers are collecting a paycheque, and I want to just start it off because I had a great chat with the member for Windsor-Essex this morning—the \$14 million in payroll per week that workers are collecting down in Windsor, that is remarkable, Speaker, because this Premier has a plan to get it done and we've done it by not raising a single tax since we formed government.

We're building highways, transit and other infrastructure, keeping costs down and delivering better services for everyone, and we've done this as part of a fiscally responsible plan to balance the budget and restore Ontario's credit ratings. Thanks to the success of this plan, today our government is in a position to do more, build more and give more to the people of this province.

Getting to where we find ourselves today, Speaker, this point where we're finding the success in our plan, it wasn't automatic and it certainly wasn't guaranteed. When we took office in 2018, life was getting too expensive for working families. High taxes, high burden, high red tape and delays affected our economy.

One of the great engines of our economy, our manufacturing sector, had been in decline and, of course, lost 300,000 jobs. This was a fundamental shift in the province of Ontario, a shift to be a service economy. Speaker, when I was in Victoria as Minister of Labour, my first meeting—and I went out there and met with Ministers of Labour. I remember the agenda they give you, when you look at last meeting, it had been years prior, before the pandemic, and Ontario's contribution signalled this province's plan to be a service economy. They put it in writing. The Minister of Labour at the time signalled that that's what they wanted to do.

But what did that represent? It represented a fundamental disdain, a fundamental disbelief in the capabilities in our workforce. This Premier's on a mission to change that. The pandemic showed us we need to build things in this province, manufacture and make things. You look today at our life sciences sector, booming. The fact that our PPE—zero per cent made in Ontario; today, over 90%. You look to our manufacturing sector. I remember in my community, the Kraft plant shut down. General Electric in Peterborough, General Motors—these are incredible job creators that signalled the best of this province, the best of our ingenuity, the best of our manufacturing might. They're the very best of what it meant to be an Ontarian, to create things in the province.

I vividly remember: one of the first doors I knocked on, on Leskard in Orono, and Pete Etmanskie, a constituent of mine, said, "You're in General Motors country, son." This was and continues to this day to be a remarkable source of pride for folks in my community who work at General Motors. You see, Speaker, when we were predicted to have zero per cent of EV automotive manufacturing, when Bloomberg said we will not have any piece of that pie—and as someone who enjoys pie and who enjoys pizza, not getting a slice; I mean, that's not fair—but, today, not only are we getting a slice, we're getting the whole pie. We're making cars again. We're the only jurisdiction to have the

automotive might that we have today, six of the big automotive giants in our jurisdiction, and they're doing because Premier Ford has created a competitive environment that creates low taxation: \$8 billion off the backs of job creators that's partnering with skills development to create a resilient workforce.

Anyone who's been down to Stellantis or seen the EVs or worked with Unifor—a shout-out to Mike Piane, Vito and the team in Brampton, and he reminds me that they're retooling, that this government is supporting them. This Premier is giving them the nimbleness to retool their lines for whatever comes at them. Whether it's hybrid, EV, ICE vehicles, we are positioning our workforce for success in tomorrow's economy, to be a leader, to create and manufacture things again. That's what this Premier's doing.

It's a belief that people can stand on their own two feet, can achieve greatness, can achieve their full potential, not because of government and not living off of government handouts but, rather, the gentle support of government through programs like the Skills Development Fund—Madam Speaker, that you know very well—low taxation, a low burden environment. You see our triple-A rating. We have created the climate for success in Ontario.

As I've said, we've done that by reducing the cost of doing business by \$8 billion, but when we create this investment, the new automotive manufacturing plants, how will we going to get people to and from work? If it was up to the opposition, they would tell people in communities like mine to bike to work, over an hour and a half, but the reality is, for the pipefitter/steamfitter that I had breakfast with this morning reminded me that you'd get up every day, getting up at 4 a.m. was nothing, because that's what he did for his career, because he'd have to drive.

0910

I think to incredible crane operators in my riding—the guys who do Castleton Sports Club, getting up at 3 a.m. to be in Scarborough to start the day. This is the reality of rural Ontarians driving.

As we move towards a cleaner, more sustainable future and actually manufacture vehicles—not rebates for millionaires, but actually manufacturing and creating the incredible supply to drive down costs. We still have to drive to work—and so recognizing that this Premier said for every dollar we invest in roads, bridges and highways, we're going to invest two in public transit.

So two-way, all-day GO in Lakeshore East—what a big beneficiary our communities have been of that decision. As the federal government was dialing back Via Rail service, Premier Ford and our government were investing in GO Transit, electrifying the rail, increasing frequency—two-way, all-day GO everywhere I look. The member from Milton, who has been a massive champion for commuters in his riding—they've benefited from expanded GO service.

We're delivering on a plan that builds hospitals, that builds roads and highways and bridges, that invests in public transit—the Ontario Line. Hearing in this place the lines like the opposition—it hurts me to even repeat it—things like “a fantasy tunnel.” That's what they said about

the Ontario Line, and how many kilometres of tunnelling have we done today? How many workers today are taking home a six-figure salary? What it really represents is their decoupling of reality—the loss of the unionized base that used to support that party but that has now come to us to support us because they know that this government wants them to earn a paycheque, that we're not going to pander to the fringe, that we're going to fundamentally represent the will of the Ontario people by getting things built. That's why they've lost their unionized base. That's why they're coming over and endorsing Premier Ford and supporting us. We believe in those workers. We believe in their success. We believe that our future will not be realized if not for those workers on the Ontario Line—the incredible unionized workforce. Just look; it's fact. How many unions came out and supported Premier Ford's feasibility study on the tunnel? How many? Almost all the building trades. These are the same unions that have abandoned the NDP, because they support a plan, a Premier, who has his eyes laser-focused on building for tomorrow.

A wise, elderly woman in my riding said, “David, there a reason the front windshield is bigger than the rear-view mirror. My best days may yet be behind me, but for my grandkids, for our next generation, please look out that front windshield when you're driving forward.” That's what Premier Ford is doing.

Building a highway—my goodness; to think that we would never build a road again in the province of Ontario. That is the dithering and delay that's defined by Liberals and the NDP. We're building the roads. And do you know what? We're doing things like recycled asphalt—leveraging the engineering might and the incredible technology that we see today to get this infrastructure built.

We've created over 860,000 new jobs since 2018 and attracted tens of billions of dollars in new investments.

We have a job to do, and that means building those hospitals—over 50 infrastructure projects on the go today.

The 600 schools that were closed under the Liberals—that's their record in rural Ontario. They turned their backs on rural Ontario. Of course, my predecessor called rural Ontario and northern Ontario a no man's land. That was the contempt through which they viewed people in rural Ontario. Well, today we've seen places in my riding like Premier Tech expanding—Custom Plastics. I spoke to the folks at Protoplast, looking at expanding—Belden. To think that the Sphere in Las Vegas—that those networking solutions were done out of the incredible prowess and might of the team at Belden in Cobourg. The fact that when we turn on our favourite hockey game and watch our Leafs, hopefully on the march to the cup—when that referee blows that whistle to end that game, that that is custom injection moulding done in Cobourg.

This is a government that believes in the men and women in Ontario's workforce—that we can create, and that does not see what colour party you belong to, what your beliefs are. We just believe in people's potential. Programs like the SDF mentioned in the fall economic statement are helping people achieve their full potential,

whether it's folks getting a second chance in construction, thanks to the leadership of this Premier, or whether it's newcomers at A Women's Work—a shout-out to Natasha Ferguson in Scarborough—getting a chance to be the master of their own destiny. We're there to support people, to give them a fundamental leg up.

That belief in our workforce isn't just on the workforce. It is a belief in our natural resources, the ability to cultivate from the earth the things we need to be a progressive economy, to move into the future, to mine our critical minerals in the north. Again, if it were up to the opposition, we'd be navel-gazing, studying that until I'm in a retirement home. But this government says, "Yes, we can get those critical minerals out of the ground."

When I was up in the north, I remember getting a letter full of vitriol. At the bottom was a chief's phone number. I called that chief. It was the lawyers who wrote the letter. But we had a wonderful conversation. We can have that conversation because I choose Ontario where we listen and learn from our elders and Indigenous peoples and have those conversations, because it is they, in Thunder Bay and communities like that, where I visit training centres—60% of the youth being trained are Indigenous peoples, creating companies that are supporting the Marathon PGM project.

I think of Chief Michano at Biigtigong and the work they did in the Marathon project there. It's nothing shy of incredible, partnering with Indigenous nations. Rick Dumas, the mayor up there, wants to create economic opportunity for his community.

Again, if the shoe was on the other foot—God forbid the Liberals were in charge—we would never get that done. We would have never realized that success. We're mining those critical minerals because that's going to fuel the batteries and the manufacturing prowess that is our automotive sector.

I recognize that my success—I will never achieve that success. My success is dependent on the success of those eight hours-plus in the north, some of whom I'll never get the chance of meeting—hopefully. But my success depends on theirs. Liberals viewed them with contempt—"no man's land," of course, again.

Being connected to the global economy, as Ontario is, comes with its advantages—I've talked about how we're going to harness that advantage—but also challenges. We're going up against international competitors who are trying to pull investments and jobs out of our economy—the tug-of-war we see. Again, this Premier has said: Are we going to sit on the sidelines and watch the future of automotive vehicles go beyond us? Or are we going to work with our labour workforce? Are we going to work with employers and contractor associations? Are we going to work with those employers and that labour coalition—the three-legged stool, government, employers and employer associations, and labour, standing tall to get those investments in Ontario?

We know from the previous Liberal government that they were the folks that liked to sit on the sidelines. This Premier is not afraid to get out on the playing field. Yes, sometimes you trip, sometimes you fall, but you get back

up because that's a belief, as everyday Ontarians do each and every day. We don't have the luxury of navel-gazing, of studying things ad nauseam. What the Liberals do to fuel that is they raise taxes. We know because their leader said that she would raise taxes, a municipal tax. That's what we really need: another taxation, another line item of taxes on hard-working men and women of this province.

But that's not happening because our low-taxation environment has landed \$44 billion in investment. Behind each and every dollar is a story: a story of that worker going to work in Windsor—\$14 million in payroll—zero of which would have happened under the Liberal Party.

That wasn't enough, because we've worked with labour to talk about joint health and safety tables that are ensuring the most qualified workers are there doing the job, that we're protecting the health and safety of the workers.

And now we're going to St. Thomas and we're looking to that investment, the EV battery investment—Volkswagen—and Goodyear in Napanee, just down the highway from us in Napanee. Up in Sault Ste. Marie, workers will be producing clean, low-emission steel to support manufacturers. My grandfather was in the steel sector when he emigrated from Italy. I think he'd be proud to know today that we didn't sit on the sidelines and let this go. We didn't just—you know, by fighting a carbon tax and investing in clean electric arc furnace, clean steel production, we've ensured—and I think my grandpa would be happy to know, that those steelworkers' jobs are protected for generations to come.

0920

I want to thank Ron and the team at Dofasco down in Hamilton; Alan Kestenbaum, of course, formerly of Stelco; Algoma Steel and the incredible workers there—I've had the opportunity to go and visit the work being done there, the work to electrify the arc furnace to produce the cleanest steel on planet Earth. Again, what am I tying this all back to? A fundamental belief in our workers, a belief in their ability to create clean steel for tomorrow, and we know that these investments are creating good jobs in life sciences, in EV.

I want to close, before I hand over my time today, just with the energy that's going to power that and a nod to the people at OPG, at Bruce, in particular. The text message I got from an OPG worker whom I met at Algoma Orchards the weekend we were giving out pumpkins, Madam Speaker, for a donation to Clarington East Food Bank—and we were talking, and I met a worker there. I'm too young to have a senior's moment, but his name—forgive me, I mentioned a few names today, but this one escapes me.

But he was there with his wife and with their children, and he told me his grandfather worked in the nuclear sector—his father, now he's there—and we spoke about new nuclear. We spoke about the IESO report. We spoke about the largest-ever procurement for energy under Minister Lecce's leadership that we're seeing that's going to ensure that those young children of his have a future, not just tomorrow but for a generation, a generation of clean power that will fuel our continued economic

success—not taking risky deals at 80-plus cents a kilowatt hour, down the throats of farmers in rural Ontario and communities that weren't consulted, but working collaboratively.

I visited Hiawatha First Nation and saw OPG and the collaborative work from the millwrights who are there and who do great work multiple times a year at Darlington, empowering women—full cohorts of women entering the clean energy space, Indigenous peoples entering the clean energy space.

And I suppose, in closing, I'll say: This fall economic statement, what it is is an articulation that your tax dollars are best spent in your pocket, in the pockets of Ontarians. It's an articulation that our manufacturers are the best of what Ontario is. Men and women in health care sectors who are seeing the new med schools, the new nursing seats that this Premier is investing in and recognizing that, in Ontario, we can sit on the sidelines, as the Liberals would have us do, or you can get on the field. Yes, you're going to trip. You're going to fall. But this Premier is never shy to say, "Hey, we're going to learn from that and we're going to keep forging ahead." Forging ahead to a future where we have cleaner electricity, thanks to this government's commitment to a clean grid; forging ahead to a future where we're going to be driving cars built here.

Interjection.

Hon. David Piccini: I'm getting shouted down because they don't like when someone holds a mirror to their abysmal record that drove out manufacturing jobs. But a brighter future where we're going to build those cars here, where those Unifor workers are going to go to work, collecting a paycheque; folks at OPG that I met at Algoma, where their next generation are going to work on the lines of a clean energy future, where we're going to mine those critical minerals in the north, where we can have an interconnected economy that's by and for Ontarians, that's built here in Ontario by Ontario workers, by a manufacturing workforce growing, backed by an interconnected supply chain of small and medium-sized businesses.

A province that embraces success—imagine that: a province that once again embraces ingenuity and success, that elevates it, that creates things in this province again, builds things in this province again. We've got the workers that can get the job done. Under this Premier's leadership, we're going to do just that.

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

MPP Zee Hamid: Today, I rise to speak as part of the second reading of the building a better Ontario for you act, budget measures, 2024.

In follow-up to the Minister of Labour, Immigration Training and Skills Development, David Piccini, who began second reading of this important bill on behalf of the Minister of Finance, Peter Bethlenfalvy, I echo the minister in saying how proud we are of the work our government is doing. Our plan, Ontario's plan, is working.

Despite the challenging economic times, we're building a better Ontario for you by focusing on the fundamentals and the things that matter most for the people and families

of Ontario; that is, everyone who lives, invests, works and retires in this great province of ours. It is you who are in our thoughts when we're creating and thinking of ways of creating better jobs and bigger paycheques and thinking about the highways, transit and other infrastructure we need to build and how we need to keep costs down and deliver better services for you.

I'd like to spend a moment and briefly visit the new initiatives and investments rolled out in the 2024 fall economic statement, as well as in-scope initiatives that we're moving forward via the proposals in the building a better Ontario for you budget measures bill.

Surely, one of the more impactful initiatives we announced in the 2024 fall economic statement is how we have increased the Ontario Municipal Partnership Fund, or OMPF, by \$100 million over the next two years. This increase will bring the total funding provided through this program to \$600 million by 2026. The OMPF is the province's main general assistance grant to municipalities. As announced in the FES, municipalities will benefit from an immediate \$50 million increase to the OMPF in 2025.

Municipalities are also benefiting from our investment of nearly \$2 billion in housing-enabling infrastructure to help build more homes across Ontario. This funding includes \$1.22 billion for the Housing-Enabling Water Systems Fund and \$725 million for the Municipal Housing Infrastructure Program. This is in addition to the province's Building Faster Fund, which has awarded more than \$260 million to municipalities for their performance against their 2023 housing targets.

Housing targets are important. One of the measures that, if approved in the fall bill, would help move forward our work is support for municipalities' interests with these housing targets. As members of this legislature know, Ontario is working to empower municipalities to increase housing supply and address housing affordability through municipal vacant homes tax.

As well, our plan is addressing transit service gaps in unserved and underserved communities, specifically, by our new \$5-million Ontario Transit Investment Fund. This annual fund will bring municipalities, Indigenous communities, non-profit organizations and key partners together to develop integrated, coordinated and sustainable transit services.

Creating jobs and driving Ontario's long-term economic growth and global competitiveness is a priority for this government because the benefits of jobs, growth and competitiveness include strong municipalities and communities. That is why we are allocating an additional \$100 million to the Invest Ontario Fund, bringing the total to \$700 million. To date, Invest Ontario has helped attract \$4.1 billion in investments, which are expected to create 4,012 jobs.

Speaker, creating jobs and driving economic growth and competitiveness is why we are delivering tax support to Ontario manufacturers by continuing to offer the Ontario Made Manufacturing Investment Tax Credit to eligible Canadian-controlled private corporations. These manufacturers could receive up to \$2 million per year in

tax support to help lower their costs, encourage innovation and enhance competitiveness.

Jobs, growth and competitiveness are the rationale for launching the Advancing Ontario Made Manufacturing Plan, a 10-year road map for growing the sector's workforce and production capacity. The Advancing Ontario Made Manufacturing Plan is a road map to help grow this vital sector's output to over \$120 billion and expand Ontario's manufacturing workforce to one million people by 2035.

To grow the life sciences sector, we're delivering on Ontario's life sciences strategy, Taking Life Sciences to the Next Level. Here, we're investing \$146 million to launch phase two of the strategy to help secure the province as a global biomanufacturing and life sciences hub.

0930

To build on a point the minister introduced, the need to provide affordable electricity for families and businesses for today, as well as the need for the future, is why we're launching the largest competitive energy procurement in the province's history. This initiative will secure at least 5,000 megawatts of electricity resources to meet the growing demand for clean and reliable power. Speaker, 5,000 megawatts is enough to power over two million homes. That is a big number. So are these next ones: We're investing nearly \$50 billion over the next 10 years in hospital and health infrastructure, including \$36 billion in capital grants. These investments will support over 50 hospital projects and deliver approximately 3,000 new hospital beds to enhance access to quality care and build a connected, people-first health care system.

We've also made historic investments of \$6.4 billion since 2019 to build modern, safe and comfortable long-term-care homes for seniors and residents. We're making progress to build 58,000 new and upgraded beds across the province by 2028, and we're investing about \$23 billion over the next 10 years, including \$16 billion in capital grants, to build new schools, create child care spaces and modernize school infrastructure.

To build on a point discussed by the minister, we're proposing to further extend the temporary gas and fuel tax rate cuts, so that the rate of tax on gasoline and diesel would remain at nine cents per litre for six further months, until June 30, 2025. This is proposed in the fall bill before us today. This extension would save Ontario households \$380 on average over the three years since July 2022. I would like to add that this relief is especially important as the federal carbon tax is set to increase again on April 1, 2025.

As part of our plan, this government is helping workers and families today, and we're also keeping an eye on the future. That is why, to help workers save for retirement, we have finalized regulations to enable a permanent target benefit pension plan framework to come into effect on January 1, 2025. Target benefit pension plans, often created by unions or associations within a specific industry, provide a monthly stream of income in retirement at a predictable cost to employers.

Now that I bring up personal finance matters, I'd like to note that our government is helping Ontarians on a personal finance front by empowering Ontario's drivers. We're empowering them by enabling more consumer choices when purchasing auto insurance through finalized and posted regulatory changes, which make statutory accident benefits, other than medical, rehabilitation and attendant care, optional for consumers to purchase. While the first-payer regulations are still being finalized, both of these changes will come into effect on July 1, 2026. We arrived at this date after extensive consultation within the sector, where we heard largely from insurance brokers themselves.

We are a government that listens first and then acts. That is why we're giving as much time needed for the industry to implement these changes and prepare as they become increasingly better equipped to help Ontarians.

Speaking about how we're enabling choice for consumers through changes to the regulations that impact the auto insurance marketplace allows me to segue to regulations. For too long, Ontario businesses and entrepreneurs faced unnecessary red tape and a prohibitively high cost of doing business. Since 2018, the government has taken significant actions to reduce regulatory burdens and lower costs for businesses to help them compete, grow and create good-paying, stable jobs. After all, private sector business is the beating heart of our economy—of any economy, for that matter.

For our economy to be healthier and grow, we need that heart to be as strong as it can be. That is why our government has put such emphasis on being open for business. If our businesses are doing better, that means that we're selling, hiring and investing, and consumers are getting what they want to buy, workers are getting the jobs they want to do, and investors are getting returns on their chosen investments.

We're focused on reducing burdensome regulations, yet make no mistake: Our government is also there for the little guy, the consumers and workers who are trying to make their way in life, to live the life they want the way they want to live, to make their own dollar go as far as it can and to be able to trust that they're getting a fair deal, so they can trust that business institutions are there for them as much as anyone else in society.

Regulations are needed; they just need to be the right ones. That's why this bill contains several measures that, when seen as a whole, can be listed under the headings of protecting consumers, working for workers and making life easier.

Here are some examples under the heading of protecting consumers.

Speaker, with the fall bill, we're proposing to provide the Financial Services Regulatory Authority of Ontario, or FRSA for short, with enhanced resolution and investigative tools needed to manage credit unions in financial crisis. As those in the Legislature know, FSRA is an independent agency focused on improving consumer protections in the province, and it regulates, among others, insurance companies, mortgage brokers, financial planners and advisers, and, of course, credit unions.

And speaking of credit unions, I would be remiss to not point out how important of a role these financial institutions play in our communities. More than 1.8 million Ontarians are members of a credit union—myself included—which had assets of about \$97 billion in 2023. They're regulated by FSRA under the credit unions act of 2020. This is a growing sector that our government is very much committed to supporting.

Back to FSRA: In summary, what this proposed amendment would do is provide FSRA with enhanced powers to better protect Ontario's financial system. This point connects back to one made by the minister in his remarks—how Ontario is plugged in tight to the global economy. The financial system of Ontario is highly integrated with the Canadian and global financial system. If the Canadian or global financial system suffers a sudden and unexpected shock, the shock could reverberate in Ontario's credit union market. The shock could be enough that a credit union could see a sudden change of fortune and, as a result, be at risk of failure. If this proposal is adopted, FSRA would be able to step in and help both the individual credit union and the sector as a whole. If approved, changes would be made to the act.

Speaker, this fall bill also contains a measure aimed at helping to protect investors. This measure has to do with how a key element of executing a placement of funds by an investor includes reviewing the company's books, to put things in layperson terms—like myself, for that matter. The financial books of any business need to be accurate and conform to accounting and audit standards. Auditing firms play a very important role in the financial sector. But what happens when an auditing firm is being audited themselves? Well, a measure in the bill before us today relates to the Canadian Public Accountability Board Act, 2006. In summary, our proposal ensures that when an auditing firm is itself audited, the results of that audit must be disclosed publicly.

When auditing firms are engaged by clients, a key part of what they audit is the company's compliance with tax rules, which brings me to my next point having to do with our plan and the fall bill.

In this bill are a set of proposed amendments related to the Employer Health Tax Act. Here are proposed changes to ease the red tape burden on businesses with regard to the employer health tax, as well as changes to clarify eligibility for tax exemption amounts and the mechanisms for the Minister of Finance to pay a refund for overpaid taxes. You see, sometimes a refund is warranted under legislation and regulation. This change, if approved, would avoid the need for the refund applicant to have no choice but to use the objections and appeals process to obtain a refund of overpaid taxes.

Speaking of employers and workers, among the most important sectors that need workers is the Ontario construction sector. Through the fall bill, the government is introducing amendments to the Construction Act to implement priority recommendations from a recent independent review process. As members of this Legislature know, the Construction Act plays a critical role in

Ontario's economic development, increasing the provincial housing supply and the building of priority infrastructure projects, such as new highways and transit.

Ontario is proposing amendments to the Construction Act to ensure the legislation is working effectively and to address issues raised by the construction industry. If passed, the proposed changes would enhance access to statutory adjudication to resolve disputes and improve the flow of payments within the construction industry.

Speaker, I'll close my arguments by saying that our government has a plan since the first day of its official installation back in summer 2018. Fast-forward to today and we're still following that plan. The 2024 fall economic statement and the building a better Ontario for you act, 2024, reflect our latest thinking and results in the next steps of that plan.

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In six years—despite a pandemic and despite globally impactful economic and geopolitical risk and challenges buffeting the province—here we are, turning things around for Ontario, rebuilding the economy, reducing the cost of doing business, working for workers, prioritizing the things that matter to individuals and families where they live and go on about their lives, providing better services. We're getting it done, Speaker.

So I call on all members to vote in favour of the building a better Ontario for you act, budget measures, 2024.

Thank you, Speaker, and I'll now pass it over to my friend and colleague the member for Peterborough–Kawartha.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): I recognize the member for Peterborough–Kawartha.

Mr. Dave Smith: As I pick up the debate this morning from my colleagues from Northumberland–Peterborough South and Milton, there are some staff members at the Ministry of Finance I'd like to share there, because they've spent a lot of time, a lot of long hours to make sure that our fall economic statement is ready and it is good: Cam Vidler, Todd Jerry, Susan McGovern, Daniela Tabachnick, Dusan Radisic, Ben Mubiru, Borjana Zikic, Catherine Nicol, Emily Hogeveen, Jaiman Chin, Nav Hundal, Miles White, Safa Khan, Ashley Millman, Taylor Putnam, Christian Buzo Tingarov, Nabiha Paracha, Michael Pacheco, Marcel Atunwa, Marc Desormeaux, Jonathan Thompson and Julia Facca.

And I'm leaving one to the end in particular, and that's Colin Blachar. Colin is our deputy director of issues, media and legislative affairs. Speaker, he worked really, really hard to write a speech for me that would be in my voice. I said to him, "Colin, don't spend a great deal of time on it because you know I'm not going to follow the speech. I'm going to go off on a tangent at some point in there and I'm going to lose track of where I was and I'm just going to keep going off on my own, because that's what I do." And he assured me that he'd get this done and it would be done in my voice. He tried really, really hard. So I'm going to apologize right off the bat, Colin: I'm probably only going to get about three or four of the pages

that you wrote, and the rest of it I'll just end up ad-libbing because I'll go off topic on it.

So, as I rise for the second reading of the building a better Ontario for you act, our plan is ambitious and it's necessary. We know that by continuing to invest prudently and responsibly, we're laying the groundwork for economic growth and thriving communities throughout the province.

And we know what the social realities are of the day, Speaker. The reality is that while Ontario's economy is growing, individual people are still finding it hard to make ends meet at times. What we know is, with inflation as it has gone up and with interest rates when they went up, these are things that put significant pressures on a lot of people, and it takes some time, as they have been coming down, for individuals to actually see some of the benefit of that. So we recognize that there are people who are having some troubles.

One of the things that we do as government is to make sure that we're doing things that help the average person, and one of the things that we're going to be doing with that—as we know that individual families are grappling with the realities of the struggles that they have—is a \$200 rebate for every single person in Ontario that filed a tax return last year.

And then on top of that, Speaker, we know that families have hit a lot of increases in costs. A lot of it is due to rising costs from inflation, as we have said. But one of the major factors on inflation is actually the carbon tax and what that has done to people.

Now, the opposition members are going to stand up and they're going to say, "Oh, you shouldn't do this; you shouldn't do that; you shouldn't do this; and you shouldn't do that." But the reality is, if we followed their advice all the time, the economy would not be in the position that it is right now here in Ontario. We would not be seeing increased revenue.

When we talk about revenue for the province of Ontario, let's face facts: The only revenue the government has is what it takes from you. The government doesn't go out and sell a whole bunch of things. The government doesn't make products. They tax people.

Back in the spring, when the budget came out, we thought we needed a certain amount of money to do the things that we needed to do. We increased spending on certain things as well, and that's reflected in the fall economic statement.

But the key to it, Speaker, is that the economy actually grew faster than what we thought it would. There were higher revenues, then, on personal income tax. That is money that came from you, the individual, and we didn't anticipate that.

So what are we doing? There were a couple of options that we could do with it. Absolutely, there were a couple of options. The opposition has said, "You should give a tax credit." People need relief today. As the Minister of Finance has said, we recognize that \$200 is not going to be the thing that drags you out of the financial situation you are in, but when we estimated what our expenses were

going to be, when we estimated what our income was going to be and we developed that budget, we estimated a certain amount of growth, and how much were we going to need to take from you to pay for the things that Ontario needs.

As it turns out, you did a far better job helping the economy. You did a far better job at work and increasing productivity. To thank you, to say thank you for that, we're giving you back your money—\$200. If you've got a family, for every child that you've got, we're going to give you another \$200 on top of it. Why? Because let's face facts: We're coming into the winter season. Every family that has children recognizes that there are expenses that they are dealing with. I'm looking at the member from Willowdale right now. I know that he appreciates, now that he's a new father, what the expenses actually are of having a child because there are things that you cannot anticipate, and this is something that will help. That additional \$200 per child is going to make a difference for you. If you've got a family, two adults, three kids, that's a family of five. That's \$1,000 extra coming to you in early January, right after the holiday season, when you get that first Visa bill after you have gone out and you've done what you could do for Christmas. This is something that's going to make a difference for you. These are things that you have to take into account.

Yes, we could have done something around the tax break that would have happened after you filed your taxes in March or April, whenever you would do that, and the period of time it would take for the federal government to go through their process and get it, but the fact of the matter is, people need that type of relief right now. They need to have that money in their pocket right now. Why do they need to have it in their pocket? Because the government took it out of their pocket when they taxed them for it.

We need to make sure that we are doing things that tax people less and less. We are the only government in recent history that has not had an increase in taxes or fees since we have been elected. When you go back to 2018, what was the world like in Ontario prior to that? What was happening with the Liberals? Well, they never saw a tax or an increase that they didn't fall in love with—tax and spend, tax and spend, tax and spend.

We're of the belief that what we need to be doing is treating you like an adult and making sure that we are letting you spend your money the way you think you should be spending it, instead of the nanny state that some of the other members of the opposition would like us to be in.

Even after we reduced the deficit, we're still making investments to support growth in the province, and that's why we were able to do things that we have been able to do in this. When you look at simple things, like extending the temporary gas and fuel tax cuts—we're extending it now to June 30, 2025. That's \$380 that the average family in Ontario is going to have back in their pocket, rather than giving it to the government, and this is something that just makes sense.

In the fall economic statement, there are some technical things that we've had to do to extend that, and that's part of what this legislation is. We know that we need to do more because when you face some of the challenges that the federal government has placed on us, the carbon tax is something that has increased the price of every single item that you're buying.

The additional money that we're giving back to you is going to make a difference for you because it's your money. It's not someone else's. You should decide how you spend it, and this is a government that wants to treat people like the adults that they are and wants people to make the decision for themselves on how they spend their money. It should not be a Liberal decision. It should not be an NDP decision on how your money is spent. You should be deciding how you spend that money.

Not only that, but we eliminated the sticker fees for your licence plates. Now, this is something that I know that the opposition has come back and said, "This is a bad idea. Blah, blah, blah—it's revenue, it's revenue it's revenue." It's not; it's their money. Stop taking it from them. That's what our approach is.

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When you look at how this has been done, imagine a world where we have this device, a logic box called a computer, where the insurance company updates the government and tells them who has got insurance on which vehicle—imagine that. Imagine a world where, as a consumer, you've registered the vehicle that you have and you can cross-reference that vehicle with the insurance company's information. So why would I, as an individual, have to physically go into a ServiceOntario location with two pieces of paper: one piece of paper that the insurance company gave me that has the same information on it that they provided to the government, and a second piece of paper that the government gave to me that has the same information that the insurance company has and the same information that the government has because the government gave it to me? I have to set that down on the table and explain that I'm renewing my licence plate and I'm going to have to pay you a fee for you to look at the information that you've already got that was given to you by the insurance company, that you gave to me for my car, and you're going to charge me for the ability for me to stand in front of you for a couple of hours waiting in line to pay you. Well, I can't imagine a world where we would have computer equipment that could do that quickly and automatically, and that's one of the things that we've done. We've made that change because it makes sense. Why wouldn't you do that?

The reason that the opposition objected to it is, as they say, "You've reduced revenue." No. We've stopped taking money from you that we didn't need to take from you. It is a philosophical difference, absolutely. We firmly believe that the hard-earned money that you've got, you should keep. You should not be handing it over to someone else. You should not be having that someone else tell you how you should be spending it because, as an interesting thing, you're an adult, and we believe you should be treated as an adult.

Speaker, I have gone way off. I'm only on page 4, so I didn't make it through three pages and I've really ad-libbed here. But when I look at it from 100,000 feet, of course it really is about fiscal dollars and cents. And when we look at small and medium and even large dollar signs, when you look at our fiscal plan, our fiscal plan is something that really is working.

There are objections from the opposition constantly on this. "You shouldn't do this; you shouldn't do that; you shouldn't do this; you're doing it all wrong." Here's the cold, hard reality, Speaker: Since we took power in 2018, in six short years, government revenues, by reducing taxes, by reducing red tape, by cutting the cost of doing business—\$59 billion. That is the increase in Ontario's revenue. Contrast that to the opposition.

Let's just take something that Bonnie Crombie has talked about. She's floated the idea of a 1% tax increase to give that money to municipalities. How do you raise government revenues? Well, the opposition and the Liberals chirp constantly about, "You need to raise taxes. You need to raise taxes. You need to raise taxes." If you want to know how to raise your government revenues, just look at what we have done. Fifty-nine billion dollars is the increase in revenue to Ontario by cutting personal income tax, by giving tax relief to seniors, by giving tax relief to individuals, by cutting the cost of doing business in Ontario, by incentivizing businesses to do things, by reducing the cost of electricity in Ontario, by building infrastructure, and we're headed towards a balanced budget. All of that by cutting taxes and cutting government fees and reducing the burden on the average person.

Interjection.

Mr. Dave Smith: My good colleague from Essex has just pointed out something as well. Our budget back in 2018 was significantly smaller than it is today, and in the fall economic statement, we're talking about \$212 billion in total spending and investments in this province.

One of the key things that we're investing in is health care: 50 new hospitals or new builds within existing hospitals—50 of them. How many were done by the previous Liberal government? Well, I've got 10 fingers and thumbs on my two hands, and I can count on those two hands how many were done and still have fingers and thumbs left over. That's how many were done by the previous government.

But I want to point out something else because some of the feedback that has come back to us is that we should be spending that \$200 on health care instead because we don't have enough doctors. Well, I'll tell you what: If there was a doctor sitting on his couch right now, watching TV, saying, "You know, I wish I had a job," they would already be hired. If there was a nurse sitting on their couch right now saying, "Geez, I wish I had a job," we would have been hiring them, but the fact of the matter is that they don't.

It takes between five and seven years to train a doctor. When the previous Liberal government cut the number of residents' positions by 50, in their infinite wisdom, as the population was growing, they really were short-sighted in

their approach. We would have 450 more doctors today in Ontario practising had they not made that foolish mistake.

It does not take a rocket scientist to figure out that as your population grows, you need more health care professionals. You need more doctors and you need more nurses when you have more people. I think if you went to somebody in kindergarten and said, “If we have more people in the province next year than we have this year, do we need to have more doctors?”, I would hazard to bet that the class of kindergartners would say, “We need more doctors.” Yet the previous Liberal government said, “Screw that idea. We don’t need more doctors. That’s someone else’s problem to deal with.”

In our very first budget in 2019, we added 50 resident spots back to bring us back to be that point. Those doctors will be graduating from school this year. We have added a total of 402 spots. We have two new medical schools that are being built right now, and they’ll be taking students in the following year.

Help is on its way, but the challenge that we face—and it is one of those cold, hard realities—is that it will take between five and seven years to train a doctor, and we’re doing those things right now. Those are things that should have been done by the previous Liberal government 10 to 12 years ago. All they had to do was look at the population projections, because they had them. They could have looked at it and said, “When we go from 12 million people to 16 million people, we are going to need more doctors. We are going to need more nurses.”

We have almost 3,000 more spots in colleges and universities for nurses. It takes four years for an RN to be trained. That first tranche, that first cohort, are coming out this year as well. It takes two years for an RPN to be trained, and we have new RPNs coming into the system because they have been trained.

That leads me to a great thing that we’re doing. We added, in one of our budgets not that long ago, a Learn and Stay program. If you wanted to be a nurse, if you wanted to be a paramedic, if you wanted to be a health care professional in so many other ways, we have a Learn and Stay program. If you want to go off to a college or university and you’re going to work in an underserved area, we’re going to help you out by covering your tuition cost on it. That is working. We’re seeing the benefits of it right now.

You know what we did, Speaker? We decided that we’re going to add that for family medicine. If you are a medical student, if you’re going to medical school and you want to become a doctor and you decide that you’re going to take up family medicine instead, we’re going to pick up the cost of tuition for you. All you have to do is be a family physician for five years. We’re picking up that cost because we want to see more Ontario high school graduates going off to college and university, going off to university in particular, to become a doctor. We want them to come back into the rest of Ontario and help, and we’re going to make it easier for them.

We’re the only province in Canada that has made it easier for a doctor anywhere else in this country to come to Ontario. It doesn’t matter where you practise in Canada. You could be licensed in Manitoba, you could be licensed

in Nova Scotia, you could be licensed in the Yukon. We are going to recognize that licence if you want to come and practise in Ontario. We’re making it easier for you to do that. That’s all investments in health care. That is all things that we’re doing to make a positive difference for the people of this province.

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Again, Speaker, I apologize to Colin for going way off topic here on this. I’m only on page 6 of what he’s written for me and I’m down to about two and a half minutes.

It would be remiss of me if I didn’t mention Dr. Jane Philpott. We just made that announcement, just a week or so ago: Dr. Jane Philpott, former federal Liberal Minister of Health, one of the foremost experts in health care in Canada right now, and she has joined Premier Ford’s team to help. How can we adjust the system so that every person within the next five years who wants to have a family doctor will have a family doctor? We are building toward that. We currently lead the country in primary care, with about 88% of the residents of Ontario having primary care.

Just as an interesting note, since 2018, the population of Ontario has gone up by about 2.6 million people. Ironically, we are told it’s about 2.5 million who do not have primary care. Well, again, I’m going to come back to: Had the previous Liberal government not cut the spots by 50, had they actually done what they needed to do, we would not have a shortage of doctors today. But the fact of the matter is, they did, and we have 450 less doctors right now in Ontario as a direct result of foolish decisions made by previous governments, because they didn’t look beyond their own election cycle. They only looked at “What can we do in four years”—and it takes five years to train a doctor. “Let someone else worry about that. It’s not our problem.” That’s not the approach that we’ve taken. We are looking at how we build Ontario in a way that is beneficial to everyone as we move forward.

My colleague from Northumberland–Peterborough South said it best: The front windshield of your car is significantly bigger than the rear-view mirror. Stop looking in the rear-view mirror. Look ahead. Look beyond. Because if you build that way, it is good for everyone. We’re demonstrating that you can reduce the cost of taxes, you can reduce the burden on business, you can reduce the burden on individuals and you can plan for the future. You can build the province the way it needs to be built. You can be looking after infrastructure, you can be looking after health care, you can be looking after education and you can be lifting up everybody in this province when you do that.

That’s the approach that we’ve taken from day one. That is a smart, intelligent approach. I’m looking forward to all of the questions from the opposition because I know they are going to focus on everything negative and tell us things that we should be doing that aren’t going to work, because none of their ideas have worked so far.

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

Ms. Jessica Bell: Goodness gracious me—that’s quite a statement.

My question is to one of the three of you who spoke to talk about housing in the fall economic statement. Because when I look at what is in the fall economic statement and housing, I see that housing starts are down. I see that there is no serious investment in addressing homelessness and no serious investment in addressing affordable housing, even though this government has built about 1,067 affordable homes in six years, which is, quite frankly, pathetic.

What is this government's plan to address the homelessness crisis in Ontario?

Mr. Dave Smith: If you take a look at what we have been doing over the last number of years, you'll see that, actually, we are trying to address the housing crisis.

When I look at what the opposition member did, and voted against, when we increased the homelessness prevention fund for all Ontario municipalities—in my municipality in particular, we received almost 50% more to deal with the homelessness issue. On top of that, when you look at infrastructure that needs to be built so that we have the full suite of houses that we need across this entire province, let's just look at the OMPF funding. We've increased it by \$100 million—\$100 million going to municipalities so that they can be building the infrastructure that needs to be built so that houses can be built. And we're not just talking about one set of houses but the full suite of houses.

I invite the member to actually read not only our fall economic statement but our budget to see what we have been doing all along.

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

Mr. Tyler Allsopp: As a former municipal councillor from Belleville, Ontario, I know that municipalities have felt the pinch of higher prices and growing expenses just like families and businesses have. This government has stepped up on the past few budgets with supports like the Building Faster Fund or infrastructure support funding, and I have been looking forward to seeing what we are going to be doing again in this year's 2024 fall economic statement.

So could the member from Milton please explain what we are doing to provide new supports to municipalities?

MPP Zee Hamid: Thank you for that great question from the member of Bay of Quinte, who, I might add, is an amazing and hard-working representative of his community.

As a former municipal councillor myself, I understand the value of municipalities and I can say with full confidence that, unlike the previous Liberals, when I was on the council at the time, we are true partners to municipalities.

While we know that all our municipalities have challenges, I think we can acknowledge that rural and northern communities have extra challenges. We're continuing a historic investment to support our municipal partners by increasing the Ontario Municipal Partnership Fund, OMPF, by \$100 million over the next two years. This funding will allow municipalities to fund the critical areas identified by each municipality and is especially

there to help more northern and rural communities who need it the most.

Speaker, governments love to talk a big game, but we're actually there for municipalities at every step of the way. While other parties have chosen to ignore rural municipalities and rural communities, we are once again stepping up and supporting the municipalities that play such a vital role—

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

Further questions?

Mr. Terence Kernaghan: My question is about broken promises from this government.

The minister mentioned investments in GO Transit during his speech. In a bold 2022 election promise, the Premier committed to spend "an additional \$160 million to improve the speed and frequency of" GO Transit "service between London and Toronto." A few short months after the election, not only was that promise broken, but the service was cancelled entirely.

How can the minister or anyone from this government defend the Premier's broken promises?

Mr. Dave Smith: It's interesting that the member opposite wants to bring up transportation and wants to bring up how we're doing those types of investments. Let's just take a look at some of the things that we have done.

We actually have put in two-way, all-day GO across most of southwestern Ontario, and it is making a positive difference on it. We have cut the fares by doing something called One Fare, so now if you're coming into the GTA and you hop on the GO train, guess what? You pay for the GO train. When you get here, your expenses, when it comes to Toronto transit, are also picked up by that. That's saving people \$1,600 a year. That is money that goes right back into their pocket. But of course, the member opposite voted against that.

It doesn't matter what we have put forward that has been a good idea, that is making a positive difference for the people of this province, putting money back into their pockets. The members opposite vote against it.

As we move forward, Speaker, I'm looking forward to hear more of the promises that the Premier is making on how we're going to cut those costs for everyone.

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

Mr. Rudy Cuzzetto: I want to thank the members that spoke here today.

Being a former employee of Ford Motor Co. and a Unifor member, I want to first thank the Unifor members who are supporting our party at this present time, especially the ones at 707.

In 2017, before I was elected, the former Liberal Minister of Finance, who I defeated in Mississauga-Lakeshore, said that the assembly line manufacturing was just a thing of the past.

What is our government doing in the automotive industry to attract more jobs here in the province of Ontario?

Mr. Dave Smith: It's a shame I've got four minutes and five seconds left here, because I can eat that entire time when we talk about this.

The electric vehicle strategy—we are the only jurisdiction in the entire world that has it from natural resources to finished product. We have the entire supply chain here in Ontario, and it's part of our process as we're moving forward. In fact, Ontario is the greatest jurisdiction when it comes to electric vehicles now. We are the only ones who have the entire supply chain.

And what has that meant for us? Under the previous Liberals, 300,000 manufacturing jobs have left, but since 2018, 867,000 jobs have been created in this province because of the leadership of Premier Ford and what we're doing. We're taking it from the natural resources in the Ring of Fire all the way down to that finalized product that's coming out.

Ontario is the leader in electric vehicles across the entire world.

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

Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon: I have a couple of questions, the first one being—I'll put them together and you can answer them. I want to know if you can go one single day without mentioning the Ontario Liberal Party or if your love affair and obsession is too strong. That's one. Two is, what is your government doing to combat the climate emergency? We know, from a million experts, but especially the Financial Accountability Officer, about the high cost of inaction, and all we've seen is inaction from this government on the climate front.

Mr. Dave Smith: I would love—love—to take more than the two minutes and 20 seconds that I have, but I know you're going to cut me off after 60 seconds.

Let's take a look at the electric vehicle marketplace and what we have done. We have a plan that is put forward, because we know that EVs are the way to go in the future. We know that is going to cut greenhouse gas emissions. We're the only party that has come forward with an entire plan that makes sense, that is seeing results as we do these things.

The previous Liberal government—because she said I couldn't get through my answer without mentioning them—put in chargers that took eight hours to charge an electric vehicle, and, of course, they objected when we ripped those out and we put in chargers that take 15 minutes to charge your vehicle.

We have the infrastructure that's being built for electric vehicles, we have the highways being built that those electric vehicles are going to be driving on, and we have the electric vehicles being built here in Ontario.

Thank you very much for the question. I loved the opportunity to answer it.

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

Ms. Peggy Sattler: I appreciate the energy of the member for Peterborough—Kawartha.

I listened to his comments, and he pointed out, quite rightly, that it takes a number of years to train family physicians. In my community in London West, we have 128,000 people who don't have a family doctor. One of the things you could do while you are waiting for those graduates from medical school is provide administrative support to relieve the paperwork burden on the family physicians who are already practising.

Why is there nothing in this fall economic statement that supports family physicians to take in more patients?

Mr. Dave Smith: In the 30 seconds that I have—we have taken measures already to do things like that. We had a round table with multiple physicians on what those challenges are. We know that most family physicians were spending between 19 and 20 hours a week doing paperwork. We have reduced that burden. On top of that, we have started, with Dr. Jane Philpott, one of Ontario's, one of Canada's, leading experts on health care, and she is going through the entire process on what we should be doing better in health care to make it so that everybody can have that family doctor they're looking for—and our target is five years from now.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Thank you for that rousing debate.

Second reading debate deemed adjourned.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): It is now time for members' statements.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

YORK REGION MENTAL HEALTH COMMUNITY CARE HUB

M^{me} Dawn Gallagher Murphy: Of the 197 local riding events in which I participated over the summer, 17 of these were announcements pertaining to investments in my great riding of Newmarket—Aurora. The one that I want to speak to this morning is the one that was held on July 3 in Newmarket, where, alongside the Minister of Health, we confirmed our government's commitment to invest in the building of the new York Region Mental Health Community Care Hub, a facility that will streamline access to high-quality mental health and addictions services. More than six years ago, I had discussions regarding gaps in our local mental health services with the Canadian Mental Health Association York Region and South Simcoe. And that day, on July 3, 2024, I delivered on my commitment to support this innovative hub that will be a 24/7, specialized community care facility for individuals 12 and above who need immediate mental health support, including 20 short-stay beds—this will be for ages 16 and over. It will connect people to needed care sooner and offer culturally appropriate services.

Speaker, this is just the beginning. I continue to deliver on my commitments to my community, which are focused on ensuring the well-being and growing of our economy.

REMEMBRANCE DAY

Ms. Bhutila Karpoche: During Remembrance Week, we participate in traditional services, wear poppies and observe a moment of silence to honour those who died serving our country in wars and in peacekeeping efforts.

In Parkdale–High Park, two local teachers, Katy Whitfield and Ian Da Silva, started a community commemoration project in 2020 called “They walked the streets... We will remember them.” It is a project to learn about and remember the soldiers in our community who served in the First and Second World Wars and never returned by sharing their stories; to remember that those who made the ultimate sacrifice in the wars weren’t only soldiers—they were also people, just like us. They were fathers and brothers, sons and daughters, neighbours and friends. They lived lives just like ours; they walked the same streets.

Every soldier’s story is told using an info card that documents their military service, accompanied by a QR code that allows the viewer to connect with the Canadian Virtual War Memorial website, which provides more detail and documents about the soldier’s war experience. The info cards also feature the logos of the schools and churches they attended.

This initiative has grown to 11 memorial sites with stories of over 1,300 soldiers from Humbercrest, Bloor West Village, the Junction, High Park, Swansea, Roncesvalles and Parkdale. This type of storytelling helps community members connect with the soldiers’ experiences and helps the neighbourhood understand how it had been impacted by the world wars and by the loss of young men who served and who died in the wars.

Speaker, Katy and Ian have dedicated this project to all those who served, those who came home and those who continue to serve for Canada. I ask the House to join me in thanking them for their dedication to ensure that we will never forget.

Applause.

FERTILITY SERVICES

Ms. Christine Hogarth: It was a true honour and privilege last week to be part of a very important announcement in my riding of Etobicoke–Lakeshore to expand the Ontario Fertility Program. On October 24, I joined Minister of Health and the Minister of Finance for the announcement of a \$150-million investment to help families in need receive publicly funded fertility treatment.

It is an issue that many women and families have thought about and—more than you think—some your friends and families have experienced. In my own conversations with several women in my community and across the province, the stories come up time and time again. In 2019, Minister Tangri and I both co-authored a letter on this to the then Minister of Health, Christine Elliott.

Today, I want to acknowledge all the brave voices from my riding and across the province who have shared their struggles in their fertility journey with me. I also want to give a special shout-out to the ReproMed facility in

Etobicoke–Lakeshore, where this announcement was made. During the announcement, I got a chance to witness first-hand this amazing facility that has helped numerous couples struggling with infertility build their families. With their valuable knowledge and technology to achieve more successful patient outcomes, the ReproMed team has given a lifeline to families whose dreams of having children felt impossible.

To all the individuals and families from Etobicoke–Lakeshore who have shared their personal journeys with me and advocated for this cause: Help is here. This expansion will triple the number of families connected to government-funded fertility services. This truly reflects our PC government’s commitment to support families across our province.

CYCLING INFRASTRUCTURE

Ms. Jessica Bell: This is a letter—I’d like to read it out—from Karen, George and Rebecca Amaro.

“Our daughter Alexandra Amaro was killed on her bike as she left Dufferin Mall Dec. 2, 2020.

“Alex was 23. Like a lot of city kids, she didn’t yet have her driver’s licence. Her bike was her ride.

“There are no words to describe the everlasting, devastating heartbreak of living with such sudden, tragic loss, especially knowing that it was preventable.

“Guaranteed, that if either of you or anyone within Ontario’s Legislative Assembly lost a family member or close friend so tragically while cycling city streets, this pre-election push to restrict bike lanes within Toronto and other municipalities would not be on the table.

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“Minister Sarkaria, you say that this bike lane legislation is about ‘giving people more time with their families.’

“Our family would give anything to have more time with Alex; to hug her, to speak with her, to celebrate holidays and life milestones ... to see what a difference she would be making in this world today...

“Please drop this aggressive attack on cyclists and turn your attention to delivering action in other areas that is your responsibility—like affordable housing.

“Sincerely,

“Karen, George and Rebecca Amaro”—Alex’s parents and sister. Thank you.

KINSMEN SUPER TV BINGO

Mr. Dave Smith: I got a text from Billy Walker telling me to speak slower.

Saturday, October 26 was the start of the Kinsmen Super TV Bingo season. This season is 28th year that the Kinsmen have been broadcasting from CHEX TV studios in Peterborough.

When the TV bingo first moved to CHEX, it was owned by Power Broadcasting and it was a CBC affiliate. Now it’s a Global affiliate owned by Corus Entertainment. I bring this up because Super TV Bingo has become such an institution. It’s survived multiple owners of the station and two different broadcast affiliates.

Reed Manley has been the driving force behind bingo since Peterborough Kinsmen took over the broadcast. You can catch him behind the camera, calling bingo, on Saturday nights at 7 o'clock just before Hockey Night in Canada. Darrel Junkin and Dave Ronson also share duties with Reed as the bingo callers. When they aren't on camera, they're doing other tasks behind the scenes. I have tell you, Speaker, it actually is an awful lot of fun. I volunteer on the phones on most Saturdays myself. But what it really does is, it provides a huge resource for our communities from the GTA to Gravenhurst and all the way east past Brockville.

Last year alone, \$650,000 was given to over 350 organizations, like Campbellford Memorial Hospital, Camp Maple Leaf, the Bowmanville Salvation Army, Gananoque Food Bank, Hospice North Hastings, Cornerstone Family Violence Prevention Centre, Community Living Georgina, Kawartha Food Share, Brock Mission and more than 30 school breakfast programs.

Thank you to all of the Kin members who give up their time to "Serve the Community's Greatest Needs."

GOVERNMENT ACCOUNTABILITY

M^{me} France Gélinas: We all know now that this province is going \$3 billion further into debt so that the government can send a \$200 cheque to every adult and child in this province. If the government thinks that that will make the people of Ontario forget that they don't have a family doctor, their home care worker doesn't show up half the time, their kids can't drink the water in their school because of old lead pipes, I think they're dreaming, Speaker.

I suppose the family can spend this money on a tablet and a streaming service so they can sit for 20 to 30 hours or longer in the emergency department or use that money for extra gas to drive to the next town because the emergency department in their community has been shut down.

As Ontarians decide how to spend the 200 bucks the government has borrowed on their behalf, 2,000 people sick enough to be admitted into a hospital will be in a hallway or a bathroom; cancer patients still pay out of pocket for take-home cancer drugs; children's aid societies in Algoma and North Bay are close to bankruptcy; 30,000 children are on the wait-list for mental health services and 73,000 are on the autism wait-list; parks in communities across our province are filled with homeless encampments; not to mention no movement on the four-laning of Highway 69.

Yet this Premier and this government are ignoring these problems and adding \$3 billion to the deficit in a shameless attempt to buy votes.

DIWALI

Mrs. Daisy Wai: Today, I rise to celebrate the vibrant festival of Diwali, also known as the Festival of Lights, observed by millions around the world, including many in

my diverse community in my own riding of Richmond Hill, as well as in Ontario.

As the lights of Diwali are to illuminate our homes, they remind us of the shared values of love, peace and togetherness that unite us all, regardless of our backgrounds.

In my riding, Richmond Hill is a rich tapestry of cultures, home to diverse communities including Iranian, Jewish, Chinese, Italian and many others. Each group contributes to the vibrant fabric of our society, particularly our lively south Asian population.

As we celebrate Diwali, let us remember the importance of inclusivity and the strength that comes from our differences. I encourage everyone to join in the festivities, whether through community events or simply sharing in the joy of this special occasion with friends and neighbours.

To all those celebrating Diwali in Richmond Hill and beyond, I wish you all a joyful festival filled with love and light. May the coming year bring you peace and happiness.

GOVERNMENT ACCOUNTABILITY

Mr. Adil Shamji: Yesterday, I listened intently as the Minister of Finance delivered his fall economic statement. If it made one thing clear, it's that this government's priorities are not Don Valley East's priorities. But this isn't surprising coming from a Premier who said this summer that Don Valley East is "a sleepy little neighbourhood in the suburbs that no one goes to."

My constituents tell me about their struggles finding a family doctor. They tell me how frustrating it is to drive down Eglinton and see empty Crosstown tracks without any sign of the LRT. They tell me how expensive their rent is and how long it takes to get landlord-tenant issues resolved at the LTB. The fall economic statement offered far too little for my constituents. There is no funding to increase the number of family doctors, no plan to finally open the endlessly delayed Eglinton Crosstown, and there is not even a mention of the Landlord and Tenant Board, let alone a plan to address the backlog.

We all noticed that the government has tried to promise a one-time cheque. That cheque might help pay the first month's rent, but not the second. It might help pay the first week's groceries, but not the next. It might help pay for a child's winter coat, but not their winter boots.

This government offered nothing to help bring down the cost of homes or groceries, create better-paying jobs or deliver any kind of permanent tax relief for small businesses or everyday Ontarians.

With that said, there was one thing that the Minister of Finance said which I do agree with: There is so much more work to do. I just wish it was more for you.

QUINTE BUSINESS ACHIEVEMENT AWARDS

Mr. Tyler Allsopp: I rise today to talk about the 28th annual Quinte Business Achievement Awards that took place at the National Air Force Museum of Canada last

Friday. I have to say, if you are coming to Quinte West, you must stop at the National Air Force Museum—absolutely incredible. I'd like to thank all the organizers, the volunteers, the chamber of commerce and everyone who worked so hard to make this event truly incredible.

Speaker, I'd like to take a moment to congratulate all the winners this year:

- Retail Business of the Year: Kraft Village;
- Hospitality/Tourism Business of the Year: Meyer's Creek Brewing Co.;
- Regulated Professions Business of the Year: Hitchon's Hearing Centre;
- Trades/Construction Services Business of the Year: Luke Joseph Carpentry;
- Manufacturing Business of the Year: JBS Foods Ontario;
- Young Entrepreneur of the Year: Brandon O'Quinn;
- New Business of the Year: Base 31;
- New Business of the Year: Mike and Lori's Garden;
- Not-for-Profit of the Year: the Alzheimer Society;
- Tech Sector Business of the Year: Rillea Technologies Inc.;
- Business Person of the Year: Tim McKinney;
- Agribusiness Business of the Year: Cheer Farms;
- Health and Wellness Business of the Year: Fearless Wellness Centre;
- Sustainability of the Year: Afiya Beauty;
- Trailblazer of the Year: GlobalMed Inc. D.B.A. APTYX; and
- Business Excellence: McDougall Insurance.

Congratulations to all the winners and all the nominees as well for everything that you are doing for business and for our community in Bay of Quinte. Thank you very much. Let's give them a round of applause.

HALLOWEEN MESSAGE

Mr. Matthew Rae: Trick or treat: There may be little ghosts and goblins running around this evening, but what we really need to be afraid of is the federal Liberal-NDP coalition government haunting our paycheques and taking more money out of our pockets. Ontarians know this bone-chilling reality too well, when 300,000 manufacturing jobs vanished into thin air and energy prices rose from the grave to haunt our wallets.

But beware: With the Crombie Liberals, we're not only stepping into a dream world; we're opening up Pandora's jack-o'-lantern, where budgets balance themselves and money grows on trees under a full moon's light. And don't say "carbon tax, carbon tax, carbon tax" three times fast in front of a mirror or carbon tax Crombie will appear and take all of your money.

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And what's this, Speaker? Another traffic nightmare on Bloor Street; another frightful inconvenience for Ontarians. But the spooky coalition's worst nightmare is a government that slashes taxes, puts more money back in people's pockets and gets things done. Because, at the end of the day, we don't need trickery, Speaker; we need worthwhile results.

Happy Halloween, everyone.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): We have with us in the Speaker's gallery today some special guests: Her Excellency Tjorven Bellmann, ambassador of the Federal Republic of Germany to Canada. Her Excellency is accompanied by Ms. Kristina Thony, who is the consul general of the Federal Republic of Germany in Toronto and Mr. Florian Schrieverhoff, who is the attaché of culture, press and economic affairs.

Please join me in warmly welcoming our guests to the Legislative Assembly today.

Applause.

MPP Lise Vaugeois: I would like to warmly welcome Michau van Speyk and Alina Cameron, amazing advocates from the Ontario Autism Coalition. It's so great to have you here.

Hon. Michael Parsa: I, too, want to welcome both Alina and Michau. Welcome to Queen's Park.

Mr. Speaker, I also want to welcome Alicia Soares from Karis Disability Services, who's joined by my friend Irene Moore. My Irene has held various positions at Karis Disability Services, including executive director. But, Irene will be retiring after 35 years of dedicated service to people with diverse abilities.

Irene, thank you so much for everything that you do. I look forward to meeting you after question period. Enjoy retirement.

Mrs. Robin Martin: I wanted to introduce Bialik Hebrew Day School. They're not here at the moment, but I know they're coming in shortly. We've had Bialik classes here almost every day or every day this week. Today, it's the grade 5 class from Bialik. Welcome to Queen's Park.

Ms. Bhutla Karpoche: She's not here yet but will be joining us very soon. I would like to introduce and welcome my OLIP intern for this term, Sayyidah Jaffer.

Hon. Doug Downey: I'd like to welcome Peter George, Paul Mondell and Danielle Burton visiting us today in the Speaker's gallery.

Hon. Natalia Kusendova-Bashta: I would like to introduce some very special guests who are with us today. They recently attended the Nigerian Canadian Celebrities Entertainment Awards in Toronto, where they recognize Nigerian community members for being leaders and role models in humanitarian work, entertainment and entrepreneurship. Here with us today we have Temidayo Enitan, Bolaji Amusan, Odunlade Adekola, Prophet Israel Oladele and Afeez Owo. Welcome to Queen's Park.

Mr. Amarjot Sandhu: I would like to welcome Prabhleen Kaur all the way from Punjab, India. Welcome to Queen's Park.

QUESTION PERIOD

GOVERNMENT ACCOUNTABILITY

Ms. Marit Stiles: This question is for the Premier. The hard-working people of Ontario have invested in this

province. They expect to see a government that will invest in them. But yesterday's fall economic statement makes it very clear that people are not getting what they paid for. Housing starts are down. Transit projects are delayed. Health care waits are increasing. And the cost of living wasn't even worth a mention in their book.

If this government is not building homes or getting people medical care when they need it and can't even get gauze to home care patients, has this government not failed the people of this province?

Interjections.

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

To reply, the Minister of Finance.

Hon. Peter Bethlenfalvy: Mr. Speaker, through you to the member opposite, I just heard that she said that the cost of living wasn't addressed: Where have you been since day one? This government has been putting money back in the pockets of people since day one. Let's start with the gas tax. We provided relief at the pumps, the licence plate stickers—relief there.

It was that government, the Liberal government, supported by the NDP, that put the tolls on the 412 and the 418. Now this is a government that has been helping people, putting money back in their pockets. It's that opposition party, along with the Liberals—for 15 years they had their hands in the pockets of people, taking money out. It's this government that's putting money back in their pockets.

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

Ms. Marit Stiles: Speaker, where has this minister been? The economic update speaks for itself. Unemployment is up. Check your own numbers: rent, housing costs—skyrocketing. Ontario is once again forced to go cap in hand to Justin Trudeau for equalization payments—shameful. This province was once the economic engine of Canada. Look at where we are now under this government's watch.

Back to the Premier again: If this government is not building homes and not fixing schools and not hiring doctors, what are you doing?

Interjections.

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

I remind the members to make their comments through the Chair.

The Minister of Finance.

Hon. Peter Bethlenfalvy: I can't believe what I'm hearing. I mean, I know it's Halloween, but I just don't get what—who is that person?

Mr. Speaker, for 15 years, what did we see in the economy? We saw the tail lights of 300,000 manufacturing jobs leave for the US. Under this Premier, under this government and all of us here, we're rebuilding that economy. Jobs are coming back to Ontario.

We're leading. If we were a country, we would be leading the G20, and we would be that big to be in the G20, leading economic growth, bringing prosperity right across Ontario. I don't know which province the member oppos-

ite is living in, but this is a province that's created almost 200,000 new jobs just this year, Mr. Speaker. The sun is rising again in that province, an economic engine in that province called Ontario. It's sunny days again.

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

Ms. Marit Stiles: Taking a lesson from their buddy Justin Trudeau once again, eh? Look at that. That tells you a lot.

Listen, I'll tell you, Speaker, what they've been doing: building luxury spas in downtown Toronto that nobody wanted; fighting nurses and education workers in court to nickel-and-dime them; hemorrhaging public dollars to private health care companies.

They are under criminal investigation by the RCMP for their greenbelt scandal—and let me say, Speaker, that scheme didn't build a single home in the province of Ontario. What a waste of space.

If you can't deliver on the basic responsibilities of a government, then do you not think maybe it's time you got out of the way?

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Interjections.

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

Order. Government side, come to order.

Minister of Finance.

Hon. Peter Bethlenfalvy: They are using the same old, tired lines—same old, same old, same old. In the meantime, we understand that the cost of living for many people in this province—they're struggling with grocery prices, the cost of gas, the cost of housing and other costs. That's why, because of the tax revenues and because of our stewardship of the economy and the fiscal situation, we're able to put that growth and revenue back into the pockets of the people of Ontario. That's why we're giving a \$200 tax rebate.

A family of five will get \$1,000—think about that—to help with those groceries, to help with those travel costs, and maybe be able to afford a little bit more over the holiday period. This is a government that has been working to put money back into the hard-working hands of the people of Ontario.

GOVERNMENT'S RECORD

Ms. Marit Stiles: I'll say, Speaker, first of all, that affordability crisis, that skyrocketing cost of living, that's this government's legacy. That's this government's legacy after six years in power—six long years.

I want to dig a little bit more into this government's record. With this government and this Premier, Ontarians, as I said, are not getting what they paid for. While Ontarians are stuck in the same place at the end of each month, the best that this Premier and this government can offer are stale ideas and empty promises.

Let's look at housing. In yesterday's fiscal update, here's what we learned: housing starts, down; housing targets, out of reach; housing crisis gets worse by the day; mortgage payments, loan payments, down payments.

Can this government explain to Ontarians why housing is no longer a priority for their government?

Interjections.

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

To reply, the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing.

Hon. Paul Calandra: Just for a second, let's unpack what she just said. She talked about the skyrocketing cost of mortgage prices. Now, why do we have skyrocketing mortgage prices across the province of Ontario and across the country? Because the Liberal and NDP coalition in Ottawa, their tax-and-spend policies led to higher interest rates because inflation went through the roof. It's the same policies that that crew put in place here in the province of Ontario that have put us in crisis, that we have been unravelling year after year after year.

The interest rate increases were the fastest increases in the shortest amount of time in the history of the country. It was this Premier who took to the microphone and called on the federal government to do its part in reducing those interest rates, and do you know what the underlying theme was? The NDP continued to prop up another failed Liberal government, when they could have taken them down, like they could have in Ontario, ended the misery and brought a good strong, stable, Conservative government—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Stop the clock. Order. It's getting increasingly noisy in here. I'm asking both sides of the House to come to order. I'm going to start calling members out individually, if need be, to maintain order in this House as we continue with question period.

Start the clock. The supplementary question.

Ms. Marit Stiles: Look, you don't have to take it from me; you have to just look at the government's own fiscal update, your own update. Housing starts are down. They are nowhere near meeting their own targets. One and a half million homes by 2031 is a pipe dream. Housing starts, down; housing targets, out of reach; housing crisis, worse by the day; six years, wasted; task force recommendations, ignored.

When will this Premier finally say yes to making housing more affordable, yes to our Homes Ontario plan and yes to getting people in Ontario the help that they need?

Interjections.

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

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The member for Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke will come to order.

The Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing can reply.

Hon. Paul Calandra: Let's be very clear, Mr. Speaker: Before the rapid increase in interest rates that were brought on by the high-inflation policies of the Liberal and NDP coalition in Ottawa, we were building more homes than ever before in recorded history of the province—and not just single, detached homes but purpose-built rentals.

Interest rates increased and you know what happened? The people who build communities had to put their shovels down. The people who wanted to buy their first home couldn't afford to buy their first home.

This Premier stood up and said the interest rates have to come down. We're finally starting to see them come down while we're continuing to work to unravel the mess that they left behind—but I'm sure Canadians and Ontarians have such comfort.

The NDP want to start the NDP home-building contracting company. For \$150 billion, you can get a home build by the Leader of the Opposition—a recipe for disaster. Nobody wants it.

But I challenge you: Bring down the federal government and let's get the economy moving across Canada.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Stop the clock. I will remind the House to make their comments through the Chair.

The member for Ottawa Centre will come to order. The member for Don Valley East will come to order. The Associate Minister of Energy-Intensive Industries will come to order.

Start the clock. The final supplementary.

Ms. Marit Stiles: In the words of the great Eminem, will the real Premier of Ontario please stand up?

These answers do not change the facts. Housing starts are down. Costs are up. But instead of doing his job, the Premier keeps blaming everyone but himself.

Here are three things that this Premier could do right away to build more homes: Allow fourplexes, increase density near transit and, yes, say yes to building truly affordable homes in the province of Ontario. Support our Homes Ontario plan.

Speaker, will the Premier finally do his job and build the homes that people are waiting for?

Interjections.

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

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Just one second, Premier.

The Minister of Labour, Immigration, Training and Skills Development will come to order. The Minister of Red Tape Reduction will come to order. The government House leader will come to order.

We will now start the clock. The Premier can reply.

Hon. Doug Ford: Sorry, Mr. Speaker. I couldn't hear you from all the cackling on the other side there. You know, you just took a hat trick away from my good friend Minister Calandra.

I can tell you one thing. I just heard you say—everyone was shouting and screaming—I thought you said build density on top of the TOCs on transit. You voted against that. You voted against that when our infrastructure minister and Minister of Housing put that forward. So you may have to read your book again.

You voted against making sure we did the BFF, the Building Faster Fund; you voted against that. We were

giving municipalities across the province targets to hit and gave hundreds of millions of dollars away for them.

You voted against the highways and the roads that are going to get people to these new communities. You voted against the GO trains that are going to new communities. You voted against the largest transit project in North America, to get people there until we can build condos on top of these stations—

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

1050

GOVERNMENT ACCOUNTABILITY

Mr. Sol Mamakwa: My question is to the Premier. The crisis in health, housing and affordability experienced right across the province is magnified in the north, especially for First Nations. The fall economic statement is not meant for people living in northern Ontario.

Does the Premier think he has done enough for the people in the north with this fall economic statement?

Interjections.

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

The Minister of Finance.

Hon. Peter Bethlenfalvy: Mr. Speaker, through you, I thank the member opposite for the very serious question.

Since day one, this government has opened up the north and supported the north like we haven't seen for decades. As my distinguished colleague the Minister of Mines mentioned to me, in 1996, the population in the north peaked. Do you know what's happening now under this government? The population now is starting to grow again in the north, because they're seeing support. They're seeing support like they've never seen.

In fact, the Premier was just up in Sudbury announcing a waste water infrastructure investment to help build 3,300 new homes in Sudbury. We just announced yesterday in the fall economic statement an increase of \$100 million to the Ontario Municipal Partnership Fund to help 320 northern, small and rural communities in the north. In fact—

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

Mr. Sol Mamakwa: I know they may be opening up the north, but there's still a crisis that's happening in the north. I was just in a community over the weekend. It's unbelievable when you see three caskets in a church. There's a crisis happening.

But I want to say this, Speaker: Back in 2018, the Premier promised to build 76 much-needed long-term-care beds in Sioux Lookout. In May, the Premier again promised to get it done. But yesterday's fall economic statement does not deliver the new long-term-care beds for the elders who have been waiting.

I ask again, Speaker: When will this government provide the long-overdue long-term-care beds in Sioux Lookout?

Interjections.

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

Again, the Minister of Finance.

Hon. Peter Bethlenfalvy: Through you again, Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the member and acknowledge the member opposite for agreeing with us that we're opening up the north—long overdue, but it's this government that is getting it done, if we just think of some of the things like the mobile crisis unit, the increased funding in Thunder Bay that we just announced; if you think about the northern travel grant increase to \$45 million, helping for health care in the north; if you think about the Homelessness Prevention Program that we increased by 40%, which benefits many of the communities in the north.

Just last week, the Premier, the Minister of Health and I were privileged to announce the Learn and Stay program for medical students. Students who study in Thunder Bay and Sudbury and many parts of the north, if they stay in those communities, we'll pay their medical tuition and expenses for them. This is a game changer for many medical students—7,300 medical students.

We're doing a lot for the north and we're going to continue to build the prosperity in the north.

TAXATION

Mrs. Robin Martin: We've heard loud and clear from people all over the province that due to the Trudeau-Crombie carbon tax, which is truly scary, life is just too expensive. When they go to the grocery store, they're feeling the pinch. When they go to fill up on gas, they're feeling the pinch. When they pay their mortgages and bills, they're feeling the pinch. That is not right; in Ontario, people should be optimistic.

Speaker, can the Minister of Finance please explain more about what our government can do to support Ontarians at a time when the price of everything is being driven up by the scary Trudeau-Crombie carbon tax?

Interjections.

Hon. Peter Bethlenfalvy: I heard a boo.

Thank you to the member for Eglinton–Lawrence for that question. Where are you? You're over there now. Okay, well, thank you for that question.

I think about this carbon tax. You just mentioned the carbon tax. We cut the gas tax. We're providing relief at the pumps: the gas prices, fuel and diesel for our truckers, the 5.3 cents for them. This is really having an impact on the people who move the food, the groceries, the goods right across the province.

Do you know what's happening with the support of that NDP party and that Liberal Party up in Ottawa? They're increasing the tax again in April, Mr. Speaker. So one group of parties have their hand in your pockets, trying to take money out and make life more difficult, and there's another party, the Progressive Conservative Party of Ontario, that is putting money back in the hard-working pockets of the people of Ontario.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): I'll again remind the members to make their comments through the Chair.

Supplementary question.

Mrs. Robin Martin: Every day, Ontarians are feeling the financial squeeze due to the truly scary Trudeau-Crombie carbon tax. Groceries are more expensive, monthly bills are tougher to manage, and high inflation is stretching people's budgets. And the Trudeau-Crombie carbon tax, as the minister said, is only making things worse. Families in my riding and across Ontario are feeling the impact, and it's becoming harder just to get by.

We know that our government is working hard to keep life affordable, but with all these pressures, people are looking for more help. Speaker, can the minister please tell us how the government is helping Ontarians cope with the high cost of living by putting more of their money back into their pockets?

Hon. Peter Bethlenfalvy: Thank you again to the member from Eglinton–Lawrence for that question. Mr. Speaker, let's do a little compare and contrast. When they were in power for 15 years, who put tolls on the 412 and the 418? The NDP and Liberals. Who increased the wine tax and the beer tax? Who increased the driver's licence fees? Who increased the employer health tax? Do you remember that one? "I'm not going to raise any taxes," and they did that almost on day one.

Now, help me out here, Mr. Speaker. Who cut the gas tax?

Interjections: We did.

Hon. Peter Bethlenfalvy: Who cut the beer tax and froze the beer tax?

Interjections: We did.

Hon. Peter Bethlenfalvy: The member from Niagara, who cut the wine tax?

Interjection: We did.

Hon. Peter Bethlenfalvy: Absolutely. Who cut the tolls on the 412 and the 418?

Interjections: We did.

Hon. Peter Bethlenfalvy: And who is going to keep cutting taxes and putting fees and money back in the pockets of the hard-working people in Ontario? We are.

GOVERNMENT ACCOUNTABILITY

Ms. Catherine Fife: My question is for the Premier. There's been a lot of talk, so much talk, about housing in this House, but very, very little action. The lack of affordable housing in Ontario is a humanitarian crisis, and based on this fall economic statement, this government has pretty much given up on addressing this crisis. Housing starts are down again. The government has cut its own target to 81,000 homes, which is nowhere near the predicted 125,000 homes. They'll never hit the target of 1.5 million at this rate.

To make matters worse, the government hasn't even tried to access the federal \$250 million that they put on the table to work with provinces to address encampments. Those encampments have exploded, actually, in our ridings across the province. They're not even willing to address this crisis around homelessness.

So to the Premier: When will the government correct its failed course and focus on building truly attainable,

affordable housing and start leading for the people of this province?

Hon. Doug Ford: Well, Mr. Speaker, we led the charge on removing the HST for purpose-built rentals. We invested over \$3 billion in new funding for municipalities to help fund the housing-enabling infrastructure fund. This includes \$1.2 billion in funding for those who meet the exceeded housing targets. We expanded that by giving \$120 million to small, rural and northern municipalities that have not been assigned housing targets already.

We've invested over \$42 million to help enrol approximately 5,100 new households in the Canada-Ontario Housing Benefit program, better known as the COHB program, this year. This is on top of the 22,700 households already receiving the COHB benefits as of March 31, 2024. Mr. Speaker, they voted against every one of those bills.

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

Ms. Catherine Fife: Clearly not working, Speaker. In fact, this is a government that is running from the RCMP all the way into an early election. That's what this Premier's focus has been on.

Listen, Speaker, by their own figures, this government is failing. It can't hit its own targets. In fact, it's actually making life worse for Ontarians: 30,000 children are on a wait-list for mental health; 83,000 children are waiting for autism services; 234,000 homeless people in this province. That is your record, and it's a painful reminder, I think, of how lost this government is, but it's Ontarians who are paying the price.

Instead of real solutions, we get a \$200 cheque scheme, costing \$3 billion, Speaker. I have to say, this is money that is so needed in health care and education, and it will undoubtedly go as well as the LCBO paper bag debacle, quite honestly. And the scandals, scams, beer promises, this is what we get from this government under a criminal investigation by the RCMP.

When can Ontarians expect a government that will show up for them and work for them instead of yourselves?

Interjections.

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

I'm going to ask the member for Waterloo to withdraw the unparliamentary comment.

Ms. Catherine Fife: Withdraw.

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

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The member for Bay of Quinte will come to order.

To reply, the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing.

Hon. Paul Calandra: Look, Mr. Speaker, it shows the inadequacy, really, of the opposition. For the opposition—there's a show that everybody used to watch and some guy used to say that winter is coming. For the NDP, winter is coming every single day. Do you know why? Because it drives them crazy that the economy and that the govern-

ment is on the right track. She called cutting taxes and putting money back into the pockets of the people of Ontario “a scheme.” So all of those people who are going to be getting money back in their pockets, it’s a scheme. When you go to work every single day, you work really hard, you pay taxes, you raise your family, apparently according to the NDP, you’re scheming.

Earlier in question period, the Leader of the Opposition dared us to call an election. Now they are saying don’t call an election. What is it?

What you can do is this: Support the policies that have brought more jobs to Ontario, support the policies that are bringing more transit and transportation. You were silent when we were building more—

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

ENERGY POLICIES

Ms. Christine Hogarth: My question is for the Minister of Energy and Electrification. Minister, families in my riding are struggling with rising costs. Life just keeps getting more expensive and many are worried about just getting by.

When the Liberals were in charge, energy costs went way up. Families couldn’t keep up and, sadly, many had to choose between eating or heating. Now the Trudeau-Crombie carbon tax is pushing prices even higher. Heating our homes, buying groceries and filling up at the gas station—everything costs more because of this regressive tax. On April 1, 2024, the Trudeau-Crombie carbon tax went up another 23%.

Speaker, can the minister please tell us how our government is changing our energy policies along with the opposition to this unfair tax, and how will that keep our energy affordable?

Hon. Stephen Lecce: I want to thank the member from Etobicoke–Lakeshore for being a strong champion for the people of Toronto and a leader in our caucus who is standing up for affordability.

Mr. Speaker, this debate in the House today is most ironic. The Leader of the Opposition commenced her QP round talking about affordability. She must have missed the mark when we cut and extended the gas tax, saving 5 cents a litre for every single commuter in the province of Ontario. She must have missed the mark when we introduced the Affordable Energy Act to end the perilous policies of the Liberals that left us skyrocketing energy rates, as we now will ensure that affordability and competition is what informs every single energy procurement we make. She must have missed the mark when we went to the Supreme Court to litigate against the carbon tax that is now adding 20 cents a litre when it increases for the fourth time in April.

Our government is standing up for affordability. We’ve codified it in legislation. I urge the members opposite to put their money where—

Interjections.

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

The member for Hamilton West–Ancaster–Dundas will come to order. The member for Waterloo will come to order.

Supplementary question?

Ms. Christine Hogarth: Thank you, Minister. Families in my riding are deeply concerned about the impacts of rising energy costs on their daily lives. Many are already stretching every dollar to cover the basics like food, transportation and home heating. They remember the Liberal government’s policies that led to soaring electricity bills, taking a big chunk out of their household budget. Now the Trudeau-Crombie carbon tax is adding even more pressure. Each day, it increases and it’s harder to keep up, whether it’s for shopping for gas, groceries or electricity.

Families are asking for relief; they’re not asking for added costs. Can the minister please explain how the Affordable Energy Act will help protect families like the families in Etobicoke from rising costs and provide a stable, affordable energy future?

Hon. Stephen Lecce: Yes, we must move forward with an affordable future for our children and grandchildren as we build out a vision for the province where we can deliver energy security for our industry, our farmers and our people. And we’re doing that without imposing higher taxes on working families.

Mr. Speaker, I want to take us back. Remember the days, the headlines: at the CBC, “Auditor General Blasts Kathleen Wynne’s ‘Fair Hydro Plan;’” at Global News, “Billion Dollar ‘Mistake:’ Ontario Liberals ‘Hijacked’ Plans for Sustainable Green Economy;” and the Globe saying, “Ontario’s Wynne Says She Regrets Handling of Electricity Prices.”

We have enough case studies that we know we can never go back to the reckless policies of higher energy and taxes under the Liberals, which is why the Premier has led the way with an Affordable Energy Act that codifies affordability, nuclear energy, mass expansion of conservation and a commitment to using technology, not taxation, to reduce emissions for the people of Ontario.

NORTHERN HIGHWAY IMPROVEMENT

MPP Jamie West: The Conservative fall economic statement won’t deliver on Highway 69 again. For six years, the Conservative government has promised to finish four-laning Highway 69, and for six years, they have failed. There’s not a single kilometre, not a single shovel in ground. They haven’t even tendered a contract.

When it comes to insider projects like a tunnel under the 401 or luxury spas, the Conservative government will move mountains. But when it comes to people dying on northern highways, the Conservative government makes excuses.

My question is, when will the Premier finally keep his promise to four-lane Highway 69?

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

Hon. Prabmeet Singh Sarkaria: This government has invested more in the north than any other government in previous history. When the former Liberal government,

for 15 years, did absolutely nothing, the NDP sat back and cancelled projects like the Northlander. It's a shame. But this government, under the Premier, is investing. That is why our government, in June 2022, completed construction of an additional 14 kilometres of new lanes. To date, 84 kilometres of Highway 69 have been expanded to four lanes, and we're going to continue to do that.

But Mr. Speaker, every single time in this House, when there's been a vote on Highway 69 and the funding to support more construction and design work, guess what? That member from Sudbury has voted against it every single time, and that's a shame. Our government supports growth in the north. That member over there has voted against every single one of those investments, whether it's been Highways 11/17 or 69, or whether it's been projects like the Northlander. That's a shame, but we will always support the north and invest.

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

MPP Jamie West: There has been zero legislation, zero effort on Highway 69. What he's saying isn't factual at all. The only thing they're good at constructing is excuses.

Like the Liberals, they have been promising time and time again that they will complete this. The Liberals promised over 15 years and broke the promise. The Conservatives started promising in 2018; they promised again in 2022. They keep breaking their promises. There's a pattern of over two decades of this government breaking promises to four-lane Highway 69. Meanwhile, Sudburians keep dying.

The question: The Premier first made his promise in 2018. It's 2024, six years later. Will he finally keep his promise to four-lane Highway 69?

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The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): I'm going to caution the member on his choice of words and his use of language.

The Minister of Transportation.

Hon. Prabmeet Singh Sarkaria: That member sounds a bit defensive because that's all he can do right now, Mr. Speaker. Because if you look at his record, he's voted against supporting growth in the north, whether that be the four-laning of Highway 69 that he's asking about today, the design work, the expansion of that project—every single one of those is a part of our plan to build and expand highways over the next 10 years for \$27 billion. And what does that member do when he has the chance to support it? He votes against those projects, Mr. Speaker.

When it comes to Highway 11/17, whether it's been improvements to snow clearing, whether it's been improvements to making sure we invest on the safety element of it, that member over there has voted against that, Mr. Speaker. And when this government has put forward investments in the north, whether it be in mining or legislation in mining to help improve communities like Sudbury, to get more growth up there, what does that member do? Whether it's highways, whether it's transit or whether it's investing in mining, that member for Sudbury votes against it every single time and that's—

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

FERTILITY SERVICES

Mr. Vincent Ke: My question is for the Minister of Health. This past Sunday, my family and I experienced a profound joy as we welcomed the arrival of my first grandchild. Moments like these show how significant and life-changing the gift of family truly is.

Speaker, reflecting on this, I cannot help but think of the many couples who are struggling to achieve this same joy due to fertility challenges. For them, the path to parenthood is often complex, not only physically and emotionally but also financially.

Can the Minister of Health explain what this government is doing to support families who struggle with the financial burdens associated with fertility treatments in Ontario?

Hon. Sylvia Jones: Congratulations. While I am not looking forward to being a grandparent, I am very happy for your joy.

Last week, when the Minister of Finance and the member from Etobicoke–Lakeshore, the Minister of Long-Term Care and, of course, the member from Newmarket–Aurora were able to visit an Etobicoke fertility clinic, ReproMed, we saw directly what an investment like this will mean and what an impact it will have on families.

I am incredibly proud of the investment that our government has been able to make through the fall economic statement: \$150 million over two years to expand IVF for families who are desperately wanting to celebrate expanding their family. It is indeed exciting news and I'm very proud that our government was able to do that.

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

Mr. Vincent Ke: Thank you to the Minister of Health for this encouraging news about increased funding for fertility treatments.

I commend the government for its commitment to supporting families who dream of expanding and experiencing the joys of parenthood. For many Ontarians, the journey to becoming parents can be financially overwhelming and this support demonstrates a meaningful step toward alleviating some of those burdens.

Speaker, accessible support for fertility should be seen as part of this government's commitment to helping all Ontarians realize their dreams of building a family.

Can the minister provide additional information about how many Ontario families will be eligible to participate in the tax credit?

Hon. Sylvia Jones: Of course, in addition to the \$150 million over two years for specifically expanding IVF treatments, we also have a tax credit now available for families, because there are often additional costs that are incurred when families are going through fertility treatments. The fertility tax credit of \$150 million means that families who want to expand their families are going to have that opportunity, and they have a government who has their back and is supporting them in that journey.

SKILLED TRADES

Ms. Natalie Pierre: My question is for the Minister of Labour, Immigration, Training and Skills Development. The skilled trades offer a viable and rewarding career path for young people and job seekers in Ontario. Unlike the previous Liberal government that left behind a generational labour shortage in their wake, our government is creating more opportunities for people across the province to pursue a high-earning and fulfilling career in the trades.

We often hear the minister talk about how we are breaking down the stigma around trades and building a strong workforce, but people in my riding want to hear about the personal impact of these changes. They want to know about the individual lives that have been changed as a result of this important work.

Can the minister please share with the House what he is hearing from workers, students and employers on the ground?

Hon. David Piccini: Thank you to the member for that question. What a champion of young men and women in the trades. I was absolutely thrilled to join her in Burlington. Thank you for the work you do.

Speaker, we're smashing the stigmas in the trades, and I want to tell you some stories. I'm going to start with Shiloh. We met him. Shiloh was bagging groceries. Thanks to our Skills Development Fund and investments made to support him, he's now on his way to becoming a level 2 master carpenter.

But I'm going to one up that and tell you a story of Rok. Many on this side of the House know Rok well, and I think members on the other side as well. Rok: "For me, dreams do come true." Those are the words of Rok. She said she was the only woman—350 men on a job site; the only Black woman there. Well, that's changing because Rok is an inspiration. She stands tall as an inspiration to young women entering the trades.

Let's talk stats: A 30% increase in women registering into apprenticeships. That's because of this Premier. We're building a stronger Ontario—

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

The supplementary question.

Ms. Natalie Pierre: Thank you, Minister, for your response. These stories serve as powerful reminders of who we're fighting for, ensuring that our focus remains on improving the lives of Ontarians. Every worker in Ontario deserves a fair, safe and respectful work environment. I've spoken to workers and stakeholders in my riding who have concerns about the enforcement of new regulations in the skilled trades sector. We know that strong policies are only as strong and effective as their enforcement. That's why it's critical that these rules are not just words on paper but actively upheld in every workplace across Ontario.

Could the minister please share with the House how our government is supporting Ontario workers and cracking down on bad actors?

Hon. David Piccini: I just want to continue briefly on Rok's story. There's an incredibly empowering video of her outlining her story into the trades. One of the things she talks about is health and safety. We're working with

our prevention council to ensure that we're making incredible investments. You've seen it with the firefighters who visited this place, on their retroactive cancer coverage. We continue to lead Canada on taking steps to both protect and honour our first responders but investing in prevention.

Secondly, our Employment Standards Act: This is an act that rarely was touched in the past. This Premier, with every Working for Workers—we're almost at as many Working for Workers as J.K. Rowling has Harry Potter novels, and we're going to keep doing it. Why? Because it's iterative. Investing and making changes to the Employment Standards Act—we have investigators investigating every claim. Proactive investigations are up, and we're working with health and safety associations to make sure workers are safe on the job site as we build a stronger Ontario.

HOME CARE

Ms. Sandy Shaw: My question is for the Minister of Health. This minister knows full well that home care patients across Ontario continue to suffer, waiting for vital medical and pain supplies.

I do wonder, does this minister also know that home care workers are now forced to stretch the time in between changing bandages, catheters and emptying drains, and that they are reusing supplies that are no longer sterile, drastically increasing the risk of life-threatening infections? Others, like my constituent Elizabeth Shaw, are buying their supplies from Amazon.

Really, this has gone on long enough. You made this mess. It's time that you fixed it.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): I'll remind the members to make their comments through the Chair.

The Deputy Premier and Minister of Health.

Hon. Sylvia Jones: As I've said many times in this House and outside of this House, it is completely unacceptable when families, when patients are not able to get the critical supplies and the medications that they need as they recover in their homes. That is why we have embedded special assistance teams with this particular vendor focused on ensuring that individuals who need those supplies are getting them in a very expedited manner.

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And I will say, as I have directed Ontario Health atHome to do, they have opened up a portal, a process to ensure that any patients, any families, any caregivers who went out and purchased these necessary supplies are getting reimbursed. I can share with the member opposite that, as those applications come in, they are being dealt with expeditiously. In fact, over 80% have already had their processes and refunds issued.

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

Ms. Sandy Shaw: To the Minister of Health: It is unacceptable, I agree with you there, but it's gone on for almost two months. This needs to end now because, in my riding, hospitals have loaned supplies. Community members have donated leftover supplies and delivered them directly to agencies.

My constituent Tom Swain is helping his wife, Margaret, manage lung cancer at home. He received a gift from a former home care patient who dropped off leftover provisions at his door. His wife said she had tears thinking about the kindness of strangers.

The people of Hamilton are stepping up to help our sick and vulnerable people. When will this minister accept responsibility? You need to accept responsibility for this mess and do the same. Protect our vulnerable people in this province.

Hon. Sylvia Jones: I trust the member opposite is sharing the 1-866-377-7567 number to ensure that people know the process and how they can ensure that their critical supplies are being delivered on schedule and on time.

I have to say again to the Minister of Finance a thank you for the investments that not only happened in the 2023 budget of \$1 billion in health care and community care but, of course, in the 2024 budget, an additional \$2 billion. These investments are now allowing us to ramp up and increase the number of individuals, 700,000 in the province of Ontario, who were not receiving community and home care previously and are now because of our investments.

PUBLIC SAFETY

Mr. John Yakabuski: My question is for the Solicitor General. Ontarians are deeply concerned about their safety. In communities across the province, families are worried. They hear about tragic cases where lives are lost because repeat offenders are allowed back into society after being granted bail time and again.

Despite these clear and present dangers, the federal government has failed to act on bail reform. They've been slow to make changes that would protect our communities.

Here in Ontario, we've done what we can to ensure safety. But the Criminal Code, which controls bail rules, is federal. We need the federal government to make these changes.

Speaker, can the Solicitor General please explain what measures our government is advocating to the federal government to ensure that our communities are kept safe?

Hon. Michael S. Kerzner: I want to thank my colleague and friend, who's such a strong advocate for public safety. Thank you.

Mr. Speaker, when the associate minister and I went to Yellowknife, we couldn't have been more clear—that was to attend the federal, provincial and territorial meeting. We said some very simple things that the other ministers of other provinces and territories supported, and that is that we must restore mandatory minimum sentencing for serious crimes, remove bail availability for violent offenders, and establish a three-strike-you're-out rule for repeat offenders.

There's only one government that has ever cared more about public safety: That's our government, led by Premier Ford.

And, Mr. Speaker, while the Liberals never started to do anything on public safety, our government will never stop.

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

Mr. John Yakabuski: Thank you to the Solicitor General for that answer.

Families across Ontario are watching closely. They deserve to feel safe in their own neighbourhoods. They want to know that we're doing everything possible to keep violent offenders off the streets.

Our police work hard each and every day, but they need our support. Ontario has been clear about the changes needed to protect our communities, yet we're still waiting for the federal government to act.

Municipal leaders, police and families are asking for stronger laws, more resources and better coordination.

Ontario has called for mandatory minimums and stricter bail rules, but we can't make these changes alone. Speaker, can the Solicitor General please share what steps our government is taking to continue pressuring the federal government to take immediate action on bail reform?

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

Hon. Michael S. Kerzner: The truth is, the Crombie and Trudeau Liberals just don't get it. They want more studies. They want to go back to wait for more conferences. We don't agree with this.

And that's why we're never afraid to stand up against the criminals and put them behind bars where they belong. No matter the threat, no matter the odds, no matter the cost, our government, led by Premier Ford, will never stop. And we won't apologize for being tough on crime. We won't apologize for fighting auto theft. We won't apologize for standing up for the victims that have their lives dramatically changed by being attacked in the middle of the night in their own bedrooms.

Mr. Speaker, there's a difference between us and them. The Liberals want to pander to the criminals; we will stand with the victims.

NORTHERN MUNICIPAL INFRASTRUCTURE

Mr. John Vanthof: My question is to the Minister of Finance. A previous Conservative government downloaded miles of provincial highways to municipalities as a cost-cutting measure to them. Former municipal Highway 67 in Iroquois Falls is a good example. As a result of these downloaded highways and their costs, many of these municipalities, including Iroquois Falls, can't afford to provide basic services. So, as a result, they're forced to make massive municipal tax increases.

The province uploaded the Gardiner and the DVP for Toronto. Will you do the same for municipalities like Iroquois Falls?

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Again, I'll ask the members to make their comments through the Chair.

Minister of Finance.

Hon. Peter Bethlenfalvy: I'll let the Minister of Transportation and highways take on the supplementary part of that question, Mr. Speaker.

Let me highlight first, though, a significant announcement made yesterday with the advocacy of the Minister of Housing and Municipal Affairs to provide support to 320 small, more rural and northern communities under the Ontario Municipal Partnership Fund. Mr. Speaker, that's going to increase \$50 million next year, on top of \$500 million, and another \$50 million the following year. That's a \$100-million increase that's going to help 320 communities right across Ontario. In fact, this is going to be—for many, many communities, including your riding, right across Ontario—a big help at a time when they need it for highways, for infrastructure, for whatever they need in their communities, because we're supporting communities right across Ontario.

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

Mr. John Vanthof: Thank you to the Minister of Finance for that response.

So \$50 million over 320 municipalities? It costs almost half a million dollars on average to replace a kilometre of two-lane highway in this province. So that doesn't even do half a kilometre on 67.

But they can't afford to provide services now. So why don't you actually take back the highways that you downloaded? You recognized it for Toronto—

Interjection.

Mr. John Vanthof: You recognized it for Toronto, but you refuse to recognize it for the rest of the province.

You claim that there are no tax increases under the Conservative government. What you're doing is downloading the tax increases to the municipalities. That's what you're doing.

Take back those highways. Thank you.

Interjections.

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

Again, I'll remind members to make their comments through the Chair.

Minister of Transportation.

Hon. Prabmeet Singh Sarkaria: Let's look at the record here, Mr. Speaker. There's only one party in this province that supports building highways and roads. We heard not too long ago, a couple of months ago, the federal Liberal environment minister say there is no more money for roads. He doesn't want to build roads anywhere in this country or this province.

We know the needs of the north, Mr. Speaker. We know the infrastructure needs of the north, and that's why we have dedicated over \$28 billion over the next 10 years to build the roads, to build the highways across this province, especially in the north, recognizing the challenges that we have in the north over there.

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But let's be clear: Those members, any time they have had an opportunity to vote to support highways in the north, have stood up time and time again—whether it be Highway 11/17, support for municipalities or, in fact, the

budget that we have, the fall economic statement that we have put forward today—and have refused to support every single one of those investments. As a government—

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

Continuing on, we've got the member for Richmond Hill next.

LONG-TERM CARE

Mrs. Daisy Wai: My question is for the Minister of Long-Term Care, who cares about the seniors just as much as I do. Ontario's seniors deserve access to services and support they need to enjoy a high quality of life. When I speak to families in my riding of Richmond Hill, I often hear that they are concerned about their loved ones having a place to call home as they age.

As our senior population continues to grow at a rapid rate, we must ensure that we have the critical infrastructure needed to support them. The previous Liberal government failed to understand the importance of investing in long-term care. In contrast, our government has made record investments in building and redeveloping long-term-care homes across the province.

Speaker, can the minister please share what actions our government has taken to ensure that our seniors have a place to call home?

Hon. Natalia Kusendova-Bashta: It is my honour to rise today and answer my very first question as Ontario's Minister of Long-Term Care. I want to thank the Premier for putting his trust in me and giving me this honour of a lifetime.

To the member from Richmond Hill: She is correct. We both indeed care for our seniors, including those living in long-term care.

Speaker, I have had a very busy and productive summer touring our beautiful province to check in with the sector and ensure that we are on track. I participated in ground-breakings and toured construction sites, a testament to our progress of building thousands more homes—not merely beds, but homes. I visited colleges and universities to talk to our brilliant students and let them know that long-term care is hiring, and I visited residents, staff and caregivers in no less than 52 homes to hear their voices directly and ensure they are reflected in our policies.

Speaker, I'm happy to report that the long-term-care sector is growing and thriving in the province of Ontario, with hundreds of shovels in the ground on capital projects and thousands of more new staff joining our long-term-care workforce.

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

Mrs. Daisy Wai: Thank you very much, Minister. I know that our government's actions will provide peace of mind for seniors and their families in my riding of Richmond Hill.

Ontario's seniors have worked hard to build up our province to what it is today. They deserve our continued support and commitment. That's why we must ensure that

long-term-care homes have the resources they need to provide residents with high-quality care.

Speaker, can the minister please explain what actions our government has taken to improve the quality of life for residents in long-term care?

Hon. Natalia Kusendova-Bashta: The member makes a great point, and as a nurse, I care deeply about the quality of care our residents receive.

When the member and I visited Mackenzie Health in her riding and we toured the home, we spoke to the nurses, the PSWs and the nurse practitioner about the impacts that our investments are having today, right now. The PSWs told us how their resident ratios have improved: Where in the past, they would have to take care of 10 to 12 residents, today their ratios are closer to six. The nurses told us about the new equipment like bladder scanners, IV pumps and glucometers they are able to access thanks to our Equipment and Training Fund. The nurse practitioner told us about the impact their presence has in the long-term-care home, providing clinical guidance, expertise and education to other staff.

In a nutshell, Speaker, our investments are working. They are improving the quality of care for our residents and job satisfaction for our staff.

SCHOOL NUTRITION PROGRAMS

Ms. Peggy Sattler: My question is to the Premier. Heather lives in London West and just started volunteering at her son's elementary school. She told me that 50 to 70 kids are coming to school hungry every single day. She knows that kids who are hungry cannot learn, so she applied to the Ontario school nutrition program. Unfortunately, she was told that there is no funding available because there are already 30 schools on the wait-list in the southwest region, including 13 schools in London-Middlesex. Parents like Heather want this government to get the basics right. They had an opportunity in the fall economic statement to invest in student nutrition programs.

Will the Premier explain to Heather why there is money for luxury spas and fantasy tunnels, but teachers and parent volunteers have to fundraise to make sure that kids are fed?

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The parliamentary assistant and member for Markham-Unionville.

Mr. Billy Pang: A healthy meal goes a long way to ensuring that students are set up for success. I'm proud of the work we are doing alongside MCCSS to ensure that over \$28 million annually for the Student Nutrition Program continues to reach the students who need it most. This program helps to ensure that students can stay fully engaged and focused on our updated STEM-focused curriculum.

The Student Nutrition Program helps to further complement my ministry's investment of over \$58 million in student safety and well-being initiatives in schools. Together, these investments help ensure students can learn in a safe and healthy environment. We know that the Student Nutrition Program, which provides meals and snacks to

students to nearly 70% of our publicly funded schools, must continue.

I look forward to working with my colleagues at MCCSS as we support students across the province.

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

Ms. Peggy Sattler: Students who are hungry cannot learn, period. Kids need access to healthy, nutritious food, and they need it through the school nutrition program. This government has had six years to properly fund school nutrition. It provides less funding than almost every other province in Canada. Under this Premier's watch, the number of students going to class hungry has gotten bigger every single year as the rising cost of groceries leaves more and more families struggling to feed their kids.

Can the Premier tell Heather and so many other Ontario parents why making sure that kids have access to nutritious food is not a priority for his government?

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

Hon. Michael Parsa: Let me make it very clear to my colleagues in opposition: Every child and every youth is our priority in this province, which is why we invested more than \$6.15 million in the program last year; which is why we partnered with many—because the spirit of the School Nutrition Program involves municipalities and the private sector. We initiated, with this minister here, the Healthy Students Brighter Ontario campaign with our partners, which increased support by more than \$7.1 million on top of the \$6.15 million. Why? Because we want to make sure that children and youth who are going to school have access to breakfast, snacks and lunches.

I wrote a letter last year to my federal counterparts to ask them to step up and support our efforts to make sure no child or youth in this province ever goes hungry.

CORRECTION OF RECORD

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The member for Nickel Belt has informed me she has a point of order.

M^{me} France Gélinas: Point of order, Speaker. I wish to correct my record. Yesterday, the member from Kiiwetinoong asked me if the chief had been consulted for the transportation of radioactive material. I misidentified her. Her name is Patsy Corbiere. She is Ogimaa-kwe of Aundeck Omni Kaning, as well as the tribal chair of the United Chiefs and Councils of Mnídoo Mnising. I misidentified her yesterday and I wanted to correct my record.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): I thank the member for Nickel Belt. It's entirely in order to correct your record.

DIWALI

HALLOWEEN

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The member for Kitchener Centre has a point of order.

Ms. Aislinn Clancy: I'd just like to wish everyone here and the people of my riding a happy Diwali and a happy Halloween. Enjoy your day.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): There being no further business this morning, this House stands in recess until 1 p.m.

The House recessed from 1140 to 1300.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Mr. Deepak Anand: To all the residents of Mississauga–Malton who are watching at this time, happy Diwali, the festival of lights and happy Bandi Chhor Divas, the day of liberation.

Remarks in Hindi.

Remarks in Punjabi.

REPORTS BY COMMITTEES

STANDING COMMITTEE ON GOVERNMENT AGENCIES

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): I beg to inform the House that today the Clerk received the report on intended appointments dated October 31, 2024, of the Standing Committee on Government Agencies. Pursuant to standing order 110(f)(9), the report is deemed to be adopted by the House.

Report deemed adopted.

STANDING COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC ACCOUNTS

Mr. Rick Byers: I beg leave to present a report on the Value-for-Money Audit: Highway Planning and Management, 2022 Annual Report of the Office of the Auditor General of Ontario, from the Standing Committee on Public Accounts and move the adoption of its recommendations.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Mr. Byers has presented the committee's report and moves the adoption of its recommendations.

Does the member wish to make a brief statement?

Mr. Rick Byers: As member of the Standing Committee on Public Accounts, I am pleased to table the committee's report today entitled Value-for-Money Audit: Highway Planning and Management, from the 2022 Annual Report of the Office of the Auditor General.

I'd like to take this opportunity to thank the permanent membership of the committee and substitute members who participated in the public hearings and report-writing process.

The committee extends its appreciation to officials from the Ministry of Transportation. The committee also acknowledges the assistance provided by the Office of the Auditor General, the Clerk of the Committee and legislative research.

With that, I move adjournment of the debate.

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

Debate adjourned.

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

LA FERME CANTIN INC. ACT, 2024

Mr. Bourgouin moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill Pr59, An Act to revive La Ferme Cantin Inc.

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

First reading agreed to.

RETIREE EXPERIENCE AWARENESS DAY ACT, 2024

LOI DE 2024 SUR LE JOUR DE SENSIBILISATION AUX EXPÉRIENCES DES RETRAITÉS

Mrs. Wai moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 217, An Act to proclaim Retiree Experience Awareness Day / Projet de loi 217, Loi proclamant le Jour de sensibilisation aux expériences des retraités.

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

First reading agreed to.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Would the member for Richmond Hill like to make a brief statement explaining her bill?

Mrs. Daisy Wai: Yes. The bill proclaims June 15 in each year as Retiree Experience Awareness Day.

PETITIONS

HEALTH CARE

Ms. Jessica Bell: I have a petition entitled "Protect Public Health Care." This petition has been signed by many people who live in University–Rosedale and who access the hospitals along University Avenue. The concern is that many people do not have access to a family doctor. We have many people in our riding who do not have a family doctor. There's also a concern that the privatization of primary care is taking place and people are going to nurse practitioner-led clinics or doctor-led clinics and having to use their credit card unnecessarily for medically necessary care.

This petition calls on the Ontario government to uphold the laws that ban people from paying user fees for medically necessary care.

I support this petition, and I'll be giving it to page Jakob.

SOCIAL ASSISTANCE

Ms. Aislinn Clancy: I'm here to present a petition that is asking for the doubling of OW and ODSP. People are living in legislated poverty. We've seen an explosion of encampments. So this is requesting that we look at the CERB, which provides \$2,000 a month, as symbolic and

representative of what is required to live here in Ontario and have a roof and food.

I am grateful to Dr. Sally Palmer for sending this on behalf of citizens across Ontario.

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

PUBLIC SAFETY

Mr. Dave Smith: I have a petition here.

I'm hearing a lot from my constituents—they're reading in the newspaper about criminals who are out on bail, who are reoffending multiple, multiple times. It's creating significant challenges within our community.

Community safety is something that is utmost for all of us here in the government.

We know that car theft is on the rise, and we know that there are significant instances where it is a repeat offender who is going back out and creating these challenges. People feel unsafe in their downtown areas.

I have a petition, then, to lobby the federal government to please reform and repeal the current bail conditions that they put on, to make sure that people in all of our communities feel safe at night when they're going out into the community.

I wholeheartedly endorse this petition. I will sign my name to it and give it to page Ziggy to take to the table.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): I'll once again take the opportunity to remind members on both sides of the House that the standing order suggests that the summary of the petition be brief. You can also indicate the number of signatures if you so wish. But I would ask that there be no additional political commentary related to the issues that are included in the petition.

Petitions?

LAND USE PLANNING

Mr. Chris Glover: This petition is entitled "No Dump Trucks in Liberty Village," and it has thousands of signatures. It's addressed to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario. It points out that the Toronto Region Board of Trade estimates that traffic congestion in the greater Toronto area costs \$11 billion annually. It also points out that there are 10,000 residents in Liberty Village as well as 600 businesses employing 11,000 employees, and that the community is suffering from traffic congestion.

1310

Last summer, there were a number of reports of taking two hours to drive 900 metres in Liberty Village. One of the concerns that they have is that with the Ontario Line construction Metrolinx has announced that they may have to move 300 to 400 dump trucks daily between 2025 and 2029 through Liberty Village.

So the petitioners are asking the Legislative Assembly to urge the Minister of Transportation to work with Metrolinx to identify an alternative to having these dump trucks pass through Liberty Village and adding to the traffic congestion there.

I fully support this petition. I will affix any signature and pass it to Lily to take to the table.

ACCESSIBILITY FOR PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES

Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon: Good afternoon, everyone. I have a petition here from people from all over Ontario who are asking the government to improve accessibility for people with disabilities and ensure that all new buildings and existing buildings are made accessible—things like access buttons, ramps and basic things like that. Because we all know that everyone deserves equal rights and access to public spaces.

I will submit this with page Marie-David and I'll sign my name.

TAXATION

Mr. Anthony Leardi: I have a petition here. In summary, it talks about the disproportionately negative impact of the carbon tax on northern and rural communities. It says that the carbon tax has a disproportionate effect on northern communities because of the colder climate.

In summary, it also says that northern communities have fewer alternatives than carbon-based fuels, and that it places a disproportionately unfair financial strain on northern communities.

Finally, it calls upon the Ontario government to demand that the federal government address these concerns similarly as they address those concerns with Maritime provinces.

Mr. Speaker, I do support this petition and I am signing it. I'll hand the petition to this dutiful page next to me named Jakob, who I'm sure will take it to the Clerks' table.

HEALTH CARE

Ms. Sandy Shaw: I have a petition entitled "Stop Ford's Health Care Privatization Plan." It is signed by thousands of concerned citizens who believe, as do we, that Ontarians should get health care based on their need and not the size of their wallet.

We know that both the Premier and the health minister have said that they are planning—and they are privatizing parts of the health care system, and that we see that privatization is showing us that patients always end up having to pay a user fee or they end up getting a bill.

So the people who have signed this, who are very concerned, are petitioning the Legislative Assembly to stop all of their plans to privatize Ontario's health care system, and most importantly, fix the crisis that we're seeing in health care and hallway medicine.

Among the many suggestions that they make, primarily they want to make sure that this government should step up their funding so that hospitals have enough staff and enough nurses on every shift on every ward and in emergency departments.

I fully support this petition. I'm going to add my name to the thousands of constituents who have already signed

this petition—it's very important—and hand it to page Lily to take to the table.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Again, I'll remind members to keep their summaries of their petitions brief.

The member for Guelph.

LAND USE PLANNING

Mr. Mike Schreiner: I have a petition. I would like to thank Halton Hills Climate Action for submitting it—almost 1,000 signatures.

It's raising concerns about the increase in greenhouse gas emissions from building Highway 413. It notes that the highway will pave over 2,000 acres of farmland and pave over parts of the greenbelt. It raises significant concerns about localized air pollution in the town of Halton Hills. It says it will not relieve congestion and it advocates putting trucks onto the 407 by paying their tolls. And the undersigned want the Legislative Assembly to immediately cancel Highway 413, develop a regional transportation strategy and increase GO service in the area.

I fully support this petition, will sign it, and ask the page to take it to the table.

NORTHERN HEALTH TRAVEL GRANT

MPP Jamie West: This petition's entitled "Let's Fix the Northern Health Travel Grant."

Basically, it talks about the high cost of travel and accommodations. The Northern Health Travel Grant has sort of been a stagnant amount. As costs continue to climb, it becomes out of pocket for people in northern Ontario to get health care in southern Ontario.

It's a very reasonable ask that they have to establish a committee with a mandate to fix and improve the Northern Health Travel Grant. They want to bring together the health care providers in the north and the recipients of the Northern Health Travel Grant. This committee will make recommendations to the Minister of Health to improve access to health care in northern Ontario through adequate reimbursement of travel costs. It's not fair for people to pay out of pocket when they are getting health care in Ontario.

I support this petition. I'll affix my signature and provide it to page Elliot for the table.

ACCESSIBILITY FOR PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES

Mr. Ted Hsu: This petition is from residents of Kingston and the Islands, and it asks the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to take action to improve accessibility for individuals in wheelchairs and with other disabilities in both new and existing buildings. It points out a few areas of improvement. Many buildings lack accessible entrances, proper door sizes, appropriately placed access buttons and sufficient door-hold mechanisms as well as wheelchair-friendly outdoor spaces.

TAXATION

Ms. Christine Hogarth: This is a petition calling on the federal government to reconsider the implementation of the carbon tax. As we know, a lot of people in my riding and ridings across Ontario are suffering higher gas prices, higher food prices. I have the food terminal in my riding, and guess how that food has to get to your tables: It comes by big truck.

This is signed, and I certainly agree with this petition for the federal government to reconsider implementing the carbon tax. I will give it to page Graham to bring to the table.

LAND USE PLANNING

Mr. Ted Hsu: This petition is also from residents of Kingston and the Islands. It is with regard to the assembly of prime farmland in Wilmot township. It asks the government to stop the expropriation of prime agricultural land, and it calls on the government of Ontario to have a transparent and collaborative conversation with Waterloo region and with farmers to promote sustainable development.

TRANSPORTATION INFRASTRUCTURE

Mr. Deepak Anand: The residents of Mississauga–Malton have been calling me again and again asking about the gridlock and the pain they have to go through while waiting in gridlock. So this petition is about the strong and efficient transportation infrastructure. They are urging the government to invest in highways for connecting communities and supporting the residents.

I fully support this petition, Speaker. I truly believe that this government needs to do more investing in infrastructure. I want to say thank you to the members for supporting this petition, and I will give it to Samika.

PUBLIC SAFETY

MPP Jamie West: This petition is entitled "Protect 2SLGBTQI+ Communities and Drag Artists." It's about the fact that anti-2SLGBTQI+ hate crimes and harassment have been increasing across Ontario and that the drag artists particularly have been targeted by these extremists.

The petition basically is calling on the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to pass the 2SLGBTQI+ communities act so that they would form safety zones to protect people who are vulnerable against hate crimes.

I support this petition. I will affix my signature and provide it to page Lily for the table.

LAND USE PLANNING

Ms. Sandy Shaw: I have a petition entitled "Protect Farmland and Sustainable Growth in the Waterloo Region." This is specifically signed by residents of Wilmot because, as we know, the government has been overriding and rewriting local official plans, and the province is in the process of expropriating prime, class 1

farmland in Wilmot township without any transparent public consultation. There is a concerning pattern of the minister using those MZOs to fast-track developments that favour sprawl over sustainable growth, and that 770 acres of land is being expropriated and rezoned in Wilmot township. They are not willing hosts. The farmers do not want this to be happening to their land and to their farms. So the people who have signed this, the hundreds of people who have signed this, are calling for an immediate pause for all plans to expropriate and rezone farmland in Wilmot township.

1320

I agree with the folks that want to save farmland in our province, particularly in Wilmot, and I will add my name to theirs as well, and I'm going to give it to page Marie-David to take to the table. Thank you.

TUITION

MPP Jamie West: This petition is entitled "Fight the Fees." They talk about the cost of domestic and undergrad tuition increasing by 215% since the 1980s and domestic graduate tuition increasing by 247%. So about 50% of students have a median debt of over \$17,000 and it takes almost 10 years for them to repay that. Basically, while talking about the increase in the debt, at the same time, OSAP and student financial assistance has been decreased by about a billion dollars in assistance.

Also, there was a Student Choice Initiative that was defeated in the courts, and students would like legislation to enshrine their right to represent themselves.

The three asks with the petition are free and accessible education for all; they would like grants instead of loans; and they'd like us to legislate students' right to organize.

I support this petition, I'll affix my signature and provide it to page Rishabh for the table.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Thank you. That concludes the time we have available for petitions.

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): I'm going to recognize the government House leader, the member for Leeds-Grenville-Thousand Islands and Rideau Lakes, on a point of order under standing order 59.

Mr. Steve Clark: Thank you, Speaker. Under standing order 59, I'd like to inform the House of the items for consideration next week.

On Monday, November 4, a government bill will be introduced during routine proceedings. In the afternoon, opposition day number 2, followed by second reading of Bill 216, the Building Ontario for You Act.

On Tuesday, November 5, in both morning and afternoon, a government bill that will be introduced and, in the evening, private member's notice of motion number 131 in the name of the member for Brampton West.

On Wednesday, November 6, both morning and afternoon, a government bill that will be introduced and, in the evening, will be private member's notice of motion

number 132 in name of the member for Etobicoke-Lakeshore.

On Thursday, November 7, in the morning, a government bill that will be introduced. The afternoon is to be determined and, in the evening, Bill 195, the Cutting Taxes on Small Business Act; that's a private member's bill in the name of the member for Don Valley West.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

BUILDING ONTARIO FOR YOU ACT (BUDGET MEASURES), 2024

LOI DE 2024 VISANT À BÂTIR L'ONTARIO POUR VOUS (MESURES BUDGÉTAIRES)

Resuming the debate adjourned on October 31, 2024, on the motion for second reading of the following bill:

Bill 216, An Act to implement Budget measures and to enact and amend various statutes / Projet de loi 216, Loi visant à mettre en oeuvre les mesures budgétaires et à édicter et à modifier diverses lois.

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

Ms. Jessica Bell: I'm going to be sharing my time with the member for High Park, as well as the member for Kiiwetinoong.

This week, the Premier and the Conservatives released their fall economic statement. It's a mini budget which looks like the Conservatives are going to use as we head into an early election.

Mr. Dave Smith: Are you Nostradamus?

Ms. Jessica Bell: I can't wait for the \$200 cheque.

Interjections.

Ms. Jessica Bell: Yeah. You know, it's going to 15 million Ontarians, which will cost about \$3 billion. So where's the \$3 billion for health care? Where's the \$3 billion for education? Where's the \$3 billion for housing? It is a genuine question people have. There's a lot of concerns.

Another thing that I notice about the fall economic statement is that—it's in the statement itself—Ontario is becoming a have-not province. This is Ontario, the economic powerhouse of the country, and Ontario is now going to be getting equalization payments from the federal government. That is not a good sign for the economy, and that is what the fall economic statement is telling us. It's a concern as well.

The fall economic statement touches upon a lot of things. The first thing I'm going to talk about is the housing sector and what this fall economic statement means for the housing sector. I've got to say, my take-away is that the Conservatives are not serious about fixing the housing crisis. That's my take-away when I review the fall economic statement. Housing in Ontario has never been more expensive. It has never been more expensive to rent. It has never been more expensive to own a home.

The Conservatives have had six years to fix the housing crisis, and things have only gone from bad to worse. And when I look at the fall economic statement, I don't see any path out of this mess. I don't see any commitment from the Conservatives to address the seriousness of this crisis.

We look at housing starts. The fall economic statement says that housing starts are well short of meeting Ontario's target of building 1.5 million homes in 10 years. It looks like housing starts are now below 100,000 a year. That's what it says in the fall economic statement. That is a concern. I don't see anything in the fall economic statement that is going to address that shortfall. There's nothing from this government about changing zoning rules to make it faster and quicker and easier to build more homes. Where are the fourplexes?

Interjection.

Ms. Jessica Bell: No. Every party, including many of your own members, have been advocating for fourplexes as of right in towns and cities across Ontario, and yet this government hasn't moved forward with that, which would open up the opportunity for more affordable homes in neighbourhoods people want to live in.

Many advocates have been calling for this government to make it easier to build apartments and condos along transit routes. I heard the Premier say this morning, "Yes, we're moving forward on that." That's quite simply not true. It's quite simply not true. We've been advocating for some time for an increase in density near transit stations, and this government isn't doing it. What we are seeing in the provincial policy statement instead is a move to no longer require towns and cities to have density requirements and a move to make it much easier to build extremely expensive low-density housing on farmland and greenbelt lands and farmland. It's extremely concerning. So that's a worry.

I heard some members earlier today talk about how the government is allocating \$50 million more a year to municipalities. However, my concern with this is that this amount of funding, this additional funding, doesn't offset the overall loss in revenue caused by the Conservatives stripping municipalities' power to collect development fees earmarked for shelters and affordable housing.

The net result is that municipalities are going to be having less money for shelters and less money for affordable housing, at a time when the homelessness crisis has never been worse. There are encampments in my riding. There are encampments in many of your ridings. There are people who are being evicted into homelessness. There are people who are being evicted and they're thinking to themselves, "Ontario is no longer a place for me. I'm going to take my skills and my talents and move to a cheaper province." It's a real concern.

I would like to see a plan from this government that commits to significant zoning reform; that commits to building affordable housing, non-market housing and supportive housing; and that brings in strong rent control so the 1.7 million households in Ontario can live in stable, affordable homes and not live in constant fear of being evicted because they are a long-term tenant and their

landlord wants to move them on so that they can increase the rent, which is happening a lot.

I want to touch on education, because it's one of the biggest expenditures for the province. Unfortunately, when I look at what the fall economic statement has allocated for education, I've got a lot of concerns. Education funding essentially is remaining stagnant, year in and year out. What that means is that there isn't enough funding available to fix and build schools. There's just not enough funding available. It's going to remain at \$1.4 billion for the following year, which is what it's been for many years now. I think that is extremely concerning, because it means that the massive repair backlog we have in Ontario is not going to be reduced.

I'd like to give an example of how this lack of funding for capital repairs is affecting the schools in my riding. I recently visited Jesse Ketchum. It's a school on Davenport Road. It's about a kilometre from here. When you walk into the school, you see a big, blue partisan sign saying, "We're investing in schools," which is tough to stomach. We talked to the school, and it does look like funding from this government will be used to repair the school's boiler. It's an urgent repair. However, the school still has 47 outstanding urgent repairs that are not going to be addressed because there isn't enough capital funding available to address them. Those urgent repairs range from fixing the plumbing, HVAC issues, flood prevention and electrical work.

1330

The reason I give that example is because there are many older schools in my riding that have similar issues, where they have numerous urgent repairs that need to be done, ranging from 10 to 47—in the case of Jesse Ketchum—and even with the capital funding that has been allocated to the education budget, those urgent repairs are not going to be done in a timely manner. We're going to see instances like we saw in the member for Parkdale–High Park's riding, where, when it rains, the hallways are flooded. It's a big concern.

This funding freeze to education also means that class sizes are going to continue to remain large. We visited many of the schools in my riding in the first two months of the school year—elementary schools, middle schools and high schools—and we heard the same things again and again. We heard about very high class sizes. We heard about there not being enough educational assistants in the classroom to provide extra support to kids who need extra attention—especially if they're having difficulty sitting still, if they have some behavioural challenges, they need someone who's going to be a steady hand and help them so that the whole class can stay focused. We're not seeing anything to address that issue. There are some schools in my riding, including King Eddie and Palmerston, where they're seeing French immersion classes with up to 36 kids, and this is after the reallocation that happens after a few weeks. Speaker, 36 kids in a classroom is not the kind of learning environment that leads to success—it's too high.

What we would have liked to have seen in this fall economic statement, and what we will be advocating for

and continue to advocate for is for this government to invest in smaller class sizes so our kids can succeed and more funding for capital repairs so that we can fix and maintain our schools, so that they're in a state of good repair—the heating works, the cooling works, they're energy-efficient. It makes a lot of sense, but we're not seeing that in the schools today.

Another thing that I noticed in the fall economic statement is that the justice sector will be seeing a cut of 9%. This is very interesting, because this government talks a good long game about how they're interested in getting tough on crime. You cannot get tough on crime if the policing that you do is not twinned with an accountable and responsive justice system. We're seeing this with violent crime and, particularly, sexual assault cases. People are summoning the courage to go forward and report a crime, and finding that once charges are laid, time passes and court cases are being thrown out because there's not enough courtroom space or staff available to have that case go to trial. People are walking free, and survivors are not getting their day in court and they're not getting justice.

Interjection.

Ms. Jessica Bell: Yes. It's happening again and again and again.

It's concerning to see that this government is not addressing the issues facing our justice system, because people are waiting way too long for justice.

It's also concerning because this cut in justice sector funding will also affect our tribunal system. We have, in theory, a very good tribunal system where we can provide fast and cheap access to justice, where people do not necessarily have to hire a lawyer to have their issues resolved. If this bill proceeds and we see a cut of up to 9% in funding to our justice sector, it means that the massive backlogs we are seeing in our tribunal system are not going to be addressed.

I think about the Landlord and Tenant Board. The Landlord and Tenant Board has over 53,000 cases that have yet to be heard. Tenants are waiting up to two years for a hearing date. Landlords are waiting six months to nine months. With this cut of 9%, it means that people are going to be waiting longer. That's a concern, especially when I hear the minister and the MPPs opposite talk about how the Landlord and Tenant Board needs to be working for everyone. Yet when it comes to fixing the staffing shortages and the delays in the Landlord and Tenant Board, with this fall economic statement you're not going to be doing it. I have a lot of concerns about that. I have a lot of concerns, and my hope is that there will be people who will be contacting you saying, "What's going on here? You're saying one thing and you're doing another." It's very frustrating.

I want to talk a little bit about health care funding. In my riding, we have a pretty significant family doctor shortage, especially among communities where people do not speak English as their first language, especially in the Chinese Canadian community. We are seeing a lot of sole-practitioner doctors who have been practising for 30, 40

years choosing to retire or go part-time and there are very few family doctors that are looking to step up and take over these practices. It's a big concern.

We do see an increase in health care funding in the fall economic statement. There is an increase. When we look at it, we see that a large chunk of that increase is going to be earmarked for back pay and higher wages for health care workers, who had their wages suppressed—during the pandemic—by the Conservative government, because you brought in Bill 124. Thank you to the health care workers and the members of the public that took this case to court and got a ruling that showed that Bill 124 was unconstitutional and that health care workers deserve a living wage. I'm very pleased about that. But that's where the bulk of the funding is going. What that means is that we are not going to see significant improvements in emergency room wait times. We are not necessarily going to see big improvements in the number of people who have access to a family doctor. We are concerned about that.

I want to note that the Ontario government has made a decision to invest more in a Learn and Stay grant, where they will pay, or help pay—I'd love to get details about this—the cost of tuition for medical students who choose a career in family medicine for five years in Ontario. I have some questions about this which I'd love to see answered.

I also want to talk about time frames. On the face of it, this seems like a sensible idea. The challenge is that it takes about five to seven years to train up a family doctor, which means that some of the very acute challenges we're seeing in the primary care system right now are not going to be addressed by this fall economic statement, because we're not going to reap the rewards of that move for many years.

We are asking this government to look at practical, quick fixes that have been pushed by organizations like the OMA so that we can get people a family doctor this year and next year.

One practical measure that we have been pushing is for Ontario to invest in administrative support for family doctors so that they can reduce the hefty administrative burden they face—some estimate that it's up to 19 hours a week—because when you reduce that administrative burden, it means that doctors are freed up to see more patients. That is very practical. It is much quicker and cheaper to train up medical administrative assistants and support staff than it is to train up a family doctor. And it means that the family doctors can, quite simply, see more patients.

We introduced this measure as an opposition day motion, I believe, and the government rejected it. I think that's a shame because it's a very practical solution. It's a very practical solution.

What we also don't see in this budget is a commitment to invest in family health teams as well as nurse practitioner-led clinics, even though they are very effective ways to deliver primary care.

In our riding, Toronto Western put forward an application a few years ago to set up a family health team in the Chinatown and Kensington area, because, like us, they

could see that there was a pretty serious family doctor shortage downtown. They put in a request to the provincial government back in 2018-19, and, initially, back then, the government said, “Yes, you’re right; we do need another family health team downtown.” However, time passed, and when that application was up for review, that application was rejected.

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My hope is that when we’re talking to about solutions to the primary care shortage, we’re looking at investing in family health teams and we’re opening up new family health team centres across Ontario, including in University–Rosedale. I think it’s very important.

This is just a snapshot of some of the issues that I see with the fall economic statement—how to fix health care, education and housing. There’s a lot—it’s a big document—but they’re the key take-aways.

For those of you who are listening, I do encourage you to reach out to the government and give them your feedback. I encourage you to reach out to our office with written submissions. You can sign up online to speak in committee—it’s Bill 216—so that the MPPs in committee can hear directly from you.

Our goal is to improve the fall economic statement and also to present credible and sensible alternatives so we can keep this province affordable and make sure our public services work for people.

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

Ms. Bhutila Karpoche: As always, it is an honour to rise on behalf of the people of Parkdale–High Park in this House and, today, to contribute to debate on the fall economic statement.

Ontarians deserve a government that works as hard as they do, a government that puts their tax dollars to work to make their lives easier. But with this Conservative government, people are not getting what they paid for. After more than six years of costly schemes and scandals, the fall economic statement was an opportunity for this government to make the right choices for once; instead, all they are offering are more stale ideas and empty promises.

It’s time for a government and a Premier that not only lives up to the promise of our province but also gets the basics right. New Democrats will choose the people of Ontario. We will build more homes, hire doctors, fix schools and make life more affordable.

Speaker, here are some phrases that do not appear in the fall economic statement: cost of living, early childhood educators, public health care, ODSP and OW.

This list is striking to me, because when I’m out in the community speaking with constituents and they share with me their concerns and the things that they want to see this government take action on, the things they say would help them and their families the most, it’s many of these exact same issues that come up again and again.

We all know we’re living through a cost-of-living crisis. It is making it harder and harder for people to afford the basics: a roof over their heads and food on the table.

At the same time, we’re seeing an erosion of public services that Ontarians rely on. Our public health care system, public hospitals, our public education system are all buckling under the strain of disinvestment and creeping privatization brought to us by successive governments, both Liberal and Conservative. I say “successive governments” because we know privatization happened under the Liberals; in fact, many parts of our public services—our utilities, our hospitals—were privatized under the Liberals. But it’s made worse by the Conservatives.

Ontarians deserve a government that makes their lives easier, but in so many areas of the day-to-day, people are struggling. They need real solutions that will allow them to plan their lives with some security so they don’t have to worry week after week, month after month about whether they’ll be able to continue to afford their homes, or be able to afford child care, or whether their lives will be upended by rising costs.

This government’s answer is to send everybody a \$200 cheque on a one-time basis. Now, \$200 is an amount that means something to a lot of families, and in the month that they receive it, it will be of help. But the thing is, Speaker, this is a one-time payment, and what people are asking for is sustained support.

For the \$3.2 billion that is being spent on these cheques, there are so many investments that could be made to help people and to lift them up over the long term. Here are a few of the areas an NDP government would invest in and the actions that we would take to make life easier and more affordable for Ontarians.

Let me start with social assistance. The NDP would double social assistance rates and work to end legislated poverty in Ontario. ODSP and OW rates have barely increased in the past two decades, even as the cost of living has skyrocketed. I hear regularly from constituents on fixed incomes who are forced to sacrifice every day just to survive.

Speaker, the maximum monthly benefit provided for an individual ODSP recipient is \$1,308. That is 51% below the disability-adjusted poverty line as determined by Canada’s Market Basket Measure. For Ontario Works recipients, it’s even worse. Their maximum individual benefit is \$733 a month. That’s a full 64% below the poverty line. How are people supposed to live? The average monthly rent in Toronto for a studio apartment is double that amount. You can’t even get a room for that amount. To provide sustainable support to Ontarians, we must double social assistance rates immediately as a start.

An NDP government would invest in the necessary resources to get unhoused people into housing. In Ontario we’ve seen an explosion of homelessness across the province. An estimated 1.5% of the population is unhoused. That’s 234,000 people—over 10,000 in Toronto alone.

The Auditor General and Financial Accountability Office have both found that this Conservative government’s strategies have failed to produce any significant reduction of homelessness in the province. It’s no surprise, seeing as how the Housing Affordability Task Force that the government appointed was specifically mandated to

look only at market-based solutions to address the issue of housing supply, but omitted any mention of homelessness.

Now, I've tabled a bill, Bill 204, the Homelessness Task Force Act, to address this urgent gap and to ensure Ontario has a well-resourced, well-coordinated and effective strategy, working together with front-line workers to end homelessness in this province.

A critical piece of this is ensuring that we not only build the right amount of housing, but the right type of housing, so that those who are currently unhoused can once again have safe, dignified homes; so that people have access to supportive housing so that they can get the wraparound services that are needed to maintain the housing; so that we build more co-op housing, all kinds of non-market options that are truly affordable for people.

While the Conservative government has increased spending on homelessness programs and emergency response, what did they also do? Decrease investment in community housing, and that's leaving less affordable housing stock overall.

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New Democrats, we would tackle the homelessness crisis head-on. We will launch Homes Ontario, the largest home-building program in the province's history, and get the government back in the business of building housing. We would at least double the supply of permanently affordable non-market housing by offering funding, low-cost financing, public lands and other resources to build public, not-for-profit and co-op housing.

The Conservatives have been in power for six years now, with strong majorities, I might add. But in the six years, housing starts are down. The government's own Housing Affordability Task Force said that in the next 10 years, Ontario needed to build 1.5 million homes. That means at least 150,000 homes a year.

What did the government do? Because they failed to build housing, they adjusted the targets. They lowered it to 88,000 homes. They can't even meet that adjusted target. So what did they do? Lower it again, even more; it's now about 80,000 homes. With the direction that this province is heading in and the direction that this government is heading in, I think they will not be able to meet even that new target.

The NDP would take action, strong action, to protect tenants and to preserve the supply of existing, affordable housing by bringing back vacancy control and stopping illegal and bad-faith evictions.

My bill, the Rent Control for All Tenants Act—I'm actually bringing it forward for second reading this session. If passed, this bill would close the loophole that was introduced by this Conservative government that exempts units built after November 2018 from the province's rent control guidelines, leaving tenants vulnerable to being pushed out into homelessness by unfair and unpredictable rent increases—or rent gouging, really. That's what it is.

Rents have gone up an average of 54.5% over the past decade. We know from recent CBC reporting that just a handful of big corporate landlords are responsible for the

majority of above-guideline increases. Tenants from my riding in Livmore High Park have seen unpredictable rent increases, double-digit rent increases—as high as 17%—almost every year.

It has recently come to light that these increases are being driven by an algorithmic AI software used by big corporate landlords to artificially inflate rents. YieldStar is the software, and its maker, RealPage, is being sued by the US Department of Justice for price-fixing and collusion. As CBC reported just last night, it turns out Canadian landlords have been using YieldStar software with zero scrutiny even as rents have gone up and up and up, eating people's paycheques, bringing tenants to the brink or pushing them into homelessness.

An Ontario NDP government would fight against this type of corporatization, not only in the rental market, but also in areas like the grocery sector by establishing a consumer protection watchdog. For the government to truly work for Ontarians, we must put an end to price gouging that is leaving people more and more unable to afford food.

Feed Ontario reports that food insecurity in the province is at an all-time high. Recent data shows that over one million Ontarians visited a food bank in the past year. That's a record number and an increase of 25% from the previous year. It's a shameful record. One out of three food bank users are children. Think about that. One out of six are employed, but their wages aren't high enough to cover the cost of food, or all of their paycheque is going toward housing costs. Food banks are stretched to the limit and are struggling to meet demand. They don't even know if they will have enough food to give out to people. Food banks are supposed to be an emergency resource, not an answer to food insecurity.

We need to invest in housing. We need to stop grocery gouging. These are the things that will help us move towards making sure that every Ontarian is food-secure.

Speaker, the \$200 cheque that the government is sending out will help put food on the table when it arrives in January, but what about February, March, April, May, June, July, August, September, October, November, December? What about the rest of the year?

By increasing social assistance rates, by ensuring we have strong rent control protection, by investing in creating and building more affordable housing, by ensuring consumer protection, the NDP would provide families with systemic and sustained support that is needed to end food insecurity and to ensure that no Ontarian goes hungry; to ensure that people are able to maintain housing, that they have some stability and they're able to plan and build their lives.

Speaker, there are so many public services that the province is responsible for that need urgent funding and would benefit from the \$3.2 billion in investment.

An NDP government would create a wage grid for early childhood educators and child care workers, which they have been asking for for years, and bring an end to the sector's staffing shortages that are causing so many programs to limit enrolment. Instead of cancelling already

approved child care spaces that are school-based—this past summer, the Conservative government cancelled 3,500 spots in the GTA—we would dedicate those funds to ensuring that much-needed child care spaces are created, so that every parent who wants to access the \$10-a-day child care program can do so.

Last night, I held a virtual town hall for parents in my riding, and we dug into the details of this new funding formula. So many parents expressed that the lack of spaces is leaving families vulnerable to centres that may decide to withdraw from the program simply because they don't want to follow the rules as outlined in this new funding formula. Parents, especially moms, are facing the prospect of having to leave the workforce, move out of the city.

Speaker, the NDP is ready to address the core problems and create more spaces and to ensure that we are creating truly universal, quality, affordable, accessible child care.

The \$3.2 billion would mean so much when it comes to addressing the state of disrepair in our schools. Earlier this year, I shared with the House, with the Minister of Education, the state of one of the high schools in my riding, but that's not the only school that is in a state of disrepair—almost every school in my riding is; almost every school across the city is.

At Runnymede public school, an elementary school, just last week I heard from students that the school has mould, and I hear these kinds of examples from parents and from students in schools like Runnymede Collegiate, Parkdale Collegiate and Swansea Public School. Imagine that funding. It would at least help address and make a dent in the \$16.8 billion of repair backlog that we have.

1400

And \$16.8 billion, by the way, is just the number that we have since 2018. This government has refused to publish the most recent data. Actually, we have had no information since 2018. They're not even being transparent about the actual work that is needed.

The \$3.2 billion could go toward improving ventilation in our schools. Our schools are old. The buildings are old. The windows don't open. In the summer it gets too hot. Kids can't learn in these environments. The air quality is poor. We saw what happened during the pandemic and how important clean air is. There are so many things that \$3.2 billion could go toward that would make a difference now and in the long term for the people of this province.

I don't have too much time left, so I want to end by saying—oh, my goodness; I have to mention the kids on wait-lists for mental health care: 30,000 children and youth on wait-lists for mental health care and waiting up to 2.5 years. Do you know what happens during the 2.5 years? The mental illness gets worse. Kids can lose their lives. By not receiving timely care, their mental illness not only gets worse; it impacts them for the rest of their lives. And guess what? We are going to be paying the cost of this through our health care system expenses, through our justice system, in many, many ways. So why can't we just invest a little bit upfront in mental health care, so that we can avoid paying a lot more down the road? It's not only

the right thing to do morally; it's also fiscally the right thing to do.

I don't understand why the Conservative government voted against our opposition day motion to ensure that every child and every person in Ontario who needs mental health care gets access to it. Rather than one-time cheques, as I mentioned, we would invest for the long term and we would use public dollars responsibly.

Under this Conservative government, Ontarians feel stuck. They're trying hard to do all the right things. People are working hard but they're finding themselves back at the same place at the end of the month, every month.

This economic statement that barely references cost of living and offers no new money for hospitals or for schools is yet more proof that the Premier and this Conservative government are out of touch. With the harsh realities the people of Ontario are facing, Ontarians deserve a government that makes life easier. The NDP is that government.

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

Mr. Sol Mamakwa: *Remarks in Anishiniimowin.*

It's always an honour to be able to get up and speak, today on the fall economic statement. As always, I speak on behalf of the people of Kiiwetinoong to try to bring the issues and the challenges but also the successes in Kiiwetinoong.

Ontario is 1.076 million square kilometres. The riding of Kiiwetinoong makes up 294,083 square kilometres of it. The reason I share that is, Kiiwetinoong is just as much a part of Ontario as any other riding, but the fall economic statement does not reflect the needs of the communities in Kiiwetinoong.

Yesterday, the minister called on us to “dare to compare the Ontario of today to the Ontario we inherited.” When I heard that, it kind of came to mind; when I think about the communities I represent, the continued neglect, the continued apathy towards the issues impacting people in northern Ontario and especially First Nations in the north—because if I'm comparing Ontario to Ontario in 2018, I don't see the meaningful change I wish I saw.

As an example, Sioux Lookout did not have the 76 new long-term-care beds they were promised in 2018, and they still do not have them today. In 2018, Neskantaga was on their 23rd year of living with a long-term boil-water advisory. On February 1, 2025, it will be 30 years with the long-term boil-water advisory. They are not alone; 14 First Nations in Kiiwetinoong in Ontario continue to live with long-term boil-water advisories. What has changed?

I get these calls or these notes about \$200 cheques ever since we learned about this government planning to send out \$200 cheques. While there are also rumours of an early election, calls keep coming, texts keep coming, Facebook messages keep coming. They've been asking me if the government is trying to buy their votes with these \$200 cheques, which is a fair question. Like, it's a good question. But they have asked me why the government doesn't spend that \$3 billion on long-term care and other urgently needed infrastructure.

In Sioux Lookout and Kiiwetinoong, people have waited long enough. They have been promised the 76 long-term-care beds over and over again, but the government does not keep its promises.

I was at the hospital about six weeks ago in Sioux Lookout, and we have a 56-bed facility. That particular day I was there, 33 out of the 55 beds were ALC beds, alternate-level-of-care beds. On that same day, they had 10 overflow beds. Five of those overflow beds were ALC beds as well. I actually looked at the overflow beds; they're just makeshift rooms with hospital beds.

That same day, there were 10 First Nation elders from the north that were waiting to come back to Sioux Lookout to wait for their beds. They were in Thunder Bay, which is another regional hospital. They've been stuck there for weeks at a time, especially with no escort or translator.

1410

I went to emerg that same day and there were three people waiting for beds in emerg. There were no beds. In that same time, there were makeshift mental health beds that looked like cells. It's for people who go into mental health crisis.

The reason why I share that is I think having a long-term-care facility in Sioux Lookout and for the region would ease the burden of having proper access to these beds.

The constituents of Kiiwetinoong don't call me to ask for cheques in the mail; they call me about the lack of investments in their communities. Investments in health care and investments in mental health would go much further than cheques in the mail. They would be investments in a future where people could access the care they need, where our hospitals would not be in crisis, where the communities would not be in crisis.

One of the things that I read—the Ontario Psychological Association recommends practitioners charge about \$225 per hour for a session. If someone is struggling with their mental health, that \$200 will not get them very far in seeking professional help. The cost of continuing the neglect to mental health in Ontario is high. This is especially true for the people in Kiiwetinoong; the First Nations in Kiiwetinoong as well, where many struggle with the impacts of the intergenerational trauma from the harms caused by Indian residential schools, but also caused by this former Boy Scouts leader, Ralph Rowe. Ralph Rowe was also an Anglican minister in the north who had his own float plane, ski plane, that travelled all over the north. We know—we believe—that he abused over 500 boys in Kiiwetinoong.

Grand Chief of Nishnawbe Aski Nation Alvin Fiddler spoke about Ralph Rowe at the winter chiefs assembly on February 7, 2024. He started by saying, "For those of you that may not know Ralph Rowe, Ralph Rowe has been described as the most prolific pedophile in the history of this country."

Today I posted this video on my YouTube where I was able to interview a gentleman by the name of John Fox, a survivor of Ralph Rowe. I went to visit him in Kitchenuhmaykoosib Inninuwug, also known as KI or Big

Trout Lake. He speaks about how the actions of Ralph Rowe impacted his life and his mental health.

Earlier this week, the government voted down the oppo day motion to deliver mental health care to everyone in the province at no cost. Overall, in Ontario's emergency departments, mental health and substance use accounts for 2% to 4% of the visits, but in Kiiwetinoong at the Sioux Lookout Meno Ya Win Health Centre, this number is 11% to 16%. It is too common to lose loved ones to suicide, to lose children to suicide. I've been to too many funerals of young girls that have died by suicide. A recent patient at Meno Ya Win was a nine-year-old child who attempted suicide. I know last fall, as well, there was one community that had a suicide pact of 24 boys and girls, aged 11 to 12.

Meanwhile, the finance minister was telling me today that they're opening up the north. The rate of self-harm deaths for children and the youth in the Meno Ya Win catchment area is 87% higher than the Ontario rate.

We need to be able to invest in mental health care. We need to give these children the support before it's too late. Meno Ya Win Health Centre—"Meno Ya Win" means, in our language, "wellness"—is in dire need of more funding and tools to provide to mental health care, including schedule 1 beds. Instead of the \$200 cheques, this government can make real changes, real improvements to health care and the mental health care in the north. But so far, they are choosing not to.

The minister also stood across from me and spoke about building a tunnel under the 401 to fight gridlock. We are talking about a tunnel that would cost around \$100 billion, for an unpractical, unpopular tunnel idea—not up north. When it comes to transportation in the north, especially safety issues with life and death consequences, the government is less generous.

This past summer, in Sandy Lake First Nation, there were two near-misses—two planes almost crashed, caused by faulty radio equipment. I've been talking about these further needs for upgrades to airport infrastructure in northern First Nations for years without seeing meaningful change.

Road safety is an issue as well. Drivers in northern Ontario are twice as likely to die in a car crash as drivers anywhere else in the province. We have talked again and again about Ontario's most deadly highways in the winter, Highway 11/17. I've spoken before about the long closures we sometimes face. One day, last year, Highway 11/17 was closed for 24 hours.

Another thing that stands out in the budget is that projected housing starts are down from the projections in the 2024 budget, and there were cuts to the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing funding.

1420

The current approach from this government is not working in the north, and the amount of planned spending is down as well.

The number of people living in Sioux Lookout has grown so much faster, as well, than the number of housing units that are available. Earlier this year, Global News reported that Sioux Lookout added only 272 units between

2011 and 2021, despite having a population growth of over 800 people.

Also, there is a housing crisis in many First Nations, often resulting in overcrowding, which leads to people leaving and becoming homeless in communities like Thunder Bay, Dryden, Kenora or Sioux Lookout. Some people are living in canvas tents. And there are 1,500 families waiting for affordable housing.

The government opposite has shown that when they want to spend money, they are more than happy to. I shouldn't have to remind them that housing is a human right.

I see what overcrowding does. I see how it affects the mental wellness, the mental health of the people who live in these communities. I see the infrastructure crisis, the water crisis, the mental health crisis, the suicide crisis.

I mentioned earlier today that I went to a funeral at a fly-in First Nation on Saturday. When I walked into where the funeral was, what got me was when I saw the three caskets lying next to each other. That's not prosperity. There are a lot of people dying, left and right—young people.

To the young people in the north, to the young people living in Kiiwetinoong: We need you to live. There is hope. You don't have to die by suicide. We are here to support you.

This government needs to support these young people as well. I'm tired of going to funerals when young girls die by suicide. Meegwetch.

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

Mr. Dave Smith: The question is for the member for University–Rosedale.

You talked about the \$200. That's \$200 of taxpayer money that's going back to the taxpayers themselves because we saw an increase in our revenues. Are you prepared to go back to your residents and say, "You're too wealthy, and you don't deserve to have \$200 of your tax money given back to you"—or are you prepared to vote in favour of the FES?

Ms. Jessica Bell: My question is, where's the \$3 billion for health care, where's the \$3 billion for education, and where's the \$3 billion for housing?

We have people who are sleeping in ravines, who cannot get access to shelters. I literally walked to a shelter recently, and there was an individual sleeping on a mattress outside the shelter because the shelter was full.

I would like this government to take our housing crisis seriously and to address the shortfalls in our health care system. If we have \$3 billion to give, then let's look at fixing those issues. Thank you.

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

MPP Wayne Gates: Thank you very much. Always a pleasure to rise in the House, and after an hour of the lead. Food banks are the highest level in our history. We're in an affordability crisis. People cannot afford to pay their rent. Young people are living with their parents until they're 26 or 27 years old. People cannot afford to feed their families. Injured workers are being deemed and being

forced to live in poverty, which the labour minister knows. Health care is in a crisis, with ER closures all over the province.

I want to help that member from Peterborough. Do you think Galen Weston, Drake and Mitch Marner need to get a \$200 cheque as our hospitals are in crisis?

Ms. Bhutila Karpoche: I want to thank the member from Niagara Falls for his question. Here's the thing: As I mentioned in my debates, this \$200 means something to a lot of families, but it's a one-time cheque that will come sometime in January. But what about the rest of the year? Where is the sustained support that people are looking for?

Also, the people of this province are not stupid. They understand the timing of this cheque, and people are questioning the motivations of this government. With all the talks of an early or a snap election and \$200 being delivered by cheque right before this election—

MPP Wayne Gates: Call it what it is: It's a bribe.

Ms. Bhutila Karpoche: Thank you.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): I'll ask the member from Niagara Falls to withdraw that, please—your statement.

Ms. Sandy Shaw: You can't say "bribe." They can do it, but you can't say it.

MPP Wayne Gates: Oh, they can do it; I can't say it? Okay, I retract.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Guys, that is enough. You know that you should do better than that. The member from Hamilton West–Ancaster–Dundas: I caught that. And I caught that too, from the member from Niagara.

Further questions? I recognize the minister of bail reform.

Hon. Graham McGregor: My question is for any of the three members that spoke. Will they be returning their \$200 cheque, and what day can the Registrar General expect to receive the cheque returned to the government?

Ms. Jessica Bell: Look, I think it's a silly question. What people want to see in the fall economic statement is a plan for how people are going to be able to afford the bills. They want to know if they're going to have a family doctor. They want to know if they can afford their rent. They want to know if they have to wait a long time if they go to the emergency room because they're facing some serious illness. I don't see any significant fixes in the fall economic statement, and I think we should be focusing our conversations on that.

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

Ms. Sandy Shaw: My question is, do you think this government has the most expensive, the most bloated cabinet in the history of Ontario? I'm wondering if any of those who got pay bumps—there's someone here who got a pay bump before they even took their seat. I wonder if any of those people are going to return that taxpayer dollar.

What I'd also like to highlight is, most Ontarians spent \$16,000 a year in inflated Galen Weston grocery costs, so this \$200 election you-know-what won't go very far when it comes to paying for those groceries.

So my question to you is, what is the balance between this bloated cabinet and the \$200 pittance that they're giving to people, and they expect them to vote for them with that type of money?

Mr. Sol Mamakwa: I spoke lengthily about the mental health crisis, the suicide crisis and the overcrowding. What is the cost of life for young people? I don't know if \$200 will save the life of a nine-year-old. I don't know if it will save the life of a boy that's thinking about suicide. That \$200 is \$200, but a life is not worth \$200.

1430

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

MPP Zee Hamid: I should mention that I'm really proud of the government, which is making record investments in education, record investments in health care, record investments in infrastructure, transit, highways, roads, bridges, skilled trades.

One area I'd like to highlight is the Ontario Municipal Partnership Fund. We are increasing the funding by \$200 billion—

Ms. Jessica Bell: Million. Million. Million.

MPP Zee Hamid: Million—targeted mostly towards rural and northern communities that rely on it very heavily. I know that Thunder Bay, Greater Sudbury, Sault Ste. Marie, Windsor—they all achieve more than \$20 million a year from this funding.

I'd like to ask any of the members who spoke, will they support our plan to invest more in municipalities? Will they side with us to help our municipal partners or not?

Ms. Jessica Bell: Thank you to the member for Milton for that question. We've been very clear for a long time that we've been calling on the provincial government to make municipalities whole, because this government made it extremely difficult for municipalities to collect development fee revenue for necessary services, including affordable housing and shelter. When we look at the numbers, however, we see that municipalities are still not whole. They do not have the necessary money that they need to provide services to people, from transit to daycare to affordable housing. So we have a lot of concerns about that.

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

Ms. Natalie Pierre: My question is for the member from University–Rosedale. I heard in one of your previous answers you voiced your dissatisfaction on the issue of doctor shortages, so I wanted to ask you your opinion or your thoughts around expanding the Learn and Stay grant so that more doctors in communities will continue to serve here in Ontario.

Starting in 2026, Learn and Stay grants will be available to 1,360 eligible undergraduate medical students that commit to practise family medicine after graduation. Through you, Speaker, I ask the member: Will you support these initiatives and ensure more family doctors for more families here in the province of Ontario?

Ms. Jessica Bell: Thank you to the member opposite. When I look at the details of a Learn and Stay grant,

providing tuition assistance to individuals who choose a career in family medicine for five years, it makes a lot of sense. It does. The challenge I have is that it takes between five and seven years to train up a family doctor and get them working in Ontario. So while we're looking at long-term solutions, we also need short-term and mid-term solutions.

We put forward a very practical proposal to have the Ontario government provide additional administrative support to family doctors so they can take that 19 hours a week they spend on pushing paperwork, doing referrals etc., and open that up so they can see more patients. It's extremely practical. The OMA is supporting it. I would have liked to have seen that in the fall economic statement as well.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): We'll go to further debate.

Hon. Rob Flack: I rise today to speak on the fall economic statement. I'm actually looking forward to speaking on how it affects this great province that we live in, affects my ministry, agri-food and agri-business, and how it affects southwestern Ontario and the many ridings we all represent in this great Legislature.

I want to start by congratulating Minister Bethlenfalvy and his team for putting it together. We may agree or disagree, but it takes a lot of work to put it together, and we appreciate those efforts.

I want to start speaking about balanced budgets. We all have to live within our means. It's difficult in these days of governing to make sure that balance is created. When you hear people talk about balancing budgets, they think about a government that has to cut programs and cut infrastructure to get the job done. Well, I think we all know that when it comes to our government under our Premier and his ministries, that is not the case.

Instead, what the fall economic statement and outlook and fiscal review does in 2024 is it shows that our government is continuing to invest in the people of Ontario while putting us on a path—an important path—to a balanced budget. That means more highways, more hospitals, more homes—all to support a growing population that, I might add, is growing at a very, very rapid rate. I think the Minister of Labour would suggest that we're getting near a 16-million population in this province, and since I was in high school, that's more than doubled. So trying to digest that influx of population to make sure that we have the right infrastructure in place, hospitals, homes, highways, education, water, waste water and supporting a growing province is a really difficult task.

To help the people during this time of high inflation, we are putting \$200 back, and it may seem like a pittance to some across the way, but \$200 is a lot to a family, Speaker, and putting the people's money back in their pockets is key.

I want to keep emphasizing—and we have to get this right in government. The easiest thing to spend in the world is somebody else's money. I think we can all agree with that, and governments get blamed for that too often. We do a lot of good work, but it really does belong to the

people, and the more we can get back to them to let them manage their lives, manage their money, manage their situations more effectively is what it's all about. You don't have to agree, but that is what this government stands for and it always will. It's their money.

This program alone will provide \$3 billion. When added up, it's a lot because there's a big population. It's their money and we're giving it back to them. We're doing this while putting us back on a path to a balanced budget, which is crucial. You heard the Minister of Finance talk about it. Our credit rating has never been better. It was an abysmal failure under the previous government. We're getting it done and done right.

The old saying says a rising tide lifts all boats. Well, if you think to our overall treasury when we came to power, \$150 billion came into the treasury. Think back to when Bill Davis was Premier many, many decades ago; I think it was around \$32 billion to \$35 billion. It shows you how the province has grown. The treasury has grown, but we have grown the treasury from \$150 billion—and I think I'm right here when I say it's \$212.6 billion in six short years, and we did it without ever raising one tax. The economy grew, our population grew and we're investing in our province.

Small business corporate taxes have been lowered, allowing small business to succeed. The gas tax—again, it may not seem like a lot of people, but that's 300 bucks on average per family. So, add that to the \$200, we're now at \$500; add about \$120 for a family when it comes to the plates on the car, so we're starting to add up some significant money back to a family. Again, it's their money.

We're building an economy at every step of the way. New jobs, new opportunities, new investments: That's what it's all about.

Speaking of building, Speaker, I do not have to look far to see one of the many great investments being built in this province. In my own community, Volkswagen and PowerCo chose to invest in our province because of the environment created by our government. We don't do the investment. We attract people to come and make the investments and create those jobs. This type of investment would have been unfathomable under the last government, supported by the NDP.

The previous government drove electricity costs up, drove taxes up and drove jobs out of this province. In fact, in my area, since I moved to London in 1986-87, we saw jobs just being sucked out of our region. Whether it was Ford, whether it was Freightliner, they were leaving in droves and droves and droves. What we're seeing now is economic growth, an economic boom. People are moving here; people are getting employed—good-paying jobs, benefit-paying jobs with pensions.

That's why I was thrilled to see in this economic statement an additional \$100 million in Invest Ontario to secure more strategic investments in several key industries, and I'm hoping agri-food will benefit from these in the months and years to come.

I know how much of a positive impact the Volkswagen investment is going to have on our communities, and it's not just St. Thomas; it's the surrounding communities. It's

the same with Stellantis. People will be coming to good-paying jobs. It's exciting to see this growth, and I can't wait to see the positive impact the further \$100 million in Invest Ontario will have on our communities throughout the province.

I spoke about the previous Liberal government creating policy that did nothing but kill innovation and investment. Again, we're seeing these investments pay off. They seem to have not learned their lesson, and they continue to support, respectfully again submitted, this dreaded carbon tax that is just hurting, punitive and is continuing to cause untold damage to Canadian families. This tax does nothing but kill jobs and make it so that people are punished for at least driving to work so they can support their families.

Our government does not believe in punishing people who drive to work to feed their families. We're going to build the highways. We're going to build the roads. We're going to allow people to get where they need to go effectively and on time.

Instead, we are extending the temporary gas tax and fuel rate cut so that the rate of tax on gasoline and diesel fuel for our farmers and those who ride the highways would remain at 9 cents per litre until June of next year—again, not a perfect offset, but we're doing our part to curb the impact of this dreadful carbon tax. This way, people who drive to work can make a good living and not feel like they're being punished for doing so.

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Speaker, we have an aging population that has more complex needs than ever before. This means that we need more health care professionals than ever before. We're investing in them. We're seeing, what is it, 18,000 more nurses, almost 1,400 more doctors. We're going to give them the care when they need it.

That's why I was excited to see the investment of \$17.7 million in 2026-27 to expand the Ontario Learn and Stay Grant. It's a fantastic program. I know it's having a great benefit in London and Elgin county, in Middlesex county and our southwestern Ontario communities, and we look forward to further success based on that investment. The program incentivizes people to go to work in rural and northern communities and to stay there after their education is finished. We're seeing this program work.

Like many others in this chamber, I value family. As the Minister of Finance said yesterday, we understand that not everyone's journey is the same when it comes to parenthood. That is why I was excited to hear that we are investing an additional \$150 million to expand the Ontario Fertility Program and help more Ontarians realize their dream of having children of their own. I hope this \$150 million helps people achieve their dream of starting a family. I've had friends throughout my life who have had issues with this. I'm convinced that this investment will go a long way. Family is most important.

I also want to talk about how the fall economic statement is going to affect my portfolio: agriculture, food and agribusiness. But first, I'd like to explain to this House what impact our industry has on our Ontario economy and for the average Ontario family.

Almost \$51 billion in annual GDP is generated in the agri-food sector, from the farm gate to the consumer's plate, and that's up by nearly \$3 billion since 2018. Agri-food and manufacturing sales totalled \$64.4 billion in 2023—and growing. We're second in North America—when you think of this, it's pretty amazing—in output per acre, second only to California. We're first in Canada in terms of agri-food output and agri-food exports. Agri-food exports have increased by 65%, under this government, to \$26.2 billion. We employ more people than auto, tech and steel. It's an unknown fact, and we need to sing that from the rooftops, from the silo tops—how about that, Speaker—right from our grain elevators throughout this province. Speaker, 16% of Ontario's manufacturing GDP is food and beverage manufacturing, employing over 122,000 men and women alone at over 5,200 firms.

Companies in the southwest have invested, in and around London—Maple Leaf Foods, Aspire, Dr. Oetker, Cargill have made amazing investments. I was there last week supporting McDonald's. Think of this fact: There are over a billion McNuggets made out of that Cargill plant in London, feeding all of Canada. It's a pretty amazing plant to go through.

Speaker, 54% of the food we eat is produced in Ontario. We don't just contribute when it comes to trade; we also contribute to this province and this massive trillion-dollar economy—\$51 billion strong.

We're creating an environment for success. We don't create these jobs; industry does. They do the job of getting Canadians to work. And 871,000 people now make their living—again, from the farm gate to the consumer's plate, 871,000—more than auto, one in nine jobs of all Canadians.

The University of Guelph will say, for anyone who has children or grandchildren who want to think about getting into a cool career, think about agriculture and food—because for every graduate from the Niagara agricultural program in Ontario, there are four good-paying jobs waiting for them. So I encourage everyone to encourage their kids to think that way.

I hope the House can understand the impact agriculture and food really does have in this province.

I'll give a little shout-out now. The Royal Agricultural Winter Fair starts tomorrow. It's going to be on for 10 days. It's always in the first week of November. It's when the country comes to the city. You're going to see hundreds of thousands of people come. What motivates people to come to the Royal? To see animals, to see where their food is produced and how important agriculture is to this province.

As I talk about agriculture and agri-food, I want to speak about Ontario's Risk Management Program, because it's identified in the fall economic statement—and I'll quote from it in a minute. This \$150-million program supports our farmers with unforeseen challenges, such as fluctuating market prices, rising input costs, geopolitical instability, climate change and higher debt loads. The critical supports provided through the program help secure jobs and activity right across Ontario's food supply chain.

Again, I want to emphasize, risk management is a necessary tool, not only to help support our farmers in terms of risk management, but to help our farmers compete—compete not only in a North American market, but in a global market. And when they compete, when they have the tools so that they can compete, they do so and do so well. Just think—I said it earlier—the \$26.2 billion that leaves this province to help feed people throughout North America and the world.

We're going to continue to listen. We're going to continue to learn. We're going to work closely with all the stakeholders in this arena. As we've stated in the fall economic statement, "The critical supports provided through the program help secure jobs and activity across Ontario's food supply chain. Ontario will continue to work with the sector to manage the risks that it faces and to help grow the industry." We will help our farmers, our stakeholders, remain competitive. That's what risk management is all about.

We raised our Risk Management Program from \$100 million to \$150 million a couple of years ago, and we cut red tape for farmers and food processors. We also enhanced the Risk Management Program to facilitate a roll-over of program funds, year to year. This program does not just protect farms and farmers from acts of God and helps keep them competitive; it gives them a basis to go forward to compete.

Importantly, we've also worked with our federal partners to secure \$569 million to flow to our agri-food sector by 2028 through the Sustainable Canadian Agricultural Partnership program. It's working. We're delivering some wonderful results to support and grow this amazing industry that we have. Some 1,500 Ontario farms and agri-businesses have already benefited from those investments through the huge suite of programs that we offer with our federal counterparts. Our government recently topped up the feeder cattle loan program by \$240 million, as an example, to a total of \$500 million in financing to help grow the beef industry in Ontario.

We invested \$25 million in the Strategic Agri-Food Processing Fund to build up food-processing capacity, and we've increased the AgriStability program to 80%, while investing millions to create made-in-Ontario fertilizer solutions for greater self-sufficiency, and much, much more. We will continue to create the right conditions for the \$51-billion economy that we helped create in the agri-food sector.

Just two weeks ago, I was in the EU and the UK, talking to different companies and governments about made-in-Ontario food. The UK and European Union represent roughly 520 million consumers. These two communities generate almost \$25 trillion in nominal GDP. Just think of the potential for our agri-food commodities, grains, ingredients and processed food—further processed food—to find a home in those countries.

In a radically uncertain world, Europe's need for dependable, reliable and safe agri-food is absolutely crucial. Ontario is that dependable, reliable and safe trading partner, and our world-class agri-food producers and processors are ready to meet the needs of our European

partners and allies. That is why, over our six years in government, we've helped create an agri-food powerhouse in Ontario. The agribusiness boom will not just be good for the province, but also for the world, as they'll be able to have a reliable partner to feed the people in their country. I am confident this is just the beginning, as we will continue to make the necessary investments to help keep industries thriving, expanding and growing.

Just as I conclude, there's a few salient points, I believe, in this fall economic statement that I'd like to highlight. Again, coming back to the deficit: Over the medium term the government projects a deficit of \$1.5 billion in 2025-26, followed by a surplus—basically a balance—of just under a billion dollars in 2026-27. Again, I want to emphasize the size of our treasury, the size of the deficit we inherited, the size of the reduction of the debt we were able to accomplish post-COVID and the wonderful job of our economy, the men and women who make up the economy in this province, the companies that generate the great economic growth we're seeing, in getting it done.

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And 860,000 new jobs have been created, Speaker. Again, I come back to my London analysis: Over 300,000 jobs left this province under the previous Liberal government. We're seeing an economic boom throughout Ontario, with \$44 billion in EV investments, \$5 billion in life sciences. We are investing and we're attracting people to come to this province.

I was in Windsor last weekend with the member from Windsor–Tecumseh, and he was emphasizing the benefit that Stellantis is going to have in this community. I was with Mayor Dilkens, as well—very excited about the growth they're seeing in Windsor. It's not only those initial investments, it's the tertiary and secondary jobs that are going to come their way through these wonderful investments.

Ontario's historic infrastructure investment includes over \$191 billion over the next decade to build and improve transit, highways, housing infrastructure, hospitals, schools, long-term-care facilities and other critical public infrastructure.

Again, Speaker, we are a growing province, and I think the people of Ontario have a choice. The choice is: Who can manage that infrastructure? Who can invest in that infrastructure best, most effectively and most thoughtfully and attract the investment this province needs? I believe that it's this government for sure, led by Premier Ford—some \$8 billion in lower costs for businesses, \$3.7 billion of which directly supports small business, as I talked to at the beginning of my talk here this afternoon.

In 2023, Ontario's trade with the United States was valued at around C\$500 billion, and the province was the top export destination for 17 states across the United States, while ranking second for 11 others. I would point out that in the agri-food sector, \$26.2 billion of our exports—80% of those exports—go to the United States. We are a strong trading partner with them, and a lot of what we do works and works very effectively in terms of trade relationships. In fact, the greenhouse sector, vege-

tables and fruit—over 85% of what they produce in Ontario gets exported to the States.

Speaker, I will conclude at this point to say, finally, that we are so happy to see this province growing again—made-in-Ontario solutions. Again, I would say a rising tide lifts all boats, and the tide is rising. Our boat is sailing with good, full wind behind our sails. We're getting the job done.

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

MPP Wayne Gates: Thank you very much. It's always a pleasure to rise. I just want to say, on your comments: The only thing that's dropping faster than housing starts in Ontario, from 87,900 down to 81,300, is the government's interest in affordable housing. The minister's silence on housing in yesterday's speech is setting off alarm bells across Ontario, and particularly with families.

After wasting a year trying to solve this crisis by selling off the greenbelt, which is now with the RCMP, they took a 19-week vacation during the summer and we didn't come back until almost a week and a half ago. Housing is truly a number one priority. Why did the fall economic speech from the minister not address the problems in the starts that we have, the shortfall of housing in Ontario?

Hon. Rob Flack: I would begin by saying that I hope the member opposite had a wonderful vacation—19 weeks. But I can tell you that this particular MPP—and I know my colleagues will say the same—did 382 events. I don't know how many you did. I'm happy to talk to you about that.

But housing: As a former Associate Minister of Housing, I can say that it is a difficult file. It's a difficult file—

Interjection.

Hon. Rob Flack: —and you guys did such a wonderful job supporting the NDP when you were there.

I would say that the biggest opportunity we have in housing is when we redeploy the land that we have in this province, and that is what this minister is trying to do and this Minister of Infrastructure is trying to do as well. We have a huge opportunity to work with Habitat for Humanity, with co-op housing, which was here yesterday. We've got a lot of programs in play.

I think the member knows full well that when the federal government, supported by a carbon tax, continues to spend beyond its means—not like us—the interest rates go through the roof. That's what has crippled the housing industry. You know it; just admit it.

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

Ms. Christine Hogarth: My question here is for the Minister of Agriculture. In my riding of Etobicoke–Lakeshore, I have the food terminal, which is one of the world's biggest food terminals, and certainly in Canada, that's for sure.

Where the food terminal is located, it's a road called Park Lawn. Park Lawn is a very busy road. It leads you to Humber Bay Shores, which is the home of about 25,000 residents and growing.

The city of Toronto is now discussing taking out two lanes, one on each side of Park Lawn, to create bike lanes.

Then all those traffic people who are trying to get through, including all our transport trucks that take our goods and services from A to B, will now be stuck in even more traffic and congestion.

I guess my question for the Minister of Agriculture is, how much money is spent—and time is money—to have those trucks sitting on the roads in my local community versus getting that stuff moving from A to B?

Hon. Rob Flack: The food terminal in her riding, that I drive by on my way home to my riding, is an integral part and an important part of the food continuum in Ontario.

I can also say that my wife's family have a farm market business near Lakefield, Ontario. I have gotten up in the past—not recently—to drive to the food terminal in the middle of the night to make sure we pick up valuable produce to take them home to sell farm-fresh for Ontario.

Getting those trucks, big or little, into that food terminal is absolutely crucial. I mean, it is really an important part of our food continuum throughout Ontario. Again, we have to do everything to make sure those highways, those roads are kept clear to allow those trucks, often big, often small, but still a steady flow—if you get there at 2 or 3 in the morning, you'll see the lineup of lights of people getting to deliver food and to pick up food to deliver to a hungry Ontario.

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

Mr. John Vanthof: I listened intently to the remarks from the Minister of Agriculture, and there are a few things that the minister and I would agree on, like that agriculture and agribusiness are one of the most important sectors in the province. The importance of rural Ontario to the overall economic health of the province—I think we would agree on that.

One thing that I think rural Ontario really suffers from is most of the emergency room closures in the province. I believe, in 2023, there were almost 1,200 happening in rural Ontario, and emergency room closures are very important when people who work in the agriculture sector need to go to the hospital. If you're living in rural Ontario, you might not be able to get to some fancy private one in the city when your local one is closed. We have never had that before in rural Ontario, never had it before until this summer in my riding.

How does the fall economic statement address hospital closures in rural Ontario now?

Hon. Rob Flack: Let's take an example, Speaker: farmers in Castleton. Community paramedics have continued to have an improved and impactful role in rural Ontario. It's happening throughout the province. It's happening in my riding, and I know it's happening for the minister beside me here.

We've invested more in health care than any government in the history of Ontario. Again, I'm going to come back: We are a growing population. It is really hard to digest this growth. We don't bring the people in, as you know, but we have to prepare for it and we have to manage it when they do. And we are doing a good job.

Do we need to continue to invest in rural and small-town health care initiatives? Absolutely. Community

health care centres are an absolute must. Primary care is important. That's why we've seen 18,000 more nurses and close to 1,400 more doctors—more to come, absolutely. I agree with the need for that investment.

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

Hon. David Piccini: Thank you to the member for that speech. I listened intently.

I want to ask you a question, and I think it's reflective of just a fundamental differing view. I think you see the contempt and the jokes on a \$200 cheque back to taxpayers, which is, I think, intellectually dishonest, if you look at the actual numbers spent on health care, spent on education, which are records under this government. I think it reflects a fundamental difference: that government always knows—that those in government know how to best spend dollars. I think we just disagree that, for everyday people, putting more money back in their pockets is a good practice. And, of course, we've never raised a tax.

So can you tell me, for your residents that you serve, why you feel—they did put us here, after all—that that viewpoint is fundamentally more reflective of everyday Ontarians?

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): I'm just going to say, before the minister responds, Minister, you have to withdraw the "dishonest" comment.

Hon. David Piccini: Withdraw.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Thank you. Over to the Minister of Agriculture, Food and Agribusiness.

Hon. Rob Flack: Again, as I said earlier in my comments, let's add it up. The small business corporate tax has gone to a lot of small businesses and benefited them amazingly. Individually, the gas tax has averaged a \$300 savings per Ontario family. It's going to stay until June of next year. The licensing fees, \$120—\$200 now. We're getting pretty close, I think, to a thousand bucks a year, with more to come. I don't know about you, but I think that's a lot of money.

Had we not been here, I can only just imagine what taxes would have gone up for the average Ontario family. So when you think of the carbon tax and what we're offsetting and what we're doing well—my constituents want to see lower taxes. They want to see us continue to invest. And that is exactly what we're doing.

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

Mr. John Vanthof: The minister spoke in his remarks regarding the business risk management program in Ontario, a program that was designed by farmers for farmers to be bankable and predictable. It was capped by the Liberal government. That's a big part of the problem. Yes, the Conservative government raised the cap by \$50 million, but agricultural organizations have been lobbying very strongly to prepare for the downturn in agriculture and asking for that cap to be raised—the OFA and Beef Farmers of Ontario—by \$100 million a year. Does the

minister agree that that cap should be raised, and will he lobby at cabinet to do that?

Hon. Rob Flack: It's a necessary tool; we agree. Yes, we raised it \$50 million. As I said during estimates, we're listening; we're learning; we're sitting down with everyone. We're going to continue to make sure there's flexibil-

ity and make sure that it meets the needs—not only today or yesterday, but the needs of tomorrow.

Agriculture is a growing, important sector in this province, and I will always advocate for our farmers, farm producers, farm suppliers, agribusiness and food suppliers.

Report continues in volume B.

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Jordan, John (PC)	Lanark—Frontenac—Kingston	
Kanapathi, Logan (PC)	Markham—Thornhill	
Karpoche, Bhutla (NDP)	Parkdale—High Park	First Deputy Chair of the Committee of the Whole House / Première Vice-Présidente du Comité plénier de l'Assemblée législative
Ke, Vincent (IND)	Don Valley North / Don Valley-Nord	
Kernaghan, Terence (NDP)	London North Centre / London-Centre-Nord	Deputy Opposition House Leader / Leader parlementaire adjoint de l'opposition officielle
Kerzner, Hon. / L'hon. Michael S. (PC)	York Centre / York-Centre	Solicitor General / Solliciteur général
Khanjin, Hon. / L'hon. Andrea (PC)	Barrie—Innisfil	Minister of the Environment, Conservation and Parks / Ministre de l'Environnement, de la Protection de la nature et des Parcs
Kusendova-Bashta, Hon. / L'hon. Natalia (PC)	Mississauga Centre / Mississauga-Centre	Minister of Long-Term Care / Ministre des Soins de longue durée
Leardi, Anthony (PC)	Essex	Deputy Government House Leader / Leader parlementaire adjoint du gouvernement
Lecce, Hon. / L'hon. Stephen (PC)	King—Vaughan	Minister of Energy and Electrification / Ministre de l'Énergie et de l'Électrification
Lumsden, Hon. / L'hon. Neil (PC)	Hamilton East—Stoney Creek / Hamilton-Est—Stoney Creek	Minister of Sport / Ministre du Sport
MacLeod, Lisa (PC)	Nepean	
Mamakwa, Sol (NDP)	Kiiwetinoong	Deputy Leader, Official Opposition / Chef adjoint de l'opposition officielle
Mantha, Michael (IND)	Algoma—Manitoulin	
Martin, Robin (PC)	Eglinton—Lawrence	
McCarthy, Hon. / L'hon. Todd J. (PC)	Durham	Minister of Public and Business Service Delivery and Procurement / Ministre des Services au public et aux entreprises et de l'Approvisionnement
McCrimmon, Karen (LIB)	Kanata—Carleton	

Member and Party / Député(e) et parti	Constituency / Circonscription	Other responsibilities / Autres responsabilités
McGregor, Hon. / L'hon. Graham (PC)	Brampton North / Brampton-Nord	Associate Minister of Auto Theft and Bail Reform / Ministre associé de la Lutte contre le vol d'automobiles et de la Réforme relative aux mises en liberté sous caution
McMahon, Mary-Margaret (LIB)	Beaches—East York	
Mulroney, Hon. / L'hon. Caroline (PC)	York—Simcoe	President of the Treasury Board / Présidente du Conseil du Trésor Minister of Francophone Affairs / Ministre des Affaires francophones
Oosterhoff, Hon. / L'hon. Sam (PC)	Niagara West / Niagara-Ouest	Associate Minister of Energy-Intensive Industries / Ministre associé des Industries à forte consommation d'énergie
Pang, Billy (PC)	Markham—Unionville	
Parsa, Hon. / L'hon. Michael (PC)	Aurora—Oak Ridges—Richmond Hill	Minister of Children, Community and Social Services / Ministre des Services à l'enfance et des Services sociaux et communautaires
Pasma, Chandra (NDP)	Ottawa West—Nepean / Ottawa-Ouest—Nepean	
Piccini, Hon. / L'hon. David (PC)	Northumberland—Peterborough South / Northumberland—Peterborough-Sud	Minister of Labour, Immigration, Training and Skills Development / Ministre du Travail, de l'Immigration, de la Formation et du Développement des compétences Deputy Government Whip / Whip adjointe du gouvernement
Pierre, Natalie (PC)	Burlington	
Pinsonneault, Steve (PC)	Lambton—Kent—Middlesex	
Pirie, Hon. / L'hon. George (PC)	Timmins	Minister of Mines / Ministre des Mines
Quinn, Hon. / L'hon. Nolan (PC)	Stormont—Dundas—South Glengarry	Minister of Colleges and Universities / Ministre des Collèges et Universités
Rae, Matthew (PC)	Perth—Wellington	
Rakocevic, Tom (NDP)	Humber River—Black Creek	
Rasheed, Kaleed (IND)	Mississauga East—Cooksville / Mississauga-Est—Cooksville	
Rickford, Hon. / L'hon. Greg (PC)	Kenora—Rainy River	Minister of Indigenous Affairs and First Nations Economic Reconciliation / Ministre des Affaires autochtones et de la Réconciliation économique avec les Premières Nations Minister of Northern Development / Ministre du Développement du Nord
Riddell, Brian (PC)	Cambridge	
Romano, Ross (PC)	Sault Ste. Marie	
Sabawy, Sheref (PC)	Mississauga—Erin Mills	
Sandhu, Amarjot (PC)	Brampton West / Brampton-Ouest	
Sarkaria, Hon. / L'hon. Prabmeet Singh (PC)	Brampton South / Brampton-Sud	Minister of Transportation / Ministre des Transports
Sarrazin, Stéphane (PC)	Glengarry—Prescott—Russell	
Sattler, Peggy (NDP)	London West / London-Ouest	
Saunderson, Brian (PC)	Simcoe—Grey	
Schreiner, Mike (GRN)	Guelph	
Scott, Laurie (PC)	Haliburton—Kawartha Lakes—Brock	
Shamji, Adil (LIB)	Don Valley East / Don Valley-Est	
Shaw, Sandy (NDP)	Hamilton West—Ancaster—Dundas / Hamilton-Ouest—Ancaster—Dundas	
Skelly, Donna (PC)	Flamborough—Glanbrook	Deputy Speaker / Vice-Présidente Chair of the Committee of the Whole House / Présidente du Comité plénier de l'Assemblée législative
Smith, Dave (PC)	Peterborough—Kawartha	
Smith, David (PC)	Scarborough Centre / Scarborough-Centre	
Smith, Hon. / L'hon. Graydon (PC)	Parry Sound—Muskoka	Minister of Natural Resources / Ministre des Richesses naturelles
Smith, Laura (PC)	Thornhill	
Stevens, Jennifer (Jennie) (NDP)	St. Catharines	
Stiles, Marit (NDP)	Davenport	Leader, Official Opposition / Chef de l'opposition officielle Leader, New Democratic Party of Ontario / Chef du Nouveau Parti démocratique de l'Ontario
Surma, Hon. / L'hon. Kinga (PC)	Etobicoke Centre / Etobicoke-Centre	Minister of Infrastructure / Ministre de l'Infrastructure
Tabuns, Peter (NDP)	Toronto—Danforth	
Tangri, Hon. / L'hon. Nina (PC)	Mississauga—Streetsville	Associate Minister of Small Business / Ministre associée des Petites Entreprises
Taylor, Monique (NDP)	Hamilton Mountain / Hamilton-Mountain	
Thanigasalam, Hon. / L'hon. Vijay (PC)	Scarborough—Rouge Park	Associate Minister of Housing / Ministre associé du Logement

Member and Party / Député(e) et parti	Constituency / Circonscription	Other responsibilities / Autres responsabilités
Thompson, Hon. / L'hon. Lisa M. (PC)	Huron—Bruce	Minister of Rural Affairs / Ministre des Affaires rurales
Tibollo, Hon. / L'hon. Michael A. (PC)	Vaughan—Woodbridge	Associate Minister of Mental Health and Addictions / Ministre associé délégué à la Santé mentale et à la Lutte contre les dépendances
Triantafilopoulos, Effie J. (PC)	Oakville North—Burlington / Oakville-Nord—Burlington	
Vanthof, John (NDP)	Timiskaming—Cochrane	Opposition House Leader / Leader parlementaire de l'opposition officielle
Vaugeois, Lise (NDP)	Thunder Bay—Superior North / Thunder Bay—Supérieur-Nord	
Wai, Daisy (PC)	Richmond Hill	
West, Jamie (NDP)	Sudbury	
Williams, Hon. / L'hon. Charmaine A. (PC)	Brampton Centre / Brampton-Centre	Associate Minister of Women's Social and Economic Opportunity / Ministre associée des Perspectives sociales et économiques pour les femmes
Wong-Tam, Kristyn (NDP)	Toronto Centre / Toronto-Centre	
Yakabuski, John (PC)	Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke	