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Lundi
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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

Monday 1 May 2017

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

Lundi 1^{er} mai 2017

The House met at 1030.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Good morning. Please join me in prayer.

Prayers.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): This being the first sitting Monday of the month, I ask everyone to join in the singing of the Canadian national anthem.

Singing of O Canada.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Mr. Rick Nicholls: It's my pleasure this morning to introduce Mr. Jon Reyes. He's an MLA, from St. Norbert, from the Manitoba Legislative Assembly. He's a 10-year veteran of the Canadian Armed Forces and he's also the special envoy for military affairs. With him is his son Miguel Reyes. Welcome to the Ontario Legislature.

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: I'm delighted to welcome guests of page captain Emma Yu: her mother, Terry Yu, and her sister Debbi Yu. And also all of those who are here for Children's Mental Health Week.

Hon. Michael Coteau: Today is the start of Child and Youth Mental Health Week. I would like to thank parents, youth and families here and across the province who have taken time to join us today.

I'd also like to welcome Children's Mental Health Ontario's chief executive officer, Kim Moran, and many of her guests who are joining us here today; and the New Mentality Youth Action Committee, who are here with us today. Welcome to the Legislature.

Mr. Jeff Yurek: I would like to wish all doctors a happy Doctors' Day, especially those here today: Dr. Rachel Forman and Dr. Greg Athaide.

Nancy Dale and Gibb McGugan are here as well. Welcome.

Hon. Helena Jaczek: Please help me welcome the grade 10 students from St. Augustine Catholic High School, from the great riding of Oak Ridges–Markham.

Mr. Todd Smith: I would like to introduce some members from Niagara-on-the-Lake Hydro who are here with us this morning: Jim Huntingdon, Jim Ryan, Nick Miller and Tim Curtis, the chair. Welcome to Queen's Park, gentlemen.

Hon. Kathryn McGarry: In the members' east gallery this morning, I want to introduce my youngest son, Declan McGarry. Can you stand up, Declan?

Hon. Kevin Daniel Flynn: Here today for the launch of Children's Mental Health Week, we've got Michele Sparling, who is the chair of Parents for Children's Mental Health, and Rachel Sparling, her daughter. Brian

Hansell is here, president of the Paul Hansell Foundation. Jim Hogarth, the president of the Provincial Building and Construction Trades Council of Ontario, and his wife, Joan, are joining us here today too.

Miss Monique Taylor: It's always a pleasure to welcome the executive director of Children's Mental Health Ontario, Kim Moran, to the House. Welcome to Queen's Park.

Mr. Grant Crack: Good morning. It's my pleasure to welcome to Queen's Park, for the first time, my son, Calvin Crack, who is here with us today.

Ms. Soo Wong: On behalf of Minister Albanese, MPP for York South–Weston, I would like to welcome Yorktown Family Services and the executive director, Suzette Arruda-Santos, to the Legislature for Children's Mental Health Week; and also my good friend Jennifer Churchill, the CEO of the association of children's treatment centres. Welcome to Queen's Park.

Hon. Eric Hoskins: Mr. Speaker, I also want to acknowledge that today, May 1, is Doctors' Day. I want to congratulate and thank all of the tens of thousands of doctors across this province for the hard work they do every day, day in and day out.

Ms. Sophie Kiwala: I would like to extend a warm welcome to Dr. Jan Kasperski, the CEO of the Ontario Psychological Association. Welcome to Queen's Park.

M^{me} France Gélinas: I too would like to wish everyone a happy Doctors' Day. I would like to welcome to the House Dr. Rachel Forman and Dr. Greg Athaide, as well as Nancy Dale and Gibb McGugan from the OMA. Welcome to Queen's Park.

Hon. Tracy MacCharles: Good morning, Speaker. On behalf of my colleague the MPP for Ajax–Pickering, I want to welcome the guests of page captain Charlene Rocha: her mother, Nedenia Rocha, her father, Cilbur Rocha, her grandmother Bertha Rocha, her aunt Irene Rocha, and her cousin Joshua Rocha. Welcome to Queen's Park today.

WEARING OF PINS

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Point of order: the member from Elgin–Middlesex–London.

Mr. Jeff Yurek: Thank you very much, Speaker. I seek unanimous consent for all parties to wear the buttons provided by the Ontario Association of Speech-Language Pathologists and Audiologists to highlight May as hearing and speech month.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Elgin–Middlesex–London is seeking unanimous consent

to wear the ribbons—is it ribbons or buttons?—the buttons that have been distributed. Do we agree? Agreed.

WEARING OF RIBBONS

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The Minister of Children and Youth Services on a point of order.

Hon. Michael Coteau: I believe you'll find that we have unanimous consent that all members be permitted to wear green ribbons in recognition of Children's Mental Health Week.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The Minister of Children and Youth Services is seeking unanimous consent to wear the ribbons for children's mental health. Do we agree? Agreed.

RICHARD SHIU

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I want the members to know that starting today, and on the first sitting day of each month, I'm inviting assembly employees who have retired or shortly will be retiring to be in the Speaker's gallery and have their service to the assembly recognized.

In that regard, I ask all members to join me in welcoming and thanking, in the Speaker's gallery, Richard Shiu. Everyone will—

Applause.

1040

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I just learned a lesson. I've got to do the preamble first and then introduce him.

Anyway, everyone will know Richard as a loyal and long-serving member of the dining room staff. Richard began working in the dining room in 1996 and has very recently taken his retirement. Joining Richard is his wife, Rita. Please join me in thanking Richard for 21 years of service to the assembly. Thank you, Richard.

Applause.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Simcoe-Grey on a point of order.

Mr. Jim Wilson: Yes, a point of order, Mr. Speaker: I seek unanimous consent to move a motion without notice regarding Bill 114, An Act to provide for Anti-Racism Measures.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Simcoe-Grey is seeking unanimous consent to put forward a motion without notice. Do we agree? I heard a no.

ROBERT DYNEROWICZ

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member for Kitchener-Conestoga on a point of order.

Mr. Michael Harris: Yes, a point of order, Speaker: I believe you will find we have unanimous consent that we observe a moment of silence in remembrance of Canadian Armed Forces sergeant Robert J. Dyerowicz, from Kitchener, who tragically lost his life in a military training exercise.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member for Kitchener-Conestoga is seeking unanimous consent for a moment of silence. Do we agree? Agreed.

I ask everyone to please rise and observe a moment of silence in respect to the fallen soldier.

The House observed a moment's silence.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): It is therefore now time for question period.

ORAL QUESTIONS

ONTARIO BUDGET

Mr. Patrick Brown: My question is for the Premier. The government still claims they balanced the books, but all with typical Liberal math. Mr. Speaker, something doesn't—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Order, please.

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): That's not helpful when I'm trying to get attention for your leader. Thank you.

Please put your question.

Mr. Patrick Brown: But all with typical Liberal math—something doesn't add up.

What do you get when you add in \$1.8 billion from double-counted cap-and-trade money; \$500 million in pension assets, despite the Auditor General's advice not to count it; \$1.5 billion in double-counted federal transfer funds; \$450 million in land transfer taxes; and lastly, \$1 billion from the fire sale of Hydro One? What do you get, Mr. Speaker, when you add that all together? It's a \$5-billion operational deficit funded through cash grabs—

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I'm going to ask the member from Nepean-Carleton to withdraw, and I've made it clear I don't want that said.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: Withdraw.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Carry on.

Mr. Patrick Brown: Mr. Speaker, it is a \$5-billion operational deficit through cash grabs, pension assets and one-time and unusual revenue. Will the Premier come clean and admit to the House that the budget is not balanced?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Mr. Speaker, I'm very pleased to say that this is the first balanced budget in Ontario for nearly a decade. We worked very hard to eliminate the deficit. We knew that that was critical.

Our economy is in a very strong position in Ontario. We are leading the country in economic growth, but the reality is that people are still anxious. The foundation of a balanced budget actually gives us the opportunity to make investments that are needed in the province. A prime example of that is OHIP+, which allows us to invest in the people of this province and allows children and youth in this province, as of January 2018, to have free medication, because we know that if we can make

that investment and kids and young people can get access early to the medication they need, they will be healthier in the long term.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Patrick Brown: Back to the Premier: You know what else doesn't add up? The fact that the Wynne Liberals are adding another \$10 billion of debt. They say they have a balanced budget, but another reason the Liberals claim they have a balanced budget is because they're simply hiding debt elsewhere.

If this budget was truly balanced, we wouldn't be adding debt left, right and centre. But the Wynne Liberals are adding \$10 billion worth of debt to the most indebted province in the world. We owe more than any province or state, and it's about to get worse.

Can the Premier explain why we're adding so much debt this year, \$10 billion, if it's actually a balanced budget?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I absolutely understand that the Leader of the Opposition has no interest in and no plan to make capital investment in this province: no interest in it and no apparent understanding that without investment in capital, without investment in transit, in roads and in bridges across the province—he was at the city of Toronto today, talking about the city of Toronto, and didn't make one commitment to invest one cent in transit in Toronto.

We have billions of dollars that are being invested in Toronto, in Ottawa, in Kitchener-Waterloo, in Hamilton, around the province, because we know that those investments are critical to the economic viability and growth of those communities and the province overall.

We are proud of our balanced budget, the first one in a decade in Ontario. It allows us to have a foundation upon which to invest—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Be seated, please. Thank you.

Final supplementary.

Mr. Patrick Brown: Back to the Premier: This myth of a balanced budget didn't trick everyone, didn't confuse everyone. Just look at what Kelly McParland had to say in the National Post: "The budget claims to be 'balanced' even though debt will rise another \$26.4 billion this fiscal year. Debt servicing costs will again eat up \$1 billion a month." He added, "Billions of dollars in expenditures for capital projects are kept off the books; billions more in borrowing is shoved into the future; one-off asset sales like the Hydro One sell-off are used to make the numbers look better than they are." That's from the National Post.

Mr. Speaker, clearly this budget is not balanced. My question to the Premier: Is playing with the numbers, is fudging the numbers, really worth hurting the long-term future—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I'm on the edge with that. Just keep it away from there, please.

Premier?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Minister of Finance.

Hon. Charles Sousa: Let me be clear: We balanced the budget this year, next year and the year after that.

This is coming from a party who increased debt by 53% when they were in power as a province during the good times. This member himself voted in the largest deficit in our country's history: \$55 billion. He doubled debt during the time he was there.

I'll read a quote from an independent source, a rating agency. They said the following: "The government has, to its credit, outperformed its targets each year. Efforts to constrain wages and limit spending growth in key program areas kept the plan on track initially while the province has benefited from strong economic growth and, more recently, some one-off measures." That's DBRS. It goes on to say, "The net debt-to-GDP ratio is seen falling for a third straight year at 37.5% in 2016-17, and Ontario aims to ease the"—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you. New question.

CITY OF TORONTO

Mr. Patrick Brown: My question is for the Premier. This morning, I sat down with Mayor Tory to discuss the Liberal government's 2017 budget. We both agreed on one important fact: A Premier who got elected on the promise that she would fight for the city of Toronto has clearly turned her back on this great city.

The Liberals have ignored almost every promise the Premier made to the city of Toronto. Instead, they sent down a minister to say John Tory had crossed the line. Standing up for the city of Toronto isn't crossing the line. It's honouring the promises they made, which they have broken to the city of Toronto.

1050

So my question, Mr. Speaker, is, when is this Premier going to honour the commitments she made and make sure we actually support the city of Toronto?

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Be seated, please. Premier?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker—

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Stop the clock. The member from Prince Edward-Hastings will withdraw.

Mr. Todd Smith: Withdraw.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): And it's not to be done again.

Carry on.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Let me first say that I have a very strong working relationship with mayors across this province. I work with them. I go to their gatherings. I listen to their concerns. I believe that the municipal level of government is extremely important to the well-being of the whole province.

I meet with Mayor Tory on a regular basis, so let me just talk about the ways in which we have invested and

supported Toronto. There's no government in the history of this province that has invested more in housing and transit in the city of Toronto. Also, let me note that we have earmarked \$30 billion more for infrastructure in the province, and a large proportion of that will go to the city of Toronto over the next decade for future projects. I'll speak more in my supplementary.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Patrick Brown: Back to the Premier: As John Tory said, what happened 10 years ago doesn't do much for the future. Listing off highlight reels doesn't help with the immediate infrastructure needs of the city of Toronto.

Now, one very serious example Mayor Tory raised was the stories about people living in Toronto Community Housing who, when they get convicted of a crime, when these people are jailed, are allowed to jump the queue. We have 82,000 people on the waiting list for Toronto Community Housing, and someone who is a convicted criminal can jump the queue over those families. That is outrageous. I don't understand how this government can continue to support allowing violent criminals and drug dealers to jump the queue over the most vulnerable in our city. This is shameful.

Mayor Tory and city council have made this request of the province. Yes or no: Will you stop this practice? Will you allow the province to make sure convicted criminals don't get to jump the queue for social housing?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Minister of Housing.

Hon. Chris Ballard: Thank you for that very interesting question, because it is factually incorrect. I am so disappointed that the Leader of the Opposition wouldn't at least check his facts before he stood up today and spread that falsehood.

Speaker, here is how it works—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I will offer the minister a warning as much as I did for the leader. Stay away from there. Carry on.

Hon. Chris Ballard: The only legislation, the only regulation that this province puts in place is that victims of domestic violence get priority, not what the Leader of the Opposition is saying. It's absolutely wrong. Get the facts straight.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Stop the clock. Be seated, please.

Final supplementary?

Mr. Patrick Brown: Again to the Premier—and the Liberal government seems to be oblivious to the fact that the entire city council and Mayor John Tory made this request, that the wording in the provincial legislation needs to be changed. Right now, because of the word “disadvantaged,” you're allowed to jump the queue—a convicted drug dealer or anyone who has committed a violent offence. The entire Toronto city council has passed this request—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Stop the clock. You really confuse my job, when I'm trying to get them to be quiet and you continue.

Carry on.

Mr. Patrick Brown: Since I can't get an answer on convicted criminals being allowed to jump the queue, Toronto Community Housing has one other request, and that's natural gas purchasing. Because of the way the province has set it up, Toronto pays \$6.3 million more. Mayor Tory has a legitimate ask: Will the Premier at least acknowledge that, if she's not going to acknowledge—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you.

Minister?

Hon. Chris Ballard: You know, I thought I gave a fairly clear answer, and I'll give it again: The province of Ontario gives—

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Huron—Bruce.

Hon. Chris Ballard: The only mandate the province of Ontario gives is that those people fleeing domestic violence get priority in this housing. I can say that Ontario has a long-standing commitment to tackling—

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Nepean—Carleton.

Hon. Chris Ballard: —homelessness and ending chronic homelessness.

Speaker, I'll say that again: The only regulation that we have in place is that those people fleeing domestic violence get priority.

With regard to natural gas bulk purchases—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you. New question.

PHARMACARE

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Speaker, in the Premier's political response to the pharmacare issue, she left out 10 million Ontarians. Why?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: What OHIP+ does—and I said last week that I'm very glad that the leader of the third party and her caucus are on the same page in terms of the need for pharmacare support. I think that the more voices that we have leading the charge across the country, joining with our Minister of Health who has been talking about this and working with his colleagues across the country—the more voices we have joining in that chorus, the better off we are.

Instead of 125 medications, we made a decision to cover 4,400 medications, including cancer medications and medications for rare diseases, for all children and young people 24 years or younger. That was the path that we took. It will make a huge difference in children's lives.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Ms. Andrea Horwath: One in three people in this province have no drug coverage through their work. This situation is getting worse today, not better. Ontario needs

a universal pharmacare plan that will ensure those people get the medication that they need, and yet, in the Premier's political response to this issue, she chose to leave them out.

Under the Premier's response, people will continue to max out their credit cards, being forced to split their pills in half or go without the medication that they need. Why?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Minister of Health and Long-Term Care.

Hon. Eric Hoskins: I understand the frustration of the third party, but I find it remarkable that I have yet to find another third-party stakeholder or a patient interest group that actually shares their view, because this pharmacare program has been lauded and celebrated and applauded across this country. In fact, even the individuals who were involved in helping the NDP create their income-tested pharmacare proposal have supported this. In fact—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Minister.

Hon. Eric Hoskins: Steve Morgan, one of the experts in this country that was utilized—in fact, he stood right next to the leader of the third party saying, “Bravo. A first-dollar, single-payer pharmacare plan for children,” recognizing that this is critically important. That was his response, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Final supplementary?

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Speaker, I'll give the Minister of Health a little bit more time to read our plan, because in fact he's got it wrong, but that's okay. He would rather spin than be upfront about what's in our plan. But let me say, for the record—

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Stop the clock. Minister of Tourism, Culture and Sport.

1100

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Let me say for the record that I do agree that young people need their prescriptions filled, but maybe their parents do too. I believe that their parents need their prescriptions filled too. So can the Premier tell the people who work hard but don't have workplace benefits why she thinks they should have to continue to empty their wallets and reach for their credit cards to pay for their prescriptions or, worse, go without those prescriptions, as they do right now?

Hon. Eric Hoskins: I would hope that we can all celebrate this proposal that's in the budget. This is the biggest transformation in medicare in this province probably since the beginning of medicare. It's a giant leap forward towards universal pharmacare for all Ontarians. It's providing, I believe, that national leadership that the Premier has worked so diligently on over the last number of years, and it means that, come January 1, four million children and youth will be able to, with their parents, go into pharmacies and get absolutely free access to 4,400 medications, including cancer drugs, including drugs for rare diseases, at absolutely no cost to them. I would hope that a progressive party like the NDP would get up with us and celebrate this incredible visionary transformation of OHIP.

PHARMACARE

Ms. Andrea Horwath: My next question is also for the Premier. Nearly a quarter of Canadians between the ages of 30 and 60 are dealing with high blood pressure. The largest cohort of people living with HIV and AIDS are aged 30 to 40, not under 24. The gathering of statistics for people with high cholesterol doesn't even start until age 40.

The NDP plan for universal pharmacare would give all of those people coverage for the medications that they need. In fact, it would cover every single Ontarian, because that's what is needed. That's what's needed. Why has the Premier decided to leave all of these people out of her plan?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Well, as I said, the leader of the third party and I have come at this from a different direction. What we have done is we have said, for young people 24 years or younger, we would cover all of the medications that they might need—4,400 medications. The leader of the third party chose to bring forward a proposal that would have been much, much narrower.

We can try to stir up a fight between us on which plan is better, but the reality is we both know that a national pharmacare plan that covers everyone in the country is actually what is needed in this country. In the absence of that, we have taken a huge step forward so that all children and youth 24 years or younger will have all of their medications covered—4,400 medications—right in January 2018, so as quickly as possible.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: What the Premier refuses to admit and the minister refuses to acknowledge is that the vast majority of those 4,400 drugs will never be utilized by the vast majority of young people in the province of Ontario. However, a truly, truly universal pharmacare plan will—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Stop the clock. Order.

Interjections.

Mr. Mike Colle: Tell it to those little kids who will have a decent guarantee of health.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Eglinton–Lawrence, second time.

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Hamilton East–Stoney Creek.

Please finish.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: A truly universal pharmacare plan will create savings that could range between \$800 million and \$1.9 billion immediately. These are real savings that are backed up by independent experts. Why has the Premier chosen a response to the pharmacare issue that minimizes the benefits to Ontario's economy?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Minister of Health and Long-Term Care.

Hon. Eric Hoskins: I have to admit that I am profoundly disappointed at the NDP's position. This

shouldn't be about which program is of greater benefit; this should be about the important announcement that was made last week, which is the biggest transformation of medicare in the history of this province.

Mr. Speaker, I learned of a mother of a family with a teenage daughter who has cancer. She indicated that from the time this program comes into place to when this young person becomes an adult and gets a prosperous life, she estimates that she's going to save \$20,000. She said that that \$20,000 represents her daughter's college education.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Final supplementary?

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Well, Speaker, I'm profoundly disappointed that 10 million Ontarians are not going to have their prescription drugs covered here in this province—profoundly disappointed—because prescription drugs are unaffordable for millions of Ontarians. Once again, we are reminded that these Ontarians are just not the priority for this Premier.

So let me be clear to all Ontarians: I don't agree, and I am committed to bringing forward universal, comprehensive pharmacare for the people of this province, from age one to age 65, a plan that will cover all Ontarians from the outset. Will this Premier actually join me in supporting a plan that does cover all Ontarians, as Ontarians would expect a Premier to do?

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Be seated, please. Thank you.

Minister?

Hon. Eric Hoskins: Our Premier has been advocating for national pharmacare for years. I know it's recently that that leader of the third party has joined our efforts for national pharmacare, but Nav Persaud from St. Mike's, one of the leaders across this country on pharmacare, said on Metro Morning last week, "This announcement is potentially historic. It indicates that the government is taking action to address the fact that millions of people who don't take medications because they can't afford them will."

Danielle Martin, another leader on this, said, "There are real people who are going to be significantly helped by this." Maybe the member opposite doesn't think that children and youth are real people deserving of pharmacare.

And Natalie Mehra of the Ontario Health Coalition—an individual I know that the member opposite knows well—said, "This is an amazing announcement that will provide national leadership.... This is a great first step in the right direction."

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Stop the clock. Be seated, please.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Start the clock.

New question.

CONSUMER PROTECTION

Mr. Victor Fedeli: My question is for the Premier. Home Capital is one of the largest non-bank mortgage

lenders in Ontario. The Premier would know them as being under investigation by the Ontario Securities Commission. They've seen a withdrawal of hundreds of millions of dollars from savings accounts, and their shares tumbled 65%.

Last week, they received a \$2-billion bailout from the Healthcare of Ontario Pension Plan, or HOOPP. Seeing as one of the players is under a provincial government regulator's investigation and the other player manages the pension funds of Ontario's health workers, we have questions.

I ask the Premier: Was the government aware of this deal, and if so, when?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Minister of Finance.

Hon. Charles Sousa: Our first priority is always consumers and investor protection. The Ontario Securities Commission is reviewing and assessing the circumstances around Home Capital. We understand that there is a case before it now.

FSCO, our financial securities regulator, has engaged as well, because of the mortgage component of it, and then there's the investor component of it which the Ontario Securities Commission is involved with.

We have actually been doing a review for over a year and a half now, referencing to increased consumer protection and ensure that full disclosure is made for those consumers and investors, to appreciate the degrees of risk that are involved in those circumstances. But it is before review, and that's where it is.

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The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Victor Fedeli: Back to the Premier. The board chair of Home Capital is Kevin Smith. He earns \$357,000 a year and has some \$1.5 million in stock. But that's only his part-time job. The Premier would know him better as Kevin Smith, CEO of St. Joseph's health centre, his other part-time job, where he's paid \$720,000 a year. He was also a board member of HOOPP.

Now, HOOPP's CEO was Jim Keohane, who also happens to sit on the board of Home Capital.

Speaker, you truly can't tell the players without a program. The apparent conflicts are beyond description. After the bailout, which helped restore the share value, each resigned from the other's board.

I ask the Premier: Is it right for executives of a lender to also be making decisions as a borrower?

Hon. Charles Sousa: As the member may appreciate, he knows that Home Capital Group is incorporated federally and is regulated by the federal financial institutions. FSCO, which is the province's, is confident that the Office of the Superintendent of Financial Institutions, or OSFI, is carefully monitoring the situation, as well.

We're monitoring any impact on mortgage availability in the marketplace. But again, the transparency, the oversight and consumer protection are paramount. It's why we've taken the initiatives that we have to strengthen FSCO's regulation, also moving more of that to the OSC to ensure that our consumers and our investors are protected and are fully disclosed. It is before review, Mr.

Speaker, and we're trying to protect the interests of the consumers here.

CITY OF TORONTO

Ms. Andrea Horwath: My question is for the Premier. Toronto set out some clear and reasonable priorities for the Ontario budget. People living in Toronto Community Housing need help, and the mayor asked that the province join with the city to provide that help. People relying on the TTC need an improved transit system and the mayor asked the province to join the city to help provide that system.

Now, I understand what the mayor is talking about, and when we met I was clear: An NDP government will be there for Toronto. The Premier ignored the people of Toronto in last week's budget. As the mayor told people living in community housing, "The Ontario government is not helping to get your housing fixed." Why isn't the Premier doing what's needed to fix affordable housing in Toronto and communities around the province?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Mr. Speaker, let me just say once again that we are making billions of dollars of investments in Toronto. We have uploaded literally billions of dollars of costs from municipalities, including Toronto and around the province.

But let me just talk specifically about housing, because I am concerned about social housing around the province and I am concerned about social housing in the city of Toronto. As a Toronto member, I know first-hand the challenges of Toronto Community Housing, but those challenges are found in other parts of the province, as well.

For Toronto, what this budget does is it provides \$130 million for social housing repair, \$340 million for prevention of homelessness and another \$130 million for affordable housing. A specific ask that the mayor had which was about provincial land; we have acquiesced provincial land worth up to \$100 million to build 2,000 new affordable rental housing units. Those are all supports for housing in the city of Toronto.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Ms. Andrea Horwath: The mayor told Torontonians that the city got "a big goose egg when it came to social housing repairs." Social housing stock is crumbling, and concern doesn't fix it; funding fixes it.

But that wasn't all. To quote the mayor, "The most crucial needs of the people of the city of Toronto were not met by this budget." The Premier "and her government had a chance to stand up for Toronto on transit.... Instead ... they turned their backs." When I met with Mayor Tory, we talked about the importance of the province supporting 50% of the TTC's operating costs. Why is the Premier saying no to immediate improvements to Toronto's transit system—

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Stop the clock. I'll come back to the leader for that last part to make sure that she has an opportunity to say it.

The member from Eglinton–Lawrence is warned.
Carry on, please.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Why is the Premier saying no to immediate improvements to Toronto's transit and transit systems across the province?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: The chatter that you might have heard behind me, Mr. Speaker, is from members who are not from the city of Toronto, who have watched the funding that has flowed to the city of Toronto, to Hamilton, to Kitchener–Waterloo and to Ottawa.

Let me just talk about the money that is going into the city of Toronto: \$5.3 billion for the Eglinton Crosstown; \$1.2 billion for the Finch West LRT; \$3.7 billion for GO RER within Toronto; \$870 million for the Toronto–York Spadina subway; \$1.48 billion for the Scarborough subway. And on future projects, which is I know what the mayor has been talking about, \$150 million for planning and design work on the Toronto relief line, a line and a project for which there is no committed city money at this point; and \$55 million for the same work on the Yonge North subway.

No government has put more money into transit in the city of Toronto than ours.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Be seated, please. Thank you.

New question?

ONTARIO BUDGET

Mr. Shafiq Qadri: On behalf of my constituents of Etobicoke North, my question is to the Minister of Finance, the Honourable Charles Sousa.

Speaker, I can tell you that all of my colleagues on this side of the House are, in fact, quite proud of Premier Wynne and Minister of Finance Sousa for the Ontario 2017-18 budget. In fact, our growth has outpaced Canada and all other G7 countries for the last three years.

On the ground, that means the greatest expansion for prescription health care in a generation; \$1 billion for transit just in my own riding; \$400 million for Etobicoke General Hospital; we've created 700,000 new jobs since the recession; and our unemployment rate has been below the national average for two straight years.

When the global economic recession hit, we made a deliberate choice to invest in Ontarians and the things that matter to them most. Will the finance minister please itemize more of what we're doing for Ontarians in the 2017-18 Ontario budget?

Hon. Charles Sousa: I would like to thank the member from Etobicoke North for the question and his advocacy in this regard.

I'm happy to reaffirm that the 2017 budget is a balanced budget, and it's the first one since the global recession. I would also like to add, again, that not only have we balanced this year, but we're on track to do so again next year and the year after that.

A balanced budget means that the government will not be borrowing to pay for operating costs, because all of it now goes directly to invest in capital—long-term capital assets. The result is more money available for things that

matter to the people of Ontario, like free prescriptions for children under 24 or free tuition.

When the global recession hit, we set out a realistic and responsible approach to return to balance in 2017-18 and, last week, we delivered on that commitment.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Shafiq Qaadri: OHIP+, new schools, new hospitals or hospital expansions, free tuition for modest-income Ontarians, a 25% cut in hydro rates, more child care, eight stops of the Finch LRT in my riding alone: Minister, on behalf of the people of Etobicoke North, muito obrigado.

Families in Toronto will benefit from these important investments. We are already making the largest infrastructure investment in our province's history, and Toronto is, in fact, receiving very significant funding support not only for the items that I've listed, but, of course, for affordable housing, as well as transit.

Could the Minister of Finance please comment on how we continue to build up the city of Toronto?

Hon. Charles Sousa: Again, I would like to thank the member from Etobicoke North for his question and his language skills.

It's important to remember that no provincial government in Ontario's history has invested more in the city of Toronto. We've increased provincial uploads, meaning that the city of Toronto will save \$530 million this year alone. In fact, since 2003, we've contributed over \$10 billion in transit projects like the Eglinton Crosstown and the downtown relief line that we're supporting.

This year's budget includes another \$130 million for social housing repair, \$340 million for homelessness prevention and \$130 million for affordable housing. We're also using provincial lands worth up to \$100 million to build 2,000 new, affordable housing units in the city.

The city has asked us for new revenue tools, and we've responded. Our balanced budget will give the city the ability to implement a vacancy tax on empty homes, as well as a hotel tax. In fact, to ensure the people of Toronto benefit from predictable, ongoing funding, we've also doubled the share of gas revenue to the city.

On this side of the House—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you.

New question?

CHILDREN'S MENTAL HEALTH

Mr. Jeff Yurek: My question is to the Minister of Finance. Children and youth are experiencing a mental health crisis because they can't get the treatment they need when and where they need it.

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The Canadian Institute for Health Information released new data this morning that indicates that children, youth and families facing a mental health crisis are ending up in hospital ERs and in-patient units at disturbing rates. Since 2006, there's been a 63% increase in ER visits and a staggering 67% increase in hospitalizations for children and youth seeking treatment for mental health and addic-

tions. The new statistics are trending in the wrong direction compared to 2015. This government is failing our children.

My question to the Minister of Finance: Did the Minister of Children and Youth Services request funding in this year's budget to deal with the eroding capacity in community-based children's mental health centres?

Hon. Charles Sousa: Minister of Children and Youth Services.

Hon. Michael Coteau: I want to thank the member opposite for the question. I also, again, want to recognize all of the advocates, parents, family members and staff who are working across this province to make sure that our children are positioned for success here in the province of Ontario.

When I first became the minister responsible for this file, I was given a mandate by the Premier to work with providers to transform the child and youth mental health system here in the province. We recognize, without question, that there's more work that needs to be done to improve the services that young people receive. We are facing challenges with wait times. We're facing challenges with service delivery. We're facing challenges with our funding model. Our agencies have said this, the Auditor General has said this, and we've accepted this. This is exactly why we're seizing the opportunity to give Ontarians a community-based mental health system for today and into the future.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Jeff Yurek: I'll take that as, "No, I did not ask the minister for any funding."

The data shows how the erosion of community services not only leaves children and youth unable to obtain the help they need but also strains our hospital resources. The data shows that the government's inaction endangers lives and costs the system \$175 million a year. Children's Mental Health Ontario estimates that the \$118 million the system needs annually could save \$1 billion in the long run, while ensuring children and youth receive the services and treatment they need.

Speaker, will the Minister of Finance explain why none of the new federal health transfer money for mental health initiatives was allotted to children and youth?

Hon. Michael Coteau: Minister of Health.

Hon. Eric Hoskins: The importance of this issue is part of the reason why we announced \$140 million towards mental health services, including access to cognitive behavioural therapy and supportive housing, and why we announced in Barrie 10 in-patient beds for children and youth mental health as well as a set of outpatient services.

This is precisely why OHIP+ is so important. We know that 70% of mental illness emerges during childhood. For the first time in this province, those children and those youth are going to have free access to the medicines that they need to deal with their mental illness.

HOSPITAL FUNDING

Mr. John Vanthof: My question is to the Premier. Ontario hospitals have been driven to the breaking point

by your government, and this budget won't undo the damage. Operating funding for hospitals is \$300 million short of what the hospitals say they needed. That means that our community hospitals will continue to be squeezed, patients will continue to be treated in hallways and northern and rural hospitals will continue to be forced to cut the services that people count on.

Why is this government continuing to refuse to fix the damage they've caused in our hospitals?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Minister of Health and Long-Term Care.

Hon. Eric Hoskins: Last year we invested \$1 billion in Ontario's hospitals. This past week, in our budget, we announced more than \$500 million or a 3.1% increase to the bottom line, that base funding in the operational costs of hospitals right across this province. That means that all Ontario hospitals are going to get a minimum increase of at least 2%. We reserved that extra part specifically so we could address those challenges that are faced by a number of hospitals across this province, whether that's in their ERs, whether that's bed capacity or a high level of population growth in their regions.

I would ask that the member opposite perhaps might want to speak to the Ontario Hospital Association, the OHA, with regard to their response to what is outlined in the budget.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. John Vanthof: Once again, back to the Premier: Hospital budgets have been frozen for years. A 2% increase is basically inflation. That's nothing to crow about. Giving inflationary costs to the base budget isn't exactly a huge gift. So the people who are in hallways and the surgeries that are being cancelled are not going to be corrected by simply an inflationary increase.

Why is this government refusing to acknowledge this problem?

Hon. Eric Hoskins: Mr. Speaker, Anthony Dale, the president and CEO of the Ontario Hospital Association, had this to say about our budget: "The government's significant investments in hospital capital"—because we added \$9 billion to the \$11 billion that's already there, for a total of \$20 billion over the next decade—"will help to support a sustainable health care system for the future."

With regard to the operational investments, "Today's investment in the health care sector is an acknowledgement of the capacity challenges that hospitals have been facing. It also signals a renewed commitment from government to expand and enhance access to care across the continuum."

Today's budget announcement, he goes on to say, "is an investment in patient care and will help maintain system stability and strengthen access to front-line services."

A 3.1%, or more than half-billion-dollar, addition to the half-billion that we increased by last year: That's more than \$1 billion in two years to our hospitals.

PHARMACARE

Mrs. Cristina Martins: My question is for the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care. Last week, our gov-

ernment introduced a budget which includes significant investments in health care. In fact, the 2017 budget includes an additional \$7 billion for the health care sector over the next three years to reduce wait times, provide access to care, and enhance the patient experience. But most importantly, this budget includes funding for priority health care services that will have a real impact for Ontario families. This budget invests in our hospitals, in long-term-care homes, in mental health and in our world-class health care professionals.

Mr. Speaker, there is one piece of this budget that stands out for me, as the member from Davenport, more than anything else. Youth and parents in my community are particularly excited about the new OHIP+ program. Can the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care please inform this House of the historic investment our government is making in Ontario's children and youth?

Hon. Eric Hoskins: Mr. Speaker, it truly is historic, and that's the way it is being described across this country.

Pharmacare for Ontarians and for Canadians is so vitally important, that issue of access to medicine. Come January 1—not some time deep into the future, potentially, but January 1, 2018—four million Ontarians, including the member from Niagara West—Glanbrook, four million children and youth under the age of 25, are going to be able to go into pharmacies with their parents, if they are under age, with a prescription from their health care provider, and receive, absolutely free of charge—no copayment, no annual deductible—access to 4,400 medications. That's drugs for cancer, Mr. Speaker, drugs for rare diseases. This is truly an historic moment in Ontario's history, and indeed in Canada's history.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mrs. Cristina Martins: Thank you, Minister, for that response, and thank you to the minister and the Premier for all their hard work and dedication in ensuring access to prescription medications for Ontario's children and youth. As the mother of two young boys, I know how important this access is.

This new program will make a tremendous difference for those families who struggle with poverty and social inequality. It's going to give these families and their children, in Davenport and across the whole province, a better opportunity to grow strong and healthy, and a chance at a brighter future. Most importantly, it is going to impact all of Ontario's children and youth. No matter the circumstances, no matter the socio-economic status of the child or their parents, all Ontarians under the age of 24 will benefit equally from this program.

Speaker, can the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care please share with this House the impact the program will have for Ontario families?

Hon. Eric Hoskins: Mr. Speaker, this is such an important advancement to medicare in this province. It's the biggest transformation, I would argue, in the history of the 51 years that medicare has existed nationally. It provides that national leadership. The Premier, by making this decision and showing such courage, is making that bold statement to the rest of the country that this can

be done. This must be done, Mr. Speaker. Access to medicine is one of the most fundamental issues of health equity. I'm proud to be in a cabinet and part of a caucus with a Premier that has such vision and courage and boldness—

Interjection.

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The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Hamilton East–Stoney Creek, second time.

Hon. Eric Hoskins: —to advance this visionary aspect of medicare. We're going to deliver it, come January 1, to four million children and youth under the age of 25.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Be seated, please. Be seated, please.

New question.

PHOTO RADAR

Mr. Michael Harris: My question is to the Premier. Will the Premier explain why she is allowing a return of photo radar back on major expressways and roads in the province of Ontario?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Minister of Transportation.

Hon. Steven Del Duca: The member opposite knows that in fact, with Bill 65, the Safer School Zones Act, this government is moving forward to help protect our most vulnerable road users, because municipalities and road safety partners asked us for this support in school zones and in community safety zones—and only in those municipalities that want to take advantage of the power that this legislation, if passed, would provide to them.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Michael Harris: If only the Wynne Liberals were focusing on protecting students with Bill 65. Of course, we certainly support enhanced student safety, but as we know, with this government, the devil is always in the details.

Instead of a road to student safety, they've chosen a sneaky route, placing us on a slippery slope to allow photo radar on potentially any municipal parkway, expressway—

Interjections.

Mr. Michael Harris: They're going to allow photo radar on potentially—

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Member from Etobicoke North, come to order.

Mr. Michael Harris: —any municipal parkway, expressway, road and highway right across the province. This Premier is quite literally bringing us back to the future and putting photo radar back to highways in Ontario.

Bill 65, the photo radar act, is in committee today. Will the Premier bring the focus back to school safety and stop her green light for speed-trap cameras on municipal highways and roads across the entire province?

Hon. Steven Del Duca: I think the more pertinent question for that member is, why has his party and his leader brought forward 214 amendments—procedural delays—that will help deny giving municipalities that choose to use the power the opportunity to protect our most vulnerable road users?

I have listened throughout all of the debates on Bill 65 and I've heard that member and I've heard the member from Nipissing and I've heard other members on that side of the Legislature literally stand up and, on the one hand, claim that they want to protect our most vulnerable road users, including those older pedestrians and school students who are on their way to their community and neighbourhood schools. And yet, when they had the chance to work constructively with us on Bill 65: more than 200 amendments to slow down the process.

The question isn't why won't we do something; the question is, why won't they help us protect Ontario—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Be seated, please.

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Kitchener–Conestoga.

New question.

HOSPITAL FUNDING

M^{me} France Gélinas: Ma question est pour la première ministre. Ontario hospitals are being hollowed out by decades of Liberal cuts and the Premier's budget does nothing to undo the damage already done. As the Ontario Health Coalition says, this budget "will not solve the dangerous levels of overcrowding faced by hospitals across Ontario. Patients will continue to wait on stretchers in hospital hallways."

Why is this Premier ignoring the overcrowding in our hospitals and basically turning her back on patient care?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Minister of Health and Long-Term Care.

Hon. Eric Hoskins: We're doing the opposite of that. We're doing the opposite of what the NDP did when they were in government, when they closed 24% of all acute beds in the province, when they closed 13% of all the mental health beds in this province.

What we are doing is adding \$9 billion to the \$11 billion that's already there, for \$20 billion in new dollars for capital improvements, new hospitals and redevelopments across this province. We've named some of those—

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Windsor.

Hon. Eric Hoskins: —including the hospital in Windsor and elsewhere.

But on the operational side, more than half a billion dollars on top of last year's roughly half a billion dollars. This year's budget alone is a 3.1% increase to operating funding. It means that every single hospital across this province is going to benefit and benefit substantially, Mr. Speaker.

We continue to make these investments to make sure that we've got the highest quality care.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

M^{me} France Gélinas: The Premier's budget fails our health care system. It fails our hospitals, and lets the crisis of hallway medicine continue. It fails patients who need care, and have to wait days to get it.

Today, hospitals are operating over 1,100 unfunded beds. More than 250 of those beds are in hallways and storage rooms that were never designed to provide patient care. Surgeries are still being cancelled today as we speak, and emergency room wait times are longer than they have been in a decade.

Why is this Premier ignoring the damage that she's done, and refusing to stop the cuts to our hospitals?

Hon. Eric Hoskins: Mr. Speaker, here's what the NDP apparently don't like about our budget. I already mentioned the extra \$9 billion on capital. They don't like the fact—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Order. Continue.

Hon. Eric Hoskins: They obviously don't like the fact that we're investing 11 billion more dollars over the next three years in our health care budget. We're investing \$500 million to support our hospitals to reduce wait times and expand capacity. They don't like the fact that we're investing \$140 million to expand access to mental health services over the next three years, or \$101 million over the next three years to support our dementia strategy. They don't like the fact that we're adding \$100 million to support the creation and expansion of inter-professional teams over the next three years, or \$80 million for long-term care, Mr. Speaker.

MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES

Ms. Ann Hoggarth: My question is for the Minister of Labour. Today, on May 1, we recognize the beginning of Mental Health Week. Mental Health Week is an annual national event to encourage people from all walks of life to learn, talk, reflect and engage with others on all issues relating to mental health.

People often associate the Ministry of Labour's health and safety initiatives with preventing and responding to physical injuries. However, more and more I'm hearing from constituents about the importance of mental health. Ontarians want to know that mental health will be taken seriously in their workplaces.

Can the minister please share with us what he is doing to ensure that our government is taking action to promote mental health in the workplace?

Hon. Kevin Daniel Flynn: Thank you for that excellent question. Speaker, this week we're going to recognize Mental Health Week. It reminds us of how much mental health affects us all. It affects us at home; it affects us at work as well. In fact, in Canada, as I speak today, about half a million Canadians are unable to go to work today because of either mental health concerns or illnesses.

Now, smart employers know if they look after their workers as well as their bottom line they become even more successful, so I'm excited to announce this week two new initiatives at the Ministry of Labour that are going to help promote the importance of mental health in our workplaces.

The first is a webinar. It's free, it's an hour long, and any organization in Ontario can avail itself of it. I'm also proud to let you know we're launching a new portal later this month. It's a one-stop shop containing free workplace mental health resources for all employers in this province.

We're investing in mental health. It's the right thing to do.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Ms. Ann Hoggarth: Thank you to the minister for his answer. I'm happy to hear how committed our government is to promoting mental health in the workplace.

We've come a long way on this issue of mental health. Everyone has a continued role to play. It's clear that we've made tremendous strides in advancing workplace mental health in Ontario.

Last Thursday, as part of the budget, further plans were announced to support workers across Ontario. Can the minister please give us further details on the recent plans that were unveiled?

Hon. Kevin Daniel Flynn: Thank you to the member for that excellent question again.

The proposed budget that we have before us is going to ensure finally that workers who develop chronic mental stress will be entitled to benefits that are provided by the WSIB.

Benefits for injured workers in this province, Speaker, have long been a priority of this government, but we know that workers don't just suffer physical injuries; there are invisible injuries as well, ones we can't see, and although they are unseen, they are still equally significant.

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Chronic mental stress has become a reality for far too many workers in this province. Those workers deserve the benefits and deserve the supports we're already providing to workers who suffer traumatic injuries and stress. This is one important step in our efforts to make this province the most psychologically safe place to work in the world.

We all need to do our part. We're committed to making sure that Ontarians are protected from chronic mental stress.

DISASTER RELIEF

Mr. John Yakabuski: My question is for the Minister of Municipal Affairs. The Bonnechere River system has experienced flooding at a level like we've never seen before. People living on Round Lake, Golden Lake and along the river have been engaged in a man-versus-nature battle for the last few weeks.

The amount of damage to homes and properties is extensive. The disaster recovery program now allows for

individuals to be compensated for some of their losses, but that program can only be triggered by the minister and his officials. I'm sending over the most recent copy of the Eganville Leader, and I'll provide a thumb drive of photos later so that the minister can see the damage for himself. There is no question in my mind that this spring's flooding event qualifies, and I would ask the minister to make that call as expeditiously as possible so that people can get on with their lives.

Hon. Bill Mauro: I want to thank the member for the question. I want to begin by saying I'm aware, clearly, of what's going on in Renfrew county. On the weekend, I want the member to know, I did reach out to the mayors: Mayor Visneskie from Killaloe, Hagarty and Richards; Mayor Gruntz from Brudenell, Lyndoch and Raglan; Mayor Love from Madawaska Valley; Mayor Farr, North Algoma Wilberforce; Mayor Murphy from Bonnechere Valley; and Mayor LeMay from Pembroke. I reached at least five of them. The goal in reaching out to them was to ensure, as best I was able to discern from our conversations, that those municipalities and those mayors were receiving the assistance and the information they needed to convey back to their constituents as they all deal with this tragedy, this major environmental issue that's going on.

It sounds to me like they're getting the benefit of the information out of the Kingston office. They are well prepared to speak to their constituents.

In the supplementary, I'm happy to provide a bit more information for the member in terms of the program, how it works and when, if ever, it gets activated.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. John Yakubuski: Minister, I recognize there is a process and I appreciate you reaching out to local officials, and the officials from your ministry who were in the riding yesterday. But people can't wait. They need to know that their government will be there when disaster strikes.

It rained heavily over the weekend and another downpour is expected today, with heavy rains later in the week. This is only going to increase not only the financial losses, but the level of frustration that people are feeling as well. I firmly believe that once the minister has the opportunity to review the data, he will agree with me and local municipal leaders that this spring's flooding warrants the enacting of the disaster recovery program.

I emphasize once again that this is an event of historical proportions along the Bonnechere River. I ask the minister to recognize this as a disaster as quickly as possible. Can we have that commitment?

Hon. Bill Mauro: Let me first of all thank the member for his advocacy on behalf of his constituents.

The way the program will work is that the ministry folks on the ground make the assessment. They cannot do that assessment until the waters have receded so they are able to see and determine exactly what has occurred. Once they've been able to gather that data to make that assessment, they will then make a recommendation to me as the Minister of Municipal Affairs. Based upon what

they provide back to me, we will then go forward and make a recommendation on whether or not to activate that program. Unfortunately, until the water has receded, it's not possible for the ministry staff to do their work.

There is a possibility there for people on the private side to get assistance, possibly. Again, that requires the work of the people on the ground. There's a second component to the program that deals with municipal infrastructure. But again, the best I can do for the member in terms of his advocacy for his constituents is to let him know that the water has to recede before the ministry can do its work and make a recommendation back to me. Once I receive that, we'll expedite the process as quickly as we can.

HOSPITAL FUNDING

Ms. Catherine Fife: My question is to the Premier. Mr. Szillat is a retired senior from Waterloo who is living in pain. He survived cancer and now he needs two surgeries: a knee replacement and back surgery.

Mr. Szillat first met with a surgeon 15 months ago. He doesn't even know when his first surgical consult on his knees will be, but as of December 2016, it is a 413-day wait between consultation and surgery in Waterloo region. He continues to wait to find out how long he'll be waiting for surgery.

While he waits, his situation gets worse. Mr. Szillat is trying to lose weight to qualify for back surgery, but because of his knee issues he has reduced mobility, which affects his entire health.

Speaker, Mr. Szillat is in pain. After nine years of Liberal cuts to hospital funding and four years of freezes, why does this Liberal government believe it is acceptable to give hospitals \$300 million less than what they need to help people like Mr. Szillat in the province of Ontario?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Minister of Health and Long-Term Care.

Hon. Eric Hoskins: We're contributing more than \$500 million to our hospitals this year. That is a 3.1% increase, and it allows us, in fact, to target specific challenges that are being faced. It allows for a substantial new increase in cataract surgeries. It allows for a substantial increase in hip and knee surgeries.

But what I would encourage the member opposite to do, if she hasn't already, is to remind that individual that wait-lists do vary from place to place, from surgeon to surgeon. She should encourage that individual's family physician to see what the wait times are and to see if there might be another provider who can perform it nearby sooner; and to work with the LHIN, because this is precisely what the LHIN is there for. I've talked with the LHIN, and there are many examples of where they work directly with patients to help them with this.

VISITORS

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Deputy Premier.

Hon. Deborah Matthews: On a point of order: I want to welcome Joanne Sherin from Vanier Children's

Services here today, a great champion of children's mental health.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Minister of Tourism, Culture and Sport.

Hon. Eleanor McMahon: I'd like to welcome, from my riding of Burlington, Brian Hansell. I thank Brian for joining us today in the members' gallery for Children's Mental Health Week.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Minister of Municipal Affairs, on a point of order.

Hon. Bill Mauro: I was a little late getting to QP this morning. I'd once again like to welcome my oldest son, Dustin Mauro, in the members' east gallery.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): There being no deferred votes, this House stands recessed until 1 p.m. this afternoon.

The House recessed from 1147 to 1300.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

DOCTORS' DAY

Mr. Jeff Yurek: I'm pleased to rise today to celebrate Ontario's Doctors' Day. Doctors' Day was formally recognized in this House in 2011 to create a special day to recognize the hard work of our province's 29,000 practising physicians. May 1 was chosen as Doctors' Day in Ontario to mark the birthday of Dr. Emily Stowe, Canada's first female practising physician. She was born in Norwich township, Oxford county, and graduated from the New York Medical College for Women in 1867. She then opened her medical practice in Toronto.

Every day, more than 320,000 patients across the province are treated and cared for by doctors. Whether it's in a hospital, a long-term-care home, a clinic or a patient's home, Ontario's doctors are making a positive difference in the lives of patients by providing high-quality care when and where it is needed most.

To celebrate Doctors' Day in Ontario, the Ontario Medical Association invited elementary students and pediatric patients from across the province to send in drawings with personalized messages about "What my doctor means to me." The response has been overwhelming. Over the past month, the Ontario Medical Association has received hundreds of submissions, ranging from entertaining to emotional, thanking doctors for their care, professionalism and sacrifices made on behalf of their patients.

It is important to recognize that doctors' contributions to our province are not limited to health care. Each physician's office, through overhead, contributes the equivalent of four full-time jobs in a community, generates an average of \$205,000 in GDP and produces \$50,000 in tax revenue for the municipal, provincial and federal governments.

Join me in celebrating the vital work doctors perform every day to save lives and put patients first. On behalf of

the PC caucus, I would like to extend my warm wishes to Ontario's doctors.

CENTRE DE SANTÉ COMMUNAUTAIRE HAMILTON/NIAGARA

Ms. Cindy Forster: It's my pleasure today to rise to congratulate the Centre de santé communautaire Hamilton/Niagara on celebrating 25 years of service this past weekend. Many dedicated volunteers were recognized for their commitment and their long-time service.

The CSC is a community health centre in my riding, founded in 1991. It began as a social service centre, and it wasn't until 1995 that it began receiving federal dollars to provide much-needed primary health care to the francophone communities in the Niagara region.

Under the leadership of Marcel Castonguay, the centre takes a holistic approach to the delivery of programs. They focus on preventive care and health promotion by informing and educating. This is especially important in my riding because of the number of francophone seniors and the challenges specific to them as a result of limited French services and low income levels.

If you ask anyone who has been around to see the centre grow to what it is today, the names Marc Yvain Giroux and Rosaire Lavoie would also be mentioned. They were the centre's pioneers, and they were able to pair the needs of our community with a dedicated long-term vision.

I'm proud to have witnessed the growth of the centre in my community. I want to thank Marcel, the talented staff at the centre and the many dedicated volunteers who all play an indispensable role in providing health care in our community.

SPEECH AND HEARING MONTH

Mr. Bill Walker: As the critic responsible for seniors and accessibility, I'm pleased to rise and recognize, on behalf of our leader, Patrick Brown, and our Ontario PC caucus, that May is Speech and Hearing Month.

Communication disorders can have a significant impact on our physical, emotional, social and vocational well-being. They may prevent an individual from performing well at work, asking for help, hearing instructions at school or even saying, "I love you." One in six Canadians suffers from a speech, language or hearing problem.

The good news is that half of all cases are preventable. The earlier we can identify and treat them, the better the chances for improvement and even recovery.

This month is our opportunity to work to increase the importance of early detection and prevention of communication disorders, as well as to raise the public's sensitivity to the challenges faced by people who are deaf or hard-of-hearing, and break down barriers to help them reach their full academic and vocational potential.

I would like to recognize the Ontario Association of Speech-Language Pathologists and Audiologists, OSLA,

for all the work they have done to promote communication health and provide support to affected individuals and their families. Their advocacy efforts on removing barriers to communication, advancing hearing health and promoting inclusion and equal access for people with speech and hearing problems to all aspects of life, counting employment, education, recreation, housing and social services, is commendable. Promoting communication health is an important cause, and I know that many of my colleagues in this Legislature support it. I thank them very much for all of the efforts in raising awareness about the importance of early detection and intervention in the treatment of communication disorders, and for doing what they can to champion the needs of people with communication disorders in Ontario.

NATIONAL DAY OF MOURNING

Ms. Jennifer K. French: Today is May Day, recognized as International Workers' Day around the world. In Canada, we recognize Labour Day in September, and on April 28 we mark the National Day of Mourning.

Our local labour council, unions and community organizations gathered at our beautiful monument downtown to pay tribute to fallen and injured workers. This is the first year that all flags at public buildings were flown at half-staff, and I'd like to recognize and appreciate the bill brought forward by my colleague from Windsor-Tecumseh that passed last spring to make this the law in Ontario.

No one should be injured or killed on the job. We should be seeing improvements and safer, more predictable, less precarious workplaces, whether they be offices, building work sites, hospitals, jails, classrooms or other workplaces. We need to ensure workers have the safety equipment, job training and mental health supports they need. We must enforce laws and regulations to make sure working Ontarians are safe.

New Democrats support the Remember Westray campaign to call on the government and law enforcement to understand and enforce the Westray law. Employers who put their workers in jeopardy must be held responsible. Employers whose workers die on the job must be held responsible.

We must respect and protect workers. More people deserve the protection of a union, and we need to make it easier for Ontarians to have that protection. And when workers are injured, they deserve fair compensation and support. We have to fight to put dignity back in our compensation system.

The Day of Mourning is not only for workers in the trade union family; it is for every worker who goes to work and has the right to come home safely. We will remember the dead, but we must continue to diligently fight for the living.

PERTH COUNTY TARTAN

Mr. Randy Pettapiece: Today, I want to pay tribute to my necktie, or, rather, the pattern on my necktie,

which is none other than the Perth county tartan. This beautiful tartan was unveiled by Perth county council on April 6 in celebration of Canada's 150th anniversary. It represents the county's Scottish heritage, and its colours reflect the past and present of Perth county. The shades of green represent agriculture, while blue represents our rivers and streams. The red is for the blood sacrificed by the early settlers who tamed this wild land, and of the veterans who laid down their lives to protect our freedom. Gold stands for the industrious nature of the people of Perth county.

I'd like to recognize everyone involved in creating this tartan, especially councillors Helen Dowd, Doug Kellum and Bob Wilhelm, and community member Pauline Hartfiel. Their work represents the very best of the county and its people. With hard work and dedication to our communities, I know the county's best days are still to come.

CASINO STRATHROYALE

Mr. Monte McNaughton: I wish to recognize an event held annually in my riding of Lambton-Kent-Middlesex which raises money to make important and significant contributions to ease the financial burden on families living with cancer.

In Strathroy, on April 22, the seventh annual Casino Strathroyale was held. With my wife, Kate, I was pleased to be among the nearly 1,000 participants at this gala occasion. This is a lively event which combines a superb dinner with live entertainment and casino games.

Casino Strathroyale was begun by Dr. Tyler Damen after his own battle with melanoma cancer during 2006-07. He understands and knows first-hand the struggle and hardships that families experience while supporting their loved ones through an illness.

Throughout the year, residents of Strathroy-Caradoc are invited to nominate worthy recipients, and a committee selects 10 names to receive support. After expenses, all the funds raised from Casino Strathroyale go directly into the hands of local families living with cancer.

Last year, \$64,000 was distributed to 10 recipients. While the final accounting for 2017 is yet to be made, the total is expected to be even greater this year.

Speaker, I am pleased to recognize the work of Dr. Tyler Damen, his family, the many generous local sponsors and all those who support Casino Strathroyale in this cause of helping victims of cancer in Strathroy-Caradoc.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I thank all members for their statements.

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NOTICE OF REASONED AMENDMENT

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I beg to inform the House that, pursuant to standing order 71(b), the member from Nipissing has notified the Clerk of his intention to file notice of a reasoned amendment to the motion for

second reading of Bill 127, An Act to implement Budget measures and to enact, amend and repeal various statutes.

The order for second reading of Bill 127 may therefore not be called today.

PETITIONS

CURRICULUM

Mr. Ted Arnott: I have a petition to the Legislature of Ontario, and it reads as follows:

“Whereas the Ontario Ministry of Education removed the teaching of cursive writing as a mandatory component of the Ontario education curriculum; and

“Whereas numerous independent psychological studies have proven that the learning of cursive writing at a young age improves cognitive development, improves the development of fine motor skills, creativity, the integration of visual and tactile information; and

“Whereas many students are now reaching their teens and are unable to even sign their name on legal documents, government forms, drivers’ licences, etc., including petitions such as this; and

“Whereas future generations of adults will be unable to not only write in cursive but will be unable to read historical documents, genealogical documents such as birth, death and marriage certificates, prior to the 20th century, which were prepared primarily using cursive, nor will they be able to understand family letters and documents passed from one generation to the next;

“Whereas the loss of cursive writing represents a significant loss in an important component of our cultural heritage;

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

“That the Minister of Education for Ontario take the necessary action to ensure that the teaching of cursive writing is reintroduced as a mandatory element within the Ontario education system at the early public school level, at the soonest possible time.”

HOSPITAL FUNDING

Ms. Cindy Forster: A petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario—this is the petition that keeps on going:

“Whereas the decision to close the Welland general hospital was made without consultation with the residents of south Niagara, and without regard for potential social and economic impacts of this closure; and

“Whereas the recommendations to the government contained in Dr. Kevin Smith’s report on restructuring of the Niagara Health System included no evidence to support the closure of the Welland general hospital; no needs assessment for the residents of south Niagara; no costing of the entire restructuring plan; and no proposals to mitigate the impact of reduced hospital access;

“Whereas the catchment area of the Welland general hospital includes four municipalities, with a population of over 90,000, including a high percentage (+25%) of seniors and people living in poverty;

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

“(1) Stop the planned closure of the Welland general hospital;

“(2) Conduct a rigorous third-party evidence-based study to assess the present and projected health care and hospital services requirements of residents in the catchment area of the Welland general hospital;

“(3) Hold public consultations, not only during the assessment process, but also on recommendations resulting from this study.”

I support the petition, will sign it and send it with Noah.

MARKDALE HOSPITAL

Mr. Bill Walker: “To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas Grey Bruce Health Services’ Markdale hospital is the only health care facility between Owen Sound and Orangeville on the Highway 10 corridor;

“Whereas the community of Markdale rallied to raise \$13 million on the promise they would get a new state-of-the-art hospital in Markdale;

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

“That the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care announce as soon as possible its intended construction date for the new Markdale hospital and ensure that the care needs of the patients and families of our community are met in a timely manner.”

I affix my name and send it with page Matt.

DISASTER RELIEF

M^{me} France Gélina: I have hundreds of names on this petition that comes from Gogama, and thousands more that come from all over the northeast. I would like to thank Betty Carrière from Gogama. It reads as follows:

“Gogama needs help.

“Whereas at 2 a.m. on March 7, 2015, a Canadian National train derailed in Gogama;

“Whereas this derailment caused numerous tank cars carrying crude oil to explode, catch fire and spill over one million litres of oil into the Makami River; and

“Whereas residents continue to plainly observe oil and find dead fish in the Makami River as well as Lake Minisinakwa, despite the fact that the Ministry of the Environment has declared the cleanup complete;”

They “petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

“That the Ministry of the Environment require CN to continue the cleanup of Gogama’s soil and waterways

until the residents are assured of clean and safe water for themselves, the environment and the wildlife.”

I fully support this petition, will affix my name to it and ask Rishi to bring it to the Clerk.

GO TRANSIT

Ms. Soo Wong: I have a petition addressed to the Legislative Assembly.

“Whereas Cambridge, Ontario, is a municipality of over 125,000 people, many of whom commute into the greater Toronto area daily;

“Whereas the current commuting options available for travel between ... Waterloo ... and the GTA are inefficient and time-consuming, as well as environmentally damaging;

“Whereas the residents of Cambridge and the Waterloo region believe that they would be well-served by commuter rail transit that connects the region to the Milton line, and that this infrastructure would have positive, tangible economic benefits to the province of Ontario;

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

“Direct crown agency Metrolinx to commission a feasibility study into building a rail line that connects the city of Cambridge to the GO train station in Milton, and to complete this study in a timely manner and communicate the results to the municipal government of Cambridge.”

I support the petition and give it to page Maggie.

HYDRO RATES

Mr. Bill Walker: “To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas household electricity bills have skyrocketed by 56% and electricity rates have tripled as a result of the Liberal government’s mismanagement of the energy sector;

“Whereas the billion-dollar gas plants cancellation, wasteful and unaccountable spending at Ontario Power Generation and the unaffordable subsidies in the Green Energy Act will result in electricity bills climbing by another 35% by 2017 and 45% by 2020; and

“Whereas the Liberal government wasted \$2 billion on the flawed smart meter program; and

“Whereas the recent announcement to implement the Ontario Electricity Support Program will see average household hydro bills increase an additional \$137 per year starting in 2016; and

“Whereas the soaring cost of electricity is straining family budgets, and hurting the ability of manufacturers and small businesses in the province to compete and create new jobs; and

“Whereas home heating and electricity are a necessity for families in Ontario who cannot afford to continue

footing the bill for the government’s mismanagement of the energy sector;

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

“To immediately implement policies ensuring Ontario’s power consumers, including families, farmers and employers, have affordable and reliable electricity.”

I fully support it, affix my name and send it with page Rada.

HOSPITAL FUNDING

M^{me} France Gélinas: I have this petition that comes from all over Sudbury and Nickel Belt. I would like to thank Liz Larochelle from Val Caron, in my riding. It reads as follows:

“Health Care You Can Count On....

“Whereas for all Ontarians—no matter who they are, or where they live—the health of their family comes first, and it should come first for the government of Ontario;

“Whereas 1,200 nurses have been laid off since January 2015;

“Whereas hospital beds are being closed across Ontario; and

“Whereas hospital budgets have been frozen for four years, and increases this year will not keep up with inflation or a growing population;”

They “petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

“Stop the cuts to hospitals, and ensure that, at a minimum, hospital funding keeps up with the growing costs of inflation and population growth, each and every year.”

I fully support this petition, will affix my name to it and ask Sofia to bring it to the Clerk.

NANJING MASSACRE

Ms. Soo Wong: I have a petition addressed to the Legislative Assembly. I wanted to say that I’ve got 3,235 signatures from Milton, Waterloo and Toronto.

“Whereas the events in Asian countries during World War II are not well-known....

“Whereas Ontarians are unfamiliar with the World War II atrocities in Asia;

“Whereas Ontario is recognized as an inclusive society;

“Whereas Ontario is the home to one of the largest Asian populations in Canada, with over 2.6 million in 2011;

“Whereas some Ontarians have direct relationships with victims and survivors of the Nanjing Massacre, whose stories are untold;

“Whereas the Nanjing Massacre was an atrocity with over 200,000 Chinese civilians and soldiers alike were indiscriminately killed, and tens of thousands of women were sexually assaulted, in the Japanese capture of the city;

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“Whereas December 13, 2017, marks the 80th anniversary of the Nanjing Massacre;

“Whereas designating December 13th in each year as the Nanjing Massacre Commemorative Day in Ontario will provide an opportunity for all Ontarians, especially the Asian community, to gather, remember, and honour the victims and families affected by the Nanjing Massacre;

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

“That the Legislature pass the Nanjing Massacre Commemorative Day Act, 2016 by December 8, 2017, to coincide with the 80th anniversary of the Nanjing Massacre, which will enable Ontarians, especially those with Asian heritage, to plan commemorative activities to honour the victims and families affected by the Nanjing Massacre.”

I fully support the petition. I will give my petition to page Jeremi.

PRIVATIZATION OF PUBLIC ASSETS

Mr. Bill Walker: “To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas the current government under Premier Kathleen Wynne is calling for the sale of up to 60% of Hydro One shares into private ownership; and

“Whereas the decision to sell the public utility was made without any public input and the deal will continue to be done in complete secrecy; and

“Whereas the loss of majority ownership in Hydro One will force ratepayers to accept whatever changes the new owners decide, such as higher rates; and

“Whereas electricity rates are already sky-high and hurting family budgets as well as businesses; and

“Whereas ratepayers will never again have independent investigations of consumer complaints, such as the Ontario Ombudsman’s damning report on failed billing; and

“Whereas the people of Ontario are the true owners of Hydro One and they do not believe the fire sale of Hydro One is in their best interest;

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

“To protect Ontario ratepayers by stopping the sale of Hydro One.”

I fully support it, affix my name and send it with page Noah.

HEALTH CARE FUNDING

Miss Monique Taylor: I have a petition that was signed by thousands of people in my community for Justin Masotti. Unfortunately, Justin died on April 21 due to further complications, but I will read this petition today in his memory.

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas 17-year-old Justin Masotti of Hamilton is battling an extremely rare form of brain cancer that has not responded to traditional cancer treatment;

“Whereas the alternative cancer treatments he is now receiving out-of-country appear to be having a positive impact on him;

“Whereas the huge costs already incurred by his family to fund his out-of-country treatments are not being covered by OHIP as they are considered experimental;

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

“That the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care, on compassionate grounds, fund the transport and medical costs associated with the out-of-country cancer treatment of Justin Masotti.”

I will affix my name to it.

Rest in peace, Justin.

HYDRO RATES

Mr. Bill Walker: “To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas the Green Energy Act has driven up the cost of electricity in Ontario due to unrealistic subsidies for certain energy sources, including the world’s highest subsidies for solar power; and

“Whereas this cost is passed on to ratepayers through the global adjustment, which can account for almost half of a ratepayer’s hydro bill; and

“Whereas the high cost of energy is severely impacting the quality of life of Ontario’s residents, especially fixed-income seniors; and

“Whereas it is imperative to remedy Liberal mismanagement in the energy sector by implementing immediate reforms detailed in the Ontario PC white paper Paths to Prosperity—Affordable Energy;

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

“To immediately repeal the Green Energy Act, 2009, and all other statutes that artificially inflate the cost of electricity with the aim of bringing down electricity rates and abolishing expensive surcharges such as the global adjustment and debt retirement charges.”

I fully support it, affix my name and send it with page Rishi.

EMPLOYMENT STANDARDS

M^{me} France Gélinas: I have this petition to support a \$15-an-hour minimum wage. I’d like to thank Mona Filion from Azilda, in my riding. It reads as follows:

“Whereas a growing number of Ontarians are affected by the growth in low-wage, part-time, casual, temporary and insecure employment; and

“Whereas too many workers are unprotected by current minimum standards outlined in employment and labour laws; and

“Whereas the Ontario government is currently engaging in a public consultation to review and improve employment and labour laws in the province;”

They petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to:

“Implement a minimum wage of \$15 an hour.”

I fully support this petition, will affix my name to it and ask page Maggie to bring it to the Clerk.

LONG-TERM CARE

Mr. Bill Walker: “To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas Ontario’s 627 long-term-care homes play a critical role in the support and care for more than 100,000 elderly Ontarians each and every year;

“Whereas nine out of 10 residents in long-term care today have some form of cognitive impairment, along with other complex medical needs, and require specialized, in-home supports to manage their complex needs;

“Whereas each and every year, 20,000 Ontarians remain on the waiting list for long-term care services and yet, despite this, no new beds are being added to the system;

“Whereas over 40% of Ontario’s long-term-care beds require significant renovations or to be rebuilt and the current program put forward to renew them has had limited success;

“Whereas long-term-care homes require stable and predictable funding each year to support the needs of residents entrusted in their care;

“We, the undersigned, citizens of Ontario, call on the government to support the Ontario Long Term Care Association’s Building Better Long-Term Care pre-budget submission and ensure better seniors’ care through a commitment to improve long-term care.”

I fully support it, affix my name, and send it with page Hayden.

PRIVATIZATION OF PUBLIC ASSETS

Miss Monique Taylor: I would like to thank a young person in my riding, Megan Duvall, who knocked on doors to have residents sign this petition. It reads as follows:

“Privatizing Hydro One: Another Wrong Choice.

“Whereas once you privatize hydro, there’s no return; and

“We’ll lose billions in reliable annual revenues for schools and hospitals; and

“We’ll lose our biggest economic asset and control over our energy future; and

“We’ll pay higher and higher hydro bills just like what’s happened elsewhere;

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

“To stop the sale of Hydro One and make sure Ontario families benefit from owning Hydro One now and for generations to come.”

I support this. I’ll affix my name to it and give it to page Sofia to bring to the Clerk.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

RENTAL FAIRNESS ACT, 2017

LOI DE 2017 SUR L’ÉQUITÉ EN LOCATION IMMOBILIÈRE

Resuming the debate adjourned on April 27, 2017, on the motion for second reading of the following bill:

Bill 124, An Act to amend the Residential Tenancies Act, 2006 / Projet de loi 124, Loi modifiant la Loi de 2006 sur la location à usage d’habitation.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Further debate—oh, I’m sorry. The Minister of Housing apparently has the floor.

Hon. Chris Ballard: Thank you, Speaker. I just want to carry on where I left off at the end of the debate last week about the fair housing plan. Our government released our fair housing plan a couple of weeks back. It’s a comprehensive set of 16 actions that the province will take to make buying or renting a home more affordable. Every year, over 100,000 people move to Ontario because of our strong and vibrant economy; yet, we all know that housing affordability is a complex issue with no one silver bullet.

In some ways, our hot housing market is tied to the confidence people have in the Ontario economy. But as the Premier has said—and I said this last week; I will quote her again: “When bets and speculation drive the average resale of a house up by 33% in just 12 months, we know we have a problem.”

Speaker, that’s why we took time to consult with people from every side of the issue: developers, planners, financial institutions, economists, federal and municipal partners, realtors; perhaps most importantly, though, we’ve listened to all of the people who are looking for a place to live or who are struggling to pay for the place that they are living in now.

The Long-Term Affordable Housing Strategy—these initiatives that we’re introducing build on top of this strategy, which is, at the core, about ensuring that every Ontarian has access to an affordable and suitable home. Our government is serious about reducing the pressure of housing costs felt by Ontarians, as well as providing more affordable options for people to choose from.

Last December, the Promoting Affordable Housing Act was given royal assent. Driven by the updated Long-Term Affordable Housing Strategy, this act lays the legislative groundwork to create more affordable housing across the province and supports our goal to end chronic homelessness by 2025. Our communities are already seeing the benefits. Through that landmark piece of legislation, we’ve made significant improvements to help expand and improve the rental housing market. We’re preventing unnecessary evictions from social housing

units for those individuals and families who cease to be eligible due to an increase in income. In this way, we're encouraging more inclusive communities, strengthening tenant rights, and creating more mixed-income housing. We're making secondary suites, such as above-garage apartments or basement units, less costly to build in new homes by exempting them from development charges. Secondary suites are a potential source of affordable rental housing and allow homeowners to earn additional income. And we're giving municipalities the option to implement inclusionary zoning, which would require affordable housing units to be included in residential developments.

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The proposed Rental Fairness Act that we're discussing here today also includes a suite of other changes to the Residential Tenancies Act, because the issues that tenants face include more than just out-of-control rent hikes. Today I'll discuss changes to the transitional housing system, illegal clauses in leases, unfounded evictions and rent increases above the provincial guideline.

I want to take a minute to just turn the discussion to the issue of homelessness, an issue that continues to be a problem in my riding of Newmarket–Aurora and in many other communities. Too many of our citizens are transitioning out of provincially funded institutions such as jails and hospitals or out of a precarious living situation, and finding themselves on the street because they have nowhere to go. But our government is making great strides toward our goal of ending chronic homelessness by 2025. One of the ways we're accomplishing this is through the province's transitional housing system.

Transitional housing serves an important role within Ontario's housing system. In addition to being a person's temporary home, it provides a mix of appropriate support services for people who are in vulnerable situations. For example, people with mental health and addiction issues or survivors of domestic violence may access these services. Whatever their needs, transitional housing helps people to become more independent and move to longer-term stable housing in their community.

Currently, the Residential Tenancies Act does not define transitional housing and does not outline specific rules or responsibilities for transitional housing providers. Some transitional housing providers offer programs of up to one year that are fully exempt from the Residential Tenancies Act. However, these organizations have told us that many of their participants require more than one year to successfully complete the objectives of the program and find suitable and affordable long-term housing. As a result of these short timelines, some clients are not receiving the temporary housing and support services they need to become independent.

To help us understand how the province could facilitate better outcomes for people in transitional housing programs, we consulted stakeholders on potential amendments to the RTA, Residential Tenancies Act. These amendments aim to provide flexibility for transitional housing providers while ensuring that clients in vulner-

able situations have appropriate protections. We consulted with transitional housing providers, tenant and landlord advocacy organizations, municipal service managers and indigenous organizations. We also spoke to approximately 70 people who have lived experience in transitional housing programs.

We heard from the transitional housing providers that, due to the nature of their programs, they need an exemption from the Residential Tenancies Act, and if transitional housing programs were to remain under the act, providers might not be able to enforce rules that are critical to the program's success, such as restricting visitors or prohibiting drug use or substance abuse.

Throughout the consultations we also learned about how transitional housing programs affected participants' lives. For some, participating in a transitional housing program helped them adjust to a new life in Canada and acted as a stepping stone to pursue education and employment. For others, it helped them to overcome addiction, trauma and other challenges, and to relearn life skills they lost after years of homelessness and housing instability.

Participants told us it often takes more than a year to successfully complete a program and find suitable and affordable longer-term housing. To illustrate this point I'd like to share this quote from a participant in Covenant House's program, just one of the many testimonials we heard. She said, "Everyone who enters the transitional housing program ... has to attend school or work. And, if you're in school, it's challenging to fulfill your school duties as well as the life skills commitments of the program. We need more time. I think if we had the option to stay longer that would be better."

During these discussions with participants, we also heard that most if not all participants signed written agreements to enter into the program. Participants understand their rights and responsibilities under the program, and that restrictions like most curfews or disallowing guests were necessary in order to operate the program successfully.

With the one minute I have left, I just want to reiterate some of the important aspects that we bring to the fore.

Changes to the act, this legislation, will provide more protection for renters and will make for a far more robust Residential Tenancies Act as we go forward in the future. We've all heard stories about untenable, unconscionable rises in rent over the past few months—stories that really break your heart. We have to make sure, through legislation such as this, that does not happen again, that tenants are treated fairly, and that we have a system that provides stability for families to put down roots in communities they love.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions or comments?

Mr. Bill Walker: It's a pleasure to provide a few comments on Bill 124, the Rental Fairness Act, 2017.

The minister just talked about exorbitant rents being charged. Obviously, we want to go after those. But why wouldn't they go after the people who are actually doing

this, instead of whitewashing like they do and trying to make everything look like it's going to be a perfect scenario at the end of the day? In this case, again, he talked about tenants. I believe that tenants—in some cases in this proposed legislation—are the latest affordability victims in Wynne's Ontario, where a shortage of supply and high costs for landlords have been forcing up rents. In many of our areas, we have challenges with not having enough affordable housing, but they put in restrictions there that make it prohibitive for a landlord or builder to say, "I want to do that."

I just had a gentleman approach me on the weekend. He knows that there is a need, but he said, "We need the government to come forward so that it's actually viable for us to build this type of housing, so that there are solutions for people who are in need out there."

We're facing a housing crisis because of a lack of supply, and this bill will make the problem worse by discouraging new rental buildings and second units in houses. They already know that people are scrambling and can't find enough housing, and yet they put in restrictions and new legislation that's going to impede even more of that.

At the end of the day, the challenge is that they've taken an affordability problem and made it worse. Over the last six weeks, every time they mused about rent controls, landlords increased their rents in many cases, in case it was their last chance. This bill will only be retroactive to April 20, meaning that many of these increases won't be covered.

The government needs to take real action to address red tape and the barriers to building more housing in Ontario, and to work with the development community and builders and landlords who want to go out there and provide good, affordable housing for people in need, and ensure that they're not putting more red tape, more legislation, more bureaucracy in place so that the builders say, "I don't have the opportunity to make money, so I'm not going to build more housing," even though they've identified in many of our communities that there is a need and they're prepared to step forward.

The government needs to start working before they put legislation; not go out and consult after, like they are with our school closings.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions or comments?

M^{me} France Gélinas: It was interesting to hear the minister talk about this issue. We on the NDP side have been wanting serious changes to this bill, the Residential Tenancies Act. I'm glad to see that some of the ideas that we have been pushing forward, such as closing the loopholes of the 1991 rent control—we're now in 2017—will be acted upon.

There are a number of good ideas in the bill, such as the use of standard leases and clarifying of the eviction rules, but at the same time, as is very common with this government, a lot of the details of it—to make sure that the intention is actually what will happen—are left to regulation. I don't get to see the regulations. We get to

see the bill. The regulations are made behind closed doors by the governing Liberals.

Many of the intentions in the bill are things that we can support, things that we have been asking for and advocating for alongside many, many other people. The problem with the bill is that it states its intentions, but it leaves to regulation how it's actually going to be done.

When you change things such as the eviction rules, it makes me worry. There are people out there who are very hard to house, and they also deserve a place to live. Are they going to find the right balance between the two? I won't get to vote on that, Speaker, because this will be left to regulations, like a lot of other details.

1340

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Mr. Arthur Potts: It gives me great pleasure to have an opportunity to comment on the Minister of Housing's debate on this very important bill, the fair housing act. I want to say how very proud we are on this side of the House of the incredible work the minister has done on this very comprehensive, very compassionate and very complete set of plans to address affordability issues in the housing market.

The member opposite, in the leadoff speech—the member from Oxford—had a chance to shout out comments I had made in the House years ago or months ago about this very issue in which I had taken issue on rent controls as a very blunt instrument. They are a blunt instrument, and the fear is that, with rent controls, we might actually—but what we have done is very different. It's a comprehensive plan.

If the member from Bruce-Grey-Owen Sound had read the entire 16-point plan, he'd see that we are working with the development community. We're making changes to the property tax rules around multi-residential housing, and it's going a long way to provide the incentives the development community needs in order to do exactly what was suggested, to build more tenancy buildings, not the least of which—and I've said it before—is the notion that we're going to change the property tax on multi-residential units so you're not paying four times the property tax that you would if you built the same unit that was in a condo structure.

To the NDP's comments that they have been behind this, it was only, what, three weeks, four weeks ago that the member opposite from Toronto-Danforth actually brought his private member's bill. The coincidence—and I'm sure it was just a coincidence, because we see him do this time and time again. When he hears our members asking that member, our Minister of Housing, questions about affordability, he knows, "Oh, my God, something's about to come. I'd better jump all over this. I'd better take credit for this and put a private member's bill." He did the same thing when I did my daycare wait-list fees.

We have not a blunt instrument, which was the NDP approach, to just change what they call the loophole. We have a very comprehensive, a very large, complex suite of programs which will address affordability problems, and I'm very proud about it.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Mr. Randy Pettapiece: It's a pleasure to rise to add my comments to this debate. I suppose there's good and bad in every bill, and I think we can all agree on that.

What my people in the riding are telling me, especially those in the building trades and in the rental housing units trade or business, is that it just seems that every time you turn around, there's more red tape. There are more forms they have to sign; there's more of this, more of that. I look at this bill and I look at some of the things that are in it, and I can see this happening very easily.

One of the things holding back development, certainly in my riding and in different spots in the province, is the red tape issue. You go through years of trying to get a development approved by anybody. There's all kinds of different levels of bureaucracy you have to go through. It changes from here to there, in different areas. It frustrates anyone who wants to get into the rental business, and as we are seeing where I live, we have a lack of rental units in our area. It's very frustrating, if you can't afford to own a home, that there aren't the rental units around that there should be. I do know that there has been some movement to try to correct that, but again I get back to red tape and also the costs of building new rental units. You know, a metre of concrete costs the same whether you're putting it into an affordable housing unit or a new home. So contractors are standing back a little bit and waiting to see how some of this stuff unfolds. But I do believe the real issue with some of this is the red tape issue that we've been trying to correct for a number of years.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Thank you. That concludes our questions and comments. We return to the Minister of Housing to reply.

Hon. Chris Ballard: I'd like to thank the members for Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound, Nickel Belt, Beaches–East York and Perth–Wellington for their comments in this debate. I do listen, and we do take notes.

The official opposition's notion, though, that rent controls restrain the building of new rental units is, in my opinion, overly simplistic. The fact is, the 1991 exemption, which was put in place with a promise that there would be lots of purpose-built rental constructed, did not achieve that objective. Out of 1.45 million housing completions in Ontario between 1992—the year after that was put in place—and 2016, purpose-built private rental units accounted for just 6%, or around 93,000 units. So, clearly, it's not working.

Despite this evidence, the official opposition refuses to accept that rent controls do not impact the construction of rental units. The official opposition's pitch is simple, in my mind, in its code. When they talk about increasing supply, what I really think they're talking about is paving over the greenbelt and hoping that prices will plummet.

By passing this bill, a quarter of a million more people will be protected from unreasonable rent hikes. With the pre-1991 rental units continuing to appreciate in value, and attracting new capital investment, the evidence

shows that Ontario's version of rent control allows landlords to make a fair return on their investment.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Further debate?

Mr. Randy Hillier: Bill 124 is an important bill not just for this assembly, not just for the city of Toronto, but it's an important bill for all of Ontario.

When I first saw those 16 proposals for this bill, I thought about it. I thought about what they were trying to do, and what they were trying to accomplish. It really dawned on me, what was happening, while I was pruning my apple tree last week. If anybody has ever pruned an apple tree, you can see what this government is like. It just keeps growing and growing and growing, and it gets twisted and gnarled, up, to the point where no more fruit grows on that tree unless it is pruned and trimmed. What I was doing was pruning and trimming the gnarled limbs, and that's what needs to happen with this Liberal government: a significant pruning and trimming of the gnarled policies and legislation that they keep coming up with.

Just think about this: We have a huge problem of a lack of supply of housing, and an impact on the affordability of housing in the GTA. So of course, the gnarled limbs of this Liberal government decide, "We are going to choke off the supply even further," as the solution to this. It's absolutely incredible that this government would rely on historically failed policies as a solution to the problems that they keep creating themselves.

There is a significant problem of housing affordability. We've seen the magnitude of the increase in housing down here has been unsustainable. People are having difficulties entering into the housing market in this city.

The solution is not to restrict supply. That should be intuitive to all members opposite, not to restrict supply.

Hon. Steven Del Duca: Randy Appleseed.

Mr. Randy Hillier: The Minister of Transportation likes my fruit tree analogy. It would be nice if he got out of his political tree some time and actually learned about what's happening on the ground here in Ontario. But if you want to—

Interjections.

1350

Mr. Randy Hillier: Listen. Prune this government. Trim it down.

Interjections.

Mr. Randy Hillier: I guess I struck a nerve with the apple tree analogy—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Sorry to interrupt.

The member for Lanark–Frontenac–Lennox and Addington has the floor, and I need to be able to hear him.

I again recognize the member.

Mr. Randy Hillier: Thank you, Speaker. I'll put this in clearer terms for the Minister of Transportation and others. When a fruit tree continues to grow and grow, it doesn't produce more fruit; it actually reduces how much fruit is available to blossom.

Hon. Jeff Leal: Except if it's a new gala variety.

Mr. Randy Hillier: It doesn't matter what variety, Jeff.

Mr. Ernie Hardeman: The Minister of Agriculture should know that.

Mr. Randy Hillier: The Minister of Agriculture should know—

Hon. Jeff Leal: Gala and Ambrosia. Do you know the lesson about gala and Ambrosia apples?

Mr. Randy Hillier: Speaker, the point I'm trying to make is that growth, without proper trimming, management and pruning, causes problems in nature. The same thing applies to society. It has an impact on the nature of societies.

This proposal is not going to achieve any improvements in affordability—the necessary improvements in affordability—for the people of the GTA or the people of Toronto. Expanding rent control will help some people, without a doubt. Nobody will question that individual that we saw on the news a few weeks ago who was talking about his rent doubling. We know that, under this proposal, that won't be allowed to happen. I don't know how many people were seeing their rent doubled. I know that in the nine years that I've been here in Toronto, I haven't ever been asked to double the rent on my apartment that I rent down here. I'm sure there are others that may have. But again, let's focus on the problem: affordable homes.

People want detached or single-family homes, and there is not the supply available for those types of homes. The smart growth act, the Places to Grow Act, the provincial policy statement on land use: All these things are a growth of government legislation that has negatively and with consequence impacted housing affordability in Ontario and in the GTA. It is the government's own doing that has led to this problem. Growing government more, having them more involved in the marketplace, is not the solution.

This government believes that the laws of supply and demand don't apply to their legislation; that the laws of supply and demand are unimportant. Surely they should understand those great liberal principles of Adam Smith and many others who recognized the laws of supply and demand. Your legislation should complement the laws of supply and demand, not attempt to abrogate them or to disregard them.

We can all say this with absolute certainty, Speaker: If Bill 124 gets passed—I'm sure it will—and then gets implemented, and all other things being equal—if that legislation is allowed to remain in place for any period of time, we will be talking about an even bigger housing affordability problem 10 years from now. We will be talking about an even greater shortage of rental housing 10 years from now. We will be talking about the same problems that led to this bill, but we'll be speaking to them in even greater and more imminent and more credible terms, because this bill does not address any of the problems.

Creating two new bureaucracies to advise the government about the barriers to development—Lord jumpin',

Speaker. They are the barriers to development; they are the absolute barrier. And they're creating a bureaucracy to advise them about the barriers? It's absolutely astonishing to have such gall to believe that all of these problems that are happening with affordable housing have no bearing on the policies that this government has implemented over the years, over the course of its administration.

Take ownership of what you've done. Take ownership. Look in the mirror and say, "Guess what? We really mucked this one up with all of our well-intended legislation. We really mucked this up. We forgot about the very essence and the very basics of supply and demand. We were going to impose this Liberal, activist-centre utopia on the marketplace here in the GTA." They ended up failing. They ended up failing huge, big time.

This bill is just a recognition that this government is a failure. It's a failure for the people who want to have affordable homes in Toronto; a failure for people who want to have affordable homes in Ontario; and a failure for people to be able to go out and find a home that they would like to purchase—a single-family home, a detached home.

But they know better than anybody else. They know better than the marketplace. They know better than the millions of people who live here. They know better than the tens of millions of people who live in the province. They know better than everyone how to control and manage and manipulate, to create their activist-centre utopia paradise.

Well, you've got it. You've got it. Everything that is happening here is a result of your activist-centre utopian dreams: why homes are unaffordable now in Toronto; why young new families and couples can't get into the marketplace here.

I really encourage the Minister of Transportation, as he's pondering his new photo radar bill, to think about how he's hurting people in Ontario, in the GTA, preventing them from buying a home, preventing them from being able to get a home that's affordable.

This facade of a housing supply team: Give me a break. You guys all know that that's not true. You all know that it's not true.

Interjection.

Mr. Randy Hillier: I see that the Deputy Premier thinks the alternative is that we pave over Ontario, pave over Toronto. That's a falsehood. It shows an elementary level of understanding of what the problem is, to think that you are either on this side of a question or you're on that side of a question—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): I'm going to ask the member to withdraw the unparliamentary remark.

Mr. Randy Hillier: I will withdraw. I'll have to go back through Hansard and see what I might have said, just for my own edification, Speaker. I don't want to make the same mistake twice.

There is a breadth and a spectrum to this problem. It is not a case of the only solution is the Liberal solution, or the other only solution is to pave over everything. Like I

said, that suggests a very limited knowledge or interest in the subject, Speaker.

1400

I would call on the Deputy Premier and the other ministers here to actually look at what is going on with affordable housing. Why is it that a few years ago in Toronto, it would take three times your yearly salary to buy an average home, and it now takes seven times your yearly salary to buy an average home? Those are unsustainable numbers. You can't continue to increase—

Interjection.

Mr. Randy Hillier: I know the Liberal member wants to make excuses, but even those who want to make excuses need to recognize that that trend line is unsustainable.

I know that the Liberals enjoy that term. They love everything to be sustainable. Well, your activist-centre government is unsustainable. When the cost of housing continues to increase faster than wages and salaries, even the government ought to realize that that is unsustainable. Your activist-centre government is unsustainable.

Speaker, we look forward to hearing more about this bill, hearing more how the laws of supply and demand no longer apply in the Liberal utopia of the GTA.

I look forward to seeing this bill go to committee afterwards and actually hearing what other experts will say about this bill, because we've seen in every editorial, in every newspaper account—every economist has said that this is a failed plan, that these policies are known universally not to work.

But I guess, Speaker, like the budget, this is all about campaigns. This isn't about actually fixing, or helping people with the affordability of homes. This is all about campaign buzzwords for next year for this Liberal government—just like their budget. This is about portraying themselves in a manner that is not consistent with the facts, to the people of Ontario; a manner of portraying themselves to improve their political and electoral success, at the expense of people in Ontario. They would rather see the people of Ontario not be able to find affordable homes. They would rather find political success.

Speaker, I'll leave it at that. I do look forward to some further debate. I do look forward to hearing how this government will just throw away the laws of supply and demand and believe that they can legislate utopia down here, with more gnarled legislation.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions or comments?

Ms. Jennifer K. French: I'm glad to have the opportunity to comment after that rousing debate. It's nice to see that the member from Lanark–Frontenac–Lennox and Addington was branching out in his comments there.

Interjections.

Ms. Jennifer K. French: Oh, yes. For those watching at home who missed it, we had a lengthy discussion about fruit and fruit trees, and I'm not entirely sure how it connected. However, here we are.

I would like to comment, though, on the member's remarks about supply and demand, and to take us back in

time a little bit—not that far, though—to my grade 10 economics class days, when we talked about supply and demand. The very fundamental, basic concepts I don't expect have changed too much, although I'm sure I could be corrected. But basically, if there is no supply, you have a whole whack of demand, and that is what we see, not in economic terms, but in personal terms, every day in our constituency office: that person after person who comes through our doors looking for housing can't find it because the supply isn't there; the inventory isn't there. It doesn't seem, as the member said, that that is the priority, to change that situation. So we have the massive demand for what we don't see out in our communities and we don't even see on the horizon when it comes to affordable housing.

I appreciate his reminder that we sit across from a so-called activist-centre government. If only there was some action that went with that activist piece that they talk about. We hear talk and talk and then some more talk, and then after that we hear more talk, but we don't see that action. Maybe sometime soon we will.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments? The Minister of Municipal Affairs.

Hon. Bill Mauro: Speaker, thanks very much; I appreciate this.

Thanks to the member opposite for his comments. I was scrambling there trying to find the riding name—Lanark something. I apologize.

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Lanark–Frontenac–Lennox and Addington.

Hon. Bill Mauro: I thank him for his comments. Obviously, the topic at hand that he spent his time discussing, the legislation in front of us—he spent a fair bit of time talking about housing affordability, very relevant and very important. Obviously, people following this issue closely would have seen the suite and the package of announcements that have been made very recently by the Minister of Finance and the Premier, and they will know about the work being done by the Minister of Housing in this regard.

What I think I was hearing, though, when I was listening to the member's comments, was language that might be referred to as a veiled reference, perhaps, to some of the land use planning policies that exist within the province of Ontario. When I mention that, I mean, of course, the greenbelt plan, the growth plan, the Niagara Escarpment Plan, the Oak Ridges Moraine Conservation Plan. I'm not sure, but I think he was referencing those plans as somehow perhaps being responsible—for what he describes as being responsible for what he describes as being fundamental to the issue of housing affordability. Obviously, on this side of the House, we don't agree with that. We think these policies largely are important and well received.

Given the significant population growth that has occurred in the GTHA over the last number of years and given that it is expected that by 2031 or 2041 there will be four million more people coming to work, live and make their home and their families in this region of

Canada, I think it's all the more important that we have these sorts of land use policies in place to help guide that growth. Without them, I'm not sure what we'd be faced with. So I'm not sure if that's what the member was referencing, but perhaps we'll get some clarity in his remarks.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions or comments?

Mr. Monte McNaughton: I'm pleased to rise for a couple of minutes to follow the member from Lanark–Frontenac–Lennox and Addington, who I thought did a superb job articulating his concerns with Bill 124, An Act to amend the Residential Tenancies Act, 2006.

I loved in particular—and I know the members of the government did—my colleague's reference to apple trees. I thought that really laid out clearly just the size of government that we have here in Ontario today, the intrusiveness of this government when it comes to the free market. I actually think it's time that we have a debate in Ontario about the role of government in the marketplace. This government has a history, over 14 years in power, of being involved too much, in my opinion, in the economy, whether it's their role in the private sector or with this particular piece of legislation.

My colleague accurately identified the problem when it comes to the housing market in the province, and it is a supply issue. The member from Oshawa mentioned that as well.

I can tell you, Mr. Speaker, that when the government made this announcement a number of weeks ago, I was actually in Strathroy at a local small business gathering. A person came up to me—we have a rental supply issue down in our area in southwestern Ontario—and he accurately said that this is going to increase the shortage, because people aren't going to build and invest in rental housing because of this rent control measure that this government is bringing in.

1410

Our leader, Patrick Brown, also acknowledged the red tape issues around construction, and that's another detriment to the marketplace.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

M^{me} France Gélinas: I, too, was very interested in the analogy that the member from Lanark–Frontenac–Lennox and Addington started his lead speech with, with the pruning of his trees. In the back of my mind, I kept thinking, “Well, it's way too early to start to prune your apple trees.” Usually, you wait until the snow is gone and there's a bit—

Interjection: You're in the north.

M^{me} France Gélinas: And then I realized, “Oh, yes, spring has sprung down here.” We got forgotten up north, and spring has yet to sprung, up where I'm from.

This aside, some of the comments he makes about the bill are supportable, but the premise behind his 20 minutes, I would say, I strongly disagree with. If the idea of no rent control was to be the solution to it all, then I would say Toronto would be awash with vacant apartments, and people would have a choice as to where they

want to live and would be able to move to a cheaper apartment in the neighbourhood that they like better.

None of that is actually happening. We haven't got rent control on any of the buildings that are supposedly new—but some of them are really 26 years old. Any buildings that were built after 1991 don't see any form of rent control under the existing laws.

There has been massive construction. I have been in this Legislative Assembly for 10 years, and every time I come back when a new session starts, I count the number of those great big—in French, it's “grues”—you know, those great big things that they put—

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Cranes.

M^{me} France Gélinas: Cranes; that's it. The big cranes. There's always, like, seven, 10, sometimes 12 of them going on at once. I wish we had one of them up north—I would be happy. There's lots of them down here, yet no place to rent.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): That concludes our time for questions and comments.

The member for Lanark–Frontenac–Lennox and Addington can now respond.

Mr. Randy Hillier: Thanks to the members from Oshawa, Thunder Bay–Atikokan, Lambton–Kent–Middlesex and Nickel Belt for their comments.

This is a matter about supply. Does this bill improve supply? We know that the demand is strong in Toronto. There's nothing on the horizon that would make us believe that the demand will shrink. There's going to be continued demand for housing here. What does this bill do to improve supply? The short answer is, zero. The short answer is, there will be no improvement.

The member from Nickel Belt raised a good point when she was commenting about my trimming the trees. It bears out that there are differences, and differences of time, within this province. We have a large province. Things that are appropriate to do today in Lanark would not be appropriate to do in the north, and would be too late if you were down in Niagara. They've already got that job all done. There are differences in the geographic and demographic makeup of this province.

This legislation, of course, although ostensibly to address the acuity of the housing affordability problem in Toronto, has a wide range, a broad spectrum, of impositions on the rest of the province as well, where there is not the same level of acuity.

I would encourage the members on the Liberal side to actually read the editorial in Ontario Farmer which makes the case that maybe now is a good time for the government to encourage investment in rural and small-town Ontario as well, and ease up on the regulatory burden in rural and small-town Ontario with this bill.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Pursuant to standing order 47(c), I am now required to interrupt the proceedings and announce that there has been more than six and one-half hours of debate on the motion for second reading of this bill. This debate will therefore be deemed adjourned unless the government House leader or his designate specifies otherwise.

I recognize the Minister of Transportation.

Hon. Steven Del Duca: No further debate, Speaker.
Second reading debate deemed adjourned.

2017 ONTARIO BUDGET

BUDGET DE L'ONTARIO DE 2017

Resuming the debate adjourned on April 27, 2017, on the motion that this House approves in general the budgetary policy of the government.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Further debate?

Mr. Bill Walker: I'd like to seek unanimous consent to defer the leadoff on the budget motion.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): The member for Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound is seeking the unanimous consent of the House to defer the leadoff of the official opposition. No? I hear a no.

The member for Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound.

Mr. Bill Walker: Thanks a lot, Mr. Speaker; we tried. I guess they'll just have to listen to me for a fair bit this afternoon, then.

Mr. Speaker, there are a lot of things that I'm going to cover today. The budget was a big challenge in many ways. I'm going to start off by suggesting that it was not a balanced budget. They're using \$5 billion of either unusual or one-time revenues to try to suggest to people that they have balanced the budget. They can try to spin it however they want to the people of Ontario; we know what they've done. The people of Ontario will see through the charade and they will know what they've done.

They're hiding \$5-billion operational deficits through cash grabs like the sale of Hydro One—which, once it's gone, it's gone; there's no bringing it back; unauthorized pension assets, which the Auditor General has recommended to them they shouldn't use; and one-time unusual revenues like the sale of the LCBO and OPG head offices here in Toronto. Once you sell those, they're gone. You don't get to do this again next year and the year after and the year after.

The Financial Accountability Officer has already told them that they'll be back into a structural deficit by trying to play this shell game. It's unacceptable. They're trying to cook the books a year before the election. They're trying to get their speaking points out and say that all is good in the province of Ontario; everything is wonderful; it's all good. But the people in my riding of Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound—that's not what they're hearing and it's certainly not what they're telling me when I go home each weekend to see what's really happening in our area.

They are telling me that things are harder under the Liberals. They're struggling under hydro bills. They can't get mental health. Schools are closing. Hospitals are starting to actually look at, in some cases, stopping operations in some of their facilities because of budget cuts. All of the waste that they've had over their 14 years is coming home to roost, and sadly, it's on the backs of youth—our school closings—on seniors in our hospitals

and everybody obviously in our hospitals, and in our long-term-care homes.

Again, they promised 30,000 redeveloped beds, Mr. Speaker. They're nowhere even near that. For two years in estimates, I've been asking them, "Just give me the game plan. Tell me where you were going to build them and what year you were going to build them." They don't even give me that. To me, that was just a number that sounded good at election time: "We are going to redevelop 30,000 beds." It's not happening. I've confronted them and told them that there are 26,500 seniors currently sitting on a waiting list, waiting to get into a facility. That's going to grow to 50,000 in six years. Not one bed was actually announced in last week's budget. So what are those people—and not just the person who needs the bed. What about the caregiver? What about the family who is struggling to keep these people at home currently—of where they will go? Those are true-life issues.

They want to talk to us about all kinds of things in the budget that they think are wonderful. It is not wonderful out there. It's a patchwork. It's an attempt to fix the mess they've created over their 14 years. They've doubled the debt. Again, these aren't my numbers; these are the Auditor General numbers that I'm putting out. We'll be at over \$330 billion. We're spending \$12 billion a year in interest payments just to service our debt. Not one cent of that goes to mental health; not one cent of that goes to social housing or affordable housing; not one cent of that goes to the less fortunate in our society, and none of it goes to our youth—\$12 billion a year. This has been every year since I arrived here almost six years ago.

At the end of the day, they are not doing anything to truly address the problems. It's a patchwork. They want to pretend. They want people to think the world's—they'll bring out stats that make it look like they're doing fine, but you actually go back and ask the people. You ask the people who own small businesses, you ask the seniors on limited revenues, you ask people who are less fortunate what they're getting, and you ask people who are needing social services—all of them tell me that life has gotten harder and worse under these Liberals.

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We asked them for a number of budget requests that would start to address a number of these challenges, and they did not do that. I'm going to go through a few items here, Mr. Speaker, just to share some of the reality.

As I just said, Ontario used to be the leader of Confederation, used to be the province that was pulling everyone else along for our great Confederation. We are now the largest subnational debtor in the world: \$300 billion and climbing is our debt—more than doubled. The rest of our history of our province was \$129 billion. They've doubled that in 14 years, and it continues to go in the wrong direction. How could we, in good conscience, stand here and applaud them for doing that, particularly to the students in front of you, our great pages in front of you, Mr. Speaker?

We pay \$12 billion in debt. That's more than they spend on post-secondary education. I don't think most

people, if they were given a chance, would say, “We want you to spend more on debt payments than on post-secondary education.” They spend more on that than on important youth programs like autism—only \$4.4 billion spent on autism, but \$12 billion on the debt.

They spend—it’s projected to be \$312 billion this year, which is 24% more than just five years ago, and will go up another 8% in two years, to \$336 billion. The number is so big, I think, sadly, many people in Ontario can’t even get their head around that. They don’t know what \$336 billion even means. But I can tell you, it’s a lot of woe for our next generation. They’re going to be paying off what we have done to them. Not we—the Liberals, because it’s been their decision. They’ve had the majority government. They made the decision despite the official opposition challenging and trying to hold them accountable and hold their feet to the fire.

In a similar matter, some people confuse the debt and the deficit. Again, here they use one-time and unusual revenue. They’re hiding more than \$5 billion in operational deficit. They’re getting \$1 billion on a one-time sale of government buildings and the sell-off of Hydro One. They’re hoping for \$2 billion on cap-and-trade, but they’ve followed California—not a great example. In the last auction they had there, it didn’t come anywhere near that. So what happens when you budget for \$2 billion and it doesn’t come in? They’ll go and borrow more money, Mr. Speaker, and make it even worse. And let’s not forget in these notes—these are historically the lowest interest rates we’ve ever had in our province. What happens when they start—and eventually they will go back up?

They’re getting \$1.5 billion in new federal money; in other words, the Trudeau trust fund that they’re using to reduce the deficit. Is there a guarantee that will come in every year? Because if not, there’s another \$1.5 billion that either has to come from new taxes or they cut programs. And over \$500 million in pension asset funds—which I have already said the Auditor General specifically did not authorize.

Many times in this House, particularly in the last couple of months, I’ve talked about school closings: very near and dear to my heart, particularly single-community schools. When you take the school out, people start to leave. It makes the challenge that much tougher, not just for the school enrolment that they keep saying is a challenge, but that whole community starts to falter. The little grocery store; does it stay in business? The little gas station; does it stay in business? How do those students get any extracurricular activities? They’re going to put kids on buses for an hour and a half in some cases to get to school and another hour and a half back. Mr. Speaker, I don’t want to miss this opportunity to suggest: They keep talking about the environment all the time. Why is increased busing not counted into this? What about all those emissions that are going to happen with people riding buses two and three times longer than they currently do now?

They put a fair bit of money into the budget. They’re sending three people out, apparently, from their caucus to

start listening to the school closure issue. Would you, Mr. Speaker, not typically send the people out to listen before you actually decree your direction and your stance? Listening now, when half the schools have been closed—they have actually closed more schools than any other government in history. And there’s still 300 more schools on the chopping block.

I think there’s a lot of hollow words from the minister when she says, “We’re going to listen”—because we’ve presented various options. We had an opposition day motion in this House. They could have, at that point, said, “We agree. We’ve taken a misstep here. We need to recalibrate. We need to truly care about the kids and listen and not decimate communities and ruin lives.” They could have stepped back and said, “Yes, we will put a moratorium for a year.” But you know why they probably aren’t doing that? Because they’ve run our province into such a hole financially that they need that money. They need to pull it from our schools so that they can go out—because of the waste and mismanagement over their 14 years—to try to make those balanced budgets they want. They want to be able to say before an election, “We balanced the budget.”

The upcoming budget promises investment in new schools 10 years down the road. The Wynne Liberals are closing schools now. We’re not talking 10 years down the road. We want to ensure we’re talking about today and what’s happening today and the destruction they are going to create when they make these misguided decisions based on their own ideology and their need to cover up—sorry. I withdraw, Mr. Speaker. I didn’t mean that as “cover up”—but when they are trying to cover over what is happening in their government. At the end of the day, there are 300 more schools on the chopping block. I can’t imagine I could stand on that side of the House and portray to be the government of education, knowing that they’ve actually closed more schools than any other government in our province’s history, and there are still more to come.

Investing in health care: After freezing hospital budgets for many, many years—four straight years—they’re finally trying to play catch-up. And that’s good. I will applaud them for putting some money back in. But what has happened in the four years? What are the challenges that those hospital corporations currently are having because they’ve had four years of that? At the end of the day, you worry: Have they put in enough to truly allow those hospitals to catch up? Have they lost staff? Have they lost valuable practitioners and medical staff that have gone off because they see the writing on the wall that there are cuts coming?

In my own backyard, Grey Bruce Health Services is having to look at actually removing surgeries out of some of their more rural sites because of the ability to budget for them. Part of that, again, is because of 40% increases in energy and hydro costs. That has to come from somewhere. At the end of the day, they are forced to have a balanced budget. It’s unfortunate that this government doesn’t have the same legislation imposed on them. Then

we wouldn't be in this crisis of a financial situation that we're seeing.

Front-line health workers: Nurses are continuing to lose jobs. The doctors are challenged; they are certainly not in a happy place with the current government in the last number of years. Instead of looking at that and saying, "We're not going to cut more front-line health services," what they have done is they have focused on growing their health bureaucracy. They're actually creating 80 new sub-LHINs and 84 new LHIN vice-presidents. Now, yes, you need a bit of planning and, yes, you need strategy, but do you need that many, at the cost of cutting front-line care? Most people who come to me don't even really understand what a LHIN is or what they do, but they know that they are not getting in for their surgery; they know that there's a wait-list. They don't know how to fight bureaucracy and get the service in a timely matter.

I'm a recreation guy from way back, and I believe it's better to be proactive and preventive, as opposed to waiting until someone gets sick, missing the diagnosis and having to try to treat them at that point, which is much more costly. People are running to the emergency department because they don't have family physicians. At the end of the day, those are the very most costly forms of health care we have, as opposed to being more proactive, more preventive, and allowing people in front-line services to get them in, get them diagnosed as quickly as possible and get them on the road to recovery as quickly as possible.

I had someone last night tell me she waited eight months just to get in to get an assessment for her knee surgery. That was about a year and a half ago. She's still waiting to actually get in for her surgery. She was hobbling and in great pain. She was saying to me, "Can you believe it, Bill, that in Ontario it takes me that long just to get in to be seen by a specialist, and now I'm still waiting to get in for my surgery?" Luckily, she has the ability to have some help around her through her own family, but what if she didn't? What if she was on her own? This is unacceptable, how we're treating people in our great province—and I'm going to reinforce it over and over and over again in my remarks today—because of those challenges with regard to waste, mismanagement and, frankly, just the pure ideology of "We know what's better" as opposed to addressing the challenges in our system.

Hydro: As I say, Mr. Speaker, every meeting I go to, whether it's a business, whether it's a seniors' organization, whether it's with young people buying their first home, the biggest issue most people out there are grappling with is hydro. I can't take this opportunity and not mention it. The Liberals keep coming out and saying, "We have a relief program for this, and we have a relief program for that, and we have another relief program over here." Why don't they do anything to actually take action to stop the issue of why we have to have so much relief?

Just a month or so ago, whenever they introduced the 18% or 17% cut, as opposed to how they tried to sell it,

as a 25% cut—of your money, by the way; it's taxpayer money coming back to you—what they didn't share with the people, particularly those pages in front of you, Mr. Speaker, is that they just moved that debt out by 10 years. It's going to cost our province, the taxpayers of Ontario, an additional \$25 billion. Again, that's at today's historically low interest rates. What happens if, in five years, those rates go up by 2%, 3% or 4%? Invariably, at some point, those rates will start to go back up. How much will that cost that generation at that time, and what programs and services will then be cut? If they continue to follow their trajectory of overspending and not living within their means, then those debt payments become bigger, and even less services and programs are available to the great people of our province.

They're selling Hydro One. You campaigned, Mr. Speaker; I campaigned. I don't recall that ever being in an election platform. You would have thought that, if they were truly sincere and wanted to show their integrity and show their accountability, they would have said to the people of Ontario, "We're coming to your front door. We're going to take Hydro One and we're going to sell it off, a one-time fire sale, to make us look good, and I want you to vote on that."

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That would have been the absolute defining moment of an election. I'm pretty certain that we would have gotten there, and we wouldn't be in this situation today where there would be a fire sale.

Once Hydro One is gone—a \$750-million net revenue to this province—it's gone forever. You can't put it back together. As much as I believe the NDP are saying that they'll take it and put it all back together, some of those shares are already sold; you're not getting them back. Hopefully, they won't go forward with any more sales, and we can actually try to make some sense out of it.

The Green Energy Act is going to cost us \$133 billion. Speaker, again, I ask you: Is that truly, for about 5% of the overall grid—if it was ever all running at the same time, it's about 5% of our grid.

We are fully supportive of climate and environment, but we have to do it in a strategic manner. We have to do it in a manner where there are actually actions that are proving to be helpful to all Ontarians, and not just go again down the path of ideology.

It comes up continually. Since 2009, Ontario—and many people say it this way—has given \$6 billion. It's not quite that simple; in fact, it's worse. We actually pay other jurisdictions—the United States and Quebec—to take our surplus energy. We've paid them \$6 billion to take our surplus energy, which makes their manufacturing community doubly competitive against our own Ontario businesses. There's not one word that they can defend that with. They just keep saying it's just part of business and it's the way we go, and it's all in the spirit of "we're going to save the planet."

Mr. Speaker, there are other ways to do environmental programs that are actually going to be of value and show some actual benefit and change in our province and in our country.

They're so out of touch. They spent nearly \$1 million on partisan advertising to spin their plan, and they're approving \$4.5-million executive salaries at Hydro One.

This partisan advertising absolutely drives me crazy. There are people out there who aren't getting their payments, their supports, their programs and their services, yet the government comes out and, instead of relief going to the families that need it for their hydro bills, most of it is going to consultants, with, I think, \$9.2 million, and another \$2.3 million for the advertising campaign. They stripped the Auditor General of being able to have actual teeth in saying, "I approve," "I don't approve," and that's a partisan ad or it's not.

If they did that, it leads you to believe they did it for a reason. They wanted to be able to continue to do what they want to do on their agenda, and utilize taxpayers' money for their benefit and their gain, to stay in power.

It's unacceptable that people are going without when there was \$10 million or \$12 million on the table. They should have had that money going to the front line, to help them with their day-to-day needs, with their energy costs, with their ability to provide services.

We've already said, particularly with regard to Hydro One, that we'll get rid of the Green Energy Act before it costs us that \$133 billion. We'll dismantle that Green Energy Act, or the "bad contracts act," as we like to call it; we'll stop the fire sale of Hydro One; and we'll rein in exorbitant executive compensation in every sector.

I'm going to move on to housing. They say they have a plan to increase the supply. In fact, the budget shows they're reducing supply. It shows that housing construction starts are projected to go down next year by almost 10%, or—

Mr. Randy Hillier: Point of order.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): I hear the member from Lanark–Frontenac–Lennox and Addington has a point of order.

Mr. Randy Hillier: Speaker, I don't believe we have a quorum present.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Is there a quorum present in the House?

The Clerk-at-the-Table (Ms. Valerie Quioc Lim): We don't have a quorum.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Call in the members. We have up to five minutes to get a quorum.

The Acting Speaker ordered the bells rung.

The Clerk-at-the-Table (Ms. Valerie Quioc Lim): We have a quorum.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): A quorum is now present.

The member for Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound has the floor.

Mr. Bill Walker: I'll finish off on that last point. The budget actually shows there's a reduction of supply in housing. It shows that housing construction starts are projected to go down next year by almost 10%, or 6,500 housing construction starts. At the same time, they're cashing in huge because of higher housing resale prices.

They're collecting more on the land transfer tax than ever before—again, a concern I have with regard to that.

Mr. Speaker, I want to talk a little bit again—my critic role is long-term care. I started off with a few comments. We all know that the aging boomers gap is coming at us. The baby boomer generation is upon us. They should have been doing this planning 14 years ago. They should have had the solutions in place, as opposed to now, still just kind of blindly pretending that it's not coming at us. Not one new bed was budgeted in the budget. I think the words they used were, "We're encouraging the private sector to build more beds." Well, they've been "encouraging" a lot of things to happen in 14 years, but tell that to the senior who has been sitting at home wondering where that bed is going to be. Ask the senior's family member, who is getting battered and beaten down because they're trying to provide that care to their loved one when there's no bed in sight.

We would have hoped they would have listened. We've been working with all of the long-term-care associations to push the government and ask them to take some kind of action to give people hope, to give them the thought process that at least this government truly cares about seniors.

I will give them a little bit of credit. They put in some money for food for seniors, which is good. Partly, though, that's because we in this House pushed them and said that it's a crime that seniors in long-term-care facilities were getting less allotted per day than prisoners. We asked them to gauge that to the consumer price index every year. They did not agree to do that, but at least they put some money in there for that.

There are still, as I said, considerable concerns. They cut \$47 million from the agriculture budget. Mr. Speaker, where does our food come from—the healthy food that we all need—if we aren't supporting our agriculture industry? Every day in here when the Minister of Agriculture gets a chance to speak, he stands up and trumpets the flag that he's the greatest guy to support agriculture in the world. I'm not certain how he's going to go out and talk to all those agricultural groups and tell them, "Yes, I did a really good job. I got \$47 million cut from the budget for you to be able to continue to invest in your business and your livelihoods out there."

We continue to hear about mental health housing. Dr. Susan Boron, from my backyard, "called it a crisis and warned that it could ... turn into a publicity nightmare for the province." Today we're wearing pins addressing mental health and yet, Mr. Speaker, there are many organizations—and individuals, more importantly—out there very concerned with where the government isn't going and what they're not doing, because they continue to waste.

I'm going to recap a couple of numbers:

—\$1.2 billion in gas plants and not one thing to show for it except a barren piece of land to remind us of what a boondoggle it was;

—eHealth: \$8 billion they've wasted on that, and I think if you were to ask anyone in your riding, they

would probably suggest to you that there is no eHealth program that they access and actually have working for them; and

—the Green Energy Act: \$133 billion for a bunch of companies that they're ideologically supporting, trying to make people across this province believe that they've done the right thing.

Mr. Speaker, there are a lot of challenges. This budget is going to need a lot more scrutiny. It's going to need a lot more discussion.

I'm going to turn it over to my colleagues soon because I believe many more people are going to weigh in on this. It's a challenge. The debt payments scare me—the deficit that they continue to run year after year. They say they balanced the budget this year, but there's a \$5-billion gaping hole. If they truly are sincere, they'll show trust and integrity and truly tell the people of Ontario that they didn't balance.

At the end of the day, we're going to have a hard time justifying how you would support—they've thrown in a few baubles to try to make it go that way, but at the end of the day, they haven't changed their ways. They haven't addressed the problems. They're structurally going to be back in deficit very shortly, Mr. Speaker, and we're spending \$12 billion on interest payments. That doesn't help anyone in this great province of Ontario.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Further debate?

Mr. John Vanthof: Speaker, I believe we have unanimous consent to stand down the NDP lead.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): The member from Timiskaming–Cochrane is seeking the unanimous consent of the House to stand down the NDP lead. Agreed? Agreed.

The member for Nickel Belt.

M^{me} France Gélinas: Thank you, Speaker. You're assuring me that I do not have to have the lead, that I can do just the 20 minutes?

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Indeed. The House agreed to stand down the New Democrats' lead speech, so you have 20 minutes.

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M^{me} France Gélinas: Thank you. It is a pleasure for me to spend the next 20 minutes putting a few thoughts on the record as to what is in the bill.

The first thing I want to talk about is that it is getting harder and harder to build a good life and to get ahead in Ontario. Everywhere you go—and people who come to our constituency offices talk about the cost of everyday life going up. The wages are flat or sometimes even decreasing. The services that they'd like to count on, such as our health care services, schools and education, are being squeezed more and more.

Everybody wanted big change. They wanted to make sure that their kids have the opportunity to build a secure future for themselves, like we all did. Our parents wanted that for us, and I want that for my children and my grandchildren. People in Ontario spoke loudly that they see the first step as a \$15-an-hour minimum wage. We

were all hoping we would see some of that in the budget, but it certainly didn't come.

We are now up to 85% of Ontarians who want to keep hydro public; 85% of Ontarians agree that they want to keep hydro public. And what do we see? We see a budget that continues to sell more and more shares of Hydro One. How could that be?

We also saw a budget that did not undo some of the damage that needs immediate attention, and I will go into more details about that.

Je vais commencer avec mon portfolio pour les services en français.

On était tous très excités de voir dans le budget qu'il y a 3,2 millions de dollars pour la Place des Arts à Sudbury. C'est un petit encadré qu'il y a dans le budget. Tout le monde est bien excité. Mais lorsqu'on essaie de voir où est cet argent-là, et comment on fait pour s'assurer que cet argent va venir cette année pendant qu'il y a encore un gouvernement libéral majoritaire et que ce n'est pas une promesse qui est faite pour les trois prochaines années—parce qu'en ce moment, lorsque moi je regarde dans le budget, je ne peux pas trouver où sont les 3,2 millions de dollars qui ont été mis dans un encadré dans le budget pour la Place des Arts à Sudbury.

Donc, autant que je voudrais être capable de me réjouir du fait que la Place des Arts va finalement recevoir un financement du côté de la province, c'est difficile de faire ça quand je suis députée et que mon rôle à moi est de m'assurer que les promesses qui sont faites vont venir. C'est important de comprendre que lorsqu'il y a des choses comme ça que les gens voient dans le budget, automatiquement ils assument que, « Oh! C'est écrit dans le budget. On va recevoir cet argent dans une couple de jours, une couple de semaines au plus tard. » Mais plusieurs des promesses qui sont faites viennent avec une période de temps de trois ans, cinq ans ou 10 ans. Donc, on fait des promesses à long terme quand on sait très bien qu'il y a bien des chances qu'ils ne seront pas là pour garder ces promesses à long terme.

Une des promesses—et j'espère que quelqu'un du côté des libéraux va se lever pour dire, « France, ne t'en fais pas; c'est parce que t'as manqué la page, et puis, oui, c'est vraiment là. » Il y a 294 pages dans ce budget. À date, je n'en vois pas, sur aucune de ces pages, où on dit d'où vont venir les 3,2 millions de dollars pour la Place des Arts de Sudbury, et que ça va venir cette année, pas après la prochaine élection. Donc, on va avoir le droit d'avoir des commentaires de deux minutes. Les libéraux auront deux commentaires de deux minutes à faire sur ma présentation. J'espère qu'ils vont en profiter pour me dire exactement où dans le budget on va retrouver les 3,2 millions de dollars pour la Place des Arts et également me donner des garanties que ces 3,2 millions, ce n'est pas une promesse qui nous est faite pour les trois prochaines années mais une promesse qui nous est faite et qui est absolument dans le budget 2017-2018 et qui va se passer pendant l'exercice financier en cours.

Donc, j'ai bien hâte d'avoir les commentaires là-dessus, parce qu'à date je l'ai déjà demandé à plusieurs

personnes, et il n'y a personne qui a été capable de me rassurer. Donc, c'est le temps. Si vous avez des « réassurements »—je ne sais pas si c'est un mot, ça. Mais en tout cas, si vous pouvez me rassurer, c'est maintenant ou jamais. J'aimerais ça qu'on me montre où on peut trouver ça dans le budget.

Bien entendu, du côté des services en français, j'aurais aimé voir du financement pour les centres de santé communautaire francophones, que l'on demande un peu partout dans la province. Ça fait longtemps qu'il y a des communautés qui attendent. Je vous dirais qu'il y a des communautés qui attendent depuis 2007 pour avoir accès à des services en français, des soins primaires en français, la promotion de la santé, le développement communautaire et la prévention de la maladie. Il me semble que cela aurait été un bon temps pour investir. On voit déjà quelles sont les conséquences, du fait qu'il y a tellement de gens que moi je représente, de francophones et d'anglophones, qui ne sont pas capables d'avoir accès aux services de soins primaires.

Qu'est-ce que ça veut dire? Ça veut dire que ces gens-là se ramassent dans la salle d'urgence, et on voit les conséquences de ça : les temps d'attente dans les salles d'urgence de l'Ontario sont les plus longs depuis 10 ans. Ça fait des années que le gouvernement libéral dit qu'une des priorités est de diminuer les temps d'attente pour les salles d'urgence. Pourtant, bien qu'on nous le promette année après année, les temps d'attente sont les plus longs des 10 dernières années.

Ça m'emmène également à regarder un peu un autre de mes dossiers, les soins de santé.

The budget did show that in health care there will be a hospital-sector-wide increase of 3%, with all hospitals receiving a minimum 2% increase. This means that the increase to our hospitals will not keep up with inflation and population growth. I must say that not very often do we hear our hospitals going on the record telling the ministry and everybody else that just to maintain what they already have, just to maintain the long wait-lists in our emergency rooms, just to maintain the 1,200 beds that are not funded, just to maintain the overcrowding of our hospitals, where every nook and cranny in hallways and patient lounges and rooms is being used as a hospital room that should have never been designed as a hospital room—just to do this, to maintain where we're at, they needed 5%. What we're seeing in the budget is that they will get 2%. I'm worried, Speaker; I'm worried.

The situation in the hospitals in the north is not pretty. But now, it's starting to be not only in northern Ontario that the situation in our hospitals is becoming worrisome; it is throughout our big community hospitals, and it's actually starting to show its ugly face even down here on University Avenue, in some of our tertiary and quaternary hospitals here in Toronto. We've never seen that before, Speaker—never.

Our health care system was something that we could all be proud of. Yes, every now and again there was—I don't know—a community-acquired pneumonia going on someplace and that hospital would have a tough time, or

a case of the flu going on in another community where that hospital would have a tough time, but we're way past that. We're way past that. Our hospitals don't have any surge capacity anymore because they are all full or overfull. And what does this government say? They say that our hospitals will get a 2% increase when hospitals have spoken clearly that they needed at least 5% to maintain—we're not talking about undoing the damage that has been done by four years of budget freezes for our hospitals and a year with a 1% increase. All in all, if we go back the last 10 years, our hospitals haven't had enough to keep up with the cost of living and population growth.

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You have to realize that when you're talking about hospital services, many of the operational expenses of hospitals are way above the cost of inflation. If you look at the cost of drugs in our hospitals, they are in double-digit increases year after year. All of the new drugs that come into the market come at really, really high costs. Whether we look at the new biologics or we look at the new chemotherapy or we look at the new drugs coming onto the market, they all come at a really high cost, which means that the overall cost of drugs for a hospital don't go up by 2%; they go up by 10%, 11% and 12% year after year. So to go from percentages to an amount, what had been put on the record is that our hospitals needed a minimum of \$850 million to keep the status quo, and the government is offering \$518 million. This is \$300 million short of what our hospitals needed.

Of course, when you just say our hospitals are getting a budget increase of \$518 million, nobody knows what that means. Those are huge numbers. Unless you follow health care, like it is my job to do, and know how much is being spent, those numbers look really big. When you put them in percentage points, you realize that no, they were not that big.

Then it brings me to the need for pharmacare. I have nothing against giving children access to medication. We looked at the number that the government used; the number says there are four million people between the ages of zero and 24, and I don't doubt that. But I want to be clear that there are not four million children without access to drugs. In that four million, we have all of the kids who live with parents who receive OW and ODSP; they are already covered. We have all of the children who are covered by a private drug plan because their parents happen to have a drug plan—very lucky parents, but there are some—so to say that this would help four million youth is not exactly dead on.

I have no problem with giving children and youth access to drugs, but I have a big problem when we leave 2.2 million Ontarians with nothing. There are 2.2 million Ontarians above youth, 12 to 65—because at 65 you get on the Ontario Drug Benefit Program—in that age category who have nothing. Most of them struggle, and most of them cannot buy the drugs they need.

Did you know, Speaker, that of this cohort who work, of all of the people who work under the age of 65,

although they have a job, they have a paid income, one in three does not have a drug plan? They are added to the people who have nothing at all. What does that mean? That means a lot of hardship for a lot of people. That means the dream that Tommy Douglas had brought forward, that care would be based on need, not on ability to pay, is just that—a dream—because if you have access to your physician or your nurse practitioner free of charge and you end up with a prescription and you don't have the money to fill it, then it is all for nothing. For 2.2 million Ontarians, it is all for nothing because they can't afford to buy the medicine that they need, or the choices that they end up having to make to be able to pay for those drugs mean going without a lot of other things.

Health does not just happen. We all know that the determinants of health play a huge role in keeping people healthy. We all know that the number one way to identify who will be healthy and who will not is your income. For every \$1,000 more of income you get, you are a little bit healthier. If you look at the one in three workers that work precarious jobs with no benefits and often with poor pay, they are more at risk of poor health. When you look at the 2.2 million people who have no benefits at all, they are more at risk of poor health.

Medicine has changed greatly, and continues to evolve. A lot of the care that you need, once you have a diagnosis, once there is an illness or a disease—most of that treatment comes from drugs right now, and all sorts of different medicines. If you cannot have access to those medicines, then it is all for nothing. We all know that the burden of disease is not shared equally. Certainly, for people who live in poverty, poor education and even the neighbourhood that you live in will have an impact on your health. There are many things that impact your health, but certainly having access to the medicine you need is something that could be a game-changer.

When Tommy Douglas brought medicare forward, he started with hospital care in Saskatchewan. Once the hospital care was established, he grew it to include physician services. Then he was the champion to make sure that not only Saskatchewan had this but that it was throughout our country—ten provinces. There were two territories at the time; there are now three. We can all be proud of medicare. We have to follow the same path towards pharmacare. It has to be accessible to all. It has to be universal, as when Tommy Douglas started medicare.

The point about the way the NDP rolled out our pharmacare program is that it allows us to build the infrastructure to negotiate better prices for our drugs. It is shameful that the same series of drugs, if you go to the US and ask their veterans affairs—because they pay for the drugs for all veterans—they average 67% cheaper drug costs than we do. If we were to purchase this series of drugs for 13.4 million Ontarians, we would be in a position to negotiate better drug prices like we have never been able to negotiate before. Those savings would allow us to expand towards a fully universal and comprehensive pharmacare, which is something that I hope the government will look at seriously.

Unfortunately, my 20 minutes is almost over and I still have lots of other parts that I wanted to talk about. How come there's no money for Grassy Narrows? We have brought this issue forward so, so many times. It is time to clean up the mess in Grassy Narrows. You have made the point that you care about those people. Well, show that you care by putting some money aside so we can start the cleanup so that the population doesn't have to live with mercury poisoning. But it's not in the budget.

Mr. Randy Hillier: Point of order.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Point of order, the member for Lanark–Frontenac–Lennox and Addington.

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Mr. Randy Hillier: Thank you, Speaker. It appears once again that a quorum is not present and that there's not enough interest in the budget motion today.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Is a quorum present in the House?

The Clerk-at-the-Table (Ms. Valerie Quioc Lim): A quorum is not present, Speaker.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Call in the members. We have up to five minutes to establish a quorum.

The Acting Speaker ordered the bells rung.

The Clerk-at-the-Table (Ms. Valerie Quioc Lim): A quorum is present, Speaker.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Now we can resume with questions or comments. The member for Etobicoke Centre.

Mr. Yvan Baker: Speaker, a point of clarification: Do I have two minutes or 20? Two? Okay.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Later, you get the 20 minutes.

Mr. Yvan Baker: I get the 20. Great. I have so much to say that it's unfortunate that I have only two minutes.

Speaker, there are a few things that I want to highlight while I have this opportunity. First of all, this is a budget that really reflects the hard work of people across Ontario and members of this government. If you look at what has happened in this budget, this is the culmination of years of work to arrive at a balanced budget. That is because of a strong-performing economy across Ontario. We are outpacing the G7 in growth, and we are outpacing the rest of Canada in growth. But it is also the result of the fact that this government has worked incredibly hard to make sure that we do our best to focus on outcomes, to focus on results, to make sure we're spending taxpayers' dollars wisely. That's really at the root of being able to balance the budget.

What balancing the budget has allowed us to do is to invest even more in the priorities that Ontarians hold dear. That means we've been able to invest in health care. We're going to be investing a significant amount in hospitals, in building new hospitals. We're obviously providing the pharmacare, the OHIP+, for young people under 25.

We're investing in education—\$6.4 billion more, over three years, in education. We're adding more people to

the new OSAP, which allows more students to benefit from free tuition.

We're helping seniors with a range of initiatives, which I'm particularly proud of because, in my riding, we have a large number of seniors who are going to be pleased to see some of the investments we're making in health care and other services for seniors.

I'm proud of this budget, and I look forward to speaking about it more in the speeches to come.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Mr. Randy Hillier: It's always a pleasure to listen to the member from Nickel Belt. Of course, she always will have a focus and an emphasis on health care. Clearly, in all of her debates in the House, everybody recognizes her vociferous advocacy as a proponent for improved health care.

I do want to make a mention that it is very disappointing this afternoon to see that the government can't keep a quorum present on the budget motion debate. You would think that this motion would be of such significance and importance that the Liberal members would be here in their throngs to debate the budget motion. I have to wonder if there is some lack of support in the Liberal backbenches and the Liberal benches for this budget that may or may not—

Mrs. Cristina Martins: Point of order, Speaker.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Point of order: the member for Davenport.

Mrs. Cristina Martins: I think it's extremely important that the member use his two minutes to actually speak about the budget and the bill that's on the table, versus about who is in the House or not—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): It's not a point of order. But I would caution the member that it is kind of the convention of this place not to make reference to the absence of other members. He still has a few seconds to respond.

Mr. Randy Hillier: I recognize that. I was just talking about the need for quorum bells to be rung today on this budget motion.

Once again, Speaker, we'll have more opportunity to speak to this in my time. It was wonderful to hear the member from Nickel Belt speak about pharmacare and some of the shortcomings and failures of this budget to address so many health care problems that we know exist and persist in this province.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Miss Monique Taylor: I want to thank the member from Nickel Belt for her thoughtful words when it comes to this budget and the lack of what is done for the people of Ontario, especially in the health care system.

Speaker, with it being Children's Mental Health Week, I want to put in a few moments about the lack of dollars put in the budget—because there was nothing put in for children's mental health, and yet groups after groups come to this House and talk about the need. We've heard statistics that emergency room visits for mental health disorders have gone up by 63%; hospitaliz-

ation has gone up by 67%. Yet this government didn't think it was important to add dollars into the budget.

I want to quickly read something that was in the Star today about a young girl in grade 8. She was suffering panic attacks.

"A counsellor at her elementary school was no help. In high school 'there were absolutely no resources,' and by Grade 10 she was self-harming.

"Before her 18th birthday, she tried to kill herself and ended up in hospital.

"Unfortunately, the funding isn't there' to help kids," she says—"now 24."

I'm going to skip on: "'There are so many youth that are waiting so long—there are so many—the government needs to fill the gaps.'

"For children with mental health troubles, wait lists are the norm—when problems arise, they typically can't get help for a year and a half and end up in hospital, only to be discharged to find they have to wait yet again for services in the community."

This is absolutely, completely disrespectful to the youth of this province. I was so saddened to see the budget with zero for children's mental health when CMHO has been here time and time again bringing forward solutions, and the government refused to listen.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): We have time for one last question or comment.

Hon. Liz Sandals: I'm pleased to have just a couple of minutes to talk about this year's budget. You know, it really has been so important that what we've been able to do is to deliver a balanced budget to the people of Ontario this year. After the recession, we actually made a conscious decision: We said, "We're going to work our way out of this slowly, because to slash and burn would have a devastating effect on programs for people in Ontario. We're going to continue to invest in health care and education, and in transit and infrastructure. We're going to have a plan where we reduce the deficit each year, and we will balance the budget in 2017."

Speaker, that is exactly what we have done. In fact, we've done better than our target every year in terms of cutting the deficit, and we now have a balanced budget.

The good news is that because we've been able to grow Ontario's economy while we've been working on managing down spending, we actually do have the flexibility this year to create some new investments. I'm getting really, really positive feedback on our OHIP+ plan to provide universal pharmacare for everyone in this province under 25 years of age. So if you have a child or a young person in your family who needs some sort of medication, all they need is their prescription and their OHIP card. They can take the prescription and the OHIP card to your neighbourhood pharmacist, and that drug—4,400 that are on the Ontario drug formulary—will be delivered to that person absolutely free of charge.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): That concludes our questions and comments. The member for Nickel Belt can now respond.

M^{me} France Gélinas: There were a few more things I wanted to put on the record and didn't have a chance to.

How come we're still seeing cuts to education? Fifteen school boards will have special education cuts that total \$4.6 million.

We also saw the Geographic Circumstances Grant, which affects me a whole lot, which keeps rural and northern schools open, is being cut again. It's been cut by almost \$16 million over the last three years. It is too hard to ask little kids, three and a half, four, four and a half, five years old to be on a bus for three hours each day. You can't do this. We have to find a way to keep our little community schools open. Those long bus rides are wrong. It has to change.

1510

I wanted to say that I don't understand why the budget for the Ministry of Northern Development and Mines has gone down, and the Ring of Fire is not even mentioned. Why is it that the Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry's budget has also gone down when we know we need them in the field? Why is it that there's no money for children's mental health, although they are the poor cousin of a poor cousin, and need our help? When they talk about the 4,400 medications that are available to children—let's ask some of the physicians in your caucus—a lot of those drugs will never be used for children because they are not safe to be used for children.

Saskatchewan has had a similar program, and it never led to anything further. Saskatchewan has paid for the drugs for the children in their province for a long time. It has never sparked any kind of march towards pharmacare. The NDP plan will.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Further debate on the motion?

Mr. Yvan Baker: It's an honour to rise and have an opportunity to speak to the budget motion.

Speaker, when I ran for office, I did what aspiring politicians do and I spent time knocking on doors in my community and meeting with my constituents, and I heard from them about the issues that were important to them. I heard about growing the economy and growing opportunity for people, so that people of all ages could find jobs and opportunity. I heard about health care—about the importance of investing in health care and the importance of enhancing community care. As a member who represents a riding with one of the largest percentages of seniors in the country, this was something that I heard about a lot.

I heard about education—so that we can provide our young people with the best possible foundation and opportunities for the years to come. I heard about the need to invest in transit and infrastructure of all kinds, including roads and bridges, hospitals and schools, and I heard about making sure that we help people with their daily cost of living, making sure that they can deal with increasing costs and how it's burdening families out there. I did hear about the need for government to spend its tax dollars wisely and to balance the budget.

I'm proud to stand here today to speak to this budget because this budget takes incredibly important steps in all those various categories that I just spoke of.

Before I get into the content of the budget, though, Speaker, I did want to just say a few words about what's happened here today in the Legislature. I came here, as I just mentioned, because I stand for something. I stand for making improvements in all the areas I just talked about, as do my caucus colleagues.

It seems that the Progressive Conservatives don't feel the same way. It's disappointing that they're using procedural tactics to delay the debate of the budget bill. This is an important budget that, if passed, would create the first universal pharmacare plan for children and youth under 25 in Canada, which we're calling OHIP+. It's clear to me that the PCs don't want to see an expansion of universal health care in Ontario, so they abuse the standing orders to simply stall the budget bill. As a result, the House is unable to debate the bill this afternoon, as originally scheduled. The PCs have become nothing more than the party of no, and their stall tactics in the Legislature are only designed to slow the progress we're trying to make here for the people of Ontario, for people of our respective communities, for people in my community in Etobicoke Centre.

Amongst other things, Speaker, the budget bill, if passed, would also give workers chronic and mental health stress benefits, and provide Ontarians with better access to health care, but—

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): I apologize.

I can't hear the member for Etobicoke Centre because of the heckling that's coming from one side of the House.

The member for Etobicoke Centre has the floor.

Mr. Yvan Baker: Thanks very much, Speaker. Amongst other things, the budget bill would, if passed, give workers chronic and mental stress benefits, and provide Ontarians with better access to health care by giving nurses the authority to write prescriptions.

In addition to the budget bill, the PCs are also stalling bills to make roads safer for children and to give municipal councillors better parental leave benefits. Now they're pushing back against OHIP+, mental health benefits, helping nurses provide more services to our communities, and billions in health care investments.

As I said at the outset, I came here because I stand for something, as do my fellow caucus colleagues. They stand for making the lives of the people in their communities stronger and better. This budget is designed to do that.

The PCs have not put forward plans of their own in these various areas that we've talked about, and many others. Not only are they not putting forward their own plans; now they're trying to stall the plan that we're trying to move forward.

I'm really disappointed in the PCs, and I wanted to make sure that the members of this House and the folks watching at home understood that the PCs are stalling the work we're trying to do here.

What I did want to do was talk to the work that we are doing here. When we think about the quality of life of the people of Ontario, foundational to that is the health of our

economy. When you look at what's happening—if you look at economic growth in Ontario and you compare it to other provinces, if you compare it to other G7 countries, you can see that we're outpacing them in terms of growth. I think it's a testament to the people of Ontario that our economy is performing so well. It's incredible to see the progress we've made since the depths of the recession, economically, as a province.

That, in combination with some very, very hard work by folks here in the government—the President of the Treasury Board, the Minister of Finance and our entire caucus and cabinet—in working to balance the budget, in working to find ways to spend money more wisely, has allowed us to balance the budget. This in turn has allowed us to make investments in important areas. I'm incredibly proud of that.

When the recession hit, we made a deliberate choice to invest in the economy, to protect vital services like health care and education. As the President of the Treasury Board was alluding to just a few moments ago, we set out a path to return to balance.

What's incredibly interesting about this is that we've done this while making record investments in infrastructure. This budget here has \$190 billion over 13 years in infrastructure investment.

We didn't do what that party did, the PC Party, when they were in office, and slash and burn public services. We went out and we took a thoughtful, methodical approach to making sure we were getting better value for money and to balancing the budget while investing in the services that the people of Ontario really care about.

Those investments in infrastructure that I'm talking about include things like building schools and hospitals and transit.

We also know that when infrastructure investments are made, private sector investment also increases, businesses are more productive, and real wages rise. So it's thanks to these investments, thanks to the work of the people of Ontario, thanks to the work we've done together, that our economy is performing so well, and it's thanks to this that we've been able to balance the budget.

Just to give some quick figures about our economic performance: Since the recession, almost 700,000 new jobs have been created. March's unemployment rate was at 6.4%. That's below the national unemployment rate of 6.7% for 24 consecutive months. We're leading Canada in foreign direct investment, and that's ahead of California, ahead of Ohio, ahead of Michigan. Exports are up. Retail sales are up 4.8% since 2015. Housing starts are up over 24% from January, and Canadians are flocking to Ontario at the fastest rate in 29 years.

As someone who studied economics, who studied business, who worked in business, who looked at these indicators in advising my clients in business, I know how important these indicators are. These are strong indicators that Ontario's economy is performing well, and a very good sign. That doesn't mean there is not more work to be done, but this is a very good sign.

It's interesting to hear some of the members of the PC caucus rise and speak. Aside from just trying to delay the

budget, what they have said has been about tearing down this budget. They've talked about how they, effectively, obviously want us to make cuts to services that people rely on. I guess what I'm not clear on is—on the one hand, during this debate they've talked about the cuts that they would like us to make, and then they rise in question period and demand to know why investments haven't been made in their communities. It's very difficult to understand what the PC Party is really standing for. Again, I gather it's the party that stands for nothing except delaying the good work that people here are trying to do on this side.

1520

They talk a lot about the debt. When I hear the PCs talking about debt, I find it shocking to hear some of the things that the PCs are saying. The PC Party is the party that increased the debt by 53% when they were in office. They make it sound as though they're very concerned about bringing the debt down. Their track record is awful on this account, Speaker.

This is the party, the PC Party, that kept hidden from the people of Ontario a \$5.6-billion budget deficit and then took the 407, sold it well under value—so, wasted taxpayers' dollars—and used that to balance the budget. Now they're rising up and talking to us about how to manage debt. I think you can see from the work that the team on this side has done—the President of the Treasury Board, the Minister of Finance, the Premier and others—that in balancing the budget we've taken a thoughtful, methodical approach—this is not to mention all the slashing and burning that they did in public services and the damage they did to health care and education during their time in office.

The other thing that the PCs have been talking about, Speaker, is this issue around sub-national debt, the amount of debt we have as a sub-national jurisdiction. I think it's really important that people at home and people in the House understand that it's inappropriate to compare Ontario with many other sub-national jurisdictions. There are a number of reasons for that. One is that there are different accounting approaches in different jurisdictions; that's the first. For example, in Ontario, we account for pension liabilities as part of our debt and we don't use our capital assets to reduce our net debt. That's the first thing.

You also have to think about the services that Ontario provides in comparison to the services that other sub-national jurisdictions provide. For example, in Ontario we provide health care, including OHIP+. We provide education, highways and transportation, and sustainable social welfare programs. In California, for example—I know that the PCs like to reference California—health care is delivered by private insurance companies; education is provided by the local, not the state government; their highways are the most congested in the country and in the second-worst condition; and social welfare programs are delivered by the federal government. So to compare Ontario to other sub-national jurisdictions is an apples-to-oranges comparison, Speaker, and really is

misleading people about the fact that Ontario carries a much larger burden in terms of providing services within its jurisdiction than do these other sub-national jurisdictions.

I'd like to go back to what the budget does for people—and one of them is the investments in health care. We're increasing health care investments by \$11.5 billion over the next three years. That includes a \$7-billion booster shot to health care, including the commitment made in the 2016 budget. This will improve access to care. This will expand mental health and addiction services and enhance the experience and recovery of patients.

We're also dedicating \$1.3 billion in funding to further reduce wait times. I had my seniors' advisory group meeting this morning, as I do every month. In those meetings I consistently hear from seniors in my community, in Etobicoke Centre, about how important it is that we continue to improve access to care, that we continue to improve the quality of care, but also that we reduce wait times. So many of them have told me about that, and that's what we're doing: We're responding to that feedback, to those concerns.

One of the key components within health care is, of course, OHIP+. As of January 2018, we're going to be providing free prescription drugs to everyone aged 24 and under. This is going to provide coverage for over 4,400 medications, Speaker. This program is the first of its kind in Canada. This will ensure that parents and young people never have to choose between paying for medication and other essentials. There are four million young people who will benefit from this, Speaker—four million people in the province of Ontario, not to mention all of their families. I think that is something that we have to keep in mind: how many people this will touch in a really meaningful way.

I want to move on to education because I did mention that at the outset. I think that, for example, if we look now in Ontario, 85.5% are graduating from high school. That's more than ever before. In 2016, 68% of adults in Ontario had a post-secondary credential, which is up from 56% in 2002. That's higher than any rate for any country in the OECD. We can be proud of the work that's been done to make sure that young people get the right start. There is, of course, more work to be done.

We continue to build new schools and renew existing ones. The province, in this budget, is providing almost \$16 billion over 10 years to help build and improve schools. So it's interesting that I watch the PCs rise in question period and talk about schools, and then here they are delaying a budget that would invest \$16 billion over 10 years to help build and improve new schools. Now, instead of debating the bill, all they can do is heckle from the other side. I think it's pretty disappointing.

We're rolling out the new Ontario Student Assistance Program, which means free tuition for more than 210,000 students in post-secondary education. That's starting this fall. I know that the Minister of Advanced Education and

Skills Development is here for the debate, and she has done incredible work in trying to develop and launch this program. I know that when I talk to people in my community, they think that this is really exciting. So when you think about this in combination with some of the other measures in this budget, like what's been done on OHIP+, these are steps that are really going to make a difference in people's cost of living and are really going to help families, particularly those with young people who are trying to get a good start.

On this note of making life more affordable, Speaker, one of the things that a lot of us hear about in our communities is that one of the areas where a lot of families are struggling is with child care. That's something that we've heard and we're trying to respond to on the side. We're helping 100,000—100,000, Speaker—more children get affordable, quality, licensed child care. In 2017-18 alone, Ontario will support child care for 24,000 more children—24,000 more children—up to four years old, through new fee subsidy spaces and support for new licensed child care spaces in schools.

One of the other things that we're doing to make life more affordable is our plan on housing. When you think about the fair housing plan, which has a number of components—and I'll talk about it in a moment—this is again another step to make sure that we are helping people with their daily costs of living and helping them to address one of their largest costs of living, which is housing. That's in addition to the things we've done on pharmacare, the things we've done on OSAP and post-secondary education and other areas.

One of the things that I spoke about at the beginning is the importance of the economy. Although we are performing well, there is definitely a lot more work we can do. One of the things that I know Minister Matthews and others have been working on is helping people acquire the skills they need to find a job and receive secure and predictable employment and then retirement income. We're doing a range of things to help businesses prosper. Through our investments in supporting business, Speaker, we are creating and retaining more than 37,000 jobs across the province.

So there are a number of steps being taken to strengthen our economy. Obviously the foundation of that is the significant investments in infrastructure—\$190 billion over 13 years—and the investments in helping young people access post-secondary education and then strengthening that education so that they are prepared for the world they are entering.

I talked about the investments in infrastructure before. These are all important steps. Again, this is in hospitals, this is in schools, this is in transit, this is in roads, this is in bridges. This is in all the things that the people in my community and communities across the province have said they would like us to continue to invest in.

Again, when I hear the members of the PC caucus talk about how they want to reduce the debt, the question that they have to be asked is, what would they cut to make that happen? Which infrastructure investments would

they cancel? Which hospitals would they close? Which transit plans would they cancel? Those are the questions that I think the PCs have to wrestle with, and perhaps that's why they're mum on this budget and not willing to debate it, and trying to delay it.

1530

Lastly, Speaker, I think an issue that's really important to people in my community of Etobicoke Centre is the issue of housing. I know a number of members of our caucus have worked incredibly hard on this particular issue. One of the issues that I work very hard on is the issue of helping people enter the housing market. Housing prices have grown very, very rapidly in the greater Toronto area, so this is something that I felt we absolutely needed to address. If you look at resale house prices in Toronto, they're up more than 33% from the previous year.

Buying a home is critical for people and for families because it allows them to put a roof over their head and it's the most economical way for people to do that. But the purchase of a house is very often, traditionally, the way that families accumulate wealth and accumulate savings, and are able to save for their retirement and able to save and earn for their children's education and many other important expenses throughout their lives. So it's really important that we do everything we can to make sure that people can enter the housing market, especially young families, as they're trying to do so.

We've put forward a plan that has a suite of measures; I won't mention them all. Some of the measures, like providing municipalities with the ability to tax vacant properties; the non-resident tax, which I was a strong advocate of, to make sure that we are putting people first who live here, who work here, who pay taxes here—I think that that's an incredibly important principle that we need to support.

I started by talking about why I ran for office, and about the issues that I wanted to work on, whether that be education, health care, growing our economy, building infrastructure and, of course, balancing our budget. I've had the privilege of working on all of those things, particular on balancing the budget, over the past three years.

I'm proud of what this budget does. I'm proud of what it does for our financial future. I'm proud of what it does for the people of Ontario and the people of Etobicoke Centre.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Mr. Randy Pettapiece: Speaker, I'm pleased to rise to lend my comments to the speech that the member from Etobicoke Centre just gave.

I wonder if the member could visualize \$11 billion or \$12 billion; I wonder if he can visualize that. That's the amount of interest that is going to be paid this year on our debt.

Two weeks ago, we just lost a nursing home west of Stratford; they're closing it down. About two years ago, we lost another one. We've lost beds in Harriston. I

wonder how \$11 billion could have helped there. I think it would have gone a long way to help those businesses keep those nursing homes open. But they're gone. Two are gone, and one is leaving.

On Fridays, if I can, if I'm in Stratford at my office, I go down for lunch to the Anavets association—that's the army, navy and air force veterans' association. They have a nice lunch over there. There's usually a couple of hundred people in there having lunch. I just walked in 10 feet, and they were saying, "What is this Premier trying to pull this time?" They could see through what was going on.

Nobody asked this Premier to sell Hydro One—nobody. She never said she was going to do that, in her election last time. Now she has sold Hydro One, and she's putting that money into trying to get rid of the deficit. She's using her cap-and-trade tax to get down to a balanced budget.

What happens when they don't have this anymore, when they don't have any more assets to sell? How are they going to manage their deficit? They're not, and they're not managing it properly right now.

I hope the people in Ontario—in fact, I know they do—when this government says something is free, it's not. Somebody has got to pay for it. Somebody has to pay for these free things that this government says they're giving away. That's something that is not selling with the people of the province of Ontario.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Miss Monique Taylor: I was listening intently to the member as he did his 20 minutes on his depiction of what the budget looks like for the people of Ontario.

Once again, I'm going to rise in this House and talk about the things that were not in the budget when it comes to children's mental health and the dollars that have not been put in.

The increase that children's mental health base budgets have seen was 3% in 2003 and 5% in 2006. Yet we have 12,000 children waiting for services in the province—and this is moderate to severe cases that are waiting, for over a year, which we read in the Star this morning.

So to talk about all of the great things that they're doing that they want to boast about—it's unfortunate that our most vulnerable children are still not going to be a priority for this government. Quite frankly, Speaker, that's where we need to start. If we do not deal with our children's mental health, they are going to go on to live lives with mental health issues. Then they are probably going to have to access the systems further.

We see hospital wait times increased because of children's mental health. We see emergency room wait times increased because of children's mental health. That's all a cost on our budget, in our hospital systems. If we fix it when they're children, those costs will come off later in life. It's really unfortunate. And then, we see a \$4.6-million cut to special education over 15 school boards. Where are this government's priorities when it

comes to our children? Because I think they were completely left out of this budget.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions or comments?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: I'm delighted to weigh in for a couple of minutes on this topic.

I really want to take a moment and commend the member from Etobicoke Centre. He was elected, as we know, in 2014. He is parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Finance, he's also my parliamentary assistant on digital government, but since he was elected, Speaker, he's been sitting on Treasury Board. He knows the kind of work that goes into building a budget like this. He knows, because he has years of experience there now, the kinds of decisions that Treasury Board has to make.

I am extremely proud that this government has finally gotten back to balance. It's been almost a decade, but we are in balance. I'm happy about that because it allows us to make really important investments that will benefit the people of this province. This budget is a big booster shot to health care—and I couldn't be happier to be sitting in this House. I will have the right to vote on a bill that is an historic expansion of medicare. We very much look forward to working with the federal government, with other provinces and territories. I do believe Ontario taking this step will mean that other provinces will see what we're doing and follow suit. I absolutely believe, just as we had success when it came to income security for pensioners, that what we started in Ontario will expand across the country.

Making sure that every child in this province can take the drugs that have been prescribed to them by physicians, by nurse practitioners is a huge step forward. We must not lose sight in this House of the historic nature of the investment in children and youth when it comes to pharmacare, Speaker. It is big, it is important, and I think we should all celebrate it.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Mr. Bill Walker: It's a pleasure to provide some comments to my colleague from Etobicoke Centre. He referred to me as heckling him. I was actually trying to add some good points of debate to enhance his speech. He shared with us that he got into becoming a politician to tackle the debt and deficit. He wanted to get in because of infrastructure, he wanted to get in because of schools and hospitals. So, Mr. Speaker, I would love to heckle him a little bit or offer debate, whatever he chooses to listen to.

But one point I want to get on is, again, the educational assistants, the special education assistants, that were stripped across all of our boards. Not one dollar was put back into the budget for those people. I keep saying the kids that were needing those special-needs—they had special needs the day before they made that choice and they still do.

He talked about building some schools. I'm glad to see some schools getting built. What he leaves out is, they have closed more schools than any government in the

province's history, and there are 300 more to go. We're going to continue—because that is infrastructure in our own backyards that has a huge impact in the community. They stripped out the community impact portion on the actual school reviews.

Our hospitals are now struggling. In my backyard, they are coming to me, saying, "We're going to have huge, significant deficits" because this government has wasted so much money and held any increases for four years that it's going to be tough for them to balance the budget coming down. And they've done nothing to address the soaring and exorbitant hydro costs.

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He also talked a little bit about debt and deficit, and it was just—it's okay. I'd like to ask him the question: In your own home, if you spend more than you bring in, you have to make choices too. Why aren't you doing it as government? Why can you continue to put the debt on our next generation and the generation after that, to try to pretend that we are actually in a great space in Ontario's history? We're not. We're financially in a very dire situation. All you're doing is moving debt beyond your ability out to the next generation and the generation behind. It's unconscionable that you think we should just say, "Yes, all's rosy," and vote for your budget when you continue to saddle the next generation with debt and deficit. It's unacceptable. I will not be able to support, in that capacity, continuing to put our future in jeopardy.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): That's four questions and comments, and I return to the member for Etobicoke Centre.

Mr. Yvan Baker: I'd like to thank all the members who joined this debate on the budget motion. I'd just like to reiterate again and summarize some of the key points.

First of all, as a result of the hard work of the people of Ontario and the investments that we've made, the economy is performing very, very well. We're outpacing the G7. We're outpacing the rest of Canada. That work, along with the work of making sure that we're using tax dollars even more wisely, has allowed us to make investments in key areas: investments in health care, whether it be the OHIP+ pharmacare program for kids or young people under 25; whether it be increased investments in education and building schools across the province, including in the ridings of all members in this Legislature; whether it be expanding the new OSAP so that more young people can get access to post-secondary education; whether it be the steps taken to build out infrastructure, \$190 billion over 13 years. All of these things are critical and are touching and will continue to touch the lives of the people of our province and of my riding in Etobicoke Centre. That's why I'm proud of this budget.

I'm also proud of this budget because it is fiscally responsible. I'm someone who studied finance, who advised companies in the private sector on how to grow their businesses and how to invest their money. I know a sound financial plan when I see one. I know that what we've done here is to very thoughtfully try to come to balance, and we've done just that. We didn't approach it

the way some governments of the past have, by slashing and burning services. We've done it in a thoughtful, methodical way by getting more value for money for the people of Ontario.

The member opposite suggested that we should make choices. I would like to know what choices the PCs would make. Unfortunately, we haven't heard from the PCs. They have no position on anything. It would be great if they took a position on something, but as of now it appears that they'd like us to cut. They cut in the 1990s. They ran on cutting 100,000 jobs, and they're running on cutting again.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Further debate?

Mr. Randy Hillier: It's been a pleasure to be here and engaged in debate on the budget today, and listening to the tall tales from the other side during the debate has been quite entertaining as well.

Speaker, we have heard the storyline that this government has been a saviour and we are now in balance, and it is due to the hard work and the effort and the sincere interest that this government has in financial prudence and financial management. You know, you can't help but think of that song—Sixteen Tons, is it? “Another day older and deeper in debt”—after each budget. Even now we have a financially balanced budget, we're another day older and we're deeper in debt.

The hallmark of this Liberal government is debt—debt. Everything with their government, everything with their administration, everything is about expenditure and about debt. That's the prism and the lens that they measure themselves through: How much money can they spend? And they are prolific at spending money. There is no question, no doubt about it. But spending money and going into debt is not an accurate measurement of government effectiveness, nor is it an effective barometer of proper administration.

We hear every day in this House, Speaker, the stories from individual members about the ineptness and the incompetence of this government in the delivery of services and their responsibilities. So when the member from Etobicoke Centre is talking about fiscal prudence and wondering what our plan is and equating expenditures as effectiveness, let me remind him of the story that we just had in my riding last week where the LHIN was refusing patient care. The LHIN in Ottawa was refusing to accept patients from my riding. It had nothing to do with expenditure of money. It was improper, incompetent administration. I would say a government that doesn't take its responsibility seriously about providing good administration—that was one example, but there are many, many examples.

In my riding, five years ago, a long-term-care home closed up. It was closed up by this Liberal government. It was in Picton. Seventy-eight licensed long-term-care beds were removed from the LHIN. They were not allowed to be occupied by individuals. We know that we have thousands of people in my area who need a long-term-care bed. They pulled out 78. That was five years

ago. This government still has not found a place to put those 78 licensed beds. They're out there, but they're not being utilized.

Five years—five years—and they sent me out a note last year saying, “We're getting close. We're getting close to deciding where we're going to put these 78 beds.” Every long-term-care facility in my riding has put forward, “We need them. We need them. We want them.” But this government is trapped in its paralysis and its irresponsibility of actually doing its job. They can't decide where to place those 78 licences.

But I want to talk about one other—well, maybe a few more elements of this bill. But the next one that I want to speak to is the administration of justice.

For the member of Etobicoke Centre here: Again, we have seen story after story after story in the press and through discussions—all of the attorneys general of this country met last week in Gatineau to discuss the egregious problem that is happening in the administration of justice, where criminal cases are being thrown out of court because of delay—thousands. We understand that in Ontario alone over 11,000 more cases are at risk of being thrown out because of delays due to the Jordan case. We also know that our jails are severely overcrowded. We know that segregation is severely abused. We know that there are all kinds of maladministration within our justice system.

But what is the government's solution to that egregious, acute problem in the administration of our justice? Well, in this budget, the solution is to reduce expenditures at the Ministry of the Attorney General by \$4 million. Can you imagine? Everybody is clamouring for more crowns, more resources and more courts—more resources—so that we ensure innocent people are not unduly held and that violent criminal offenders are suitably punished or penalized by our court system. But no, Speaker, this government chose once again to turn its back on its responsibilities, turn its back and say, “This is just too complicated. This is too troublesome. This is too problematic. We don't know what to do with this.”

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Some 11,000 cases, and let's put this in context for everybody, because I did hear the Attorney General last week quoted in the Ottawa Citizen; I think it was by the columnist Kelly Egan. The Attorney General mentioned in his column that the Jordan decision was tantamount to rule changes in a hockey game in the third period. I think that's an accurate reflection of that quote.

The right to a timely and speedy trial is nothing new. It is established and recognized in our Charter of Rights and Freedoms: the right to timely and speedy trials. This is not a new requirement. Indeed, that was solidified even further after the Charter of Rights and Freedoms in the Askov decision. Once again, it said, in that case, that a 34-month delay in trial was unacceptable and that the case would be thrown out. The Jordan decision has just provided further clarity and clarification. And this government, in the budget anyway, has said, “Well, that's too complicated. Let's not go there. Let's not fix the

administration of justice. Let's leave our jails overcrowded. Let's leave our courts overcrowded." Is that not an abuse of process? You would think that the members opposite would feel the egregiousness of keeping people incarcerated for years without trial. You'd think that would tug at them to say, "We can't allow that." But no, they continue on.

Is that wise spending and prudent fiscal management? I don't think so. But again, after saying all that, we're deeper in debt. Let's not fix the problems. Let's let those problems persist, but let's go into debt some more.

And listen, Speaker, I know the difference between an investment and a debt. The people of Ontario know the difference between investments and debt. The Liberal government use those words interchangeably, as if they were synonyms. They are not synonyms. Debt and investments are very different instruments. These guys go in debt; the investments pale. There is no investment in our courts, in our administration of justice, as I just spoke about, but more debt.

When we're speaking about this budget, it's hard not to speak about the cost of electricity and hydro, the operations of Hydro One and the cost of electricity. I put out a mail-out to my riding a few weeks back. So far, I have received over a thousand responses mailed back to my office. A thousand responses have been mailed back. Each one of those was about the Liberal government's electricity policies and the high cost of electricity and how it was hurting and harming those individuals, those families, those businesses.

That was an astonishing number: 1,000 returned. That means that everybody went out and cut that mail-out up, wrote on it, went out and bought a stamp, and put the stamp on it. They also—many, many hundreds of them—attached their hydro bill to those mail-outs, and asked me—and they want to know from this Premier and from this government: What are they going to do? We still have significant numbers of errors on our hydro bills, as well as high costs.

I had one individual in to see me on Friday last. He had a letter from Hydro One saying, "We want a \$2,000 security deposit from you." It went on to say, "You have no history of NSF cheques. You have no history of late payments. You're a good customer; we really like you. But we're going to demand a \$2,000 security deposit from you."

He phoned up Hydro One and he said, "I meet all your requirements as a good customer—never paid late, never an NSF cheque, always a good, paying customer." And the response from Hydro One was, "Just pay the security deposit anyway. We have on your file that you're a good customer. Just pay the \$2,000 anyway."

Of course, Speaker, we can also tell everybody now that, under the new program of these abuses at Hydro One, we no longer have the Ombudsman in the province to deal with this. Hell, we don't even have an ombudsman at Hydro One anymore, right? She left.

Hon. Bob Chiarelli: Give us the name of the customer.

Mr. Randy Hillier: The former Minister of Energy has said to give them the name. I will. We have already gone to Hydro One. I don't wait around, okay?

Hon. Bob Chiarelli: Give us the name.

Mr. Randy Hillier: I don't think it's appropriate for me to put his name on record in the House without his confirmation, but I will go over—and it has already been actioned, Minister.

That's just so typical of this Liberal government: spend money, spend money, and who cares about the problems that they are involved with? They don't care. It's just that, unfortunately, they don't see those people whom their policies are hurting. They don't see those people. They have their backs turned to that hurt that is being caused.

I'll add to that a little bit further as a proof point of their uncaring attitude towards the harm that their policies cause and their fundamental belief that by announcing an expenditure, by announcing more debt, by announcing the policies, everything will be good.

Their affordable housing act is one further demonstration of an absolute and abject failure of this government to recognize the causes of the problems that they create. We know that the problem of affordable housing in this city and in the GTA is a direct result of a lack of supply. We know that the supply is impacted by government rules and regulations. We know that. Every economist recognizes that they have strangled supply while the demand continues to increase.

Their bill that was introduced and will be going to second reading shortly does squat to address the problem of supply. Squat. Zero. Nothing. The only thing they've done is brought in rent control for the whole province because there is a problem in Toronto.

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What appears to be the problem in Toronto? Well, we know. I haven't seen any immediate results elsewhere in the province, but we did see that story on the news that made significant headlines down here about the individual who had his rent doubled. We did see that story. I've not seen any indication of that anywhere else in the province. I may be wrong, and if I am I'd be happy to hear, during this debate, some other examples. But there it is again: a problem in Toronto, and the Liberal government brings out the sledgehammer to the rest of Ontario as the solution. That's not the way to administer; it's not the way to govern. It's a way to cause problems, and that's what this government has done. And they're causing further problems.

This budget—I guess the only thing we can really say about this, what the people of Ontario really gain with this budget is that they get two campaign budgets instead of just one. We know that the general election is scheduled for next June, June 2018, and the people of Ontario have now got two campaign budgets, one this year and one next year. But I think the people of Ontario clearly understand the difference between debt and investment, unlike the Liberal members, and they will reject that view that just going into debt is the way to

measure the quality of government. Going into debt is not the way to measure the effectiveness of government.

Hon. Deborah Matthews: So what are you going to cut?

Mr. Randy Hillier: I see the Deputy Premier is being riled by that, by exposing the fundamental flaw in the Liberal government of their unwillingness to recognize that their debt is debt and it's not an investment; it is a debt.

Speaker, I will be welcoming further debate. I will be interested in hearing why 78 beds still remain unallocated in the South East LHIN. I will be willing to hear why this government cannot have a Hydro One policy or administration that is effective. I'll be interested to hear about the 11,000 charges that are at risk of being thrown out and the overcrowding in our jails, and why—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Thank you. Questions and comments.

Ms. Cindy Forster: I want to thank the member from Lanark-Frontenac for raising the issue of bed licences. I would encourage him not to hold his breath waiting for a decision to be made. A similar situation in my riding: announced in 2008, and the beds were not built until 2016, a long nine years later. And they weren't additional beds; they were beds that had been squeezed out of a former, larger nursing home. They were given to the for-profit sector instead of to the not-for-profit sector, although in Welland, we have a great non-profit nursing home called the Foyer Richelieu. The Foyer Richelieu is supported not only by public dollars but by the Club Richelieu, who just celebrated their 90th anniversary this past couple of weekends ago. That club raised hundreds of thousands of dollars for this non-profit nursing home over the last 25 to 30 years, but the government chose to give the beds to a for-profit.

It used to be that 80 beds was a break-even proposition, and now the people in the game say 120 beds is break-even. The foyer only had 60 beds, and so they really could have benefitted from having those additional 80 beds. They would have still had thousands of dollars being flowed in from the Club Richelieu for all kinds of programs and equipment. I know that they lobbied the government and MPPs for a number of years, but nobody was listening to them, unfortunately. At the end of the day, those beds are now with Jarlette, which is a good for-profit operator—we can't take that away from them—but the beds would have been far better off with the Richelieu, in our community, in a non-profit setting.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Mr. Yvan Baker: I'm pleased to respond to the member for Lanark. He mentioned a lot of things, and I couldn't possibly respond to all of it in my two minutes. But he ended by suggesting that the members on this side don't know the difference between debt and investment. I am not going to take lessons from that member about how to manage finances. I've spent a career managing finances, managing finances for others, and advising

others on how to balance their budgets and how to spend their money wisely.

I can tell you that, having been part of Treasury Board and having been parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Finance, I know a lot about the work that has been done by this team to make sure that we prudently work towards a balanced budget, and that we do so not by slashing and burning, as the PCs did when they were in office; not by running on 100,000 job cuts, as the PCs did in the last election; but by focusing on outcomes, by measuring outcomes for people, whether that be health care or education or in other services, and by figuring out how we can deliver the best outcomes, and deliver the best value for money at the same time. That's what we've done.

That's why, in conjunction with economic growth, which has helped us to grow the economy and therefore the tax base, and in conjunction with those prudent cost-savings measures, by becoming smarter with taxpayer dollars, we've been able to balance the budget.

The member opposite wants to see the debt cut. He needs to tell us what infrastructure investments he would cancel. What programs would he slash and burn? Here we are again, hearing from the PCs, just as we did in the 1990s, just as we did in the run-up to the last campaign. Here we are, in the lead-up to the next campaign, and they're talking about cuts—cuts to those infrastructure investments, and cuts to the services, like health care, education and pharmacare for young people, that the people of Etobicoke Centre and the people of Ontario have asked for and deserve.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Mr. Bill Walker: It's a pleasure to make some comments in regard to my colleague from Lanark-Frontenac-Lennox and Addington. He started off his speech by quoting a song, *Sixteen Tons*: "Another day older and deeper in debt." He couldn't have nailed it any better, frankly.

Some of the members, I think, are actually feeling a bit of guilt over there, because they're getting a bit defensive about this: Why can't we do things differently? Why can't we find other ways?

Why wouldn't we talk a little bit about their incompetence and the billions of dollars that they've spent that are giving no benefit to Ontarians—the \$1.2 billion for gas plants that were cancelled and did not produce one iota of energy. They didn't talk about school closures, hospitals challenged with budgets, special education assistants, mental health, social services and hydro costs.

He talked about long-term-care beds. A number of people have talked about that. They're all waiting and waiting and waiting for when these announcements will come out.

He talked about their incompetence and the waste. They're talking \$190 billion over 13 years in infrastructure. Why don't they spend some of that and build those long-term-care homes now? Why don't they allow these hospitals to stay in existence?

He talked about fiscal prudence and a balanced budget. What he did suggest is that they want everybody to think they are saviours and that they actually are prolific people, to balance the budget. What they are is leaders in debt. They've actually put our province in the worst situation it has ever been in. They're spending \$12 billion a year on nothing other than debt and interest payments.

There's no one over there, frankly, who should be standing and proudly saying, "I support spending \$12 billion every single year." Let's just round it down to around \$10 billion for the last five years: That's \$50 billion. How many schools wouldn't be closed if we had \$50 billion? How many hospitals wouldn't be in challenges? How many people would actually get their hip replacements if we had \$50 billion in the bank and not paying interest payments?

They didn't do a thing about Hydro One. They're still going down the road with their ideology.

One of the things that I think this Liberal spin is—actually, if they used it to turn some of their wind turbines, maybe those could actually be a really good investment.

They might as well give out a pair of rose-coloured glasses, because the province isn't in the wonderful shape they state it is.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Mr. Paul Miller: I just want to go back a little bit here, Speaker. This bill seems to be a 180-degree turn from Liberal policies held since 2003, reflecting political desperation more than a sincere newfound commitment to affordable housing. The Liberals have consistently refused to fund the repairs of municipal social housing, and in 2013 the Wynne government cut \$129 million per year in annual funding for Toronto social housing programs.

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Anything that makes it easier to evict tenants, even if they're bad tenants, requires close scrutiny, Speaker. This bill comes too late for tenants who have already received rent increase notifications; for example, Liberty Village, 100% increases. The bill does not get rid of vacancy decontrol and does not provide for a rent registry. Landlords will still have an incentive to squeeze out lower income tenants in gentrifying neighbourhoods, and prospective tenants still face unaffordable market rents.

Tenant groups and advocates have long sought the disclosure of the 1991 loophole, which has been done. Standard leases and rents to the AGIs and "landlord's own use" eviction rules—they will be strongly supported. Landlords will not be supportive of the rent regulation provisions, probably. Smaller landlords will benefit from the clarity and simplification of eviction rules, but large landlords already know how to manage any current lack of clarity and simplicity.

In closing, all of these incentives that have been brought forward at the eleventh hour are quite interesting. All I know is that I've been here a while, and I know that

they have wasted billions and billions of dollars. Whether it be gas plants, eHealth, Ornge over the last eight to 10 years, no government in Canadian history has had more scandals than this Liberal government in the last 10 years.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): That concludes our questions and comments. We return to the member from Lanark–Frontenac–Lennox and Addington.

Mr. Randy Hillier: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and to the members from Welland, Etobicoke Centre, Hamilton East–Stoney Creek and, of course, Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound, for their comments.

I'm just going to end off with my response: \$12 billion in interest repayment costs this year—\$12 billion. That's repayment of debt. It is more than what we spend on post-secondary education. It is more than what we spend on all the programs for our children and youth services. It is more than what we spend on community safety. It is more than what we spend on the Ministry of the Attorney General. Indeed, it is more than what we spend on just about every other ministry. That is debt. That is an expenditure. It is a way to prevent investment from happening, when you spend \$12 billion a year on interest payments on your debt. It's not an investment.

I know the member from Etobicoke said that he's not going to take any lessons from me or from this side. Clearly that's been the Liberals' problem all along: that they don't take lessons. Even when the lessons of life slap them in the face, they won't listen to it. They won't behave to it. They won't respond to it.

It's more spending. It's more debt. Sixteen Tons—maybe Sixteen Billion will be that new tune from Tennessee Ernie Ford: "Another day older and deeper in debt." I hope, Minister, next year the campaign budget doesn't add to the debt, but we'll see.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Further debate.

Ms. Catherine Fife: It's a pleasure to address the budget bill, Bill 127. It's interesting because I don't think that the government got that little bump that they expected from this budget. Clearly they were going for a very strong—

Interruption.

Ms. Catherine Fife: I don't know what that is. Did I break it? I'll start again. Sorry for breaking the sound system at Queen's Park. It's another issue that we need to address here in this place.

I was just referencing the feedback that the government received after the budget. There were lots of shiny things in this budget. There's no doubt about it, Mr. Speaker. The voices of Ontarians—I think we can all agree on this side of the House, unless we're talking to very different people—were not reflected in this budget. Quite honestly, the feedback that I received over the weekend—I happened to be in Ottawa for a basketball tournament, the Ontario Basketball Association finals, and got a chance to talk to many different people from many places across the province. The consensus was that this budget does not address or undo the damage that's

been done by the Liberals over the last 14 years. It certainly doesn't address the youth unemployment issue that we have in the province of Ontario.

That's the way that I review this budget. How is it affecting the opportunities of Ontarians to reach their potential in the province of Ontario, either through training, education, through mental health supports—finding secure housing, for instance, in the province of Ontario—having mental health issues and health issues addressed so that people can reach their potential?

As the critic for the New Democratic Party of Ontario for research and innovation, economic development and jobs, and early learning and care, I can tell you that this budget is lacking, Mr. Speaker, which really quite honestly took me by surprise, because we knew that this was going to be an election budget. All of us knew in this House. Nobody knew it more than perhaps the last two rows over there on that side of the House. I think that we were expecting some big changes. Instead, this government has really followed through on this pattern of contracting out, of looking towards privatization of public services on everything really.

They have not addressed the systemic issues that we see in our health care system. Every single MPP in this House can bring 20 to 200 stories to this Legislature about people who are not being served by the health care system. This morning I had the opportunity to bring forward the voice of Mr. Szillat from Waterloo region, a retired senior who has multiple issues. He survived cancer. Will he survive the wait-list for his knee and back surgery? That is unknown. His consultation was over 15 months ago for his back surgery. He's still waiting for his consult for knee surgery, and that's at 413 days. You have people on wait-lists to find out how long they are going to wait for surgery in the province of Ontario. That is after nine years of systemic cuts and undercutting of our public health care system. That is after five solid years of budget freezes which have left systemic gaps in our system. We heard that first-hand, actually, through the budget committee—and not only that committee that travelled across the province. The Ontario Health Coalition, to their credit, has been consistent. Many groups have just given up. They have just stopped registering to come as a delegation, especially the year that the budget was already written when we were already on committee and listening to the voices of Ontarians. That's the level of cynicism that's out there right now in the province of Ontario.

So what did we get? We got an OHIP+ program for youth to access 4,400 drugs, although it's highly unlikely they will ever need those 4,400 drugs.

Interjections.

Ms. Catherine Fife: It's very true. In fact, the specialists and the experts and the researchers looked at our plan, which looked at all workers. One in every three workers in the province of Ontario can't afford to fill their prescription. How this government can ignore those voices, leave those people out of the budget—after this careful marketing strategy of reshaping the Premier of

this province as somebody who has just remembered that there are people out there. Perhaps she opened her hydro bill some time ago, when they came out with the revised hydro plan after hydro bills went up 300% in the province of Ontario—300%.

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I was out in Eastbridge, in my own riding, knocking on doors, which is always a pleasurable thing to do between elections, I have to tell you. I have a petition. The petition asked, very simply, to stop penalizing people who have to use hydro during the day—time of use. It has been a plan that has never worked very well. It's not a conservation strategy that's even very effective. It only penalizes seniors and businesses who have no choice but to use hydro during the day. Rarely will I get such an enthusiastic response to a petition, I have to tell you. The anger, the emotion, at the door, in some respects was validating because we feel the same anger on this side of the House. But at the same time, you can actually see that people are hurting. They are hurting and they are tired of not being listened to by this government. This goes from hydro to housing to health care. Those are the big three, quite honestly, right now.

One lady said to me, "Listen, I have no choice. Now I am on a fixed income." She is from a European country. She said, "I'm going to leave Ontario. I only have so much money every month. I can't afford these hydro bills."

The difference with the hydro bills which is really significant is that prior to the 2014 election, there had been a scandal buildup. There had been the gas plants, eHealth, Ornge, chemotherapy drugs and MaRS, and then Infrastructure Ontario with the public-private partnerships where we spent \$8 billion more than we needed to, and then the full privatization of the Green Energy Act, which left us spending \$37 billion more than we needed to. How to you recover from \$37 billion?

Do you know where we would be as a province if this government had just put some basic financial due diligence, had not put themselves first, not put their party first, not put those people who were donating to their party first? If they put the people first, we would be in a very different position in the province of Ontario. We wouldn't have the mayor of Toronto, John Tory, calling out this government. After all of this time, after all of these conversations and these meetings and these photo ops, he thought the Premier was listening to him. He did. He has called out the Toronto MPPs, all the way across that side of the House—

Ms. Cindy Forster: Liberal MPPs.

Ms. Catherine Fife: The Liberal MPPs, and he's holding up their pictures and their little placards saying, "Try harder." Yes, try harder. Try harder for the people of this province. You should be trying harder for the seniors of this province so they don't have to go to private, for-profit, expensive homes which now the LHINs are subsidizing. In some of the homes in the province of Ontario, we are spending less on food and nutrition than we are in prisons in the province. That is

your legacy. That is your legacy and your track record. If you think that we're going to let you forget that, you have another think coming.

The anger is well placed. The anger is a legitimate emotion for the people of this province to have. When I knock on doors and they open their hydro bill, that's the difference. That's the difference. They now open their hydro bill every month—they've done everything that they possibly can, and they see how this government has neglected them, has turned its back on them. That is what this government has done.

So when I look at this budget bill and I see that we have a pseudo, sort-of-hydro plan for pharmacare for youth—a great many of these youth are actually covered under their parents' plans; some of them are actually covered under student plans. I have a son who is attending Conestoga College. He is covered by that plan as well, and he's covered by our plan. He has two plans. Many people don't have plans. But our plan would have covered those people as well. It would have covered the kids and the parents and the grandparents. What a concept, Mr. Speaker. Imagine the universality of a plan that actually meets the needs of the people of this province. It's bold, and it resonated really well, obviously, and this government responded. However, the pharmacare plan and the costing of that pharmacare plan was not in this budget, and that's how you can tell the real priorities. You have to cost it out. You have to tell the people of this province how you're going to pay for it, and you did not. In fact, the finance minister said he forgot that part or he left that part out of the budget. It's a matter of public record. He left that part out because it's such a big document. Oh, it's such a big document, they couldn't actually cost it out—only at Queen's Park, I tell you.

We have exorbitant hydro costs in the province of Ontario which have undermined our economy. We have a health care system which has embraced privatization under the leadership of this government, which has compromised the quality, which has undermined the value and the return on investment for those health care dollars, which has hurt jobs in Ontario. One only has to look at Sudbury—and we should not look down our noses at any job in the province of Ontario that pays a living wage. Of course, a living wage was also left out of this budget. But the workers who were doing the laundry services at the Sudbury hospital—they're gone; contracted out, taken those jobs someplace else. The jobs at Wilfrid Laurier University, the custodial jobs that paid \$22 an hour, got contracted out—now \$12 an hour—to a private company.

This is what this government has done. It has basically sold out public services. The basic job of government in Ontario is to serve the people of Ontario. It really isn't a complicated concept. However, this government really has done a good job in undermining why many of us have entered politics: to try to make a difference for the people in our communities and across the province, especially those most vulnerable.

On any given issue, though—it's hard to imagine how this government failed to address housing. I have said this many times in this House—the importance of housing. Housing stabilizes the economy; housing creates educational opportunities where the potential of those students can be realized; housing has direct health consequences and environmental consequences, and criminal and justice health consequences. If you don't get housing right, very little else can be accomplished. You can have a youth pharmacare program—but if you have no home, then really, what is the point? If you're sleeping on the street, but can access a drug, how are you ever going to reach your potential? This came through with some of the voices of youth across the province who were willing to be brave enough and courageous enough to speak out on this issue.

Perhaps housing is on my mind because we just met with the Co-operative Housing Federation of Canada, who have done a very good job—in fact, they lobbied hard, as they always do, for significant strategic investment in housing. As you know, Mr. Speaker, we favour a shared model of responsibility for housing. We think that every level of government can and should come to the table in a fair and open, transparent way, in a sustainable way, so that we can plan for housing to make a difference in the province of Ontario.

The Co-operative Housing Federation of Canada says very clearly that trying to achieve the goal of housing “will help lift children, seniors and refugees out of poverty, enabling them to reach their full potential and lead more dignified lives.” We all want that. “It will also significantly reduce government spending on health care, emergency shelters and incarceration. A recent report estimated the cost of poverty in Toronto alone to be between \$4.5 billion and \$5.5 billion annually. The lack of affordable housing is a leading cause for poverty in Ontario.”

And yet, where is the money for housing in this budget bill? Maybe there's a curtain that I haven't pulled across. Maybe there's a different layer to this budget I haven't found.

1630

When you consider that affordable housing has an important part to play in building and growing an inclusive economy—for every dollar spent on construction of affordable housing, there's a corresponding \$1.40 increase to the GDP through new local jobs and locally sourced construction materials. It also creates a long-term public asset and a permanent pathway to the middle class. Well, that's what everybody is talking about: lifting people up. Right? But how can people ever achieve their potential if they don't have secure, stable, affordable housing? How can it happen? It cannot.

I remember in Hamilton, at the finance committee, when the executive director of the legal aid society came to the table and he said that there are children in Hamilton who change residences six times in the course of a school year. That sometimes means that they are changing schools. If you have transient, unstable housing,

then you have transient, unstable learning. They will never reach their potential.

It defies logic.

There was obviously a political gold medal for them as well. There was a political gold medal for them, waiting to be had. They rarely turn down an opportunity to grab the gold, Mr. Speaker. There's a ribbon to be cut. There's a press release to go out. There's a couple of op-eds in a local paper. It defies all logic why the Premier of this province has drawn a line in the sand on housing in Toronto, because I am going to tell you something: What happens in Toronto affects the rest of the province. The housing crisis that's going to be happening in Toronto is filtering out through Mississauga, through Etobicoke, through Scarborough, through Durham. It affects the entire province. If you don't invest in housing, you will never achieve your economic or social justice or justice goals, ever. It will not happen.

In Kitchener-Waterloo and Cambridge, the rental housing units are in high demand. The cost is going up. Seniors are being bumped out of their houses. Supportive housing isn't even on the agenda for this government. There is no home care strategy. Seniors are getting one hour—one hour a day—for all of their needs, their full needs. They can't afford the long-term-care facilities that have been fully privatized by the province of Ontario. Where are they to go? If you haven't been able to stabilize housing after 14 years—14 years this government has had. Majority—you only had the minority once, and it was a good time for us. It clearly wasn't a good time for you. That's when we had to fight for—

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): I apologize to the member for Kitchener–Waterloo.

There's a lot of noise coming from this side of the House. The member for Kitchener–Waterloo has the floor. She is entitled to offer her opinions on the budget motion. I would ask the government members to refrain from heckling.

Member for Kitchener–Waterloo.

Ms. Catherine Fife: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

The Co-operative Housing Federation says, "Protect low-income households living in housing co-operatives." It's simple. You could do that. That is 7,000 vulnerable households.

Second, "Take an 'affordable housing first' approach to surplus government property." Make sure that this happens—because the first time we heard it, it was an offhand comment by one of your members.

"Planning for the future" and "Partner with federal non-profits and housing co-ops to build new affordable housing." There's federal money on the table. You just had to match it. I don't often get a chance to say very good things about the federal government, but they put some money on the table. It's not a lot, so you didn't have to match it a lot.

Mr. Speaker, it really defies logic that this government missed an opportunity to make such a difference for the

people of this province. Health care, housing and hydro could have been part of that equation. This was a failure of a budget and a failure of leadership on the part of this Premier.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments? The member for Etobicoke Centre.

Mr. Yvan Baker: I really wish that I had more time, because I'd love to be able to rebut the points of the member opposite for Kitchener–Waterloo. For her to criticize this government on health care I find surprising in light of what is in this budget and what has been done in previous budgets. We are talking about a \$7-billion booster shot to health care. We are talking about significant investments in hospitals that will touch communities across this province. We are talking about more funding for community care. We're talking about more funding for not only patients, but for caregivers. We're talking about a \$100-million dementia strategy. These are just some of the things that are in this budget that support greater access, greater quality of care for people in Ontario.

She talked about how this is a government that's not investing in housing. I've got the housing minister next to me. I'm sure he would be chomping at the bit to respond to some of this stuff. We've put tremendous amounts of money into housing as a government. I think it's unfortunate that the member opposite won't recognize that and ignores that when she gets up and debates this budget.

The other question that the member opposite should answer—and hopefully, she will be able to do so in her final two minutes—is to talk about, if she would like to see all this spending in all these other areas, what she would cut. What would she cut? Maybe she'd cut the pharmacare program; I'm not sure. Maybe she'd cut back on some of the health care investments we were just talking about.

In any event, this is a budget that addresses health care, investments in education, investments in mental health services. There are investments in transit and infrastructure in communities across Ontario, and it underpins and supports a growing economy. We've been able to make these investments because of a growing economy, and that's a testament to the people of Ontario. Because we have been prudent with taxpayer dollars, we have managed to balance the budget. By balancing the budget and being prudent with taxpayer dollars, we've been allowed to make these investments in these important services that matter to the people of Ontario.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Mr. Robert Bailey: I'd like to comment on the member from Kitchener–Waterloo's remarks and some other remarks that I heard earlier in the day.

I was just reading a number of different news bulletins about the budget here. One says, "Hold the Celebration: A Balanced Budget Won't End Ontario's Fiscal Challenges." Ontario's debt is expected to continue to grow, increasing approximately \$9 billion next year despite the

government's promise to balance the budget in the spring. "Even if Queen's Park balances the budget, it will still add billions to the provincial debt with no end in sight." He's the author of the document "Hold the Celebration: A Balanced Budget Won't End Ontario's Fiscal Challenges."

Even with a balanced budget, it says, the coming fiscal year, after nine consecutive deficits, would still add \$9 billion to the debt in 2017-18 and another \$9 billion next year. "This may seem counterintuitive, but the province separates capital spending from its operating budget.... Although the province will stop adding new debt from spending on day-to-day operations such as salaries, programs and income transfers, it will continue to add new debt from spending on long-term projects...."

The Financial Accountability Officer estimates Ontario's debt will keep growing, hitting \$370 billion by 2020-21. Crucially, Ontario's debt relative to the size of its economy is almost 40%, which I think is an all-time high. That's something that a lot of lenders and others will look at. Hopefully, this government will work to reduce that.

Ontario's debt will rise by 17% in the next three years as a result of interest charges. I think that's \$12 billion a year, I've heard someone say here. That would be one of the largest government departments if it was actually a government agency or a government ministry. So I think that's something we need to—oh, I'm out of time. Sorry.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Thank you. Questions and comments?

Ms. Cindy Forster: I'm just going to spend my two minutes zoning in on the health care piece of the member from Kitchener–Waterloo's assessment of the budget measures.

The Liberal government has had 14 years to correct the wrong of the former Mike Harris government, where contracts in the community sector were actually tendered out, and the for-profit sector picked up a lot of those contracts. The Liberals stopped re-contracting those out, but many of the for-profits still hold those contracts.

If we go back to 2015, when we had a lengthy strike in the Niagara-Hamilton area with CarePartners, we had a for-profit operator making \$600,000 or \$800,000 a year off the public purse, with 4,500 employees across this province. These are now professionals, registered nurses, registered practical nurses, some personal support workers working in uncertain, precarious, unpredictable jobs as home care providers, with inferior pensions, inferior wages of as little as 60% of what they would make if they were working in a hospital, inferior benefits—and all of that out of the public purse—where we did have operators in the not-for-profit sector, like VON, that provided stable, predictable, secure jobs for the nurses in this province.

1640

The government has had 14 years to correct that, and they are still doing nothing about it. I think that the member from Kitchener–Waterloo has, and rightly so, the ability and the need to attack some of the measures of the government.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Mr. Arthur Potts: I'm delighted to have an opportunity to give comment to the member from Kitchener–Waterloo's comments.

I find it really incredible that she talks about the minority years, when the NDP had it good here, because what I see, Speaker, is they are about to make the same mistake they made during the minority years. They didn't use that time very productively or very effectively, because they turned down, at the time, the most progressive budget that had come forward in Ontario in decades.

It's because of the progressive budget that was put forward in 2014, which they turned down, that the previous member for Beaches–East York is no longer in this House. It was a progressive budget, and they didn't support it.

I've got to think, Speaker, that they must be feeling pretty lucky that we have a majority in the House at this time, on this budget, because we are going to protect them from themselves.

Interjections.

Mr. Arthur Potts: If they come out and vote against this budget—and I understand why they are upset—we're going to protect them, because we are the most progressive party in this Legislature by far.

Interjection.

Mr. Arthur Potts: I appreciate why the member opposite would be upset because of this, because we've taken over that space from them.

When she talks about the issues with John Tory and housing—he has to understand that while he says we didn't provide maybe more new budget money, the fact is that we have provided over \$1.4 billion of housing infrastructure money for the city of Toronto. He should learn to say thank you.

For you to get up and parrot Tory policy means that the member from Kitchener–Waterloo has lost her profile as a progressive. I know she's passionate about the things that she wants to do, but when she starts quoting John Tory as an ally in this House, you know that she has lost her way.

John Tory is out there saying there's no money out of the cap-and-trade revenue. Well, that's just hocus-pocus. There's almost \$600 million made available to the Ministry of Housing to fix up houses in the province of Ontario, to make them cleaner and greener and use fuel more efficiently.

John Tory needs to say thank you, and you need to stop quoting him.

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): We'll just wait a second.

The member for Kitchener–Waterloo can reply.

Ms. Catherine Fife: I will agree with the member from Beaches–East York on one thing: You do take up a lot of space, my friend. I tell you, you do take up a lot of space. You should remember that in the minority government, that's when we tried to get your government

to reduce auto insurance rates. Do you remember that, Mr. Speaker? We came to the table, and we worked hard to hold your government to a level of integrity and raise the bar. You turned us down on almost every one of those. Your record, the Liberal government's, under Dalton McGuinty and Kathleen Wynne, speaks for itself.

The PA says, "What are you going to cut?" You know what, Mr. Speaker? It boggles the mind, because you don't have to cut. You actually have to invest in public services. You have to be strategic. You have to remove the profit agenda from energy, from health care, from infrastructure.

Quite honestly, even with child care, this government has made a historic mistake in that they have put capital funding on the table for for-profit corporate child care. You will be subsidizing poor-quality child care. So you can say it's \$200 million here and \$200 million there, but it is not going to quality child care—

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): I apologize to the member for Kitchener–Waterloo. There's a loud conversation going on across the floor while the member for Kitchener–Waterloo is trying to respond.

I'll give you a few extra seconds.

But I'd ask the members to please calm down. I want to hear the reply from the member from Kitchener–Waterloo.

Again, I'll give you a few extra seconds.

Ms. Catherine Fife: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

This is an interesting place in the history of the province, because there are still four ongoing OPP investigations into this government. So the question really remains: Will this budget erase the knowledge that two court cases are going to come before this government in September? Will this budget undo the damage of the perception? It is the truth of this government that you have continually put yourselves ahead of the people of this province. Shame on you. This budget is unsupportable.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Further debate?

Hon. Kathryn McGarry: It's a pleasure to rise in the House this afternoon to add my comments on behalf of my constituents from the great riding of Cambridge. I'll be sharing my time with the Minister of Government and Community Services and the minister responsible for accessibility.

It gives me great pleasure to add these comments this afternoon because, as we well know, I've been a former nurse—actually, I'm still a nurse in the province of Ontario—for many, many years. I watched with great interest as the budget was unfolded on Thursday. I'm very proud that the 2017 budget is a balanced budget—the first balanced budget since the global recession. This government had three consecutive balanced budgets ahead of the 2008 global downturn.

Thanks to a balanced budget, we're also able to help families with their everyday costs, such as free prescription medications for children and youth, lower electricity

bills, more affordable child care, and a number of other investments that assist us.

I'd like to go back, if I may, and give some context to this debate. When the global recession hit, we made a deliberate choice to invest in our economy while protecting vital services such as health care and education. If you go back a few years to what happened in the 1990s, when I was in home and community care, when I lost work because nurses and physicians were laid off in the province of Ontario, I really took stock at that time about wanting to contribute later on and to run for a party that invested in health care, rather than cut it.

To give some context to this, during the 1990s when the NDP were in government—at that time there was a bit of a recession that hit in the early 1990s. The NDP made the decision to slash vital services like health care. They reduced nursing school places and reduced medical school places. They delisted home care. They took 5% out of the budget in home care, where I was working at the time. I sent patients back to the hospital to then be admitted to hospital before they were placed in long-term care. This was long a memory of mine.

It came the next government, which were the PCs. The cuts to health care continued. Again, we lost nurses out of the system. We lost beds out of the system—12,000, as a matter of fact—and 28 hospitals closed. We knew at the time, with the burgeoning population of seniors and baby boomers coming forward, that if you cut beds, cut nurses and cut doctors while this was coming through, we were going to end up with a shortage of nurses, doctors and hospital beds. And guess what? That happened in early 2003.

Since this government has come in, we've continued to make investments year over year: 27,000 more nurses in the province; we increased medical school places and nursing school places, and continue to invest in home and community care. So we have far more services, including diagnostic and imaging tests, than we did in the 1990s. And I know that for sure because I was working as an agency nurse in a number of different hospitals before I could find a full-time job again, and that wasn't until 2004.

The thing that really got me on Thursday was the finance minister, when we got briefed about this budget and the signature piece: pharmacare paid for, for kids under age 24. In 1990, I had a son that we were raising that had a severe, critical, life-threatening disease in his respiratory system. This was at a time when services in the province of Ontario were being cut and slashed. At that time he didn't have a diagnosis that did anything but fall through the cracks. He ended up living in hospital for most of the time between 1990 and 1994, between age 10 and age 14. Every two to four weeks, they would try to send him home.

1650

Now picture the context that I just gave you. Nurses were being fired. Nurses were being let go. Home care was delisted. That was at the time when my son faced critical illness. At that time, I was also laid off. I had no

benefits. My husband was self-employed to be able to manage my son's care. He also had no benefits.

At that time, in 1990, we were spending \$1,000 per month—more than my net salary—in medication costs for this child. That respiratory solution didn't last long because of expiry dates. Very often, we would spend the \$1,000—more than my salary—and he would go back to hospital in two or three days. In two to three months when they stabilized him again, he would come back, and I would spend the same money again.

That affected our financial future as a family until today. We mortgaged our house. We remortgaged our house. This child was in and out of hospital with no benefits from us, because he fell through the cracks.

At that time, he was not eligible for home care. If I assessed him today, as a care coordinator for a CCAC, which I was working as when I was elected, he would have services at home. We probably could have kept him at home for two out of the four years. But under the NDP and the PCs, we didn't have that ability.

Eventually, after three years in hospital—two at KW, one at SickKids—and another year at a rehab hospital at the Hugh MacMillan centre, where 90% of those families were on social assistance—we were among the very few who weren't on social assistance—during that period of time, we finally got a drug benefit card. But the damage was done to my family; it was done to my son; it was done to our finances. That affected the rest of our family until today, because we weren't able to put aside for some of our children's university costs. They've had to help to do that themselves.

We have recovered greatly since then, but the financial hardship, the mental stress, the issues with our other kids, the financial hardships that not only my family had, but all of our extended family had because of this, were almost irreparable.

When I heard that we are now providing pharmacare to all kids under age 24, it was a game-changer. It means that nobody else has to pay that money that we couldn't afford to pay at the time. It means that those families are going to be protected from financial hardship because of those medication costs. It's not just the 125 medications on that formulary. My son needed far more than what's on the regular 125 formulary medications. They were specialized. We couldn't afford to pay for them. Fast-forward to what that would cost today, in today's terms: It would be far more than \$1,000 per month.

This is a game-changer for families. This is life-saving medication. Parents no longer have to decide, "Do I pay the money for that puffer or not? Do I pay the money for that rare-disorder medication or not?" These are families that depend on those life-saving medications for their families, to be able to provide better outcomes for their children.

I was pretty emotional when it hit me that had this program been part of our health system in the early 1990s, when my son got a last wish—he almost died in the hospital several times; he narrowly avoided a lung transplant—this would have been a game-changer for my

family. This is something that would have protected the financial health for the rest of the family. We did what we had to, like many, many people do. But make no mistake: This is essential to making sure that our children have the best start in life.

You know, it was like a lightning bolt hit me. What was interesting was that I did my post-budget breakfast, and then I got on a plane and went to Boston. I went to Boston because that's where my 37-year-old son is now, and together we celebrated his daughter's first birthday on Saturday.

These are the experiences where I am so proud that we are going to be able to assist in the future, with the program that we have brought in for OHIP+. It's a game changer. The rest of the investments that we are making in health care go a long, long way to ensure that we are addressing some of the needs of the rest of our society right now: putting in more money to decrease wait times; putting more money to make sure that some of these surgical procedures can be done; making sure that we have \$100 million put into the dementia strategy; making sure that caregivers—of which we were, for my son, at one time—could actually have some of the benefits of being able to care for their family member and to be able to have some of the support that we didn't have in the 1990s.

I could go on at length, Mr. Speaker, but I think you hear my story, and there are many more stories out there. As a nurse at SickKids for 10 years, as a care coordinator who used to assess families for what they needed out of the health care system for their children, for a VON nurse who used to go into the schools and do school health programs at noon, this is an issue that's so close to my heart. I know that this is the right decision for Ontarians. I know it's the right decision for families. I know it's the right decision to ensure that our children have the best possible start and to be able to continue in life to the best of their ability.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): She indicated that she was sharing her time. I recognize the Minister of Government and Consumer Services.

Hon. Tracy MacCharles: Good afternoon. I am very pleased to join in this debate. I want to thank the Minister of Natural Resources and Forestry for sharing her personal story. Many of us in the Legislature do that from time to time. I know how difficult that is, having done that and seeing some of our colleagues from all the parties in here in the Legislature do that.

But those stories make it real. They make it real in terms of what, in this case, this budget means to someone and her family, and she spoke of her constituency as well.

Speaker, we've talked about how this budget is the first balanced budget since the global recession, which is a good thing, of course. But it also provides for us to further invest in things that are important to Ontarians and this government, whether it's health care, whether it is supporting transit and infrastructure, whether it is supporting education. So it's a pretty great budget.

I, too, as many people have spoken about here in the House, did a number of post-budget events on Friday. I did breakfasts with the Scarborough Rotary Club and the business association there, and two pharmacare events to talk about the OHIP+ youth pharmacare initiative in the budget. I have another event coming up this Friday with the Ajax-Pickering Board of Trade. I am looking forward to that one. That one also gives me a few days to further think about the budget and focus that presentation with the business community, in that case.

For the sessions that I did attend, it was pretty exciting. It was pretty moving to hear feedback from people, because it wasn't just myself and my colleagues talking about the budget; there was dialogue and questions and answers. We heard, Speaker, from pharmacists who feel that the youth pharmacare program is not only great for the youth and families who will benefit from this, but it will actually make their job easier, because essentially this measure will only require a youth or child and their family to present a prescription and an OHIP card and things will be covered. There are no copays or deductibles: 4,400 drugs will be covered. That includes many drugs that many people who already have benefit plans are not covered for. I think we've all experienced that as employees: When you need an expensive drug or someone in your community needs a drug for a complex condition, you may have a decent health care plan, but often drug plans do not extend enough to provide that kind of coverage. I think the pharmacists saying it's going to make their job easier is something we shouldn't lose sight of.

1700

Then the other thing I would say, especially for the youth who will be covered by this program, is that in addition to it being a great, universal aspect of our health care, an extension of universal health care, it will, I believe, provide better health outcomes for young people in our province.

The other thing is, if you think about it—I have two 19-year-olds, so I think about the 19-year-olds to 24-year-olds in this case, and their first job. They may be on contract. They may not have benefits, or maybe they're an entrepreneur starting up and doing some sort of self-employment, start-up kind of activity. They're unlikely to have any kind of health care benefit, and if they need any kind of routine or more complicated medicines, they're going to get it, and they're going to get it on January 1, 2018, not 2020, and not for a limited number of drugs.

I think it would be very dangerous, such as in the NDP plan, to limit the amount of drugs that are covered by a pharmacare program, especially for young people. We don't want to do that. We don't want to presume what kind of drugs kids need.

We heard from my colleague about what kind of drugs she needed. When I was battling my first round of cancer when I was 17 years old—the goal is to get out of the hospital. You want to get out of the hospital from your surgery, your treatment, and get home sooner. That's great, and we're seeing more and more of that in cancer

care, in particular. But that also means that you have to go and fill your prescriptions at home, the things you need, for example, post-chemotherapy, whether it's the steroids, the painkillers or the other drugs you have to take to counteract some of the effects of chemotherapy. I remember—sure, I'd get home, after my chemotherapy when I was 17 years old, but I would have to get drugs to finish the course of treatment.

So it's that balance of getting home sooner, but then you had a whole pile of prescriptions that would have to be filled that were covered while you were in hospital, but now when you're home, you need to cover that. I was so pleased to see that this initiative will cover cancer drugs for young people, that it will cover drugs for rare diseases. We've heard a lot in the House here about cases of limited or lack of drug coverage for children and youth who have rare diseases, so this initiative will address that, and I think that is so important. It's so important.

I know I've had some people say, what does this mean for your health care premiums if you already have coverage? There's a very good piece in the Toronto Star about that today and how the drug benefit market may play out in this regard. But it is important, as I said before, to remember that many health plans don't cover all of the drugs in the 4,400 that will be covered here.

I've also heard the question, well, what about seniors' drug coverage? But we all know in this Legislature that we have the Trillium Drug Program. We also have the Ontario Drug Benefit Program, so that people on social assistance or seniors of low income can apply for drug coverage, and that of course will continue. This doesn't change that in any kind of way.

The reality is, this youth pharmacare program is transformational—not just here in Ontario, but what it's really doing is extending the notion of universal health care that we enjoy already, whether it's for getting a chest X-ray or when we have a cast put on our leg. Our Minister of Health has been taking a leadership role in working with other provinces on a national pharmacare program. To me, this program in Ontario is something that can be a catalyst for other provinces and our federal government partners to look at as well and see where we can go.

Young people are our future, Speaker. Investing in young people, I think everyone agrees, is important. If they have good health outcomes when they're younger, this is going to pay off beyond the age of 25. This is going to improve their health and longevity. This is going to reduce financial burdens for families who have to make some really difficult choices between filling a prescription and paying some other bills. Families will benefit from this in significant ways, in ways we probably don't even fully understand yet.

I'm pretty excited about that part of the budget and other elements of it. I really look forward to meeting with the Ajax-Pickering Board of Trade this Friday to talk further about the budget.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Mr. Toby Barrett: I do want to comment on the recent presentations of the Minister of Natural Resources and Forestry.

We know that the present Ontario budget is planned to go up, in the coming budget year, by \$6 billion, and I'm puzzled. I look at some of the ministries—for example, the Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry. Overall spending is going up \$6 billion. That particular ministry is going down \$37.4 million. Last year, in the interim 2016-17 budget, it was \$861.8 million. In this year's planned budget, 2017-18, it will be down to a level of \$824.4 million.

It always bothers me when I see the smaller-budget ministries—the very, very important ministries like MNR, like northern development and mines, like agriculture, for example—when we see the cuts in the very small ministries. Agriculture has dropped \$47.1 million. Northern development and mines has dropped \$70.3 million.

These are the wealth generators in the province of Ontario. Economic development and growth; and research, innovation and science, which includes green investment funding—that has been cut from \$1.0586 billion down to \$971 million. There's an \$87.6-million cut.

Why do we cut the important ministries? They have very small budgets to begin with. These are the ministries overseeing the generating of wealth in the province of Ontario.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Mr. Paul Miller: I listened to the Minister of Natural Resources and Forestry, and I, too, see that her budget is going to be cut by over \$30 million, projected for this year, and I'm sure that's not the only ministry that is going to be cut.

In reference to the other minister's comments, yes, 4,000 drugs are going to be covered for people under 24, and that's certainly a good thing. However, for the people from 25 to 65, there's nothing there. That's probably the bulk of our population.

In our plan, which they minimized, saying it was only 125 drugs—that's to start with, and we didn't cap it at 125. It's certainly going to increase, depending on the budgeting. However, their projection in their pharmacare plan—there's no costing; there are no projection costs. It's just pie in the sky. They haven't actually put a number on it.

If you're going to bring forward a plan to the people of Ontario, you have to be able to prove to them that you can afford this plan. They haven't done this.

For the 125 drugs—we were realistic; we costed it at \$485 million. We said what it costs—and that's a high estimate; it probably won't be that high—and we're universal. Our 125 drugs that they so minimize would probably cover 60% of the problems out there. Then we would add to that as we went along, as we costed it.

Once again, their knee-jerk reaction—and I laughed when the minister said, “We've been working on this for months.” I think they worked on it for about a week, when we came out with our pharmacare program.

Once again, they're pulling the wool over the people's eyes in Ontario. I hope they're not going to be fooled again by the Liberal broken promises.

1710

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Mr. Yvan Baker: The budget was printed by the time you came out with your pharmacare program. The reality is that the Minister of Health and this government have been working on this for a very long time, on the issue of pharmacare. He's an advocate for pharmacare at all ages. We've begun by focusing on young people and giving them comprehensive coverage, making sure that they're covered. Some 4,400 drugs are covered. The NDP plan of covering 125 drugs really means that, once in a while, you might get a drug; your pharmaceuticals are covered when you go to the pharmacy, rather than covering somebody comprehensively. That's the approach that we've chosen to take.

The reality is that 4,400 drugs allows young people and their families to know that they'll be able to get—four million young people will have their prescription drugs covered. I think this is an important and revolutionary step forward.

As far as the other comments that were made, I wanted to thank the Minister of Natural Resources for her comments and for really helping to shine a light on, or personalize, the impact of some of the policies of the past and how what we're trying to do here is different.

What we're trying to do here is to make sure that the care that people need at all ages is there when people need it. And that's what this budget is all about. We've been profiling health care so much and talking about this budget because there's money for new hospitals; there's money for community care; there's money for a dementia strategy; there is money to support caregivers; and I can go on and on—the OHIP+. There's a tremendous amount in this budget that is going to continue to improve the quality of health care in this province. Do we have a lot more work to do? You bet we do, and we're going to keep doing it on this side of the House.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): One more question and comment.

Mr. Randy Pettapiece: I'm pleased to comment on the remarks by the Minister of Natural Resources and the Minister of Government and Consumer Services. There's nothing wrong with investing in a good program. There's nothing wrong with that at all. Businesses do it all the time. But they have a plan to pay back that investment if they have to borrow the money—and that's the issue with this whole budget. There is no plan to do that. There is no plan to get this budget debt under control.

They've more than doubled the debt in 14 years, and Ontario certainly is worse off as a result of that type of spending. It's certainly going to erode the services that Ontario families depend on, and it places a burden on future generations that they don't deserve. I look down a couple of generations. I've got five grandchildren now. I've got another one coming.

Interjection: Hear, hear.

Applause.

Mr. Randy Pettapiece: Thank you. It wasn't much of an effort, but anyway.

They're going to be saddled with this government's mismanagement. I worry about that. The biggest losers, certainly, are our grandchildren in this whole budget. It doesn't seem to bother this government that they're doing that to them.

The provincial debt is pegged at \$312 billion this year, and that's just about \$22,000 for every Ontarian in this province. It's projected to grow to \$336 billion by 2019-20.

Speaker, the debt has tripled since the provincial Liberals came into power. This is worrisome. The people of Ontario will see through this. Certainly it's a big reason why it's going to be difficult to support this budget.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): That concludes our questions and comments for this round.

The Minister of Natural Resources and Forestry can respond.

Hon. Kathryn McGarry: Thank you, Speaker, and thank you to the Minister of Government and Consumer Services and the minister responsible for accessibility and to the members from Haldimand-Norfolk, Hamilton East-Stoney Creek, Etobicoke Centre and Perth-Wellington. Thank you very much for your comments.

I just really wanted to wrap up by saying profitable companies borrow money. Well-managed companies roll over high-interest debt to low-interest debt, and that's what this budget does and what this government has done for 13 years. Investing in those programs and services that help people, to ensure that they have healthy, long-lived and productive lives, really helps everybody in their everyday life—like the OHIP+. Certainly it covers more than 4,400 medications to treat most acute conditions, chronic conditions, childhood cancers, and other diseases—and rare disease medication. It's the program that I'm most proud of. It's the first of its kind in Canada, and it means that children and youth will no longer have to worry about having the medication to ensure that their health is well managed. I also wanted to say that the balanced 2017 budget launches that pharmacare to ensure that they are healthy in their lives.

The last thing I wanted to comment about was the comments regarding the MNRF budget. Part of what they're talking about is the extra cost that we face each year for our busy fire season. If you recall last fire season, we had Fort McMurray going on and a couple of big fires in our northwest Ontario area. So we sometimes have to have a bump-up in our budget to be able to manage our fire season. We have some of the best firefighters in the world for firefighting.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Further debate?

Mr. Norm Miller: It's a pleasure to have the opportunity to speak to the budget motion. Let me begin just by saying that I've been here a few years now, and it

certainly is a big-spending budget. When I was first elected, the budget was about \$68 billion and balanced. This year it's \$141 billion. Certainly, the government has learned how to spend money.

Mr. Speaker, one of the great things about our democracy is that we have the right to voice our disagreement with the government, and that is one of the things I'm going to do today: I'm going to disagree with the government over their claims that this is actually a balanced budget.

In order to make it appear that they kept their promise to balance the budget this year, the government relied on \$1 billion from the sale of Hydro One and some LCBO properties and \$1.5 billion in money from one-time federal transfers and other one-time payments. And, against the advice of the Auditor General, the Minister of Finance counted \$500 million in pension assets the government cannot spend. All totalled, these things add up to \$5 billion. Mr. Speaker, the deficit last year was \$4.3 billion, so we're actually no further ahead than we were last year. And that's one-time funding, so it won't be around next year. Over the long term, they don't have a plan to stay balanced.

I would like to advise them on how they could do something in my riding that would be beneficial to the government. It would help over the long term, generating funds and tax revenues for the government. I know the Minister of Infrastructure was here earlier, and something I hope he's paying attention to—I've spoken with him directly about it—is the Muskoka Centre. The town of Gravenhurst is interested in the Muskoka Centre. It's a beautiful property on Lake Muskoka, on Muskoka Bay, that has for 25 years sat idle. When I was first elected, there was a lot of interest in what might happen on the property. There was a series of public meetings. From those public meetings, it was decided that they didn't want to see further pressures on Muskoka Bay, which has a lot of pressures already and just a narrow opening to the main part of the Muskoka Lake. They were concerned about water quality, boat traffic and that kind of thing, but they did want to see something happen there that would generate income and jobs. The property has been a sanatorium and all kinds of things, but it has sat idle the entire 16 years I've been elected. I believe it's a three- or four-storey building that's basically a huge liability now.

So from the process many years ago, they decided that a development that would generate jobs but not put pressure on the waterfront would be something they're looking for. Well, now, many years later, we have that exact type of project, for a Chinese Canadian school to be developed on the former Muskoka regional property. I've spoken with, and given all the information from the town of Gravenhurst to, the Minister of Infrastructure about this project. I completely support it, but it seems like the government is being very short-sighted in its negotiations with the town over the sale of this property.

I just worry. There's a tight timeline. They're trying to open the school by September 2019. They hope to be doing demolition of those buildings that are there, and

the company that wants to take it over is willing to assume this \$6.5-million liability of taking down the old building and dealing with whatever is there and investing in a project that would generate 200 full-time jobs in construction and then 200 jobs on an ongoing basis, not to mention what difference it will make with all of the families moving in to Gravenhurst, and for the downtown, for the waterfront, for the good of the community and tax revenues for the province of Ontario—because we know this government needs taxes.

1720

I'll just read from a recent article. It sounds like things aren't going that well. The headline is "Province Short-Sighted in Muskoka Centre Sale Rejection: Gravenhurst CAO." I'll just give a couple of selective quotes here.

"That's the frustration—if this thing goes in the toilet and it comes out that to save a dime the province wouldn't sell it to the town to create 200-plus jobs," said Gravenhurst chief administrative officer Glen Davies in an interview Monday, April 24."

It goes on: "Back in October, council approved 'in concept' a master plan put forward by Maple Leaf Education System, who in partnership with the town, would acquire the property from Infrastructure Ontario for the purpose of developing a Chinese Canadian boarding school that could house 1,500 students...."

"The developer would finance the entire project with the community reaping the benefits.

"But now, Davies said, it could end up being another municipality enjoying the economic spinoffs.

"Other communities have an interest in this school," he said, noting the province of British Columbia has come forward. "Maple Leaf Schools likes Gravenhurst because of Dr. Norman Bethune. If it takes too long or we can't make a deal then those 200 (permanent) jobs go somewhere else."

It goes on: "Whatever it costs to do that should be taken off the purchase price," said Davies, highlighting it will be the developer who pays for all demolition and environmental mitigation needed throughout the development of the property, which has been vacant since 1993." Since 1993 it has sat there. My feeling is that if the government doesn't act quickly on this project, it may be another 25 years sitting there vacant, not contributing to the economy.

It goes on: "The property has been doing nothing for almost 25 years ... The town comes along with a brilliant plan from a developer and we can't seem to gain any traction," said Davies.

"The province doesn't seem to care about the economic benefit of this project," he said pointing out the announcement last month that the federal and provincial governments are each investing more than \$100 million to support a \$1-billion partnership with Ford Canada, that will allegedly create 300 jobs in Ontario.

"They've invested big money in saving jobs and this is small money to create jobs," he said.

"We're probably within weeks of losing the project for the year," he said, adding the developer had hoped to be in the middle of demolition at this point."

I wanted to bring up that very important project because it's so important to Parry Sound–Muskoka and it should be important to the province. I hope that we realize the time sensitivity. I hope the Minister of Infrastructure will facilitate the sale of this property so that we can see those jobs being created, which will be of benefit to the finances of the province of Ontario.

Mr. Speaker, that was a bit of a sidetrack. I'll get back to my speech on the budget motion.

The government certainly doesn't have a plan to start paying down the debt, which has more than doubled to in excess of \$300 billion under their watch. As we've heard, that's some \$22,000 per man, woman and child. When I was first elected, the budget debt was about \$140 billion, and at the end of this year it's going to be \$312 billion. I think people should be concerned about that. When you look at all of the interest going in to pay for that, to service that debt, it's almost \$12 billion—\$11.6 billion a year. That's more than all post-secondary education, at \$8.4 billion. It's more than all of the youth programs; that's \$4.4 billion. It's more than on community safety; that's \$2.8 billion. It's more than indigenous people, at \$91 million. So that \$12 billion could go a long way, if it wasn't just servicing debt, toward delivering programs.

In the budget, it's unfortunate that they don't have the money to really fund the programs that they are doing. Some of the programs in the budget I thought were okay, like helping family caregivers and allowing people on ODSP and Ontario Works to earn more money without being penalized. I support that. Our leader, Patrick Brown, has been talking a lot about skills development. There's some mention of skills development. How effectively they do it we'll see. But I can't support a budget that's based on the false premise that it's actually balanced.

I wish they would fund programs that are already out there before they come out with big, expensive new programs. They've come out with a new program, an expensive program, pharmacare, that's \$465 million at its initial stage of implementation, but they aren't funding the programs that are already there.

The example I'll give from my own riding: I have constituents come into my riding office looking for help with dental problems. Just try to imagine what it's like to go around with either a toothache—anybody who's had a toothache knows how debilitating that can be—or in a situation where you're embarrassed to open your mouth because your teeth are rotten.

The government does have some programs to assist people who can't afford to get dental care—programs like Healthy Smiles. But the dentists were here last week, and what did the dentists tell us? They told us that the government funds those programs at about half the cost of what it actually costs to do the work. As a result, they can't afford to do too many. They certainly can't fill the demand for the people who need the help. Why wouldn't they properly fund that, something pretty basic? If you're the person who is in pain, who can't open their mouth or can't get a job, it's pretty major. Why wouldn't they

properly fund that, and just increase the rate to dentists before taking on more expensive programs?

I would say also that if we look at health care, it's the same thing. I'm glad to see a 3% increase in funding for health care. I hope the money makes it to the front lines. On the Muskoka side of my riding, pretty much every year, Muskoka Algonquin Healthcare has a deficit. This year, I was pleased when the government bailed them out with \$2.3 million in increased funding. I spoke personally to the Minister of Health about that. But they shouldn't have to do that every year, all the while cutting services as they try to make their budget balance. It's obvious that there's a need for increased investment in health care. Whether 3% will do it or not—we'll wait for the hospitals' response. I suspect that won't be sufficient.

I know, for example, at West Parry Sound Health Centre, they spent 25% more on hydro in 2016 than in 2014, despite having reduced consumption by 37%. They actually had their financial person analyze it and send that information over. The increased cost came from a 69% increase in the global adjustment in just two years—69% in just two years in the global adjustment. That's taking precious health care dollars away from front-line services and putting them into the hydro black hole.

For 2016, the government reduced funding to the West Parry Sound Health Centre by 2.3%. They've had their hydro bill go up and they've had a reduction of 2.3%, so seeing a 3% increase barely gets them back to where they were, and I suspect it won't be sufficient.

While the government is busy congratulating themselves for increased hospital funding, I think we need to take a hard look at the reality. In order to increase funding and announce new programs, to even pretend to balance the budget, they've had to do a lot of cutting in other places, and it seems to be mainly in rural Ontario and northern Ontario. I know our agriculture critic has certainly talked about the Ministry of Agriculture. The Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs' budget is being cut by \$47 million. That is a big concern.

1730

The Ministry of Natural Resources—the minister was just speaking. Their budget is being cut by \$37 million. I can tell you again, from the perspective of my own riding, that natural resources—we have a lot of building going on around the lakes, and as a result of a case in the court this last year, they now all require land use permits for these docks. It used to be just the big boathouses that required them; now they all require them. I can tell you that it takes a long time, and timeliness is really important to the builders and the employment that comes from the projects that get going. Seeing a further reduction in the budget for natural resources could directly affect jobs and the ability to do projects in my area.

Looking at one of the main line items under the Ministry of Natural Resources, emergency forest firefighting is being cut from \$108 million to less than \$70 million. Speaker, I have to ask, does the Minister of Finance have some inside information from Smokey the Bear that forest fires are going to be down this year? If we have a bad season, you need to spend the money.

We had a Tourism Day last week, and we heard from people in the tourism sector. I met with the president of Resorts Ontario about the challenges in the tourism sector. I didn't see, unless the government wants to point it out, changes in the budget that address some of the concerns they had.

Their concerns were that they can't plan their marketing. Let me step back a second and say that the Ontario Chamber of Commerce just did a study on tourism in Ontario and pointed out—you can go online to see it—that over the last 15 years, if Ontario's tourism had increased at the same rate as the rest of the world, which it hasn't—they have a graph showing that we are missing out on \$16 billion in economic activity the last number of years because we've lagged behind. What tourism is asking for is multi-year funding so that they can plan their marketing, so they can actually make a difference.

They mentioned the terrible burden of red tape in the tourism sector. You bring students in for a summer job and they have to have WHMIS training; they have to have health and safety training; if they're working at heights, they have to have working at heights training; they have to have first aid. And then what happens typically in a busy summer resort is you start and a number of the students quit. Then you're too busy and don't have the time to train the students in a full season. So their very good recommendation is to do that training in the schools. Give the student who has done the training some sort of transferable card that shows them they have the training. That will save the businesses having to actually take the time to do it, and it solves that problem of transferability. It would be a positive thing for the student, having done all that work.

They also complained about the fact that since—it was always tough in the tourism business to get money from the bank. I was in the business for 30 years, and if you had a \$3-million asset, they might loan you \$800,000 from a traditional bank. Post-2008, that's dried up completely. So it is a real challenge for tourism operators to be able to make the capital investments to have the quality of accommodations that the world expects. The operators are saying that they have to go to secondary loaners and pay quite high interest rates to be able to get any money to be able to keep the accommodations and the sort of quality that is needed. That is something that needs to be addressed.

In past years, I remember when I was in the business, the Conservatives of the day, when interest rates were almost 20%, had a TRIP program—I think it was the tourism reinvestment program—that just about every resort in the province took advantage of. It was backed by the government. They got a 5% reduction in interest rates, and there was a huge amount of redevelopment that happened in the province when that happened. Unfortunately, my father being a cabinet minister in the Davis government, I was not able to participate in that particular program.

They also talked about the need for more skills development, that finding the necessary skilled people in

the tourism sector is a real challenge. That is, again, something that our leader has been bringing up.

Mr. Speaker, I can see I am going to run out of time for the long speech I have here to deliver, so I will try to get to some parts of it anyway.

Northern development and mines: Obviously, I'm the critic for northern development and mines. We've seen its budget cut by some \$70 million. The other thing that was very noticeable from my perspective watching the budget: I didn't hear the Ring of Fire mentioned in the budget. If you go back and look at past budgets, there was a great flourish and mention of the Ring of Fire and applause from the Liberal members, standing up and applauding when it was announced—

Ms. Cindy Forster: It was \$1 billion.

Mr. Norm Miller: —\$1 billion not just in one budget, but at least three budgets. They've talked about the \$1 billion and the great investment and how important the Ring of Fire is. I agree. The Ring of Fire is important. It's worth billions. It could be an over-100-year mining camp for the province of Ontario.

What happened from last year to this year? There was no mention of it. I probably asked 12 times in this Legislature the same question: "Show me something concrete that you've actually done. Show me a foot of road that has been built. Show me some progress." I have never, never, never had an answer from this government—

Mrs. Cristina Martins: Come to my riding. I'll show you.

Mr. Norm Miller: —and I'll probably ask the question again—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): I have to ask the member for Davenport to stop heckling. The member from Parry Sound–Muskoka has the floor.

I'll give you a few extra seconds.

Mr. Norm Miller: I'm glad to see some action over on the other side of the House there, Mr. Speaker. I woke them up over there.

But it's just amazing how the Ring of Fire disappeared in this year's budget. There was no mention of the \$1 billion. As I said, the multiple times I've asked questions—"Show me some progress"—I've never had an answer, and I will continue to ask that question: "Show me some progress."

Mr. Speaker, unfortunately, I don't get to cover a lot of the speech that I have here to deliver, as I'm out of time, but I thank you for the opportunity to speak this afternoon.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Ms. Catherine Fife: I want to thank the member from Parry Sound–Muskoka for the 20 minutes on the 2017 Ontario budget.

Interjection.

Ms. Catherine Fife: Hey.

I do want to say that maybe that's the problem. Maybe that's the problem, because he was heckled as he was reviewing the Ring of Fire and pointing out that after—I

was up in that gallery in 2007 when Dwight Duncan kept talking about the Ring of Fire. That was over a decade ago.

The member from Davenport is saying, "Come to my riding." The Ring of Fire is not in your riding. Maybe that's the problem. Maybe that's the problem here in the province of Ontario: that there are people on that side who don't know where northern Ontario is. You certainly cannot take a train there anymore, Mr. Speaker, and the roads are literally unsafe.

This government has six contracted-out private companies who are in arrears of \$42 million. These are six companies to maintain northern roads. The government has charged them \$42 million for not upholding their end of the bargain for maintaining northern roads, which the member from Parry Sound–Muskoka will know, and they keep getting contracts. They keep getting contracts. That's the disconnect.

I think that would be the theme of the member's—not to put words in his mouth, but that would be the theme: that so disconnected is this government that this budget bill leaves so many people waiting for real leadership on health care, on housing, on hydro, on infrastructure and, yes, on the Ring of Fire—10 years, still waiting; nothing from this government.

What a missed opportunity for this province for resource extraction, for environmental leadership, for infrastructure—rail, roads and water. Really, Mr. Speaker, perhaps that's the heart of the problem.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Mr. Yvan Baker: I've been here in the House for this debate throughout the afternoon, and I have to tell you, I keep hearing from the members opposite, "Spend—stop spending; invest—stop investing."

On the one hand, the PCs are saying, "Well, we want you to pay down the debt," and on the other hand, they're saying, "Oh, but keep investing in infrastructure, particularly in our ridings." On the one hand, they say, "Oh, well, you know, your budget has grown too much; I remember so many years ago when it was in the \$70-billion range," and then, "But there are all of these things in my riding, all of these services that I need. Please invest in them. Please invest in health care and education."

To me, this just demonstrates that the members are speaking out of both sides of their mouth. You either want us to invest or you don't. You either want to invest or you don't.

Now we have complaints that the Minister of Natural Resources has found ways of delivering the services under her ministry more efficiently. Now, the members opposite, who spent months and months and months complaining about how we need to spend tax dollars more wisely, how the Liberals don't know how to spend the tax dollars—we worked really hard to find savings and find more efficient ways of delivering those services, and they're now upset about it. The PCs, if you can believe it, are arguing that we should spend more money, just for the hell of it.

1740

I think that this demonstrates to me why the party opposite is not prepared to govern, because (1) they're not prepared to make decisions, (2) they don't know how, and (3) they get up and speak out of both sides of their mouth.

Pick a path, develop a plan, bring it to the people of Ontario, build support and then we can talk.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Mr. Randy Hillier: Clearly, the Liberals' strong suit is not listening, from what we hear from the member from Etobicoke Centre.

It's also been interesting this afternoon that the member from Davenport has engaged in a lot of chirping but not any discussion or debate. I guess she hasn't been permitted to speak to the bill.

However, the member from Parry Sound–Muskoka started off by speaking about neglect by this government on a significant piece of property on Muskoka Bay. This province is riddled with those examples. The former MNR fire base up in Dryden is another good example.

Probably the most egregious example is Wesleyville. Just a short distance from here, Wesleyville, between Bowmanville and Port Hope, is 1,500 acres of prime Lake Ontario waterfront that used to be, or was envisioned to be, a power generating plant. It was mothballed in 1974 and remains mothballed today. That's 1,500 beautiful prime acres on Lake Ontario, just past Bowmanville, and since 1974 it has sat vacant. There's a big stack there. There's a big building there, but it's empty. It doesn't generate any power. It doesn't generate anything, just costs.

I guess that's another euphemism by this Liberal Party about investment. There's their investment into nothingness, into no utilization. That's a debt, Speaker, and these guys just don't get it.

Why don't you start actually managing your portfolios, start administering and governing with integrity and credibility, get rid of these properties that are just a debt and utilize them to the benefit of the people of Ontario?

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Mr. John Vanthof: I had the distinct pleasure of listening to the member from Parry Sound–Muskoka's speech—I was in the back room—and when he mentioned the Ring of Fire, it struck a chord in my heart, because in 2011, when I was elected, I distinctly remember the Minister of Northern Development and Mines at the time held a big press conference in Sudbury announcing that the smelter that was going to smelt the mineral coming out of the Ring of Fire was going to be built in Capreol. There were going to be thousands of jobs. It was going to be huge, Speaker—and then the election, and then it slowly started disappearing. One of the major companies who was involved got so frustrated that they gave up hundreds of millions of dollars and basically walked away.

Then, there were a billion dollars on the table, put forward by this government to help get there—because one thing we have to worry about is how to get there and how to get there environmentally sustainably, how to get there so that it benefits the First Nations, and how to make sure the First Nations benefit from the whole project. That billion dollars was on the table.

The question that has to be asked is, where did the billion dollars go? Because for the first time since I've been here, the Ring of Fire wasn't even mentioned in the budget. It has become a ring of smoke and drifted away. That's the question. For the people who know so well how to manage the money, supposedly, on the other side of the House, where is the billion dollars that was supposed to be earmarked for the Ring of Fire? Is it still in the budget, or did it just waft away?

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): That's it for questions and comments.

The member for Parry Sound–Muskoka can reply.

Mr. Norm Miller: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Thank you to the member from Kitchener–Waterloo, who reminded us all that there used to be a train in the north called the Northlander. In fact, just this past weekend, I was in Huntsville and one of my constituents brought it up: "Is the train going to come back? Because I'd like to use the train." It was a decision in a former budget to do away with that.

The member for Etobicoke Centre talks about spending. What we would like to see is some priorities, and to stop wasting money. Do I need to remind you about eHealth—where we spent \$8 billion but still don't have a functioning system—or Ornge, or the billion dollars in gas plants? Stop wasting the money and get it actually doing something.

The member from Timiskaming–Cochrane brought up the Ring of Fire. I, too, remember that press release. I think it said, right on it: "Thousands of jobs coming to northern Ontario." Cliffs Natural Resources was going to be involved, and there was going to be a new ferrochrome smelter for chromite, near Sudbury. That, unfortunately, has all disappeared. We're at the point this year, Mr. Speaker, where there is no mention of the Ring of Fire.

May I remind the government that, according to the Ontario Chamber of Commerce, the first 10 years of development of the region would generate nearly \$2 billion in government revenue, money this government desperately needs. The chamber also says the Ring of Fire would sustain up to 5,500 jobs annually in the first 10 years of development, and most of those jobs would be in the north, where they are really needed.

It would, of course, be especially beneficial for the indigenous communities in the area. Mining is the biggest employer of indigenous people. Over 10% of the mining workforce at this time is indigenous people.

So it is a real crime that this government now seems to have abandoned it, with no mention of the Ring of Fire in the budget. We don't know where the billion dollars went that was promised in so many other budgets.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Further debate?

Ms. Cindy Forster: I always seem to end up with the short end of the stick here, with 10 minutes when I really should have gotten 20. But anyway, here I am.

I think what Ontarians really want is for their government to get the basics of their services right. We heard a lot here today about what is lacking in our health care system, what is lacking in our schools.

We have the member for Etobicoke Centre talking about the opposition speaking out of both sides of the mouth. Well, the government is doing exactly the same thing. They say, "Well, we're investing all of this new money into schools." But at the same time, there are still 300 schools on the chopping block in this province. We've got kids in the north, four- and five-year-olds, riding a bus for three hours a day to get education.

There's all this money being invested in health care, all this new money. But in fact, it doesn't give those seniors who really need to be in a retirement home or in a long-term-care setting—thousands of them are waiting for a long-term-care setting and aren't able to get a bed. It doesn't help them when they're only getting one hour or two hours of care a day.

I can tell you that going through that community health sector, and hearing from nurses and personal support workers about patients—of course anonymously, and certainly not violating the PHIPA. They're telling me stories about people who were discharged from a hospital bed, where they were getting 24 hours a day of care, and now they're getting nine hours a day in their home. They were getting three three-hour shifts. What do you do in between, for the other five of those eight hours, if you actually required 24 hours a day of care? I don't see anything in the budget that is going to help that.

There were a lot of reannouncements in this budget. I was talking to the member for Timmins–James Bay over lunch, and he said that there is a new hospital coming to James Bay. He said, "I heard about that 10 years ago," from the Minister of Health of the day, Minister Matthews. The announcement was made 10 years ago, the money was committed 10 years ago, but the hospital still isn't there.

There was a reannouncement about affordable child care. It's not new child care spaces. It's just another reannouncement. So there's nothing new in this budget, actually, for the children in this province. It's just a reannouncement from last year's budget.

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There's nothing in the budget to talk about working conditions of workers in this province. Now, we've been hearing about this changing workplaces panel probably for the last year and a half. There has been consultation after consultation.

Ms. Catherine Fife: And reconsultation.

Ms. Cindy Forster: And reconsultation. But we haven't seen anything coming out of it yet. What workers in this province really want is stable work. They want a schedule that will actually give them a quality

work/home-life balance. They want a few sick days so that they don't have to choose between food and infecting their coworkers if they go to work sick. They want a few benefits. They'd like a pension so that they can retire in dignity. Temporary workers want to be paid the same as the people they work beside in their workplaces. We've heard from people who worked five years on the floor of a small factory who were being paid two thirds or one half of what the full-time employee was being paid.

Those are the things that workers want to see in this province.

Now, I committed to a couple of people who have come into my office—I know you all have constituency offices. I don't know how much time you actually physically spend there yourselves, but I know that in my office, I deal with a lot of health issues. I deal with a lot of people coming in who are still waiting for an MRI, but they are waiting for an MRI because they have a surgery booked—and they can't even get an MRI to actually get to that surgery without that surgery getting cancelled. I've had that happen several times, and my office is constantly having to intervene with the system to try and get those people the tests they need so that they can go on to have their back surgery or their knee surgery or whatever it is. So not only are there wait times for testing, but there are cancellations, then, in your surgeries. We hear about that. We hear about it in Hamilton; we hear about it in Niagara. Surgeries are being cancelled on a fairly regular basis, along with people being looked after, being nursed, in hallways.

I wanted to use my last few minutes to talk about two men by the name of John. It's interesting that they are both named John. I want to tell you their health care stories.

The first John I'll talk about is a 95-year-old man. All he really wanted was a bath. For the last year of his life, I talked to the CCAC. I asked them to come and do assessments. John had dementia. He was still living in his own apartment, though, in Port Colborne. His daughter-in-law was his caretaker, with his power of attorney and his power of care. Frankly, John didn't want his daughter-in-law there to watch him take a bath or help him take a bath, and so we were just trying to get poor John, 95 years old, a bath once or twice a week.

Ms. Catherine Fife: Once or twice.

Ms. Cindy Forster: Once or twice a week. That was it. He was costing the health care system nothing. He was paying for his own Meals on Wheels; he was paying for his meds, in those blister packs, himself. There was a retirement facility right next door, but he didn't avail himself to even go over there for meals or to require any services. So anyway, we never did get John a bath.

John calls his daughter-in-law one day and he says, "I've got chest pain." He's 95 years old. So an ambulance comes and gets John. They take him to the local hospital. The daughter-in-law says, "I'll meet you at the hospital." By the time she got there, which was only maybe 30 minutes later, John was already on his way

from Niagara to Hamilton to have two stents put in: 95 years old. He was a “Do not resuscitate.” His daughter-in-law had power of care and power of attorney. John signed his own consent, in his state of dementia, in Hamilton, and the daughter-in-law wasn’t even aware until she got to the local hospital that, in fact, her father-in-law was there.

Anyway, they couldn’t put John’s stent in. His blood vessels were too small and they couldn’t do it, so they sent him back to Niagara. He spent a week or so in the hospital. They put him in a nursing home and a couple of weeks later, he passed away.

The family, a good Ukrainian family, chuckles about all of that, because they said, “Poor John couldn’t get a bath.” He could not get a bath from this health care system. They said he travelled more in the last four weeks of his life than he travelled in his entire life. They just thought that it was ludicrous that this could actually happen in a health care system.

The second John I want to tell you about is also from my riding. He’s probably a 62- or 63-year-old man. This all happened within a couple of months of each other. The constituents now report this John to me. This John is at the gym. He’s 63 years old, he’s on the treadmill. He experiences chest pain, so he gets himself to the hospital—the same hospital that 95-year-old John was at.

He gets himself to the hospital. He has a cardiogram. He has some blood work. They sent John off with an appointment to see a cardiologist. John, in the next couple of days, sees the cardiologist, and sure enough, he’s got two blocked major arteries in his body, but he’s only 63 years old. So here they sent somebody home from the hospital who should have been admitted to the hospital. He gets to the cardiologist and the cardiologist says, “You have to be admitted to the hospital now. Now that we know you have two blocked arteries, we’re going to admit you to the hospital and you’re going to actually stay here in the hospital until we can ship you to the regional heart centre, where you will then have an angioplasty.”

The tale of the story is that as much as you invest dollars in the system, the system isn’t working for

everyone. People want their health services to actually work for them. They want their testing available when they need it so they actually get their surgery. They want to be able to get the surgical procedures that they need in a timely manner.

You heard this morning from the member from Kitchener–Waterloo in her question. She’s got a man, Mr.—

Ms. Catherine Fife: Szillat.

Ms. Cindy Forster: —Szillat in her riding: 412 days, and that’s just waiting for his back surgery. He hasn’t even had a consult for his knees yet.

Interjection: Brutal.

Ms. Cindy Forster: It is brutal. There’s something wrong with that, right?

This budget also doesn’t do anything to help the injured workers in this province. We just had the National Day of Mourning on April 28. I can tell you I attended a number of events across my riding, and there are injured workers out there who have been fighting the system for many years, trying to get benefits, who are existing in poverty situations.

I had a woman not long ago in my riding who had actually lived in poverty with her three teenagers for 20 years, until she found her way to my office. We filed an application to assist her and she was awarded, after all these years, compensation for the last 20 years. For some reason, her spouse, who had passed away, had fallen through the cracks.

That was a good-news story, but there are hundreds and thousands of others who actually need our assistance. I don’t see anything at all in this budget bill that will amend the Workers’ Compensation Act to assist those workers in this province.

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

Debate deemed adjourned.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): It being 6 of the clock, this House stands adjourned until tomorrow at 9 a.m.

The House adjourned at 1759.

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Takhar, Harinder S. (LIB)	Mississauga–Erindale	
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