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Mercredi
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Président : L'honorable Dave Levac
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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

Wednesday 3 May 2017

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

Mercredi 3 mai 2017

The House met at 0900.

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

Prayers.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

TIME ALLOCATION

Resuming the debate adjourned on May 2, 2017, on the motion for allocation of time 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 Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Further debate?

Hon. Chris Ballard: It's great to be here this morning to speak to Bill 124, the Rental Fairness Act, 2017.

Speaker, we've all heard stories of rent gouging going on in today's rental market. It's wrong and it's not fair. The proposed legislation would, if passed, provide immediate protection for close to a quarter of a million people to protect them from unreasonable rent hikes.

If passed, the legislation would require any rent increase served on newer units since April 20, 2017, to be rolled back to the rent increase guideline amount. Although the proposed legislation is retroactive, tenants are still facing unacceptable rent hikes. That means the longer the opposition stalls, the longer tenants will have to go without protections from unreasonable rent hikes. The third party knows that.

The NDP member from Toronto–Danforth has repeatedly called for the 1991 exemption to be closed. He has said that there's a crisis, there's urgency. Recently he said, "They should be acting now."

In fact—

Ms. Lisa M. Thompson: Point of order.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Point of order: The member from Huron–Bruce.

Ms. Lisa M. Thompson: Speaker, do we have a quorum this morning?

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Clerk?

The Deputy Clerk (Mr. Trevor Day): A quorum is not present, Speaker.

The Acting Speaker ordered the bells rung.

The Deputy Clerk (Mr. Trevor Day): A quorum is now present.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Thank you. The minister may continue.

Hon. Chris Ballard: As I was saying, just yesterday the NDP member from Kitchener–Waterloo said, "New

Democrats will not be supporting this time allocation motion," and went on to say, "We are, of course, obviously disappointed that the government side of the House has decided to fast-track this piece of legislation...."

PC leader Patrick Brown has also stressed concern and mused that the legislation has created uncertainty. He further went on to say, "Neither tenants nor landlords nor builders know what to expect."

Mr. Speaker, the faster we can act, the more clarity we can bring to the rental system. However, the PC housing critic seems to want to draw out the uncertainty. Yesterday he said, "I can tell you that I am willing to start committee earlier, sit later, meet on extra days and do what it takes to hear from the experts." Yet this same member has a track record of filibustering committee every chance he gets.

The PCs, too, have expressed that they plan to vote against the time allocation motion, which would create certainty by providing a clear legislative path. Frankly, it's time for both the PCs and NDP to stop playing political games with Ontario's renters and help provide certainty that they can expect to see rental fairness achieved this spring. This legislation not only addresses rent control but is a comprehensive suite of reforms that will address issues across the rental housing system.

We're also taking steps to lessen the abuse of a provision in the Residential Tenancies Act known as landlord's own use. Currently, landlords are able to abuse this provision by evicting tenants, claiming that they or a family member intend to move in. But in many cases, the landlords will re-list the unit at a higher price once the tenant is evicted.

In one case, Ginette and Kyle, who had been living in their Toronto apartment for five years, were asked by their landlord to move out because the landlord's mother was moving in. However, two months after moving out, the couple found an ad for their old apartment. Their rent was listed at almost twice what they had been paying.

To prevent landlords from abusing this provision, we're proposing to require landlords to pay one month's compensation to tenants who would be displaced. Landlords would also be required to provide written intention that they or their family will live in the unit for at least one year.

There is a pressing need to protect tenants from landlords who abuse this provision. We want to prevent tenants from experiencing what Ginette and Kyle went through. That's why I urge all members in the House to time-allocate this bill so we can get on with business.

I've outlined some of the reforms today that we're proposing in order to transform the rental housing system and improve housing stability for Ontario's renters. These changes would also help to improve the province's transitional housing system.

As the Premier has said, there's no one silver bullet to fixing the housing affordability crisis that we have on our hands. Too many hard-working individuals and families are struggling just to make their rent every month, and they continue to live in dread of unexpected rent hikes.

This has gone on for far too long. It's time to give these families a break. I would encourage all members not to stall this bill. The time to act is now.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Further debate?

Mr. Lorne Coe: Recently the Liberal government announced a slate of measures that you're well familiar with, Mr. Speaker, aimed at cooling the cost of buying or renting property in Toronto and the greater Toronto area. The most prominent items at the top of this government's list were a 15% tax on foreign buyers conveniently called "non-resident speculators," and the expansion of rent control to all private rental units in Ontario. But both of these ideas raise serious concerns. Taxing foreign buyers may seem politically expedient, but this policy stands on anecdotal, rather than substantial, evidence.

It was only a few days ago that the Liberal government said it would start tracking the nationality of homebuyers. It's also unclear whether such a tax will have any meaningful effect. You'll know that last year the government of British Columbia implemented a similar tax. The result was that sales volumes dropped, as they had for months before the tax, and have since rebounded, making it hard to draw conclusions about the overall effectiveness of the policy.

Rent control, the Liberal government's other flagship move to cool the housing market, is a discredited policy strategy that has been attempted in various jurisdictions over the past few decades, almost always with disastrous consequences, as you well know. In fact, the Fraser Institute's first major study conducted back in 1975 was entirely dedicated to rent control, a policy seeking to artificially cap how much landlords could raise rents.

0910

The core problem with rent control is that it doesn't help renters in the long run. By capping rents, governments create a disincentive, Speaker, for prospective builders to construct new units, and this reduces growth in the rental housing supply. It also leaves less money in landlords' budgets, as well as reduced incentives for renovating or repairing apartments over time. As a result, there is a consensus among economists that rent control policies reduce both the quantity and quality of the rental stock. Consequently, a policy that is typically designed to help renters actually hurts them over time.

But it's not only economists and the Fraser Institute that take issue with this bill that we're debating this morning. Several stakeholders also have very serious concerns about the Liberal government's proposed meas-

ures. For example, the president of the Ottawa Real Estate Investors Organization said, "I think it's a terribly misguided initiative. It's actually going to hurt the people it's supposed to protect."

The president and chief executive officer of the Federation of Rental-housing Providers of Ontario said, "Today's announcement by the Wynne government will put thousands of units, and millions of dollars in provincial revenues at risk. It is a rash, politically motivated decision, which will hurt, not help generations of Ontario renters."

Toronto's mayor, John Tory, has said, "I think it would be a real problem for this growing marketplace, this growing city, if we shut off, again, investment in affordable purpose-built rental housing, because we need it so badly."

So, Speaker, what should be done instead of the government's proposed measures in Bill 124? Buried at the bottom of the list of this Liberal government's bill are glimpses of solutions to what may be the most important driver of the greater Toronto area's housing woes: The supply of new homes is not keeping up with demand. Speaker, as you well know, Ontario, and specifically the greater Toronto area, is a large factor in driving Canada's economic engine forward. As such, people move here from all over Canada, and indeed the world, to live, work and enjoy everything that the greater Toronto area has to offer. Between 2011 and 2016, the region grew by roughly 340,000 people, roughly equivalent to a city like Markham. All of these people need places to live, making it imperative to encourage the construction of new housing units.

Beyond natural barriers to the construction of more housing, such as Lake Ontario and flood plains, city governments across the region can slow down the supply of new homes by burdening developers with red tape. The Fraser Institute measured these regulatory barriers, including how long it takes to obtain a building permit, how much it costs and the opposition home builders face from local council and community groups. Their research found that long and uncertain approval processes can severely restrict the supply of new homes.

Speaker, the measures in this government's bill simply do not go far enough to reduce the amount of red tape that prevents or delays the construction of new homes, condos or rental properties. Instead, this Liberal government is proposing small changes which we are concerned will have very little impact in addressing the housing crisis. For example, this bill would rebate a portion of the local development charges some builders may face. There are also plans to create a new "housing supply team" with the goal of identifying specific regulatory barriers to new home building.

Both of these moves acknowledge the importance of supply in the housing equation, but if the Liberal government is serious about affordability, it should go a lot further. Rather than being swayed by anecdotes, or digging up failed policies from the past, the Liberal government should face the roots of the housing crisis head on by addressing the fundamental imbalance be-

tween the demand for housing and its supply. A long-term solution can be found that is to the benefit of homeowners, renters, landlords and home builders. But this strategy requires co-operation between the province, municipalities and all of the relevant stakeholders in this sector.

Speaker, as I said earlier, many of the housing-related stakeholders are concerned that Bill 124 simply won't have the impact that there needs to be; or, worse yet, that it will have adverse impacts. Taken with the experience of other bills debated in the Legislature, it suggests a pattern of rushed or less-than-robust consultations conducted by this Liberal government.

In several of the conversations that I've had with stakeholders in my riding and in other parts of the region of Durham, I've heard that their concerns are completely absent from pieces of the legislation before us, despite these stakeholders receiving positive impact from ministers and their staff at meetings. We're concerned that this is becoming a pattern with the Liberal government. Their consultations are merely window dressing to ram through their political agenda.

On that point, let's turn to the time allocation motion that's before us this morning. A few months ago, as the associate critic for education and the official opposition critic for post-secondary education, I led the debate on Bill 92, An Act to amend the School Boards Collective Bargaining Act, 2017. Bill 92 was also motioned for time allocation. Because this government is ramming through more legislation in this manner, I'm extremely concerned that they will treat motions for time allocation as a standard process for how we create laws in Ontario.

Speaker, you'd be interested to know that there's also a history of current members of this government who took issue with motions for time allocation while they were in opposition. For example, the member of provincial Parliament for St. Catharines and the chief government whip, who has had such a long, distinguished career, said in opposition: "Each of the time allocation motions which close off or choke off debate in this House seems to be more drastic as it comes forward, seems to be more sinister as it relates to the privileges of members of this House and as it relates to healthy, democratic debate for the people of this province"—"as it relates to healthy, democratic debate for the people of this province."

This feeling is not unique to that member alone. The member for Eglinton-Lawrence once had this to say about time allocation: "That's what this government is doing. It's saying: 'We got elected. We are now going to rule by edict. We're going to rule by closing down debate. We're going to cut off debate....' That's the type of thing people are getting pretty fed up with." And that's what I'm hearing, Speaker. People are getting pretty fed up with these types of motions.

We can only wonder what happened to this government. What happened to it? They appeared to have such a strong moral compass in opposition but seem to have lost their direction after 14 years of scandal, waste and mismanagement.

Speaker, if there was ever an issue that required extensive debate, in-depth consideration and a wide consultation process, it is the housing crisis that is facing Ontario today; you've spoken on it, several members of this Legislature have spoken on it. This crisis in Toronto and the greater Toronto area is one of the most complex problems facing the government today. It involves homeowners, renters, rental property owners, home and condo construction businesses, and multiple levels of government, particularly the 442 municipalities across this province.

An extensive consultation process and a rigorous debate are both required. There is no evidence that shows that the former has occurred—none whatsoever. You've heard it, Speaker, I've heard it in my riding, and several members on this side of the Legislature have heard it as well, and regularly, and this Liberal government is now cutting off, once again, the opportunity for the latter.

0920

Despite this government's actions, we will carefully consider, as we have been, Bill 124, and continue to scrutinize it to arrive at what the most effective measures are to alleviate and, by extension, resolve the housing crisis. It takes collaboration. It takes a partnership. We need to take the opportunity to listen carefully and regularly.

In closing, this Liberal government's closure of debate simply does not allow members of provincial Parliament to adequately debate important issues within the framework of this Legislature. We have great concerns—I underscore: great concerns—as a result, that the proposed measures are rushed, reckless and potentially ineffective. That is why we continue to urge the government to refrain from using time allocation motions moving forward.

Speaker, I reference the level of consultation that I've undertaken in my riding and across the region of Durham. I've done that because, like you and others in this Legislature, I've come from a municipal background on council. At one time, as a regional councillor, I was the president of the Durham Region Non-Profit Housing Corp. and also the chair of the region of Durham's Health and Social Services Committee, and had a hand in developing and leading the development of our 10-year housing plan. What I learned out of our wide consultation to develop that plan was that hard-working families, whether they live in Durham region or they live in other parts of Ontario, deserve a legislative process that benefits them, not one that is expedient and only benefits the Liberal government.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Further debate?

Mr. Taras Natyshak: Good morning to my colleagues. I am, as always, honoured to join the debate on this specific bill, Bill 124, the Rental Fairness Act. This bill certainly will be a welcome bill for those renters specifically in the GTHA who live in an era that I can only surmise as one where unaffordability and lack of access to affordable homes is the norm.

Speaker, you would know that I come from an area of the province in the southwest. Essex is a rural area; it borders Windsor, and we don't see this. Toronto is a unique animal when it comes to housing affordability and access to rental properties. We do have some challenges around affordable housing stock and the upkeep of that stock, but nevertheless, it's a completely different environment, I would say, from that of Toronto. You only get that sense if you live here and you are challenged with trying to find a place to live.

I'd never lived in Toronto before until I was elected. Thankfully, we are given, as members of this House, a stipend to find a place, but it was a challenge when I was first elected to find a place that fit the monthly budget that we are given, which I would say is generous and allows us to live and to work here.

However, if you are someone who has to support a family, a dual-income parent with a couple of kids, that has got to be incredibly challenging—let alone being a single parent of multiple kids on a single income. I would imagine that it is nearly impossible to not only find affordable housing, but to then ensure that you can afford that housing.

I was speaking this morning with the Minister of Children and Youth Services, Mr. Coteau. We met in the elevator, and we were briefly talking about where we live and our housing. Between his home and my home in Essex—I mean, they're not even comparable, the level of affordability. You should all move to Essex.

But it's amazing, because here is the similarity—those folks in Toronto aren't making much more on an annual basis, per capita, than they would in Essex. So the affordability just doesn't exist. I guess it is one of the reasons why our area in the southwest is exploding in terms of new housing and also some new rental stock. People are figuring out, in this day and age, in this economy, when you can telecommute or you can work from your home—folks are selling their place in the GTHA and now moving down south and into all parts of the province simply because they can't afford their homes. That makes good economic sense. But some people, of course, can't simply uproot their home.

Speaker, this bill, Bill 124, contains some mechanisms that tenants will appreciate and that are welcomed. It's something that tenant and rental advocates and affordable housing advocates have fought for for quite some time.

In doing a little bit of research on this issue, I saw an article from August 12, 2003, where then-Premier Dalton McGuinty promised tenants, "We will get rid of vacancy decontrol which allows unlimited rent increases...." That was a promise back then, 14 years ago. It was evidently an issue back then. Unfortunately, this bill does not get rid of vacancy decontrol and does not provide for a rent registry. We wonder why a promise made 14 years ago wasn't kept and wasn't made to be a provision within this bill. Maybe it's because Dalton McGuinty is no longer here. Maybe it's because they've abandoned that provision or the need for that. But New Democrats certainly see that that's something that is a glaring omission in this

bill and something we hoped the government would have put in, and potentially could still put in when this bill passes second reading and moves on to the committee stage. I would expect that we will hear from those advocates who continue to push for reforms and continue to push for fairness in affordable housing and tenant protection. That's a marker that we'll put out, as New Democrats, that we'd like to see the government take some initiative on.

I heard the Minister of Housing talk about our colleague Peter Tabuns, the member from Toronto–Danforth, and his legacy of fighting for tenants during his tenure here. He has consistently raised issues. He has presented bills. He has fought on behalf of tenants in an unwavering fashion, Speaker. You could certainly point to his initiatives in this House as being the impetus for many bills that have come out of the government side—specifically, this one.

It wasn't just a couple of weeks ago, I believe, that our colleague from Toronto–Danforth put forward Bill 106, Rent Protection for All Tenants Act, which repeals subsection 6(2) of the RTA, which currently exempts rentals occupied after 1991—the infamous 1991 loophole. This bill closes the 1991 loophole which, again, will be something that will be strongly supported by tenant groups and advocates. It's also something that New Democrats have pushed for for quite some time.

So time and time again in this House, Speaker, we see that those good initiatives, those pure intentions, come from the New Democratic side. It's not for political gain. It's not for anything other than it is the right thing to do. Whether it's tenant protection, whether it's inclusionary zoning—again, another initiative pushed forward by our member from Toronto–Danforth, our member from Parkdale–High Park and our former member from Beaches–East York—they have always been on the front lines, standing shoulder to shoulder with affordable housing advocates to quell this explosion in rental increases and unaffordability in the GTHA. So, I guess, in layman's terms, it takes New Democrats to put forward these ideas, these initiatives, to push this government to finally do the right thing.

0930

I would say that it shouldn't take 14 years to get there. It should be done immediately. I would speak directly to those who are tuning in today through the telecast. We can skip this whole process. We can avoid having to take 14 years to get to the right place on legislation. We can do that by getting rid of the Liberal government, getting them out of here, because they can't do the right thing until they're pushed to the brink of extinction, and that's what we see today. Certainly in the polling numbers province-wide and now specifically in the GTHA, which was their stronghold and was their beachhead, their numbers are flailing, with the Premier at about 9% popularity, the lowest in recorded history for a Premier of the province. It took that to finally get this government to make the right decision. We would say that we can skip that process. Next year, we would hope that folks all

across the province would see that initiatives put forward by New Democrats are of good intent, are sincere and are ones that are done because we are listening. We listen to the needs of the people, not to the polls.

There couldn't be a clearer example of why, in fact, this government is making this move today. They can make all the noise they want about us not voting for time allocation. We don't vote for time allocation. Our job is to debate bills in a complete way. No matter how complex or simple they may be, it is our right, it's our obligation, to debate bills fully and to allow all members of this House to have the ability to debate. On that side of the House, when their hair catches fire, they throw a time allocation bill at us because that's all they've got left. That's all they can do to try to impress upon—

Interjection.

Mr. Taras Natyshak: Well, it's a figure of speech. As a redhead, I know what it means.

That's all they can do to try to make amends for their 14 years of failure. So we'll let them have that talking point. They can say that we and the PCs vote against time allocation—I'm not certain if the PCs will but certainly we will, because we respect the process here, Speaker. We respect the need for due process and due diligence, something that this government doesn't seem to have a grasp of. They had 14 years to do this.

Nevertheless, the bill has, again, essentially the same provisions and the same mechanisms that were put forward by our colleague the member from Toronto—Danforth, and it's something that, again, will be welcomed by tenants. There will be some need to reform the bill. I expect that the process at committee will be one that will be lengthy and one that you will hear from multiple organizations on, which are going to ask for even tighter regulations and oversight on the unaffordability of housing in the GTHA and surrounding areas and, of course, around the province. We want to ensure that people can afford to live, can afford their housing. It is one of the basic needs that humans require.

Speaker, this bill is supportable in its current form. We will certainly be putting forward amendments. We hope that the government listens not only to us, because when New Democrats are putting forward initiatives, again, it is ultimately the voice of our constituents, not the voice of pollsters and public research firms; it is coming from our communities, from people that we meet each and every day. Time and time again, it has been proven that eventually, no matter what government comes into play, it is the right thing to do. We support the intent of this bill and we will be looking for reforms.

I appreciate the time given to me this morning to debate this bill.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Further debate? Further debate? Last call for further debate.

Seeing none, Ms. Sandals has moved government notice of motion number 9, relating to the allocation of time on Bill 124, An Act to amend the Residential Tenancies Act, 2006. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? I heard a no.

All those in favour, please say "aye."

All those opposed, please say "nay."

I believe the ayes have it.

This requires a recorded vote and will be deferred until after question period today.

Vote deferred.

2017 ONTARIO BUDGET

Resuming the debate adjourned on May 1, 2017, on the motion that this House approves in general the budgetary policy of the government.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Further debate. The Minister of Labour.

Hon. Kevin Daniel Flynn: Thank you for recognizing me, Speaker.

Ms. Cindy Forster: Point of order.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Point of order, member from Welland.

Ms. Cindy Forster: I was actually the last speaker and I had eight minutes left this morning.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): I'm sorry, Minister.

The member from Welland.

Ms. Cindy Forster: Thank you, Speaker. It's always a pleasure to get up and talk a little bit about the budget.

This morning I only have about eight minutes, so I actually want to talk about the Niagara Health System. I'm glad that my friend from St. Catharines is here as well, because the budget cuts from the Liberal government for the last nine years—and I know the government will say, "Well, we gave the hospitals 2%," but 2% actually equals a cut in terms of inflation; and the four years of freezes, which were really a cut, probably a 3% cut—have led to one of the largest health systems in this province—in fact, it was the largest health system in this province. The Niagara Health System, eight or nine years ago, had hospitals in Niagara-on-the-Lake; two in St. Catharines; and one in Niagara Falls, Fort Erie, Port Colborne and Welland. Since the Liberal government took power, we have lost one hospital in St. Catharines and we have lost one hospital in Niagara-on-the-Lake. We have a state-of-the-art hospital in St. Catharines, but unfortunately, if you visit there, it is exploding at the seams. There are not enough beds. The number of beds in the Niagara Health System has been cut dramatically.

I think it was yesterday in question period that we heard about Kevin Smith. Kevin Smith was the supervisor who actually was appointed to bring recommendations around the Niagara Health System, but it became a known fact yesterday that while he was sitting on the HOOPP board, he was also sitting on the Home Capital board. He was spending many hours at board meetings for Home Capital, where he had \$1.6 million in shares and was earning \$357,000 a year, in addition to the almost \$800,000 a year that he was earning as the CEO of the Niagara Health System and the St. Joe's health care system.

I think if somebody is earning \$800,000 a year looking after two major health systems in the province of Ontario, they actually should be there and available to do that work and not sitting in board meetings for a private company, where they're earning another \$400,000 with shares on top of that.

At the same time that they're closing beds, they're proposing to actually close my hospital in Welland, which was probably built in the 1960s—a fully functioning hospital, but they're closing it because of budget cuts.

Today, I was down speaking to the paramedics who were here. I'm sure many of you went down and joined them for breakfast. I talked to Tim Borowski, a local paramedic, and Jim Simpson, a dispatcher. They were telling me about the off-load delays, which are ever-increasing, particularly in the Niagara region, because of the reduction in beds that have been made because of Liberal budget cuts.

0940

There are 32 ambulances on any given day shift and 17 on any given night shift, but when all of these paramedic teams end up in off-load delays in our emergency departments because we don't have enough beds in Niagara, then there aren't ambulances actually on the road to be going out to the calls. He said that some nights there may only be three or four ambulances on the road. The rest of them are all tied up in the emergency department with patients who can't be off-loaded because there aren't any beds.

The Niagara Health System is planning on closing more beds. They're planning on closing the Welland hospital; they're planning on closing the Port Colborne hospital; they're planning on closing the Fort Erie hospital.

They're building a new hospital in Niagara Falls. They call that the Niagara south hospital. Speaker, I can tell you, there are 90,000 people who live in south Niagara, and the hospital that's being built in Niagara Falls is not in south Niagara. Niagara Falls absolutely needs a new hospital, but not at the expense of all of the residents who live in my end of the riding. That population doubles in Port Colborne and Fort Erie in the summertime, when the cottagers go to their cottages to enjoy their time at the lake. What is going to happen to our ambulances' off-load delays? What is going to happen to our patients—our constituents—when they close more acute-care beds in our hospital system?

The problem that we always hear from the media—I don't know who came up with this term “bed blockers,” but it really is an insulting term, Speaker, because these are people who really, at the end of the day, are patients who have nowhere to go. They can't stay at home because they can't get any CCAC hours. They can't get any home care hours through the CCAC. At best, they'll get an hour or two. Their families can't look after them because they're still working.

There are no long-term-care beds available for them. In Niagara alone there's a wait-list of 1,400 waiting for a

long-term-care bed in the Niagara area. They can't go into a retirement home—although I hear that the government is perhaps subsidizing some of that these days—because they can't afford it. Many of our seniors who are on the Guaranteed Income Supplement, getting perhaps \$1,400 a month, can't afford a retirement home bed that starts, in my area, at a minimum of \$2,300. I hear that in downtown Toronto it could be as high as \$5,000 a month to get a retirement home space. And they physically might not be able to be in a retirement home because there is very little care that is provided there.

What is going to happen in the Niagara Peninsula, Speaker? I ask the government, “What's going to happen in the Niagara Peninsula?” when they continue to move forward with this proposal to close the hospital in my riding—actually, two hospitals in my riding: one in Port Colborne and one in Welland.

Those significant numbers of beds are drastically needed. We have a high senior population. We have one of the highest senior populations in this province, and, Speaker, as you'll know, people are moving to southern Ontario. Every day we see people in my community buying houses, coming from Toronto, coming from the north, even coming from southwestern Ontario and moving into Niagara, into Welland and Port Colborne because the price of housing is considerably less than it is in Toronto and Mississauga. So the problem is just going to be compounded. We need more hospital beds in the system, not less.

I noticed in the budget that there are some increases in hospital beds coming in some areas that are exploding, like in London, but I think that the government needs to take a look at the Niagara area as well. They need to make sure that whoever is overseeing the Niagara health system, and making \$750,000 or \$800,000 a year, is actually available to do that work.

I thank you for the opportunity to have been able to speak to the budget on health care issues in Niagara.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Questions and comments?

Mr. Yvan Baker: It's an honour to have an opportunity to respond, to speak to the budget motion and respond to the member from the NDP. The member spent a good amount of her debate time speaking about health care and the challenges facing her constituents around health care. That's important for us all to hear and take note of and see what we can do. When I look at the budget, I think that it's designed to address a lot of those types of issues, not just in the member's riding, but in my riding of Etobicoke Centre and in ridings across the province.

Just some examples to share with you what I mean, Speaker: For example, there's going to be \$9 billion over 10 years to build hospitals. Obviously, the impact of that will be felt differently in different communities, and the specifics of how it will impact that member's community will have to be determined. This is a recognition by this government that this is something that's much needed, that we need to build and continue to build hospital capacity, and to make sure that that will allow us to get those wait times down and provide better quality care.

Also, there's funding for the operation of hospitals, over \$500 million for hospital operations, allowing existing hospitals to provide better access to care, better-quality care, which is really important—some of the issues that the member spoke about.

There is money in there specifically to reduce wait times. There are initiatives there to help people access a specialist. There is money in the budget to enhance the patient experience. And there's a dementia strategy in place, which will not only provide care to some of the folks the member was talking about, but also to support the caregivers who provide care to their aging parents and grandparents.

I think there's a lot in the budget that addresses the issues that the member has spoken about.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): The member from Stormont–Dundas–South Glengarry.

Mr. Jim McDonell: I'm happy to rise and comment on the member from Welland. I think she made a lot of good points throughout the discussion.

The case about the hospital—you look at health care across Ontario, and it is a mess. You look and the new area for beds in the hospitals seems to be the hallways, the empty offices, anything they can find to put beds in. The Cornwall hospital is up to 138% of capacity.

It just shows that we've got a government that keeps promising infrastructure, infrastructure that's \$100 billion over 10 years. Then they quote \$120 billion over 12 years. Now they have a new number over 13 years. But we aren't getting the money today. You're always talking about the future, but the money is not being spent.

In Stormont, Dundas and Glengarry, which includes part of my neighbour's riding, not one of the townships received any infrastructure funding last year. I won't say it's because there were no requirements. We had one township that had to close three bridges last year because they aren't safe. You can comment on your programs, but when they apply and they spend money on consultants to put the projects together, they get turned down. It's not right.

It's interesting: You look through the budget and they miraculously find that they're over-exceeding and they're not spending the money—well, they're not spending it on programs that they have direct control over. They're not funding the infrastructure programs they talk about.

We look at just so many areas of this that are failed. There's a reason, when you look around at rural education, that communities are upset. Sometimes you have to sit back and look at how the system is rolled out and make those changes.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): The member from Algoma–Manitoulin.

Mr. Michael Mantha: Again, it's always a privilege to stand on behalf of the good people of Algoma–Manitoulin. The member from Welland talked about the issues that she's facing in Welland, which is in southern Ontario. For me, being a member from northern Ontario, it's quite remarkable how those issues are exactly the same, or that you can relate to those issues: hospital clos-

ures and cuts in hospitals, delays, processes, lack of funding. We need to highlight that in this budget, although there is funding that will leave many hospitals forced to continue with the cuts—the 3% that is going to be added—many from the sector said the 2% for each hospital is below what is needed, according to the Ontario Hospital Association, and it leaves these hospitals at \$300 million less than what is there to actually come back to the level that they once were at and repair some of the damage.

0950

So is this budget going to repair the damage that this Liberal government has put the health sector in? No, it's not.

An individual in my riding, actually, called me just a couple of weeks ago and told me that he went in for an urgent visit to his doctor. He was sitting with his doctor having a discussion. The doctor said, "You're going to go for an MRI. I'll put an urgent request on your MRI." He's going to be seen in two months. Luckily, he got in on an urgent matter, and it takes him two months to get in. Why does it take so long? Because hospitals have had to reduce their MRI and OR times in order to meet and balance their budgets, which is something that this government has required.

Long-term-care homes: The PSWs and all the support workers who are there are getting burnt out because there aren't enough funds in there for front-line workers. It's not that they don't want to do the work; it's just that they're burnt out, they're tired, and administration cannot just give them the time off they need.

We need a bigger and better focus on this—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Thank you. Questions and comments?

Mr. James J. Bradley: I didn't have the opportunity to hear the first part of the member's speech. I was wondering if she had made any reference to the Niagara Peninsula Conservation Authority in the first part of her speech. She probably didn't have the time to do so, but she will, I know, later on, because there have been concerns expressed to the member and to all of us in Niagara about the new direction that is being taken at the Niagara Peninsula Conservation Authority. I'm told by people who contact my office that a number of people who are noted as environmentally inclined have been shown the door by the conservation authority. There have been what people describe to me as some questionable land deals. There are some interesting contracts which have been let. And, of course, the hiring of new personnel: There are questions asked as to how particular people were chosen for particular positions which pay six-figure salaries.

I know the member herself has been very active in this particular field and would be concerned generally, because it fits into budget, as to how, if there's any provincial money—there's not that much that is directly transferred to conservation authorities—that it be given for the purpose of improving the environment and protecting the environment in the area. We have seen some interesting happenings that the member no doubt will be

referring to, not only in this particular instance, but as she has for some period of time in other instances. It's a matter of genuine concern.

The volume of calls and emails and letters, and simply conversations that have taken place, to her office, my office and, I'm sure, the other two members from the Niagara Peninsula, has been rather remarkable. I want to commend her on taking the actions that she has to this point in time.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): The member from Welland has two minutes.

Ms. Cindy Forster: Thank you to everyone for their comments.

To the member from St. Catharines: I'm glad that he raised the issue of the provincial dollars going into the Niagara Peninsula Conservation Authority. For the last six or eight months, I have been trying to get the Auditor General in to the NPCA to do a financial and an operating audit. Things continue to decline there, from my perspective. Just yesterday, one of the board members, well-respected regional councillor Bill Hodgson, was censured by the Niagara Peninsula Conservation Authority for speaking out and voicing an opinion on the whole RFP and audit process at the Niagara region. I'm going to talk more about that this afternoon in my audit, but I really would call upon the government—the Ministry of Natural Resources is saying that they have no control over the NPCA. It seems that no one is taking any responsibility to look into the issues that we continue to hear about at the NPCA, whether they be the large number of employees who have been let go—most recently, a very well-educated person who had worked at the NPCA for eight and a half years has been laid off while at the same time they're actually hiring new management positions. It is problematic. It clearly isn't entirely a budget issue, because the province only contributes about 5%, but I think that gives them the opening to go in and have a look.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Further debate?

Hon. Kevin Daniel Flynn: It's a pleasure to rise. I didn't mean to supersede the previous speaker; I honestly thought it was my turn when I stood up there in the past. It was great to hear from the other member.

It is a pleasure to rise today in support of the budget that was presented to this House last week. I have to say, on an anecdotal basis, when I go back to my own community and I get feedback on the budget, it has been tremendously positive. The one element that has been the most positive is the introduction of OHIP+: pharmacare, free prescriptions to those people in our province who are 24 years of age and under. Hopefully, it's a first step in a movement we see across the nation, because it's something that I think people have been bringing up on a regular basis. While we have a health care system that is based on the universal principles of medicare, it's nice to see some expansion of those universal principles. Drug coverage certainly is an integral part of the health care system, and people now realize that their children are covered.

The impact on the small business sector or, really, any business sector when it comes to what I would anticipate would be a reduction in premiums on benefit plans is also something that I think is viewed very, very positively in the community.

In relative terms, the province of Ontario is doing very, very well when it comes to economic indicators. Since the depths of the recession, we've seen almost 700,000 jobs created, the vast majority of them full-time jobs that pay above the average wage. The unemployment rate is the lowest in the country: 6.4%, and it has been that way for about 24 months or two years. We're leading the country and we're leading the continent in direct foreign investment. We're ahead of California and the states of Ohio and Michigan, for example. Exports are up in the province of Ontario almost 1% in the third quarter alone.

What we're seeing is a robust economy that has emerged. What happened in 2008-09 was something I had never witnessed in my life and something that I certainly hope I never do in the future either. When my parents and my grandparents talked about the depression and the recession, I've got some taste now of what they lived through, when I see what we all lived through in 2008-09 when the markets collapsed.

As I share my time with the Minister of Housing, the member for Beaches–East York and the Minister of Indigenous Relations and Reconciliation, I know that they'll be bringing along various parts of the budget that have met with approval in their own communities. I think it's all based on the idea that came forward that we had an option.

In 2008-09, various governments, various jurisdictions, had an option as to which way they should proceed. One was to go the route of austerity. It was to kind of curl up in a ball, protect what you have, wait till the recession is over and see what you can build from there. The other was the route that we chose, and that was the route to invest in our people. We know that we inherited an infrastructure deficit from the previous party and from parties before that needed to be addressed. We knew that we had to invest money in our health care system, in the buildings and the services that are provided there.

We also knew that one of the keys to ensuring that Ontario continues to enjoy this economic prosperity and what attracts that investment in the first place is the excellent public education system we have here. When you talk to employers, they talk about a number of things that they look for before they invest, but they look for that skilled workforce first. If we're going to compete in a global economy, it has to be on the basis of that. It has to be on the basis of what would attract somebody to invest in this province in the first place—why are they investing? Time after time again, it comes down to the skills that our people have.

1000

You worked in the steel industry, I know, Speaker, yourself, and one of your competitors, I believe, had the—their slogan was, I think, "Our Product Is Steel. Our

Strength Is People.” I think that in Ontario, our strength is our people as well. It really is the skills that they bring to the table, and that goes from the skilled trades to those people who are working in the finance sector to those in the service sector.

There’s an emerging skill base in this province that I think is second to none. We need to continue to invest in that, and that’s what we’ve done. What that meant is that for a few years, our budgets weren’t balanced. In this case, the budget is returned to balance, and it’s allowing us to do some of the things that I’ve talked about, and it’s why it has been received so positively in my own community in this short period of time.

I hope the opposition parties will find a way to support this budget, because there’s something in this for everybody.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): The Minister of Housing and the minister responsible for the poverty reduction strategy.

Hon. Chris Ballard: I’m happy to be able to stand and speak for a few minutes about this budget motion. Not a day goes by where I’m not stopped as I’m out and about in the great riding of Newmarket–Aurora or my constituency office isn’t hearing from people who are very pleased with a number of the key provisions that this budget is putting forward, among them pharmacare.

Just to reiterate the high points: 2017 is a balanced budget—the first balanced budget since the global recession. We have balanced the budget this year, and we are on track to do it again next year and the year after. A balanced budget means more funding for the programs and services that people rely on most, like health care and education.

On that theme of making life more affordable, the balanced budget is strengthening those public services that matter most to people while lowering costs. I can give you a few examples of the ones that really have resonated in my riding.

We’re helping 100,000 more children get affordable, quality, licensed child care. In 2017-18, Ontario will support child care for 24,000 more children up to four years old, through new fee-subsidy spaces and support for new licensed child care spaces in schools.

The government is also taking action to make housing more affordable for homebuyers and renters with my favourite part of this bill, Ontario’s Fair Housing Plan.

The government is committed to lowering household electricity bills by 25% on average beginning this summer, and to holding rate increases over the next four years to inflation.

The budget does more than that. It also creates opportunity and security. We’re committed to helping people acquire the skills they need to find a good job and receive a secure and predictable retirement income. We’re also creating opportunities for businesses to grow and prosper. We’re helping small businesses to scale up into medium-size and large enterprises, and we’re investing in transformative technologies that will create the jobs of tomorrow and attract investment from around the world.

You heard the member before me talk about Canada being a leading destination for direct foreign investment.

To ensure that opportunities are available in all regions of the province, we’re fostering an environment where everyone will benefit from and contribute to Ontario’s prosperity. It is government’s job to make sure that we raise everyone up.

Speaker, we’re creating and retaining more than 37,000 jobs across the province through our 10-year, \$2.7-billion Jobs and Prosperity Fund, which helps government partner with businesses to enhance productivity, innovation and exports.

We’re moving forward with a Basic Income Pilot Project, something that I’ve been deeply involved with. We want to see whether a basic income pilot could provide security and opportunity in a changing labour market and improve health, employment and housing outcomes.

Speaking of infrastructure, we know that investing in public infrastructure is vital to growing the economy and ensuring a high quality of life, whether people live in large, small, urban, northern or rural Ontario communities.

Speaking of housing again, something that I’m intimately familiar with, we have invested approximately \$4 billion since 2003 to create and repair affordable housing throughout the province. We’ve created more than 20,000 new affordable rental housing units, supporting more than 275,000 repairs and improvements to social and affordable housing units, and provided rental and down payment assistance to more than 90,000 households in need.

Speaker, this budget contains many items that are great for Ontario.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): The member from Beaches–East York.

Mr. Arthur Potts: I’m delighted for the opportunity to follow my esteemed colleagues and speak to the budget motion here today. While this document is, of itself, a stand-alone document doing incredible things, I believe, for the province of Ontario and the people of Ontario, I think it’s important that we recognize that this budget is part of a continuum of a vision that the Premier of Ontario, Kathleen Wynne, had, particularly in 2014, when she brought her second budget forward in the spring of 2014, in which she had a chance to establish the direction that she wanted to take this province. It was a direction that would invest, build up Ontario and fiscally manage the funds of the province of Ontario such that we could get to a balanced budget.

That was, of course, the budget that the government fell on and called an election on, leading up to the June election in 2014, in which I was elected. We ran on that budget as our platform. Subsequently to the election and winning a majority government, we brought back that budget, word for word, as it stood, an investment in the people of Ontario, where the deficit did stand close to, I think, \$12 billion or \$13 billion. Part of the plan then was to get it to where it is today, where we can announce a balanced budget.

This is not a new construct of the province of Ontario. This is a deliberate direction that the Premier set off to take almost three and a half years ago. It was like she was prescient, like Nostradamus. She had this vision of what should happen and, Speaker, here it is: promise made, promise delivered. It is happening.

So much of what's in this budget is about the long-term future of the province of Ontario. We've heard a lot about health care spending. I'm absolutely delighted with the \$9 billion of additional spending in hospitals.

When I ran in 2014, one of the really serious issues confronting my community was the danger of losing the investments in Toronto East General Hospital at that time—now renamed the Michael Garron Hospital—because the previous member had not supported that bill. We were, in our community, standing to lose the investments. Had another party been elected and we hadn't moved forward with that plan, Michael Garron Hospital would not have been able to continue in its reconstruction bid. Now we are pleased to say that we are in the middle of an RFP process to choose the builder that is going to inject—who knows?—\$400 million, \$450 million into my community to create, in the east end of Toronto, one of the best health care institutions in downtown Toronto, dealing with a very diverse population, a very poor population with complex needs.

I'm so thrilled. That was a platform that I ran on in 2014: that we would get to balance and that we would be rebuilding Michael Garron Hospital. I am pleased to see that that is, in fact, happening.

A lot of the debate we've heard in the leadoffs to this motion and the leadoffs to the budget debate, particularly from the members of the official opposition, is about this being some kind of a fake balance. It's as if they want to rewrite the general accounting principles in how we do this. The reality is, the budget is balanced because revenues come in, revenues are expended, and in generally accepted accounting principles, this is a balanced budget.

1010

The notion that revenues from the sale of assets are not forming part of our revenue stream—it's just as if they were new tax revenues. If you realize a capital gain on an asset, that is a benefit that goes to balance. It's the same thing with cap-and-trade revenues. The cap-and-trade revenues represent an asset in the province, which are accounted in the books as an asset in order to then be used in outflowing for very specific purposes, particularly with cap-and-trade, on introducing the low-carbon economy in Ontario.

There's no myth about the balance here. This is a true balance, and what's particularly exciting is that we can project out over the next two or three years that we will continue to be in balance, that we haven't been relying on specific asset sales, as is being charged by members of the opposition. We, in fact, are projecting out over the next three years to have a continuous balanced budget. I'm very thrilled about that, and I believe that all members of this House who have repeatedly voted against the trajectory that we have been on to get to a balanced

budget should see in their hearts that this is the right place for Ontario to be in and should support this budget, should support our budgetary measures.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): The Minister of Indigenous Relations and Reconciliation.

Hon. David Zimmer: I would like to add a couple of pieces of information that are out there, floating around in the world of media. I am particularly attracted by the comment of the former leader of the Ontario Progressive Conservative Party, Tim Hudak, who is now the chief executive officer of the Ontario Real Estate Association. In his new job in the private sector, looking at things objectively rather than from a partisan point of view in this House, as he usually would, he said, "We," meaning the Ontario Real Estate Association, "put a # of home ownership proposals before Premier Wynne. We're pleased to see them reflected in the" budget. That's a quote from the former leader of the PC Party.

The PC member for the riding of Elgin–Middlesex–London, who is a pharmacist himself and who has stood in this House and been very critical of many things the government is doing: What has his professional association, the chair of the Ontario Pharmacists Association, had to say about this budget? His president of his professional association said, "We're supportive of anything that's going to help children and youth get medication that they need without any financial barriers. We're ... looking forward to learning more about ... the program.... We're looking forward to hear more about what's involved with" the program.

"We're truly pleased to see from an access to medication perspective that that won't be a barrier from a financial perspective.

"We're happy to hear that access to medication is being improved."

That's some of the PC leadership's thought on the budget, but we have something here that might interest the NDP. The Service Employees International Union on health care said—and I quote from their health care president, Sharleen Stewart—"Ontario's 2017 budget provides a much-needed boost to health care." That's a quote from the SEIU president. She goes on to say, "I applaud the Ontario government for making necessary" budget inclusions. When we start question period, I hope that that thought is uppermost in the minds of the NDP during question period.

What does the Ontario Hospital Association say? Their president and CEO, Anthony Dale, said, "The government's significant investments in hospital capital will help to support a sustainable health care system for the future."

You see, Speaker and members of this House, once the opposition gets out of this bubble in here and looks at things—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Thank you, Minister.

Debate deemed adjourned.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): It being 10:15, this House stands recessed until 10:30 this morning.

The House recessed from 1015 to 1030.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Mr. Bill Walker: It is my pleasure to introduce Mary Anne Alton from the great riding of Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound; her grandson Nathaniel Durkacz; and friends Evelyn and her son Andres van Maanen, who are actually from Etobicoke–Lakeshore. Andres is from Venezuela, originally, and he wants to be Prime Minister of Canada someday.

M^{me} France Gélinas: J'ai de la belle visite de Sudbury. J'aimerais vous présenter M^{me} Carole Lamoureux, la directrice générale du Centre de counselling de Sudbury, et M^{me} Claire Narbonne-Fortin, qui est présidente du conseil d'administration du Centre de counselling. Bienvenue à Queen's Park.

Ms. Ann Hoggarth: Today I would like to welcome paramedic Cory Schepers, who is from my riding of Barrie, to the Legislative Assembly.

I would also like to welcome Catholic Family Services of Simcoe County board members Michael Kodama and Steve McDonald, executive director Michelle Bergin, and fund development coordinator Ryan Lay.

We also have several other board members from Family Service Ontario. Welcome to Ray Houde, Natalie Parnell, Connie McLeod, Leo Heuvelmans and Brad Davis. Welcome to Queen's Park.

Mr. Steve Clark: I want to introduce to you and, through you, to the members of the Legislative Assembly, two constituents from my riding of Leeds–Grenville who are here with the IBAO delegation. I want to welcome Jeff Gatcke and Brian Purcell. Welcome to Queen's Park.

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: On behalf of Monique Taylor, MPP for Hamilton Mountain, I would like to welcome a guest of page Claire Le Donne: her sister, Gabrielle Le Donne, who was a former page in the fall session of 2013. She's in the members' gallery this morning. Welcome.

Ms. Sophie Kiwala: I would like to extend a warm welcome to Terry Baker, a paramedic from OPSEU, and welcome to all paramedics from OPSEU; as well as Donna Forster, the executive director at K3C Counselling in my riding of Kingston and the Islands. Welcome to Queen's Park.

Mr. Lorne Coe: I'm very pleased to welcome to the Legislature Elizabeth Pierce and Stan MacLellan from Catholic Family Services of Durham; Ryan Willis, who is from Durham region and a CUPE representative for the paramedics; and finally, Sean McNamara, who is the president of the board of directors of the Boys and Girls Club in Durham region. Welcome to Queen's Park.

Ms. Cindy Forster: I'd like to welcome paramedics and dispatchers and EMS workers from across the province but, in particular, Tim Borowski and Jim Simpson are up there in the gallery. Welcome to Queen's Park.

Hon. Indira Naidoo-Harris: I'd like to welcome Anushka Kurian to the members' gallery today. Anushka

is joining my Status of Women office for the summer as an intern. Welcome to Queen's Park.

I'd also like to welcome Mark Preston from Burlington. Mark is here with the insurance brokers today. Welcome to Queen's Park.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: There are a number of people here from the city of Ottawa today, and I'd like to welcome Mark Zarecki, Sarah Caspi and Andrea Gardner, all here for Jewish Family Services of Ottawa; as well as Peter Hominuk and Bryan Michaud from AFO; and, obviously, anybody else who is from the city of Ottawa here today. I welcome you here.

Mrs. Lisa Gretzky: I would like to welcome everyone here from Family Service Ontario, and a very special welcome to Joyce Zuk, who is from Family Services Windsor-Essex.

Hon. Helena Jaczek: Please help me welcome the following members from Family Service Ontario. We have Alan McQuarrie, the board chair; Susan MacIsaac, executive director; and the following board members are with us as well: Shelley McCarthy, Sharon Mayne Devine and Michelle Bergin. Welcome to Queen's Park.

Mr. Toby Barrett: I extend a welcome to Susan Wells, newly appointed service director with Haldimand-Norfolk REACH.

Ms. Catherine Fife: I'd like to welcome my sister-in-law, Nancy Bollinger; my nephew Jordan Bollinger; and Janet Bollinger, from Oakville, here—first time visiting Queen's Park.

Hon. Deborah Matthews: I'm delighted to introduce and welcome interns from the Liberal Caucus Service Bureau. We have Kris Day, Gari Ravishankar, Mahbod Haghghi, C.J. Jeyanathan and Holden Wine. Welcome.

Ms. Laurie Scott: For Ontario paramedics' day, I'd like to introduce Jason Fraser, Ryan Moloney, Dave Jeffries, Tim Rose and Heidi Brown. Welcome to the Legislature.

Mr. Taras Natyshak: I'd like to welcome, from the Insurance Brokers Association of Ontario, Doug Heaman, Ryan Wallace and Matthew Carr.

Aussi, de l'Assemblée de la francophonie de l'Ontario et la Fédération de la jeunesse franco-ontarienne : Carol Jolin, Alain Dupuis, Josée Joliat et Ali Boussi.

Hon. Kevin Daniel Flynn: Having just passed the one-year anniversary on post-traumatic stress disorder legislation, please help me to welcome paramedics who are here today from all over Ontario and who serve us well.

Mr. Norm Miller: It's a pleasure to welcome, from Pointe au Baril, down for lunch with their MPP, Lauralee and Bill Kennedy.

Ms. Catherine Fife: On behalf of Family Service Ontario, welcome, everyone.

I'd also like to say a special welcome to Leslie Josling, from KW Counselling, in Kitchener, and Tracy Elop, from Carizon counselling. Welcome to Queen's Park.

Hon. Bill Mauro: I have several introductions this morning: from Thunder Bay Counselling centre, execu-

tive director Nancy Chamberlain and board member Dominique Chénard; from Family Service Ontario, Connie McLeod, board member; from the Catholic Family Development Centre, Jack Cleverdon, executive director.

I also have an intern here today, Nicholas Ryma, from Sudbury, who is working in our office. I'd also like to welcome my office manager from my municipal affairs office, Melanie Moscovitch.

Mr. Rick Nicholls: In the member's west gallery, I'd like to introduce, from Family Service Kent, Brad Davis and Leo Heuvelmans. Welcome to Queen's Park.

M^{me} France Gélinas: Moi aussi, je viens de voir que Peter Hominuk de l'Assemblée de la francophonie de l'Ontario est là également. Bienvenue à Queen's Park, Peter.

Mr. Yvan Baker: I'd like to welcome to the Legislature the family of page Kate, from my riding of Etobicoke Centre: her mom, Jennifer Krikorian; her dad, Mark Winterton; her brother Andrew; and her aunt Jacqueline Krikorian. Welcome to Queen's Park.

Mr. Raymond Sung Joon Cho: I'm very happy to welcome Soon Young Lee. She is the chair of For You Telecare Family Service. This organization provides excellent telephone counselling services.

Hon. Brad Duguid: I'm pleased to welcome guests of page captain Iman Chowdhury: her mother, Bably Chowdhury, and her cousins Teashan, Khadiza and Fatema; as well as two interns in my office: Isaac Crawford-Ritchie from Western, and Ema Ibrakovic from U of T.

M^{me} Gila Martow: Nous avons des représentants de trois organismes francophones aujourd'hui.

De l'Assemblée de la francophonie de l'Ontario : le président, M. Carol Jolin; le directeur général, M. Peter Hominuk; et analyste politique de l'Assemblée, M. Bryan Michaud.

Des représentants de la FESFO : Camille Sigouin, Pablo Mhanna-Sandoval, et Kelia Wane.

Et aussi les représentants du RÉFO : le directeur général, Alain Dupuis; la coprésidente, Josée Joliat, et Yacouba Condé, le coprésident; et le directeur adjoint, Steven Ogden.

Bienvenue à Queen's Park.

Hon. Liz Sandals: I'd like to welcome, in the west gallery, Joanne Young Evans, who is the executive director of Family Counselling and Support Services for Guelph-Wellington.

In the east gallery are four members of my staff: some new staff members, Kema Joseph and Adanette Frederick, as well as two summer interns, Jack and Jason. Welcome.

Mr. Robert Bailey: It's a great pleasure to welcome Don Pitt, the executive director of the Family Counselling Centre in Sarnia-Lambton, here today as part of Family Service Day.

Also, Chris Stolte, a Lambton county paramedic with the EMS, is here.

Hon. Glenn Thibeault: I'd like to introduce the best interns ever, in my office: Josh Loeffler, Veronica

Cesario and Alice Hansen. They're up in the east gallery. Welcome.

Mr. Patrick Brown: I'm proud to recognize, from Catholic Family Services of Simcoe County, Patrick Kodama and Michelle Bergin, who are in the House today.

1040

Mrs. Cristina Martins: It's always a special day here at Queen's Park, but it's an extremely special day today since I have my son André here in the west gallery, who is visiting today with his teacher, Miss Bourdon, and their grade 7 class.

In the gallery across the way we have Mr. Merenda with the grade 8s. Welcome to Queen's Park.

Mr. Victor Fedeli: We have Alan McQuarrie, executive director, and Derek Thompson, volunteer board chair of the Community Counselling Centre of Nipissing here today.

Hon. Tracy MacCharles: I very much want to welcome, from Catholic Family Services of Durham, the executive director, Elizabeth Pierce, and board chair Stan MacLellan.

A warm welcome also to Durham paramedics and to the Durham Boys and Girls Club folks who are here today, and two interns working in my offices this summer: Houman Tahavori and Christina Alulio.

Hon. Marie-France Lalonde: I would like to welcome to the Legislature a very great advocate and a great paramedic in Ottawa. He is a resident of our great community of Ottawa-Orléans: Norm Robillard. Welcome. Bienvenue.

Hon. Yasir Naqvi: On behalf of my Ottawa colleagues I want to welcome Kathryn Hill, who's the executive director of Family Services Ottawa. Welcome to Queen's Park.

Mr. Granville Anderson: I'd like to welcome Elizabeth Pierce and Stan MacLellan, who are here today with Catholic Family Services of Durham.

I'd also like to welcome Mike Merriman, Peter Shirer and Joel Usher, who are visiting Queen's Park today for paramedics day.

Mr. Lou Rinaldi: I'd like to welcome Janet Irvine, executive director of the Northumberland Community Counselling Centre, and Jason Fraser from the great village of Warkworth, who is a paramedic in Peterborough county. Welcome to Queen's Park.

Mr. Percy Hatfield: Just in case there's anyone else in here who hasn't been welcomed yet, with your permission, Speaker: Welcome to Queen's Park.

Mr. Vic Dhillon: I'd like to welcome Rob El-Sayed from Family Services of Peel.

Hon. Marie-France Lalonde: We're very happy to welcome in our ministry our summer intern, Chris Stewart.

Mr. Yvan Baker: I'd like to welcome the members of the Insurance Brokers Association of Ontario who are here today for their Queen's Park day. They're led by their president, Traci Boland, and chairman of the board Doug Heaman.

I invite all members to join us at the reception this evening in the Legislature dining room from 5 p.m. to 7 p.m.

Ms. Harinder Malhi: I would like to welcome Sharon Mayne-Devine and Rob El-Sayed, who are here from Family Services of Peel today visiting from my riding.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I have a few introductions. Please join me in welcoming a special guest of mine in the Speaker's gallery: my sister, Roseanne Levac, and her friend Brian Shaw. Welcome to Queen's Park for the first time. She is my baby sister, so—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Watch it.

We have with us today in the Speaker's gallery Mr. Mugurel Stanescu, the consul general of Romania. Please join me in welcoming the consul general. Thank you for joining us.

Finally, would the members please join me in welcoming the family and friends of the late Ken Black, MPP for Muskoka–Georgian Bay during the 34th Parliament, who are seated in the Speaker's gallery. I will name only a few: Beth Black, his wife; daughter Kendra Black and her husband, Peter O'Blenes; daughter Debra Selkirk; son Greg Black and his wife, Nancy Gamble; grandchildren Gillian Smart, Maui Paraskakis, Jordan Black, Ashley Gilbert, Lily Gamble, Joanne Sevier, Jordan Hyde and many other friends who are here today. Welcome, and thank you for being here.

Also in the Speaker's gallery, representing the former parliamentarians, is Mr. David Warner, Speaker during the 35th Parliament, and Mr. George Smitherman, MPP for Toronto Centre–Rosedale during the 37th and 38th Parliaments and MPP for Toronto Centre during the 39th Parliament. Welcome, gentlemen. Thank you for being here for support.

KEN BLACK

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I would entertain the government House leader on a point of order.

Hon. Yasir Naqvi: Thank you very much, Speaker. I believe you will find that we have unanimous consent to recognize a former member of provincial Parliament for Muskoka–Georgian Bay, Mr. Ken Black, with a representative from each caucus speaking for up to five minutes.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The government House leader is seeking unanimous consent to pay tribute. Do we agree? Agreed.

We'll turn to the member from Parry Sound–Muskoka to start our tribute.

Mr. Norm Miller: Thank you, Speaker. Let me begin by welcoming all of Ken's family and friends who have made the trip to Queen's Park today. You mentioned some. Ken's wife, Beth, his kids—they're not kids anymore—Greg, Debbie and Kendra—I believe David is still in the Yukon—and grandkids, friends, nieces and

nephews have all made the trip here. It's great to see such a huge group here to pay tribute to Ken today.

My family has had a long association with the Black family. Ken's brother Lyle was our family doctor when I was growing up. Lyle was also president of the Muskoka Progressive Conservative association. He did my aviation medicals, and when I learned to fly—I was about 20 years old—he very generously let me fly his beautiful Cessna 182 whenever I wished, for many years. I've always wondered why he entrusted that to me.

I have to admit, with his older brother so involved with the PCs, I always assumed that Ken must be a Conservative, and I was a little shocked when I heard he was running for the Liberals. It was around the time that Lyle passed away, so I always assumed he waited until his older brother passed to show his true Liberal colours.

The Blacks lived just down the road from us, on the Muskoka River. Ken's wife, Beth, played the piano for singsongs we had at our lodge when we hosted seniors' bus tours. I still find myself whistling some of the songs without realizing I'm doing it. His son Greg and I played hockey together on Monday nights in Port Carling and in the Lovable Losers hockey tournament for many, many years.

Ken was principal of Bracebridge and Muskoka Lakes Secondary School, which I attended. Ken certainly commanded respect at the high school. He kept his finger on the pulse of the school by walking the hallways on a regular basis. Actually, I would say he strutted the hallways, often wearing a bow tie to go with his dapper suit. As a student, you knew not to question his authority. He took pride in his work, and he ran a tight ship.

One of the highlights of my time at high school was a two-week trip to England in 1974. Ken had spent a year in Nottingham furthering his education, and over that time had made many contacts. So it was arranged that the high school band, in which I played the trumpet not very well, planned a trip to England. It was conducted by Mr. John Rutherford. We headed to Nottingham to play a series of concerts. We were billeted by families for the week, and my family was the Cresswell family. Ken made the trip with the band and let us know the rules. Remember, as a student, you did not break Ken's rules. One of the rules was, you were not allowed to drink alcohol. I had barely set foot in the Cresswells' home on the Friday we arrived when they informed me that they were going to the pub as was their Friday night tradition. I informed them that I was not allowed to drink, and they said I could stay home alone if I wished. I guess it's safe to admit now that within an hour of arriving in Nottingham, I was in a local pub enjoying a pint of very good English beer and hoping that Principal Black would not decide to visit the same pub or somehow find out that I had.

Thank you to Ron Jacques and Bill and Jan Dickinson for sending me information about Ken at school and about his involvement with environmental causes. The Dickinsons sent this story:

“During our second year in Bracebridge we had some monstrous snowfalls and as you know we were living in

the gatehouse at P-K Lodge (owned by the Miller family). Ken was always insistent that if you chose to live out of town you had to get to school 'no matter what.' On one of those wild snowy mornings, Ken picked up Ron Jacques on his snow machine and in they went.

"We were still snowbound and thought we were excused. Didn't happen! Ken found out that Knowles had a plumbing truck in the area and he arranged for that truck to pick up the Whitelaws, Dickinsons and Agnes Tough"—who was the secretary—"in the back of the truck and ship them to school. Ken ran a tight ship and he worked hard. Consistent with his personality, he expected those around him to do so as well."

1050

Thanks to Greg Black for digging up this letter from my father to Ken after the graduation of June 26, 1975.

He wrote, "Dear Ken:

"I'm not one, as you know, to write letters patting people on the back. I did want, though, to compliment you on your address to the students and parents during the graduation ceremonies.

"You expressed very well the very feelings I have had over the past two years. We have been living beyond our means; we have been using our resources at an unseemly and unjustifiable rate. Whether we like it or not, life will change in the near future.

"This may not be a bad thing. For all the wealth and affluence around us, there are far more unhappy people today than there were 30 years ago.

"The world has begun to look upon their rights rather than their responsibilities, with the result that everyone wants something more for doing less.

"I'm sure your speech was accepted very well by both the parents and the students.

"Yours sincerely,

"Frank S. Miller

"Member for Muskoka"

Ken Black was elected to the Ontario Legislature in the riding of Muskoka-Georgian Bay in 1987. Thanks again to his son Greg, I have a poem handwritten by my father to Ken. I can't remember my father ever writing a poem, so I don't know where this came from, but he did give me a copy of it, so I'm trusting this. This is the poem:

I give you this tie that is plaid,
To remind you of times I once had,
When Conservatives reigned
And the Liberals complained
About all of the things that were bad.

I was able to reach for top spot
And to get there I struggled a lot
So you'll have to agree
That the tartan for me
Once helped me to hit the jackpot!

However, the voters were fickle
And my charisma was not worth a nickel

Don't let Bay Street schmoes
Make you change your clothes
Stick with plaid, and you won't be in a pickle.

Ken went on to serve as the Minister of Tourism and Recreation, and he was appointed a special adviser to the Premier to coordinate the government's assault on drug use in Ontario. He conducted a one-man task force and coordinated the anti-drug strategies of seven ministries.

However, politics was just one chapter in Ken's remarkable career. After his term in office, Ken served as president of the Muskoka Heritage Foundation and founded the Muskoka Watershed Council in 2001.

Bill Dickinson wrote the following for Ken's nomination for an environmental award, the Wayland Drew Award:

"Perhaps Ken's greatest contribution to the Muskoka environmental scene was the conception and development of the Muskoka Watershed Council. He saw the need to somehow partner the district of Muskoka with a local NGO environmental organization, the Muskoka Conservancy (the Muskoka Heritage Foundation at the time) to attain a new level of environmental awareness. Ken used his role as president of the Muskoka Heritage Foundation to facilitate this. With great perseverance and determination he was successful in achieving this goal."

Prior to the council there was no conservation authority in Muskoka and no single agency responsible for water quality throughout the watershed. Ken has left a legacy of watershed report cards, research partnerships and position papers that will measure Muskoka's watershed health and guide governments.

Later in life, Ken continued to advocate for environmental protectionism and focused on volunteering and writing columns for the newspaper, including "In My View" for the Weekender and muskokaregion.com. His last column was titled, Time for an International Agreement on Sharing Great Lakes Waters. And his blog dated August 22, 2016, asked us to take better care of our freshwater resources. He wrote, "I suggest individual citizens, the business and corporate sectors, and the governments we elect all need to get serious about a resource that is under threat from a changing climate, and is also one we all too often take for granted."

Ken cared deeply for Muskoka, for its people and its natural heritage. Sadly, we have lost a strong advocate and a strong voice for our area. He was passionate about his community, a proponent of equal opportunity, and a true champion of Muskoka, and that is how he will always remain.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Further tribute? The member from Timiskaming-Cochrane.

Mr. John Vanthof: It's an honour to be asked to pay tribute to Ken Black on behalf of my caucus. I didn't have the opportunity to meet Mr. Black, but I have to say it was an honour doing research on his past and his contributions. I'd particularly like to welcome his family, in particular his wife, Beth. They just celebrated 62 years of marriage.

The first thing that struck me about Mr. Black, and that told me he was an incredible individual, is that he was elected as a Liberal in that part of the country. There are places in the province where you can get elected on the party ticket, and there are places where you can't. In Parry Sound–Muskoka—I believe that Muskoka–Georgian Bay was the riding at that time—in that part of the province you don't get elected on the Liberal ticket. You have to be an incredible individual, and that was testament to the fact that he was.

Further testament to the fact that Mr. Black—and, as I go on, I'm going to start calling him Ken—was an incredible individual is because he was given, off the topper, an incredible task: to be a one-man task force to look at the use of and how to control illegal drugs in this province, in particular with youth. Imagine the weight of that issue and the respect that he must have had, for the Premier to say, "We need you to look at this." He was later made the Minister of Tourism and Recreation and also responsible for drug issues in this province—again, an incredible responsibility. I think, having read through the history, that he did some great things on that front.

But before he came to this place, he was involved in education. He was a teacher, a principal and a superintendent. One of the obituaries that I found—I like this quote because it spoke to me: "Ken Black was old school."

I also had a principal who was old school, and we had not such a great relationship. I spent a lot of time in the old school principal's office. I spent a lot of time in the hall. I even spent some time—and I don't even think this is legal anymore—on the steps of the bus. I was a bad boy in the bus, and I had to sit on the steps of the bus. Every time the kids got on the bus, I had to get out. I was pretty wet by the time I got to school.

But it was people like that—our old school principal was known as "Strap Wilson." I'm not saying that was Mr. Black, but I got the feeling that Mr. Black demanded respect. He is the kind of educator that people will remember for their whole lives and he, I am sure, has developed students that have benefited this society greatly. He is the one who I'm sure hundreds of students remember, because he set them straight at a time they needed to be set straight, like Mr. Wilson did for me.

As I read on, it became apparent that Mr. Black was very interested in and very committed to the environment. If you look up Ken Black: Community Leader and Conservationist, on August 29, 2016, you'll see a beautiful picture of Mr. Black in a kayak, and you can see he is in his element. He's done great things for the environmental cause in the Muskoka area and throughout the province.

As was mentioned by Mr. Miller, he wrote a blog. I'd like to just read the titles of the last few articles that he wrote. I think they're a testament to his continued work for all of us. The last one he wrote was *Our Casual Treatment of Canada's Fresh Water Supply Must End*; the next one was *Time for Ontario, Quebec and Manitoba to Trade-in Cap-and-Trade for a Carbon Tax?* So he

wasn't always a Liberal. Then, *It Is Time for Serious Reform of Canadian Senate*; and, finally, *Time for An International Agreement on Sharing Great Lakes Waters*.

It's been an honour to share this time. Congratulations, and thank you to the family for sharing him with us.

1100

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Further tributes?

Mr. James J. Bradley: It's always difficult when you're the third person paying tribute, because much of, or almost all of, what can be said about Ken Black has been said, appropriately, by the representatives of the two other parties. I had the privilege of serving with him—in many of these tributes, I have that advantage—of having served in the Legislature with Ken Black when he was a member of the same cabinet I was in. Because there are so many things you could say, I'll try to limit them. I'm going to pick some excerpts from his eulogy, which was done before over 600 people in Bracebridge.

I do want to say I was particularly pleased, as Minister of the Environment at the time, to have Ken Black as a strong advocate for the environment. I think representatives from that area—and the present member will agree with this—have a special affinity for the environment, the Muskoka, Bracebridge and Parry Sound area of the province, that central part of the province where many people have cottages—or as northerners would say, "camps." I'm not one of them who has had that privilege but I know that many people have. The residents there have a special affinity for the environment. Ken Black had that, as a member of the community before he became a member of the Legislature, and during his tenure as Minister of Tourism, and of course subsequent to that, when he left public life at the request of the electorate in his particular riding. I think he said semi-retirement was imposed upon him by the people of his riding.

But I do remember him very well, as being a very principled person, as well as being a principal. I admired the fact that he was prepared to leave the field of education, which, as members of this assembly would know, probably pays better than the Legislature. All my members of the Legislature always want to point out something Ken would find interesting: that the members of the Legislature have now been living under a pay freeze for the last nine years. I'm sure Ken would have spoken vociferously against that, to ensure that we could attract people of his ilk to the Ontario Legislature.

But his educational background was helpful. I looked at his approach, first of all, to special education, but also to drugs. There was a special incident that happened that triggered this, but he could see the effect that it would have on children, on young people going through the education system—what drugs would do when they were involved with illicit drugs. He took that on as something very personal. I was pleased that Premier Peterson appointed him to investigate this problem and to come up with some of the solutions, none of which he said were easy solutions.

Charles Beer, who spoke at the funeral, indicated that Ken was assertive in cabinet and assertive in caucus.

When you say “assertive,” that of course means many things, but he certainly knew where he stood on the issues. But he was also able to bring people together, both in his community and here in the Legislature. Once he announced what his views would be, he was prepared to take into account the views of others.

He was involved with the Rotary Club, involved with the historical society and with many things within the community. That’s what you like to see with members of the Legislature or of any elected body: somebody who has roots in that community and has been involved. It’s certainly an advantage, at least, to be involved in the community.

He indicated an admiration for President Kennedy. Those of his ilk, and my ilk, I guess, and many in this Legislature saw President Kennedy as a hero, politically, and certainly Ken did as well. He indicated that in some of his comments, and certainly in the way that he approached his job at Queen’s Park.

But to go back to the issue of the environment, watersheds are so important, right across our province, wherever they happen to be. The fact that he would take this on as a special cause in his community is to be admired by those of us who are members of the Legislature, and certainly appreciated by those in the community.

Some of the comments about him, and I won’t go on at length because others have already mentioned many of these: “He was a dreamer of immense proportions,” his son said. That was something that resonated with people who were at that particular service.

He was a role model, with whom discipline was a priority in instilling his values. The representative of the New Democratic Party indicated how important discipline is for students at a particular point in time, that it sends them in the right direction. Ken certainly felt discipline was very important, and shared that with his colleagues. He also was mentioned as “masterfully understated in his walk of life, yet gave us a hint of the essence of the man.” That was on his work with the Muskoka Watershed Council.

He was a valuable business person, although I think he was the first to admit that his business experience wasn’t exactly the same experience he had in education, to put it kindly.

He was a person of self-deprecating humour, which is, I think, an asset in life and in politics. He was replacing, of course, Frank Miller, who was a person I remember very well as having that same self-deprecating humour and an affinity for the riding. It’s interesting to hear, particularly in this day when it is alleged that hyper-partisanship is more the norm everywhere, that the two families were very close, the Miller family and the Black family. They admired one another even though there were different political affiliations, and certainly respected the decisions of the electorate.

As I say, so much has been said about Ken, who I knew personally. I got a note from the member for Guelph, who says, “By the way, mention that his grand-

daughter, Lily Gamble, is past president of the University of Guelph Young Liberals.” I thought I’d mention that for the family.

So much has been said about Ken, and all of it is true. When we get up here, we want to always put the best face on anybody who has been a member of the Legislature. I can say genuinely—and you can see it by the number of people in the Speaker’s gallery—that he was admired by people from all backgrounds.

It’s a great sacrifice for the families of the members who are here to have their member come to the Legislature, particularly to serve in the cabinet, where the responsibilities are more onerous than perhaps others are. It was very kind of them to allow him to come down here to serve in this capacity. Our province, our country and certainly those who live in the Muskoka area are all better off because Ken made that decision to come to the Legislature. The people endorsed that decision.

I look back with great fondness for Ken Black and our many exchanges that we had as members of the Legislature, members of a caucus and members of cabinet. Ontario is a better place because of Ken Black. We thank his family.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I’d like to thank all members for their very heartfelt and kind words for Mr. Black. To Mrs. Black and the entire family and friends, we thank you for the gift of Ken. As a small token, we will ensure that you receive a Hansard copy of the tributes, including a DVD that gives you the visual as well. Again, thank you for the gift of Ken Black.

ORAL QUESTIONS

ONTARIO BUDGET

Mr. Patrick Brown: My question is for the Minister of Finance. I want to read you some lines from economic expert Ben Eisen’s recent op-ed on the provincial budget:

“Over the past three years, Ontario’s net debt has increased by \$34.8 billion.

“Over the next three years, the province expects to add \$34 billion in debt—almost exactly the same amount.

“In this context, the government’s rhetoric—that a balanced operating budget has dawned a new fiscal day and the province can now afford to spend more freely—rings hollow.”

So instead of a new fiscal day, what we have is more being spent on interest payments, \$10 billion more in debt this year and the crowding out of front-line services. Can the Minister of Finance tell this Legislature, what did he have to cut to pay for these higher interest payments?

1110

Hon. Charles Sousa: I appreciate the question from the member opposite, who, by the way, voted in the largest deficit in our country’s history—\$55 billion.

This is from the same member who, by the way—they had accumulated deficits throughout their time, more

than double Canada's overall debt, and never once did they ever pay down debt.

Furthermore, interest on debt, which he refers to, now, today in Ontario, is the lowest it has ever been, especially when compared to the Conservatives at 16%. Today it's 8.4% of our overall budget, and it's locked in for 30 and 40 years in many respects.

Going forward we are addressing debt, and the first way to address debt is to balance the books. We're balancing the books this year, next year and the year after.

We're investing heavily in a number of programs and services for the people of Ontario. I ask that member: What will he cut going forward?

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Patrick Brown: Mr. Speaker, again to the Minister of Finance—and you'll notice he did not answer the question about the skyrocketing debt in Ontario. He chooses to attack, rather than defend a budget that is struggling in debt. Those are shell games Ontarians can see through.

The reality is, when they're adding so much debt, it means there's no ability to help. A good example of that is in the city of Toronto. The conclusion from the city manager of Toronto, Peter Wallace, in his words, was that there are "no new investments" for Toronto. Despite the Liberals telling Mayor Tory they were going to invest in the city of Toronto, Toronto is receiving nothing from this government.

Mr. Speaker, will the minister come clean? Are the Liberals attacking—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Stop the clock. We've had two exchanges, and both sides are interrupting their own questioner and their own answerer, and we're going back and forth. I'm more than willing to jump into warnings, and your next little foray will dictate whether I will or I won't.

Finish your question, please.

Mr. Patrick Brown: Mr. Speaker, are the Liberals simply attacking Mayor Tory because they're embarrassed by their own budget, which is suffocating in high debt and does nothing for the city of Toronto?

Hon. Charles Sousa: Mr. Speaker, I'll answer the first part of the question. We're investing \$11.5 billion more in health care; we're investing another \$6.5 billion more in education; and we're making record investments in infrastructure and transit for the people of Ontario, all of which, in good part, is going to be supported by increased debt to the extent of those capital improvements and capital investments.

What will he cut as we move forward on those very issues that are important to the people of Ontario?

Mr. Victor Fedeli: Does that mean we're making government? Have you elected us?

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Nipissing will come to order. And I believe that one might be close enough for me to go to warnings. We'll check.

Finish, please.

Hon. Charles Sousa: Mr. Speaker, we are investing in Toronto—heavily, in fact. Toronto has set its priorities. We said we will match and support ongoing investments in social housing as well as in infrastructure.

The member opposite has opposed the revenue request. The member opposite has not even agreed to Toronto's issues. We have.

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

Mr. Patrick Brown: Again to the Minister of Finance: For a second time, the Minister of Finance refuses to acknowledge that we have \$34 billion in new debt over the next three years. Debt is still skyrocketing in Ontario. What it means is, we have so much debt and so much in interest payments, and no ability to invest. And, frankly, despite what the Minister of Finance says, when the mayor and the entire city council are saying this government does nothing for Toronto, it speaks loudly.

The reality is, they have made choices. As an example of the lack of support for Toronto, the Liberals cut \$1.4 million from the Toronto Public Library.

Where are this government's priorities? How can this minister justify \$1 billion to pay for their gas plant scandal, but \$1.4 million for the library in Toronto is too much? It's not right, Mr. Speaker.

Hon. Charles Sousa: Here are the priorities of this budget: pharmacare, free for every child under 25; tuition for our children—210,000 going to school this year—free for them as well; we're continuing to provide for junior kindergarten; and we're making investments and working with business to provide for more economic growth.

What will he cut? Will he cut pharmacare going forward? Will he cut free tuition for our students? Will he cut the supports we're making for business?

Mr. Speaker, we are the largest contributor to the city of Toronto by far. He has never once supported their initiatives—or, for that matter, any municipality in Ontario—because they downloaded, and we're uploading.

Interjections.

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

New question.

HOSPITAL FUNDING

Mr. Patrick Brown: Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Health.

I was pretty optimistic when I heard that the Liberals might finally do the right thing and support our hospitals. But according to the Ontario Health Coalition, the Liberal budget will barely make a dent. They said the funding will hardly even cover inflation, and it certainly won't be enough to sustain the current system. That's from the Ontario Health Coalition. It seems it was just enough to get a few Liberal-friendly quotes.

After years of freezing budgets and cutting health care in hospitals left, right and centre, will the minister admit

that this money doesn't cut it and they're not actually meeting the needs of Ontario's hospitals?

Hon. Eric Hoskins: Mr. Speaker, I honestly don't know where to begin. I don't know if I should be talking about the two dozen hospitals that they closed when they were last in power. I don't know if I should talk about when the leader of the official opposition was part of a government in Ottawa that ended the health services provided to refugees in this country. There are so many examples—or their promise to cut 100,000 jobs, many of them in health care.

But I am going to choose to talk about our investments—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I'm giving you what you want. We're going to warnings, and I'll immediately use them.

Finish, please.

Hon. Eric Hoskins: But I choose to talk about our investments, as articulated by the Minister of Finance in our budget.

Mr. Steve Clark: I want to talk about all your cuts.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Leeds–Grenville is warned.

Answer.

Hon. Eric Hoskins: An additional \$9 billion to construct new hospitals in this province, making a total of \$20 billion over the next—

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Niagara West–Glanbrook is warned.

Supplementary.

Mr. Patrick Brown: Mr. Speaker, again to the Minister of Health: There is a trend here. When the government can't defend their own record, they point fingers; they blame others; they blame past provincial governments, past federal governments.

Defend your own record. Be proud of your own record. If you're actually not embarrassed by what you're doing for the—

Interjection.

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

The member from Beaches–East York is warned.

And if you'd like, I'll move to naming. We're getting through this properly.

Finish, please.

Mr. Patrick Brown: Mr. Speaker, if you can be proud of your record, you don't need to attack others.

Let me give you another example. Jamie-Lee Ball spent five days on a stretcher in a hallway, and this is what she had to say about this government's budget:

“When you explain it's just inflation, it's really shocking to me.

“I don't understand how this is even negotiable. To offer Canadians their basic rights in regards to health care shouldn't be something they even have to discuss.”

Jamie-Lee Ball is right. When this Liberal government has cut and cut health care for the last five years and you have patients being stuck on stretchers for five days in

hallways, it's not right. So I'm asking Jamie-Lee Ball's question. You didn't do enough for her. You haven't done enough for patients. When can we expect the government to do the right thing?

Interjections.

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

Minister of Health.

Hon. Eric Hoskins: Mr. Speaker, on this side, we're proud of our record. The member opposite should be embarrassed by his own record. When he was a part of government in Ottawa, they closed the Health Council of Canada. When he was a part of government in Ottawa, they voted against the refugee Interim Federal Health Program. They closed the National Aboriginal Health Organization. I can't imagine what the member opposite has planned for the health care system—cutting and slashing.

We're investing \$7 billion over the next three years to further reduce wait times—wait times that are the best in the country—to provide better access to care, and to further enhance the patient experience. A 3.3% increase in health spending over the medium term, Mr. Speaker; a 3% increase to our hospitals' operating budgets—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Answer.

Hon. Eric Hoskins: —an infusion of more than \$500 million on top of last year's \$500 million, for a billion dollars to hospitals.

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

Mr. Patrick Brown: Again to the Minister of Health: Once again—typical response—they attack others. They can't be proud of their record. Why would they be proud of Jamie-Lee Ball? Five days—

Interjections.

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

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Etobicoke North is warned.

Finish, please.

Mr. Patrick Brown: Mr. Speaker, they shouldn't be proud of their record. Jamie-Lee Ball, five days on a stretcher in a hallway—and they're proud of what they're doing to health care?

Interjection: It's awful.

Mr. Patrick Brown: It's awful, Mr. Speaker.

According to the last Auditor General's report, just 30% of patients observed in hospital ERs made it to an acute care ward in less than eight hours. They're proud of that eight hours as the Ministry of Health's own target?

Why was that? Maybe it's because Ontario has the fewest number of hospital beds per 1,000 people across the country that they accept this. It's not good enough.

The people of Ontario—our patients are sick. They deserve better. This government has not delivered. When will they support our patients?

Hon. Eric Hoskins: The member opposite is just making it up as he goes along. You can make it up, but

the Fraser report says that 85% of ER patients are getting treatment within the eight-hour target for complex patients, and 89% within the four-hour target for minor patients. In fact, ER wait times for the sickest patients have been cut by almost 30%, while at the same time the volumes that we're seeing in our ERs have increased by 40%—more patients being seen, shorter wait times.

It's to the point where also CIHI, the Canadian Institute for Health Information—it's further proof that our government has made great progress. Hip replacements: 85% completed within the medical benchmark, higher than the national average; knee replacements—higher than the national average; 99% of radiation therapy within the medical benchmark, also above the national average. In every single metric, we are near, if not at, the top of the national performance in wait times.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: Alternative facts.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Nepean–Carleton is warned.

New question.

PHARMACARE

Mr. John Vanthof: My question is to the Acting Premier. Can the Acting Premier tell the 2.2 million Ontarians with no drug coverage why the Liberals are refusing to introduce a universal pharmacare program and ensure access to the medications they need?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: I don't really understand why the third party wants to get into a squabble about whether their plan is better than our plan, or our plan is better than their plan. We agree that the time has come for pharmacare in Ontario and in Canada.

One significant difference between their plan and our plan is that ours will start in January 2018. Everyone under age 25 with an OHIP card will have access to free drugs, with no copay, with no annual deductible.

We are very proud of the investment that we're making in pharmacare, and we invite the NDP to join with us and support pharmacare in the province of Ontario and beyond.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. John Vanthof: The difference is that what we're proposing is actually pharmacare.

Here's an example: Tracey from Newmarket saw the NDP pharmacare announcement on TV and called us to tell us her story and what pharmacare would mean to her. She spent two years without benefits, first taking care of an ill relative and then working part-time without benefits. She has diabetes and high cholesterol. Her prescriptions cost \$300 per month. Paying for these medications put her into credit card debt, and she's still struggling to pay that off.

Tracey is older than 24. Our universal pharmacare plan would cover Tracey. Why are the Liberals refusing to bring in a universal pharmacare plan, leaving people like Tracey going into debt just to pay for the medication they need?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: To the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care.

Hon. Eric Hoskins: I know the leader of the third party will be in Peterborough later today. I hope while she's there—and I know she's planning to talk about access to medications. I hope that when she's speaking to the crowd and the media, she'll be telling them, in Peterborough alone, of the—

Hon. Jeff Leal: I'm going to invite her to an event on Friday.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs is warned.

Finish, please.

Hon. Eric Hoskins: I hope the leader of the third party will be telling the citizens of the great city of Peterborough that 34,000 children and youth will, as of January 1, be receiving free full pharmacare, or how 11,500 households in Peterborough with children—those parents will no longer have to worry about paying for asthma inhalers or antibiotics or insulin. This begins at the start of next January—

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Windsor West is warned.

Final supplementary.

Mr. John Vanthof: New Democrats have a universal pharmacare plan that will give drug coverage to 14 million Ontarians. Under this plan, no diabetic or HIV patient will celebrate their 25th birthday knowing—

Hon. Bob Chiarelli: It's not universal with so few drugs.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Stop the clock. The Minister of Infrastructure is warned.

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): And I'm maybe about three questions away from naming. If you want that, you're going to get it.

Finish your question, please.

Mr. John Vanthof: Under this plan, people with asthma or high blood pressure receiving social assistance can enter the workforce, knowing they won't lose their drug coverage.

Why is this Liberal government leaving millions of Ontarians without drug coverage by refusing to bring in a universal pharmacare plan for people above age 24?

Interjections.

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

Minister?

Hon. Eric Hoskins: I think the member opposite knows that we have a program involving Ontario disability support as well as Ontario Works and Trillium, programs that provide supports to the kinds of individuals whom he is speaking to.

However, under their plan, no one in this province will be covered for cancer medications. Under their plan, no one in the province will be covered for drugs for rare diseases. I have to say that the leader of the third party, who was first elected 4,700 days ago, prior to last week

only mentioned in this Legislature the word “pharmacare” three times. Once, she referenced it in the context of an op-ed that I had written about pharmacare. The other time she referenced it with regard to the Trans-Pacific Partnership, erroneously referring to the concern about pharmacare.

Mr. Speaker, she had 4,700 days to talk about pharmacare. I appreciate the fact they’re late to the game, but their advocacy is important as we try to secure pharmacare nationally.

HOSPITAL FUNDING

M^{me} France Gélinas: My question is for the Acting Premier. Does the Liberal government think it’s okay that, as a result of the Premier’s cuts and underfunding to our hospitals, people going to an emergency are being treated in hallways, in a shower room, in a broom closet or in a TV room for days and sometimes weeks on end?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: To the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care.

Hon. Eric Hoskins: Of course not, Mr. Speaker. It’s not acceptable, and that’s why last year and again this year, we’ve made significant investments in our hospitals, both on the capital side—for example, the recent announcement at Trillium in Mississauga last week, where we announced that we are moving forward with the construction of a new hospital tower with acute beds, a new ER, as well as at the other sites of Trillium—but also, importantly, on the operating side, in terms of operating budgets, immediately moving to add to the resources provided last year an additional 3% increase to hospitals across this province.

That includes specific funds that will enable hospitals, in a flexible way, to address the unique challenges that they may be facing, whether that’s in their ERs because of growth, the 40% increase of patients that are being seen in our ERs, which I referenced earlier, or whether it’s with regard to bed capacity and other issues. We’re there to support our hospitals.

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

M^{me} France Gélinas: Olive is 84 years old. She lives in Sudbury. She was admitted to the hospital with sepsis. While she was being treated, she spent her first two nights on a stretcher in a busy ER and the next 20 days in a TV room, including one night in the shower room, which was quieter than the very busy TV room that she was in.

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The Premier’s cuts caused this crisis to happen and her budget is not going to come close to fixing it. When is the Liberal government going to admit to the severity of the hospital overcrowding that the Premier has created and stop pretending that a 2% increase is going to solve it?

Hon. Eric Hoskins: First of all, the member is wrong with her percentage. The increase in operating budgets to our hospitals is 3%, and that includes a significant

amount of funding specifically to priority services. It includes over \$1 billion invested over the next three years specifically to improve wait times, whether they occur in our ERs, whether it’s the 2,800 more hip and knee replacements that will be provided, whether it’s the 29,000 more MRI hours, the 2,100 more cataract surgeries, whether it’s \$70 million to adopt the latest digital technologies, \$74 million for mental health services, \$357 million for priority services in hospitals or \$66 million for telemedicine.

Altogether, including the increases already locked in from last year, there’s \$11 billion more into health care over the next three years.

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

M^{me} France Gélinas: Well, people across Ontario go to the hospital and they end up being treated in hallways. That’s because for a decade, hospital budgets have been cut or frozen. We’re talking about years and years of this Liberal government doing damage to our hospitals, and the Premier isn’t undoing this damage. Instead, her hospital budget falls at least \$300 million short of what is needed to keep the crisis from getting worse—not even to get things better.

Why is the Liberal government refusing to take responsibility for the damage the Premier has done to our health care system and make a real and meaningful commitment to ending hallway medicine in Ontario?

Hon. Eric Hoskins: Mr. Speaker, let’s hear what those who truly know about how meaningful the investments of last week’s budget are.

Theresa Agnew, Nurse Practitioners’ Association of Ontario: “Today’s provincial budget provides great news for the people of Ontario. With significant funding increases to hospitals, long-term-care homes, and primary care, we can better meet the needs of an aging population. NPAO is thrilled to hear about free prescription drugs for children and youth.”

Anthony Dale, president and CEO of the Ontario Hospital Association: “It ... signals a renewed commitment from government to expand and enhance access to care across the continuum.”

“The government’s significant investments in hospital capital will help to support a sustainable health care system for the future.”

The Council of Academic Hospitals of Ontario: It’s the same thing, championing and celebrating the investments we announced last week.

CONSUMER PROTECTION

Mr. Victor Fedeli: Good morning, Speaker. My question is for the finance minister. We’ve been asking you questions about Home Capital, the troubled mortgage lender also under securities commission investigation. Depositors left and the share price tumbled. Then they received a \$2-billion bailout from the Healthcare of Ontario Pension Plan, or HOOPP.

Kevin Smith, the board chair of Home Capital, was a member of HOOPP’s board, and Jim Keohane, HOOPP’s

CEO, was also on the board of Home Capital. After the \$2-billion deal was done, they then resigned from each other's boards within 24 hours.

All this happened right under the minister's nose. We want answers from the minister. Is an investigation into this perceived conflict of interest under way, or does the minister agree that what went down in that 24-hour period somehow passes the smell test?

Hon. Charles Sousa: I appreciate the question. In fact, as I've replied already on occasion, investigations are under way. The Ontario Securities Commission is doing its job and has already made public some of the allegations being put forward.

OSFI, which is the federal regulator that oversees Home Capital, is also taking the appropriate steps to protect the interests of consumers and investors. FSCO, which is the regulator here in Ontario, has already performed and laid some of the charges with regard to fraud.

The member opposite is now making allegations in regard to some of the executives, who share ownerships, and the chair as well as the trustees, and the resignations. We get all that, but our primary concern is to ensure that consumers and investors are protected, and that we take the appropriate steps through the regulators. In fact, they're doing their job to that extent.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Victor Fedeli: Back to the minister: Kevin Smith is also the \$720,000-a-year CEO of St. Joseph's health centre in Hamilton. But while he's at his \$357,000-a-year job at Home Capital, here's what is happening back at his hospital: 600 cataract surgeries stopped, 58 registered nursing jobs cut, mental health treatment unit closed, and 136 more positions cut, including 61 RNs.

Where was Kevin Smith through all this? Not in Hamilton, but in Toronto, attending 31 board meetings, earning \$1.5 million in stock.

You have to ask: How could he possibly run St. Joseph's while heading up a multi-billion-dollar company?

I ask the minister: Is it right that a hospital CEO, who should be focused on health care, have another full-time job, where he earned over \$1.5 million?

Hon. Charles Sousa: Again, we've made investments in the hospitals. We're investing more in operating and in capital, and supporting the well-being of Ontarians as we proceed forward on those matters. The member—

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Stormont—Dundas—South Glengarry is warned.

Hon. Charles Sousa: They have fiduciary duties. In fact, Home Capital, as well as HOOPP, act independently of government. They take the decisions as they see appropriate. We, through the Ontario Securities Commission, as FSCO, make sure that they're operating to the extent that they protect consumers and investors, including the members and the beneficiaries of the pension plan. It's their discretion. They don't report to the government. They are separate of government.

We will take the appropriate steps to ensure that they're protected.

The member opposite has very clearly stated that they have resigned now, as directors and as chair of their respective operations.

PUBLIC LIBRARIES

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: My question is to the Acting Premier. Yesterday, the Liberals defended cutting 20% from Toronto public libraries. The government says that the library's digital archives project isn't being used. Actually, the fact is, Mr. Speaker, usage is up.

The government said that the library isn't spending the money. Actually, Mr. Speaker, the library says exactly the opposite is true.

The Toronto Public Library says these Liberal cuts will mean less service at Toronto libraries. Why is the Liberal government cutting from Toronto libraries, and what library services do they actually expect to disappear?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Thank you to the member for the question. I want to be very, very clear on this: There is no change whatsoever to the base funding for Toronto public libraries. We continue to invest \$4.1 million in annual base funding to Toronto public libraries. On top of that, there is an additional \$1 million to Toronto through the Ontario Libraries Capacity Fund over the last three years, to support the important work they do.

What has changed, Speaker, is funding for the virtual reference library—funding, by the way, that is 20% provincial and 80% city of Toronto, to the Toronto public libraries. We did contribute 20%. We have seen a reduction of use, and we have chosen to reallocate that money to improve digital services, support leadership and innovation, and invest in rural and remote communities.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: Again, back to the Acting Premier: Only in a Liberal world is a cut of \$1.4 million not a cut.

One of the great things about public libraries is that everyone uses them. Young people use them; seniors use them; new Canadians use them. They are where people go to take out a book, use the Internet, learn, take a language class, polish up a resumé or catch up with friends and neighbours. Public libraries are at the heart of local communities, and the Liberals are making cuts to the Toronto Public Library. Just ask them.

Simple question: Will the Liberals reverse their cuts to libraries in Toronto? Can we tell Toronto public libraries some good news?

Interjections.

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

Deputy Premier.

Hon. Deborah Matthews: To the Minister of Tourism, Culture and Sport.

Hon. Eleanor McMahon: I want to thank the member opposite for her question. Speaker, I know that she shares the love and care and concern for libraries, and that's why I'm happy to share with her the following: Our public libraries remain an important priority for this government. That's why we actually take the time to talk to them and to listen to what they want. Libraries across this province told us very carefully, through the development of our culture strategy, that they wanted to be sure that the dollars we were investing made sense.

This is funding for a program that has been in existence for 20 years and that, back then, was an innovation. But over time, the increased development of the Internet has made it such that only 25% of libraries in Ontario are using this program.

It is administered by the Toronto Public Library. It is not in their core funding; it is not in their base funding, which remains robust at \$4.1 million. That's why I want the opposition to get their facts straight.

ROAD SAFETY

Mr. Mike Colle: As a member of the standing committee, we're dealing with the Safer School Zones Act. It's a piece of legislation which came as a result—to the Minister of Transportation—of the fact that we had a six-year-old girl in Leaside killed on her way home from school. Last month, we had a six-year-old boy killed outside of Morrish Public School. So we've got this bill before us that came as a result of this outcry from parents to make our school areas safer.

What is really disgusting is that as we sit in committee, not only Liberals but also the member from Niagara Falls would tell us that the members of the Conservative opposition have been directed by their leader to block, obstruct and filibuster this bill. The bill is only eight pages long. They've introduced over 300 amendments—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you.
Minister of Transportation.

Hon. Steven Del Duca: Of course, I want to begin by thanking the member from Eglinton–Lawrence for his advocacy on this issue and for hitting the nail right on the head.

Last November, I was delighted to join with Premier Kathleen Wynne and others, including Mayor John Tory from the city of Toronto, in Leaside to announce the strong action that our government is taking to help make Ontario's communities safer.

In direct response to many requests that we have received from municipal partners across the province, including from Mayor Tory right here in Toronto, we introduced Bill 65, the Safer School Zones Act. This bill contains strong tools to protect particularly children and seniors in our communities, because we want to make it safer for our most vulnerable road users.

As the member from Eglinton–Lawrence pointed out, notwithstanding our best efforts to respond to the challenge that exists, the Conservative Party, under direction from their leader, has introduced over 300 amendments to slow down passage of this critical legislation.

It is disgusting, it's unconscionable, and I call on those members to help us move forward with this—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you. We are on warnings.

Supplementary.

Mr. Mike Colle: What was even more appalling, as we sat in that committee, we had listened to the principal of Allenby school, in my riding, on Avenue Road. There were two teachers critically injured in front of that school a couple of years ago. Both had to retire from teaching because of their injuries. She came and pleaded to the committee to proceed with the Safer School Zones Act, to protect her teachers and students.

Yet you know one of the amendments they moved? The Conservatives, directed by their leader, said, "Do not allow any kind of speed enforcement devices on Avenue Road," after the principal came and said that we need something done on Avenue Road in front of Allenby school.

How is that responsible, when you have teachers, when you have parents, pleading for something to be done about the speeding around our schools and in our communities? How can they, in conscience, block—

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

Interjections.

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

Hon. David Zimmer: Stop killing people.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The Minister of Indigenous Relations and Reconciliation will withdraw.

Hon. David Zimmer: Withdraw.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): You are now warned.

Hon. Steven Del Duca: Again, I want to thank the member from Eglinton–Lawrence for the follow-up question.

You can understand for those of us on this side, on the government side of the House, and frankly for members of the NDP caucus, this is a very serious piece of legislation in communities right across Ontario: Toronto, Ottawa, York region and many others.

There has been a significant push from our municipal partners and our road safety partners to move forward with this legislation. It is completely beyond my comprehension as to why the member from Kitchener–Conestoga and the leader of the Conservative caucus would want to slow down passage of legislation that is designed specifically to help the elderly and to help students and their families get from point A to point B safely on the streets of the province of Ontario.

They have a chance at the committee stage to work with us to pass this legislation, to do so in an expedited fashion so that we can continue to deliver road safety for the people of Ontario. It's truly what our youngest and our oldest deserve from their government.

Interjections.

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

ROAD SAFETY

Mr. Rick Nicholls: My question is to the Acting Premier. Speaking of keeping children safe, each day thousands of students are put in harm's way as drivers blow by school buses that are stopped, with their red and yellow lights flashing.

Laughter.

Mr. Rick Nicholls: It's not funny.

Several municipalities have started pilot programs using stop-arm cameras to capture evidence of these blow-bys, and we need to update our laws to reflect that. In Mississauga, the pilot program discovered that each bus experienced two and a half blow-bys per day.

Mississauga's Mayor Crombie knows the importance of protecting students and has called on this Liberal government to support my amendment to the Highway Traffic Act. In a statement, she said, "We cannot wait for serious injury or a fatality before we act... No parent or guardian should ever have to think about the safety of their child getting to and from school each day."

To the Acting Premier: Will this government listen to the pilot program results and support our amendment to Bill 65, the Safer School Zones Act?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: To the Minister of Transportation.

Hon. Steven Del Duca: I think it's fairly evident from not only the legislation that we've introduced with Bill 65, but frankly also my responses to the member from Eglinton-Lawrence, that we are a government that takes the safety of our most vulnerable road users extremely seriously.

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Prince Edward-Hastings is warned.

Finish, please.

Hon. Steven Del Duca: We take our responsibility in this regard extremely seriously, so, of course, we will always consider any initiative, any move to help improve the safety of those vulnerable road users.

But fundamentally, the more than 300 amendments that that caucus has brought forward regarding Bill 65 have less to do with that particular initiative and far more to do with misguided principles on their part. They should be working closely with us to pass this legislation to help the road users whom they claim to be concerned about.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary? The member from Kitchener-Conestoga.

Mr. Michael Harris: It will be exactly this initiative that we're talking about at 4 p.m.

Speaker, this is about the safety of our children. It's about using our amendment to Bill 65 to take a significant step toward enhancing student safety. At committee, Liberal members have already refused serious safety-enhancing—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Please finish.

Mr. Michael Harris: They've already refused serious safety-enhancing amendments to Bill 65 like doubling school zone fines or implementing speed signs. If Premier Kathleen Wynne and her minister truly care about student safety, she would allow her members to endorse this important safety measure for school bus cameras.

This afternoon at 4 p.m., her members will have an opportunity, a simple choice to stand in support of enhanced student safety or stand against it. Will the Acting Premier tell us now which they will do? Will they support our amendment to ensure student safety or will they not? Which one—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you. Minister of Transportation.

Hon. Steven Del Duca: I said in my initial answer to the question from his colleague that of course we will consider any initiative that actually will achieve the outcome we're talking about here. But again, fundamentally, over the last number of days on Bill 65 as it's been in committee, as that caucus and that member have brought forward—

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Kitchener-Conestoga is warned. I'm not giving up.

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Hon. Steven Del Duca: —as that member and his caucus have brought forward, at the direction of their leader, Patrick Brown, so many amendments to slow down this process and filibuster this legislation, this latest stunt on their part speaks to me as something designed to save face because, rightly so, they're embarrassed by their behaviour as it relates to not standing up for students and not standing up for the most vulnerable.

It's not going to work. We won't be fooled. Help us pass Bill 65.

Interjections.

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

New question.

HOUSING POLICY

Mr. Peter Tabuns: Speaker, to the Acting Premier: The cost of a house is still skyrocketing. The budget doesn't have a single mechanism to help people buy a home. Instead, people saw a budget that tried to score cheap political points by talking about foreign speculators. But as long as you have a Canadian passport or a Canadian business number, there is nothing to rein in speculation, nothing to stop consortiums from buying swaths of housing, to drive up prices.

Why are the Liberals helping speculators? Why are they letting housing prices rise so fast because of the actions of those speculators?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: To the Minister of Finance.

Hon. Charles Sousa: I appreciate the question—seriously. There is a 16-point plan that we brought forward to deal with both supply and demand with regard to

housing, with an effort to ensure that we cool the market and provide some greater stability. We brought in measures to protect tenants and renters.

Mr. Speaker, the NRST, the non-resident speculation tax, is only one component of that. We are still going after those who are scalping assignments of purchase on new developments. That is also being addressed.

We'll continue to take the necessary steps, going forward, to have full disclosure, to provide greater data and greater integrity in the work that we do, to temper the market and protect the interests of homeowners as well as those new families trying to get into the market.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Peter Tabuns: Again to the Acting Premier: Over the last year, the cost of a home in Toronto rose by 31.7%. It means the average home costs \$920,791. A home at half that cost would still be out of reach for a lot of people.

This budget protects corporations flipping properties, and lets housing get even more out of reach for people.

Why isn't the government dealing with speculation?

Hon. Charles Sousa: Mr. Speaker, we are dealing with speculation. That's the whole purpose of the 16-point plan and the housing affordability measures that we've taken.

As I said, we are going after those speculators who are crowding out families that want to buy into the marketplace. We're going after those who are taking advantage of loopholes, and closing them. We're working very closely with the federal government and the CRA to ensure enforcement of those. We're going after anyone who wants to speculate in a residential property at the expense of homeowners and new families trying to get into the marketplace.

Part of the issue is the fact that Ontario is a destination of choice. The region and the economy are growing. There's a lot of stimulus, and a lot of new jobs coming to the province. It's attracting many more who want to choose to live in Ontario and in this region. That's creating huge demand for our homes.

We'll continue to support our marketplace, support our economic growth and support those families with the measures that we've taken.

FAMILY SERVICE ONTARIO

SERVICES À LA FAMILLE ONTARIO

M^{me} Nathalie Des Rosiers: Ma question est pour la ministre des Services sociaux et communautaires. Today is Family Service Ontario day here at the Ontario Legislature, where we honour the work that you do that is essential for our communities. I'm pleased that Family Services Ottawa is here with us today.

The work that is done by Family Service Ontario and all the agencies helps to end violence against women, as well as to provide assistance to those with developmental disabilities.

Leurs services sont essentiels au bien-être de nos communautés.

We know that whether it's coping with stress and anxiety or adjusting to separation, family service agencies have programs that help children, youth, families, students, adults—both men and women—and seniors.

Can the minister elaborate on the important work that Family Service Ontario does, and the way in which her ministry helps them?

L'hon. Helena Jaczek: Merci à la députée d'Ottawa—Vanier pour sa question.

As the member has said, the work of Family Service Ontario and their agencies touches thousands of Ontarians and helps to make the lives of the people they serve better.

Several ministries in this government support FSO agencies to provide important services across the province. And through funding provided by my ministry, FSO provides counselling and therapy for survivors of sexual abuse and family violence. They work to keep women and children safe from domestic violence through early intervention and by providing prevention counselling services for men. FSO also provides community participation, caregiver respite services and supports, and case management services for children and adults who have a developmental disability.

I want to thank FSO for the hard work they do each and every day to support some of Ontario's most vulnerable.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary.

M^{me} Nathalie Des Rosiers: Merci, madame la Ministre, de reconnaître le travail essentiel qu'ils font dans nos communautés et de le soutenir si bien et si fort.

I believe that the ministry is continuing to make significant investments to support some of our most vulnerable individuals. I understand that there's a \$1-million Rural Realities Fund that is designed to help rural, remote and northern women's shelters and agencies to address their particular concerns. I also understand that there's another fund of \$1.5 million to increase investment in indigenous community services designed and delivered by indigenous people, including a counselling helpline for indigenous women.

Can the minister please provide us with an update on the conjoint counselling program that she has supported?

Hon. Helena Jaczek: As part of our government's ongoing efforts to end violence against women, for the past two years my ministry has been testing a pilot project with Family Service Ontario to provide joint counselling programs for couples experiencing situational couple violence. This project is exploring the effectiveness of joint counselling for lower-risk situational couple violence, and whether early intervention would lead to a reduction in domestic violence.

The pilot is part of our government's work aimed at reducing the thinking, behaviours and conflict that may lead to domestic violence. We've been pleased with the results of the pilot so far, which is why I'm pleased also to let this House know that we will be continuing the conjoint counselling program for another year in order to evaluate how this type of counselling is working as an early intervention to violence.

I'd like to thank FSO for being here today. Your work makes a real difference in the lives of thousands of Ontarians every day.

MEDICAL ASSISTANCE IN DYING

Mr. Jeff Yurek: My question is to the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care.

Today I am introducing a bill to protect the conscience rights of health care professionals. Unfortunately, this government voted down every amendment the PC Party put forward to protect their conscience rights. Balance is needed in the system.

The self-referral system proposed by this government, which our party does support, is only half the solution. Protection of conscience rights of health care professionals is the other half.

Will this government support my private member's bill, to be debated on May 18?

Hon. Eric Hoskins: I think, as the members of the Legislature are already aware, the government's proposed legislation will support specific aspects of the implementation of medical assistance in dying by providing more protection and greater clarity for patients, their families and their health care providers.

I have many times stood in this Legislature, asserting my commitment to and respect for conscience rights of health care providers of all of us. I have also spoken about the necessity and the imperative to assure a balanced approach that also respects the rights of Ontario patients to access medical services in this province.

It's important that Ontarians understand that there is nothing in this legislation that would negatively impact the conscience rights of health care providers. It speaks to issues that are important with regard to protection from liability and certain life insurance standards and protections and other details.

Mr. Jeff Yurek: That is specifically why I'm asking for this bill: There is nothing to protect the conscience rights of our health care professionals.

Our amendments put forward to this government were going to enshrine that in legislation. This government voted it down. Many patients and many health care professionals have written thousands of letters and petitions in support of a self-referral system and protection of conscience rights. A balance is needed to ensure patient access to medical assistance in dying.

Other jurisdictions have a self-referral system, protect the conscience rights of health care professionals and provide better access to medical assistance in dying than Ontario.

1200

Mr. Speaker, will the minister encourage his colleagues, the members of the government, to vote in favour of my private member's bill on May 18?

Interjections.

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

Minister?

Hon. Eric Hoskins: There's no requirement by the federal legislation or Ontario legislation to require physicians to participate in medical assistance in dying. However, specifically because there is an element of the federal legislation that speaks to both conscience rights as well as a patient's right to access medical services, we introduced—not once, but twice—an amendment to the legislation that speaks directly to and reaffirms conscience rights of health care providers.

Do you know who voted it down, Mr. Speaker? That party. The Progressive Conservatives not once, but twice, voted down our amendments to assert and reinforce and reiterate, as the federal legislation did, conscience rights for health care providers. Shame on you.

CHILDREN'S MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES

Ms. Catherine Fife: My question is to the Acting Premier.

It is Mental Health Week in Ontario, and less than six months ago, Ontario's Auditor General delivered a scathing report against this government's non-record on children's mental health. She found that youth mental health agencies in Ontario have been overwhelmed by a 50% spike in hospitalization cases since 2009. She also found that this Liberal government had not analyzed the reasons behind the increase or taken steps to address it.

Mental health issues and illnesses account for more than \$6 billion in lost productivity costs every year, but this Liberal government has decided not to make mental health a priority.

Why don't the Acting Premier and this government understand that by denying mental health supports for children and youth, it compromises their ability to reach their potential in school and in the world of work, and often has devastating results for families in this province?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: I will take the first question and refer the supplementary to the Minister of Children and Youth Services.

The Minister of Health and Long-Term Care and I this morning were at the University of Toronto, where we made a very important funding announcement to support mental health services in our post-secondary institutions, in our colleges and in our universities. We announced an additional \$6 million a year, on top of the \$9-million base funding, to bring to \$15 million a year the supports on campus. That's a very important part of our mental health strategy to make sure that students can get access to the supports they need, when and where they need those supports.

We are moving forward on supporting mental health for children and youth. I know the Minister of Children and Youth Services will want to speak to the supplementary.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Ms. Catherine Fife: The wait-lists in this province are the norm, and that's the sad truth. Ontario is facing a

mental health crisis. CMHO cites wait-lists of one and a half years for service. Most kids end up in a hospital, only to be discharged and find out that they have to wait again for services in their community.

Advocates say that \$118 million is needed immediately to expand treatment and make it available early. They say the system is in crisis, even if you won't acknowledge it.

Between 2006 and 2016, emergency department visits by children and youth seeking help for mental health or substance abuse increased by 63%. Hospitalizations were up by 67%. According to Children's Mental Health Ontario, "Our current" mental health "system is not meeting the needs of children, youth and families."

The government knew all of this and did nothing. My question is to the Acting Premier: Why?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: To the Minister of Children and Youth Services.

Hon. Michael Coteau: I'd like to thank the member for the question.

There's no question in my mind that there is more that needs to be done to help young people in this province when it comes to mental health. Over the last couple of years, we've worked with the sector, with advocates, with families, with young people to look for ways to build a strategy that's going to be right for Ontario. We've come up with the Moving on Mental Health strategy.

I actually met with advocates this week here in the Legislature, and I made a commitment that we would bring forward a strategy very shortly based on the input we received across the province to really build system change that I believe is necessary.

There are areas where we see some overlap; there are areas where we see gaps. My job is to make sure that with so much change taking place in mental health here in the province of Ontario, and the demand that continues to increase, I need to make sure we're set up for change not just for one or two years but for 10, 20 years forward.

EDUCATION FUNDING

Mrs. Cristina Martins: My question is for the Minister of Education. One of our top priorities is to support our children with the best possible start in life through our publicly funded education and early years system. As the mom of two young boys, this is a top priority for me. Investing in schools is part of building Ontario up and it is important our government responds to the local needs while creating the best possible learning environments for students, not only in my riding of Davenport but across all of Ontario.

Since 2013, 146 new schools and 183 major additions and renovations have been completed to better support student achievement and well-being. I know that across the province our government continues to invest in newly renovated classrooms and school facilities.

Mr. Speaker, through you to the minister: Can you speak about how this year's 2017 budget includes key

investments to ensure students are learning in buildings better—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you. Minister of Education.

Hon. Mitzie Hunter: I want to say thank you so much to the member from Davenport for her question. I know how passionate she is and, indeed, all the members, because we believe that every child in Ontario deserves access to a world-class education and has the right to a supportive learning environment, so that they can be their best. That's why we're providing almost \$16 billion in capital investments over 10 years to help build new schools in high-growth areas, to improve the condition of existing schools, and to invest in projects to reduce surplus space.

Building on our 2016 commitment to increase renewal funding for schools, we're investing an additional \$1.2 billion in funding for repairs and renewals over the next two years in all of our schools.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mrs. Cristina Martins: Thank you, Minister. We are extremely proud on this side of the House of the accomplishments and investments we have made in education.

I know that last month our government also announced the details of the grants for student needs for the upcoming school year. This is the funding we provide across boards all across the province to better support student achievement and well-being.

Speaker, through you to the minister: Can you share with this House how this funding will help ensure that the young learners in my riding of Davenport, and all learners across our great province, get the knowledge and skills they need for success in the modern economy?

Hon. Mitzie Hunter: Again, thank you to the wonderful member from Davenport for her question. I know how hard she is working on behalf of her community.

Last month, I was proud to announce that total education funding will increase to \$23.8 billion for 2017-18. That is an increase of \$879 million, and this includes \$219 million targeted for additional teachers and education workers to support special education; \$49 million over the next three years to promote and support the well-being of Ontario students, including mental health—we know how important that is, as our Minister of Children and Youth Services has said—and \$66 million in funding to support our indigenous students, reducing class sizes, and transition supports to post-secondary education for students.

This growth in funding reflects our government's commitment to give school boards and students the best possible—

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

EXECUTIVE COMPENSATION

Mr. Todd Smith: My question this morning is for the Minister of Energy. The chief financial officer at Hydro

One is leaving after receiving almost a million-dollar increase in his salary last year alone—\$1.7 million for this position.

Now that there's another opening with Hydro One, will the minister, who still controls 70% of that company—or at least 70% of the shares of that company—make an effort? Will he try to get executive compensation under control and start to get the millionaires out of the ratepayers' trough at Hydro One?

Hon. Glenn Thibeault: Once again, I'm pleased to rise to talk about what our government is doing on this side of the House to ensure that we get our energy and our electricity rates as affordable as possible, unlike the other side of the House where they have no plan. They have no idea what to do with energy, let alone anything to do with the province.

When it comes to being a shareholder within Hydro One, I'm sure the government, like any other shareholder, will of course support a plan that balances attracting the best talent to run these companies while at the same time getting top value for money. We want to continue to attract top talent to Hydro One and to OPG, who can deliver value for ratepayers. I know that's something that on that side of the House they don't understand.

Over the past year, Hydro One has become a much better company, and its customers are beginning to see just that.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Todd Smith: It sounds like the minister's ready to continue opening up the bank vault and allowing them to come in and take whatever they want at Hydro One.

It's unbelievable to me, really, because this government continues to put up these expensive renewables across the province that are causing chaos on our grid. They haven't stopped the Green Energy Act. They haven't stopped the sell-off of Hydro One shares.

Every time they stand up in this Legislature to use Hydro One for a photo op they remember they still own 70% of it, but whenever they can actually do something about compensation there they throw their hands in the air and just say, "Here. Come on in. Take what you want."

Hydro One executives are eligible for hundreds of thousands, if not millions, of dollars of bonuses every year. Is the minister, once again, going to take the side of the people who are sending the hydro bills or side with the people who are getting these exorbitant hydro bills in their home every month that they can't afford?

Hon. Glenn Thibeault: On this side of the House, we're actually siding with the people of Ontario, providing them with a 25% reduction.

I know the opposition and the member opposite talked about having their plan in the policy department. Well, it has been 62 days since we've announced the fair hydro plan. Where's their plan? They have no plan for hydro. They have no plan for the province of Ontario.

When it comes to helping families, we actually listened to what they had to say and we acted. We put together a plan that's going to reduce their rates by 25%. What did they do? They heard and did nothing.

VISITORS

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The Minister of Agriculture on a point of order.

Hon. Jeff Leal: On a point of order. In the west public gallery today we have some folks from Peterborough here for Ontario family service day: Casey Ready, the executive director of the Community Counselling and Resource Centre in Peterborough; Charlie Martin, the chair of the board; and Kirsten Armbrust here today.

NOTICE OF DISSATISFACTION

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Pursuant to standing order 38(a), the member from Chatham-Kent-Essex has given notice of his dissatisfaction with the answer to his question given by the Minister of Transportation concerning student safety. This matter will be debated today at 6 p.m.

DEFERRED VOTES

TIME ALLOCATION

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): We have a deferred vote on government notice of motion number 9 relating to the allocation of time on Bill 124, An Act to amend the Residential Tenancies Act, 2006.

Call in the members. This will be a five-minute bell.

The division bells rang from 1213 to 1218.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): On May 2, 2017, Ms. Sandals moved government notice of motion number 9 relating to the allocation of time on Bill 124. All those in favour of the motion, please rise one at a time and be recognized by the Clerk.

Ayes

Albanese, Laura	Duguid, Brad	McMeekin, Ted
Anderson, Granville	Flynn, Kevin Daniel	Milczyn, Peter Z.
Baker, Yvan	Fraser, John	Moridi, Reza
Ballard, Chris	Hoskins, Eric	Murray, Glen R.
Berardinetti, Lorenzo	Hunter, Mitzie	Naidoo-Harris, Indira
Bradley, James J.	Jaczek, Helena	Naqvi, Yasir
Chan, Michael	Kiwala, Sophie	Potts, Arthur
Chiarelli, Bob	Lalonde, Marie-France	Qaadri, Shafiq
Colle, Mike	Leal, Jeff	Rinaldi, Lou
Coteau, Michael	MacCharles, Tracy	Sandals, Liz
Crack, Grant	Malhi, Harinder	Sousa, Charles
Damerla, Dipika	Mangat, Amrit	Takhar, Harinder S.
Del Duca, Steven	Martins, Cristina	Thibeault, Glenn
Delaney, Bob	Matthews, Deborah	Vernile, Daiene
Des Rosiers, Nathalie	Mauro, Bill	Wong, Soo
Dhillon, Vic	McGarry, Kathryn	Wynne, Kathleen O.
Dong, Han	McMahon, Eleanor	Zimmer, David

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): All those opposed, please rise one at a time and be recognized by the Clerk.

Nays

Arnott, Ted	Gélinas, France	Nicholls, Rick
Bailey, Robert	Gretzky, Lisa	Oosterhoff, Sam
Barrett, Toby	Hardeman, Ernie	Pettapiece, Randy
Bisson, Gilles	Hatfield, Percy	Sattler, Peggy
Brown, Patrick	MacLaren, Jack	Scott, Laurie
Cho, Raymond Sung Joon	MacLeod, Lisa	Smith, Todd
Clark, Steve	Mantha, Michael	Tabuns, Peter
Coe, Lorne	Martow, Gila	Thompson, Lisa M.
DiNovo, Cheri	McDonell, Jim	Vanhof, John
Fedeli, Victor	McNaughton, Monte	Walker, Bill
Fife, Catherine	Miller, Norm	Wilson, Jim
Forster, Cindy	Miller, Paul	Yurek, Jeff
French, Jennifer K.	Munro, Julia	
Gates, Wayne	Natyshak, Taras	

The Clerk of the Assembly (Mr. Todd Decker): The ayes are 51; the nays are 40.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I declare the motion carried.

Motion agreed to.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): There are no further deferred votes. This House stands recessed until 3 p.m. this afternoon.

The House recessed from 1221 to 1500.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Mr. Jim McDonell: I wanted to introduce Ray Houde and Jessica Bourdeau from Family Services Ontario, who I had an interesting meeting with just before coming up here.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS**CANADIAN HEARING SOCIETY**

Mr. Victor Fedeli: This is a story about Ernest Guillemette. We first met at the ribbon cutting of the Canadian Hearing Society. He couldn't hear, but his interpreter, Beth, was there to assist our conversation. He loved life. He loved to joke and he loved his Tim Hortons. He also loved to flirt with the ladies, and he rarely ever paid for those Tim Hortons.

Ernest died on April 16 at the age of 86. His friends came to my office last week—I knew them—and they told me the story of Ernest's death. Although he was in the hospital, they felt that he died alone.

Now, I know the front-line health care workers at the North Bay Regional Health Centre did absolutely everything to make Ernest feel comfortable and safe as he went through his last struggle; that's what they do, and they do a remarkable job. What was missing was his interpreter's friendly face and familiarity.

Ernest was old school. He used old-school sign language with lots of nuances. But his interpreter is in her eighth week of the Canadian Hearing Society strike. There are only a few freelance interpreters for the entire north. The hospital did bring one in two or three days a week, but that's very little interaction for someone of that

age, hospitalized for five weeks, left with only their own thoughts going through their mind.

Speaker, I urge all parties to resolve this strike, as another death did occur in Thunder Bay and there are similar concerns in Sudbury.

**NIAGARA PENINSULA
CONSERVATION AUTHORITY**

Ms. Cindy Forster: Today I rise in support of Bill Hodgson, a member of the Niagara Peninsula Conservation Authority board who is being censured by the board because he dared to express legitimate and valid concerns about a questionable RFP they recently issued.

Our community has raised serious concerns about the board's lack of operational accountability and financial transparency. The Auditor General intervened, offering an impartial audit, one the board declined. Perhaps fearful of what the AG may uncover, the board issued its own RFP, except it reported back to the very people it was supposed to be auditing.

The public called foul. We wrote letters. Councillor Hodgson did what was right: He questioned it. The NPCA retracted the RFP and decided to go back to the AG.

It's clear that the NPCA board chair, Sandy Annunziata, in an attempt to cover up his and some of his board members' own actions, will stop at no end to silence anyone who seems to disagree. The majority of elected municipal officials and our communities are fed up. It's time for the government to appoint a supervisor to oversee the NPCA.

Today I stand alongside local councillor Hodgson to send a strong message to the NPCA board chair, Sandy Annunziata, and his cohorts: We will not tolerate bullying and we will always stand up for transparency and accountability.

Mr. James J. Bradley: Point of order.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Point of order, the chief government whip.

Mr. James J. Bradley: I want to commend the member on that statement and say I agree with her.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): That's not a point of order, and I wish I would have caught it quicker.

Further members' statements.

**GROVES MEMORIAL
COMMUNITY HOSPITAL**

Mr. Ted Arnott: I'm glad to inform this House today that EllisDon Infrastructure Healthcare has been selected as the preferred proponent to design, build and finance the new Groves Memorial Community Hospital in the township of Centre Wellington. This latest announcement in the government's multi-stage approval process brings us closer than ever to the commencement of construction of our new Groves hospital.

My involvement in this issue began around 2002 or 2003, when the Groves hospital administrator first came

to my office to tell me that the hospital had a plan for redevelopment but it seemed to be stuck at a preliminary stage. She asked me to make inquiries. I replied that I would support whatever plan for redevelopment of the hospital was submitted to the ministry and that the community was behind, and would want to help in any way I could.

So our work began. There were many ups and downs and twists and turns, and even a complete revision of the redevelopment plan. And let me be clear: I'm not pretending to be the architect. But by setting aside partisan differences and seeking to work across party lines with no fewer than five Ministers of Health for more than a decade, we slowly but surely made progress towards our vision of a new hospital for our growing community.

I want to express my sincere thanks to all MPPs, past and present, who have supported the Groves proposal. But we need to save our most generous expression of appreciation to Groves staff and volunteers, our donors, successive county of Wellington councils and staff, successive township of Centre Wellington councils and staff, the adjacent municipalities in the hospital's catchment area, our local LHIN—indeed, the entire community—for having the vision, the patience and the perseverance which has brought us finally to the conclusion of the planning process.

We look forward to seeing construction begin very soon.

DAY OF MOURNING

Mr. Percy Hatfield: We had a special guest at our Day of Mourning ceremony in Windsor last week. Silver Kuris is 13 now. She lost her dad, Sam, to a workplace accident when she was seven. She wrote this poem when she was 10, called "My Daddy":

When I close my eyes at night,
I make a wish with all my might
That my dad will come home safe to me,
Do you think that could ever be?

I know my dad is up in heaven,
He's been there since I was seven.
He sits up there and watches over me,
He keeps me safe as I can be.

I miss my dad every day.
Will anything ever be okay?
I miss his hugs, I miss his kisses,
But most of all I miss our reminiscences,
Of all the fun we had together,
In sun and in rain, in all kinds of weather.

My brothers are brave,
They pretend they don't care.
But I'll tell you a secret,
They hide it in there.

It's not fair to lose a dad.
It makes me sad, it makes me mad!
Dads shouldn't die, just going to work,
It just isn't right that danger may lurk.

If I could change things, here's what I'd do,
I'd invent a new workplace, something new,
A place where no one could ever get hurt.
It would be like magic, do you think it would work?

No more tears and sadness,
No more missing and badness,
Every mom and dad would come home safe,
A world like that would never chafe.

When you go to work today,
Play it safe, make it okay,
So you can go home, safe and sound,
To kiss your kids and be around.

I love you, dad.
Love, Silver.

GLENGARRY AGRICULTURAL WALL OF FAME

Mr. Jim McDonell: Glengarry county has been in the forefront of agricultural excellence and innovation since its inception in the late 1700s as a home for Scottish settlers.

Last Saturday, I was honoured to attend the 17th induction ceremony of the Glengarry Agricultural Wall of Fame. This year's ceremony honoured three pillars of our local agricultural heritage.

William and Margaret Van Der Byl came to Canada from Holland in 1951 and, like many of our Dutch farmers of that day, built a diversified farming business involving mares, hogs, sows, dairy cows and cash crops. William was a founding member of the Quigley Cheese Manufacturing Association and represented the county pork producers.

Bruce Sova, born and raised in Glenroy, was a dairy farmer who set up his own monthly dairy testing and record-keeping, years ahead of the Dairy Herd Improvement Association. Beyond farming and raising four sons with Chris Smith, Bruce was an active participant in his community through the Char-Lan Junior Farmers, the Glengarry Milk Committee, the Glengarry Cheese Producers' Association, the hospital board, and the local municipal council.

The wall of fame also recognized all the Glengarry County Dairy Princesses. Speaker, it was amazing to see the successes of this group of ladies. They went on to be teachers, principals and high-ranking government and private sector managers at a much higher rate than the rest of the community. It was clear to me that the leadership skills learned through this program paid off in spades, and the community was truly the winner.

I want to thank president Robert MacDonald and the board for a fantastic event.

1510

CHILDREN'S MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES

Ms. Laurie Scott: Last year, hospitalizations for mental disorders rose in Ontario by 67%. My area's Central East LHIN has the second-highest number of active mental health cases in the province, and yet they are not receiving the support they need.

Based on the government's Moving on Mental Health strategy, there are at least 890 children with mental health challenges in the city of Kawartha Lakes alone, and no 24/7 integrated children's mental health service in the community. Studies show that kids suffering from mental health issues do much better if they are able to stay at home, which is why it's important to have local services that are closer to home. These children have to go to Peterborough or Ontario Shores, which are both under-resourced and over capacity. The Peterborough Regional Health Centre's emergency department is running at 113% capacity, and it's not hard to see why. They are simply not equipped to provide appropriate care for children suffering from mental health issues.

Children on wait-lists for treatment are often hospitalized before they can receive care, only to be put back on a wait-list of up to 18 months after they are discharged. They miss school and work opportunities while being denied care. Sadly, some children even take their own lives as they languish on wait-lists.

Children in Ontario need mental health services now. I urge the government to take real action and address the urgent need for dedicated mental health services, not only in my riding, but across Ontario.

REPORTS BY COMMITTEES

STANDING COMMITTEE ON SOCIAL POLICY

Mr. Peter Tabuns: Speaker, I beg leave to present a report from the Standing Committee on Social Policy and move its adoption.

The Clerk-at-the-Table (Ms. Tonia Grannum): Your committee begs to report the following bill, as amended:

Bill 68, An Act to amend various Acts in relation to municipalities / Projet de loi 68, Loi modifiant diverses lois en ce qui concerne les municipalités.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Shall the report be received and adopted? Agreed? Agreed.

Report adopted.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The bill is therefore ordered for third reading.

STANDING COMMITTEE ON REGULATIONS AND PRIVATE BILLS

Mr. Ted McMeekin: I beg leave to present a report from the Standing Committee on Regulations and Private Bills and move its adoption.

The Clerk-at-the-Table (Ms. Tonia Grannum): Your committee begs to report the following bills without amendment:

Bill Pr61, An Act to revive Braiseryy Chicken Ltd.

Bill Pr62, An Act to revive Roy Wilson Real Estate Inc.

Bill Pr63, An Act respecting The East York Foundation.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Shall the report be received and adopted? Agreed? Agreed.

Report adopted.

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

REGULATED HEALTH PROFESSIONS AMENDMENT ACT (FREEDOM OF CONSCIENCE IN HEALTH CARE), 2017

LOI DE 2017 MODIFIANT LA LOI SUR LES PROFESSIONS DE LA SANTÉ RÉGLEMENTÉES (LIBERTÉ DE CONSCIENCE EN MATIÈRE DE SOINS DE SANTÉ)

Mr. Yurek moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 129, An Act to amend the Regulated Health Professions Act, 1991 with respect to medical assistance in dying / Projet de loi 129, Loi modifiant la Loi de 1991 sur les professions de la santé réglementées en ce qui concerne l'aide médicale à mourir.

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

First reading agreed to.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member for a short statement.

Mr. Jeff Yurek: The bill amends the Regulated Health Professions Act.

Member participation in medical assistance in dying shall be voluntary.

A member shall not be subject to civil, administrative, disciplinary, employment, credentialing, regulatory or other sanction or penalty, or loss of privileges, loss of membership or any other liability for refusing to participate in medical assistance in dying.

Participation includes, but is not limited to, performing, assisting in the performance of or making a referral for any activities related to, or for the purpose of, medical assistance in dying.

Participation does not include the provision, upon request, of information about services that can provide access to medical assistance in dying, of a patient's

relevant medical record to the patient, or communicating, to the appropriate person in authority, a patient's request for a complete transfer of care so that the person in authority can facilitate the transfer.

MOTIONS

PRIVATE MEMBERS' PUBLIC BUSINESS

Hon. Marie-France Lalonde: I believe we have unanimous consent to put forward a motion without notice regarding private members' public business.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The minister is seeking unanimous consent to put forward a motion without notice. Do we agree? Agreed.

Minister.

Hon. Marie-France Lalonde: I move that, notwithstanding standing order 98(b), Mr. Anderson and Mr. Baker exchange places such that Mr. Anderson assumes ballot item number 60 and Mr. Baker assumes ballot item number 62; and that, notwithstanding standing order 98(g), notices for ballot items 59, 60, 62, 65, 66, 67, 68 and 69 be waived.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Madame Lalonde moves that, notwithstanding standing—

Interjection: Dispense.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Dispense? Dispense.

Agreed? Carried.

Motion agreed to.

PETITIONS

ACCESS TO JUSTICE

Ms. Laurie Scott: “Stop the Move of the Provincial Offences Court from Minden to Lindsay.

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas the Ministry of the Attorney General has announced it is closing the provincial offences court in the town of Minden; and

“Whereas closing the court in Minden would render justice inaccessible for many residents in the county who do not have reliable access to transportation to travel to Lindsay; and

“Whereas the government did not consult with the county of Haliburton to support this decision; and

“Whereas the Ontario Provincial Police will incur overtime and travelling costs which will result in higher taxes passed directly onto our taxpayers; and

“Whereas the courts have a positive effect on the economy of the county of Haliburton and closing the courthouse will divert money out of town;

“Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows: that the Minister of the Attorney General immediately reverse the decision to

move the Minden provincial offences court to Lindsay from the period of July 1, 2017, to July 1, 2018, and ensure that residents in the county of Haliburton have access to justice in their own community.”

It's signed by many people from Haliburton county, and I'll affix my signature.

ENERGY POLICIES

Ms. Sarah Campbell: I have well over 500 petitions so far from my constituents in Kenora–Rainy River. This petition reads as follows:

“Whereas peak hour hydro rates have nearly quadrupled in the last 10 years;

“Whereas time-of-use pricing has not achieved its policy goals, while pushing people with little flexibility over their hydro usage, such as seniors and stay-at-home parents;

“Whereas the Ontario Energy Board has raised rates after a mild winter, essentially penalizing Ontarians for doing ‘too good’ of a job conserving electricity;

“Whereas the delivery charges on northern hydro bills often exceed the cost of electricity used, despite an abundance of locally generated electricity;

“Whereas northerners are now left feeling like we are in a ‘no-win’ situation when it comes to lowering our hydro bills, despite electricity being an essential service;

“We, the undersigned, call upon the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to immediately return Hydro One to public hands; end the practice of paying for electricity Ontario doesn't need; review and renegotiate bad ... power contracts; end unfair rural delivery charges; re-examine the impact that density has on cost; cap private profit margins; end time-of-use billing and negotiate the permanent removal of the HST from electricity bills.”

I fully support this, will affix my signature, and give it to page Gurjaap to deliver to the table.

PRIMARY HEALTH CARE

Mr. Lou Rinaldi: I have a petition here to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

“Whereas the Ontario government needs to strengthen primary care as the foundation of the health care system to achieve health system transformation goals of Patients First; and

“Whereas research shows that interprofessional primary health care delivers better outcomes for people and better value for money; and

“Whereas an investment in primary care will help address recruitment and retention challenges, build strong interprofessional primary care teams and ensure high-quality people-centred primary health care delivery in Ontario; and

“Whereas over 7,500 staff in over 400 community health centres, family health teams, aboriginal health access centres and nurse practitioner-led clinics are being paid below rates recommended in 2012 and as a result are facing challenges recruiting and retaining health pro-

viders, including nurse practitioners, dietitians, registered nurses, health promoters and managers;

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“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to invest in interprofessional primary health care teams with a commitment of \$130 million annualized, with an implementation plan over two years, to ensure interprofessional primary health care teams can effectively retain and recruit staff.”

I’ll send it to the Chair with Katie.

PRIMARY HEALTH CARE

Mr. Todd Smith: This comes from the Gateway Community Health Centre in the GTA; that’s the greater Tweed area.

“Whereas the Ontario government needs to strengthen primary care as the foundation of the health care system to achieve health system transformation goals of Patients First; and

“Whereas research shows that interprofessional primary health care delivers better outcomes for people and better value for money; and

“Whereas an investment in primary care will help address recruitment and retention challenges, build strong interprofessional primary care teams and ensure high-quality people-centred primary health care delivery in Ontario; and

“Whereas over 7,500 staff in over 400 community health centres, family health teams, aboriginal health access centres and nurse practitioner-led clinics are being paid below rates recommended in 2012 and as a result are facing challenges recruiting and retaining health providers, including nurse practitioners, dietitians, registered nurses, health promoters and managers;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to invest in interprofessional primary health care teams with a commitment of \$130 million annualized, with an implementation plan over two years, to ensure interprofessional primary health care teams can effectively retain and recruit staff.”

I agree with this. I have signed it and will send it with Rishi to the table.

GRANDVIEW CHILDREN’S CENTRE

Miss Monique Taylor: I have a petition. The title is “Grandview Children’s Centre Capital Need.”

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas Grandview Children’s Centre is Durham region’s only outpatient rehabilitation facility for children and youth with special needs; and

“Whereas Grandview Children’s Centre’s main facility was originally constructed in 1983 to serve 400 children and now has a demand of over 8,000 children annually; and

“Whereas growth has resulted in the need for lease locations leading to inefficient and fragmented care delivery; and

“Whereas it is crucial for Grandview Children’s Centre to complete a major development project to construct a new facility in order to meet the existing as well as future needs of Durham region’s children, youth and families; and

“Whereas in 2009 Grandview Children’s Centre submitted a capital development plan to the province to construct a new facility; and

“Whereas in 2016 the town of Ajax donated a parcel of land on which to build the new Grandview; and

“Whereas the Grandview foundation has raised over \$8 million; and

“Whereas since 2009 the need for services has continued to increase, with over 2,753 children, youth and families currently on the wait-list for services;

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

“That the province of Ontario prioritizes, commits to and approves Grandview Children’s Centre’s capital development plan so that the chronic shortage of facilities in Durham can be alleviated.”

I fully support this petition. I’m going to affix my name to it and give it to page Jeremi to bring to the Clerk.

HYDRO RATES

Mr. Han Dong: I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

“Whereas electricity prices have increased and in too many cases become unaffordable for Ontarians;

“Whereas Ontario is a prosperous province and people should never have to choose between hydro and other daily necessities;

“Whereas people want to know that hydro rate relief is on the way; that relief will go to everyone; and that relief will be lasting because it is built on significant change;

“Whereas the Ontario fair hydro plan would reduce hydro bills for residential consumers, small businesses and farms by an average of 25% as part of a significant system restructuring, with increases held to the rate of inflation for the next four years;

“Whereas the Ontario fair hydro plan would provide people with low incomes and those living in rural communities with even greater reductions to their electricity bills;

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

“Support the Ontario fair hydro plan and provide relief for Ontario electricity consumers as quickly as possible;

“Continue working to ensure clean, reliable and affordable electricity is available for all Ontarians.”

I support this petition. I’ll sign it and give it to page Emma.

ACCESS TO JUSTICE

Mr. Jim McDonell: I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

“Whereas in 2015 Ontario had, at 43.8%, the highest rate in Canada of charges withdrawn, stayed or otherwise removed prior to a trial; and

“Whereas this situation causes significant costs to be incurred by the legal system, corrections, the individuals facing the charges and the general public whose access to prompt justice is impaired; and

“Whereas facing a criminal charge imposes significant material and mental costs on individuals, as well as limiting their liberty and ability to work and live in their community; and

“Whereas there is no remedy for compensating innocent Ontarians whose lives and livelihoods have been injured through being wrongfully accused;

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

“To develop and fund a program to assist Ontarians who have been wrongfully accused; and

“To study Ontario’s unacceptably high rate of stayed and withdrawn charges, and to enact reforms to rectify the situation.”

I agree with this and will pass it off to page Matthew.

EMPLOYMENT STANDARDS

Ms. Catherine Fife: This petition is entitled “Fight for \$15 and Fairness.”

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

“Whereas too many workers are not protected by the minimum standards outlined in existing employment and labour laws; and

“Whereas the Ontario government is currently reviewing employment and labour laws in the province;

“Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to change employment and labour laws to accomplish the following:

“—ensure that part-time, temporary, casual and contract workers receive the same pay and benefits as their full-time permanent counterparts;

“—promote full-time, permanent work with adequate hours for all those who choose it;

“—offer fair scheduling with proper advance notice;

“—provide at least seven (7) days of paid sick leave each year;

“—prevent employers from downloading their responsibilities for minimum standards onto temporary agencies, subcontractors or workers themselves;

“—end the practice of contract flipping, support wage protection and job security for workers when companies change ownership or contracts expire;

“—extend minimum protections to all workers by eliminating exemptions to the laws;

“—protect workers who stand up for their rights;

“—offer proactive enforcement of the laws through adequate public staffing and meaningful penalties for employers who violate the laws;

“—make it easier for workers to join unions; and

“—all workers must be paid at least \$15 an hour, regardless of their age, student status, job or sector of employment.”

I support this petition and thank the people of Waterloo for sending it to this place, and I will give it to page Peter.

ELEVATOR MAINTENANCE

Mr. Lou Rinaldi: I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

“Whereas elevators are an important amenity for a resident of a high-rise residential building; and

“Whereas ensuring basic mobility and standards of living for residents remain top priority; and

“Whereas the unreasonable delay of repairs for elevator services across Ontario is a concern for all residents of high-rise buildings who experience constant breakdowns, mechanical failures and ‘out of service’ notices for unspecified amounts of time;

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

“Urge the Ontario government to require repairs to elevators be completed within a reasonable and prescribed time frame. We urge this government to address these concerns that are shared by residents of Trinity–Spadina and across Ontario.”

I affix my signature and send it to the table with Kaitlyn.

DENTAL CARE

Mr. Todd Smith: I’m pleased to present this petition on behalf of those at the Belleville and Quinte West Community Health Centre.

“Whereas lack of access to dental care affects overall health and well-being, and poor oral health is linked to diabetes, cardiovascular, respiratory disease, and Alzheimer’s disease; and

“Whereas it is estimated that two to three million people in Ontario have not seen a dentist in the past year, mainly due to the cost of private dental services; and

“Whereas approximately every nine minutes a person in Ontario arrives at a hospital emergency room with a dental problem but can only get painkillers and antibiotics, and this costs the health care system at least \$31 million annually with no treatment of the problem;

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“Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to invest in public oral health programs for low-income adults and seniors by:

“—ensuring that plans to reform the health care system include oral health so that vulnerable people in our communities have equitable access to the dental care they need to be healthy;

“—extending public dental programs for low-income children and youth within the next two years to include low-income adults and seniors; and

“—delivering public dental services in a cost-efficient way through publicly funded dental clinics such as public health units, community health centres and aboriginal health access centres to ensure primary oral health services are accessible to vulnerable people in Ontario.”

I have signed this. I agree with it and will send it to the table with page Gracin.

PRIVATIZATION OF PUBLIC ASSETS

Ms. Cindy Forster: I have a petition.

“Ontario Is Not for Sale.”

“Whereas the Liberal government of Ontario is currently reviewing proposals to sell off a significant amount of our shared public assets such as Ontario Power Generation ... Hydro One, and the Liquor Control Board of Ontario...; and

“Whereas our shared public assets provide more affordable hydro, develop environmentally friendly energy, create thousands of good Ontario jobs, and are accountable to all Ontarians; and

“Whereas our shared public assets put money in the public bank account so we can invest in hospitals, roads and schools; and

“Whereas this Liberal government is more interested in helping out wealthy shareholders and investors than they are in the hard-working Ontarians who are building this province; and

“Whereas Ontario is stronger when there is shared prosperity;

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

“Stop the selling-off of our shared public assets. Keep our public assets in public hands.”

I support this petition and send it with page Maggie.

DENTAL CARE

Ms. Laurie Scott: “Expand Public Dental Programs.

“Petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas lack of access to dental care affects overall health and well-being, and poor oral health is linked to diabetes, cardiovascular, respiratory disease, and Alzheimer’s disease; and

“Whereas it is estimated that two to three million people in Ontario have not seen a dentist in the past year, mainly due to the cost of private dental services; and

“Whereas approximately every nine minutes a person in Ontario arrives at a hospital emergency room with a dental problem but can only get painkillers and antibiotics, and this costs the health care system at least \$31 million annually with no treatment of the problem;

“Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to invest in public oral health programs for low-income adults and seniors by:

“—ensuring that plans to reform the health care system include oral health so that vulnerable people in our communities have equitable access to the dental care they need to be healthy;

“—extending public dental programs for low-income children and youth within the next two years to include low-income adults and seniors; and

“—delivering public dental services in a cost-efficient way through publicly funded dental clinics such as public health units, community health centres and aboriginal health access centres to ensure primary oral health services are accessible to vulnerable people in Ontario.”

I affix my signature and hand it to page Iman.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

STRONGER, HEALTHIER ONTARIO ACT (BUDGET MEASURES), 2017

LOI DE 2017 POUR UN ONTARIO PLUS FORT ET EN MEILLEURE SANTÉ (MESURES BUDGÉTAIRES)

Ms. Jaczek, on behalf of Mr. Sousa, moved second reading of the following bill:

Bill 127, An Act to implement Budget measures and to enact, amend and repeal various statutes / Projet de loi 127, Loi visant à mettre en oeuvre les mesures budgétaires et à édicter, à modifier ou à abroger diverses lois.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Minister Jaczek.

Hon. Helena Jaczek: Mr. Speaker, I will be sharing my time with the member for Etobicoke Centre, and I turn it over to him now.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): The member for Etobicoke Centre.

Mr. Yvan Baker: I’m pleased to stand today and rise in the House to speak about second reading of Bill 127, the Stronger, Healthier Ontario Act, 2017, otherwise known as the provincial budget bill.

I have to share with you, Speaker, that before I was elected, I did what aspiring politicians do: I started to knock on doors in my community and meet people who I aspired to represent. When I started to do that, I heard from them about the issues that were important to them. I heard about things like making sure that we could support a growing economy and prepare our young people—people of all ages, but particularly our young people—for the jobs of tomorrow. I heard about the need to invest in and strengthen our health care system, to make it more accessible, to continue to improve the quality of care and the ways in which people can access care. I heard about education and the need to continue to strengthen our education system. I heard about the need for transit and infrastructure. I heard about the need to make sure that we address those pressures that people are feeling in terms of the rise in their cost of living. I heard from a lot of folks who are struggling to get by, or are facing increasing pressures to get by, because of the increasing cost of living.

One of the things I heard about a lot was the need to make sure that government manages people's tax dollars wisely, that we get better value for money and, ultimately, that we balance the budget.

So I rise and I share that story with you, Speaker, because I'm proud of this budget, I'm proud of this bill, and I'm proud for a number of reasons. I'm going to spend my time speaking about some of those reasons that I'm proud, and some of those initiatives, those priorities that I just spoke about, that the budget addresses or takes major steps in addressing.

First and foremost, I'm proud to share that the 2017 Ontario budget is a balanced budget. For the first time since the global recession, Ontario has eliminated the deficit. We have restored balance to the province's finances. This is thanks to Ontario's strong economy and to this government's responsible fiscal management, something that I've been proud to be a part of.

The road to balance was not an easy one. If you think back, the recession, which began in 2008, hit us hard. It hit Canada hard; it hit Ontario hard. The aftershock of that crisis, the financial turmoil, challenged families across Ontario. But we knew that the best thing for us during this time was not to do what some governments of the past have done, which was to make deep cuts to essential services that people depend on—that was something we could not do—but rather, to make strategic investments, to help people keep working and keep services running, so that families could get through the recession, so that kids could continue to get a great education and prepare for the future, and so that when moms, dads or grandparents needed to go to the hospital, they could receive great care. Our government remained committed to that throughout that difficult period.

The government put together a plan to protect and to create jobs, to grow the economy and to attract foreign investment. We took a balanced approach and responded to the global crisis by making strategic investments that supported what mattered most to the people of Ontario—quality health care, and education—but also by controlling spending. We addressed expenses and looked for savings. We froze salaries across the public sector and transformed programs and services to make them more efficient, saving Ontario half a billion dollars a year.

Because of our hard work and commitment and good governance, I'm proud to say that this government persevered and came out on top. Ontario is the leanest government in Canada, with the lowest per capita spending of any province—a promise to Ontarians to protect public services and spend tax dollars wisely, to put our province in a position to rise above, to prosper after the dark clouds of the recession had passed.

We went from losing more than 270,000 jobs during the recession to creating nearly 700,000 new jobs since then. I think that's important, and it bears repeating: During the recession, Ontario lost 270,000 jobs. These were 270,000 people who were shown a pink slip, effectively, who lost their jobs. Since then, we've been able to create 700,000 new ones. That's a real testament to the hard work of the people of Ontario.

With these job gains, with employment growing, it's not just about the number of jobs, but that these are excellent jobs, good jobs, with the majority being full time, and the vast majority of them in the private sector and in industries paying above-average wages.

Over the last three years, Ontario's real GDP growth has outpaced that of all G7 countries. Again, that bears repeating: Our GDP growth has outpaced all G7 countries. Exports and business investments are increasing, household incomes are rising, and the unemployment rate continues to decline and has been below our national average in Canada for 24 consecutive months. So the strength of Ontario's economy is having a positive effect on Ontario's finances.

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If I could quickly summarize what I just shared with you, it is that on a number of really important indicators of our economic health, of our prosperity, we continue to make important progress, and this is great news. And as a result of this economic progress, not only has this helped to enhance the quality of life for so many people, particularly those who have been able to enter or re-enter the job market, but we're also delivering on our commitment to balance the budget, eliminating the deficit in 2017-18 from more than \$19 billion at the height of the recession.

But that's not all. We're not just balancing the budget this year; we're projected to maintain that balance for the next two years. We're doing that by building on a successful track record of some really prudent fiscal decision-making, all the while investing in and supporting programs and services that people rely on, which has made Ontario an economic leader not just in Canada, but around the world.

I think it's worth noting that the economy has performed very, very well relative to our G7 counterparts and to other provinces across Canada. We're leading those jurisdictions in economic growth. Unemployment is at a low since the recession, well below the national average, and other economic indicators are showing that we're doing well.

That doesn't mean there isn't more work to do. There is absolutely more work to do. But, as a result of the hard work of the people of Ontario, as a result of this progress, we're in a position where we've been able to balance the budget. That has allowed us to make investments in the things that matter for the people of Ontario, and this budget reflects those investments.

Today our priority is still about jobs created by thriving businesses. We can't rest on our laurels. To continue strengthening businesses, we have to maintain, and we will maintain, our competitive corporate tax environment and continue to modernize regulations and help reduce business costs. Ontario already has a strong foundation for innovation and entrepreneurship, with internationally recognized research institutions and more than 574,000 Ontarians employed in science and engineering last year.

To ensure that Ontario remains at the forefront of research and development in transformative technologies

that will lead tomorrow's growth, with this budget, we will expand the Business Growth Initiative to more than \$650 million over five years. This Business Growth Initiative will create opportunities to make our economy more innovative, help scale up small businesses into medium-sized and large enterprises, reduce the regulatory burden on business and create more well-paying jobs across Ontario.

Over the past decade, Ontario has also been diversifying its exports to more international markets. We are raising our international profile, attracting foreign investment and supporting Ontario-led trade missions. To aid these activities, with this budget we are investing almost \$50 million over three years to expand Ontario's footprint in key international markets and grow the province's capacity to help businesses expand globally.

These new investments will also expand programs offered to small and medium-sized enterprises to help more companies become exporters and reach new global markets and diversify their revenue sources. The Canada-European Union Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement will reduce and will eliminate trade barriers and make Ontario's goods more competitive in the European Union, the largest single market in the world. The trade agreement is expected to create 30,000 new jobs in Ontario and boost the province's GDP by \$4.5 billion.

We are also working with the federal government to diversify international trade—so it's not just about trading for the sake of trade and growing in that regard, but it's about trading as broadly as possible—through the negotiation of free trade agreements, including seeking opportunities with other trading partners in Asia. We recognize protectionism has reared its head south of the border, but Ontario remains open to dialogue and trade with our US friends. This government is re-enforcing to the rest of the world that Ontario is a great place to do business, and raising our international profile.

The Business Growth Initiative, these initiatives that I've talked about with regard to continuing to expand our international profile, our international trading footprint—all of these things will provide and support opportunities for businesses to grow, for businesses to hire more Ontarians and to allow us all to prosper. These are important initiatives to help our economy to continue to grow that this government is taking and that are included in this budget.

Speaker, a balanced budget is more than just about a bottom-line number. It's the foundation to helping families across the province. It's about creating opportunities and providing the supports that people need to succeed. This budget is dedicated to those goals, and reflects what's important, really, to all of us, in all of our ridings, in all parts of Ontario. Whether it's giving young people free prescription medication, transforming OSAP to provide free tuition for more than 210,000 post-secondary students or helping businesses grow, a balanced budget means more funding for the programs and services that people depend on. We are carrying out our commitment so that everyone has equal opportunities for success.

Let me share with you, Speaker, a little bit of what I mean by that. Every day, people across Ontario are working hard to build a better future for themselves and for their families. With this budget, we are helping make everyday costs more affordable.

In last week's budget, the government announced the proposed OHIP+: Children and Youth Pharmacare Program, providing free drug coverage to all children and youth aged 24 and under across the province, regardless of family income, starting January 1, 2018. It will completely cover the costs of medications funded through the Ontario drug program. There will be no deductible. There will be no copayment.

OHIP+ is the first program of its kind in Canada. It's really a historic investment in the health care of our kids, representing what a strong and balanced Ontario can do. OHIP+ is just one of many strategic investments we're making to help Ontario families.

Speaker, I'm incredibly excited about this. I think that the OHIP+ program is not just Ontario showing leadership across the country, but this is something that's going to touch the lives of four million children and young people across Ontario. I think the fact that it covers over 4,400 medications—young people will know, or their families who are purchasing those prescriptions on their behalf will know, that they can get those prescriptions free, and it won't be as though some drugs are covered and others are not. This will cover over 4,400 medications, give those families certainty and help those young children not only be healthier and go on to be healthier in the years to come, but it will also help families with something I talked about at the very outset, their cost of living.

I'm really excited about this initiative, Speaker. I know, in speaking with my constituents in Etobicoke Centre since the budget has come out, that this has been something that they've spoken to me about a lot. Whether these people are young people or parents or seniors, they're excited about it, so I'm really excited about this particular initiative.

The other thing I want to talk about that I hear a lot about and touches again on that issue that I raised at the beginning, which is about the cost of living, quality of life and services for Ontarians, is child care. We've heard from many young families that finding affordable, quality child care has really been a challenging task, because there aren't enough affordable options near their home or work. That is why with this budget we are helping 100,000 more children access affordable, licensed child care, to give them the best start in life and to support families across Ontario.

In 2017-18, this will support access to licensed child care for 24,000 children up to four years old through new fee-subsidy spaces, create new licensed child care spaces in schools, help parents with low and middle incomes, and meet the demand of a growing and changing Ontario.

I'm excited about this, too, Speaker. When I talk to young families, when I talk to people who are struggling with their cost of living, one of the things that they raise

most often with me is child care: the fact that it's often not affordable, or the fact that they just can't find the spaces. So this is something that I think will make a meaningful difference in the lives of 100,000 children, and I think that in itself is a sign that the government has been able to make use of the fact that we've balanced the budget, that we've made better use of tax dollars, and now we're in a position to be able to make even greater investments than before to help people with their quality of life.

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With this budget, we are also helping young people acquire the skills that they need to find good jobs. I've talked about helping with the cost of living with regard to pharmacare for young people. I've talked about child care and supporting young people and their families in those respects. But we also need to talk about what happens to young people after that.

We've heard from students across the province about the challenges of landing a good job without relevant work experience. I've spoken in this House on many occasions about this issue, about the number of young people who are out there hoping to start careers and who struggle to find those careers. Relevant work experience is fundamental, in many cases, to young people being able to start those careers off, and start them off with their full potential.

Employers, schools and students agree that hands-on learning opportunities are essential for successfully starting a career. That's why our government is investing nearly \$190 million over three years to create 40,000 new work-related opportunities for students and recent graduates, giving them the experience they need to land their first jobs through Ontario's new Career Kick-Start Strategy. That's what we're calling it, Speaker: Ontario's new Career Kick-Start Strategy. These opportunities not only help close the job-experience gap, but they will help more students get exposed to different career options to help guide important decisions that they will make, whether it's choosing the right classes in high school to meet a prerequisite for college or university programs or choosing an apprenticeship to get certified in a trade.

Speaker, when I think about the evolution of my career, and from so many of the young people whom I talk to, most young people don't know from a young age what they want to do, and then just pursue that education and land in a job, and pursue that career throughout their life. Their choices of focus, particularly in their post-secondary education, and their choices of careers are, to a great extent, driven by their experiences, and in particular their work experiences. So this is, in part, about making sure young people get a fast start towards the career path that they want to pursue.

In many cases, it will also help them make a more informed and knowledge-based decision about the career that they're going to pursue. I think that's exciting for that reason as well.

That is why this government is also investing in guidance and career counselling to better support

students as they plan their future. Opening doors to new careers is really part of our plan to ensure that we continue to create jobs in Ontario, to grow our economy and help people in their everyday lives.

As someone who is a young person who recently has gone through that process of trying to navigate my career, as someone who has spent a lot of my time over the past three years as MPP trying to move forward to help young people select the right career path, select the right post-secondary option, I'm really, really, really excited about the Career Kick-Start Strategy and what it means for the future of so many young people, who will be the leaders of tomorrow, who will be the drivers of our economy tomorrow and in the years to come.

To further support students and recent graduates, Speaker, the new OSAP will provide free tuition for more than 210,000 students starting their post-secondary education this fall and help more students make the choice to pursue education an easier one.

We are also helping more graduates reduce financial pressures as they enter a new phase in their lives by delaying payments for the provincial portion of their OSAP loans until they start making \$35,000 a year.

Speaker, I just finished telling you about the initiatives to make sure that young people can make an informed decision about their career path and about post-secondary education and about the career that they'd like to pursue, and then getting that first bullet on their resumé through that experience, which is part of the kick-start program. But once students have made that choice and they've made a decision to pursue a post-secondary education, we're helping them to make that post-secondary education even more accessible. We're making tuition free for 210,000 students across Ontario. We're also, as I said, delaying the payments for the provincial portion of their OSAP loans until they make \$35,000 a year, so they can really wait until they're more established before they have to make those payments.

We also know that learning is a lifelong journey. For adults looking to find their next learning opportunity, to land a better job or to move into their next career, with this budget we are also launching the Ontario Lifelong Learning and Skills Plan. This plan will help adults get the literacy, numeracy and digital skills needed for our changing economy. Supporting people in getting the training and access to education that they need is not just about young people; it's about people of all ages. The Ontario Lifelong Learning and Skills Plan is foundational to that, and I'm thrilled to see that in this budget as well.

I talked a lot at the beginning about the costs of living and how many families are struggling to manage the increasing costs of living. One of the issues that comes up when we talk about the costs of living is, of course, housing affordability. This has been a hot topic at dinner tables for many months, especially within the greater Golden Horseshoe. A lot of that is driven by the fact that our housing market has seen unprecedented growth in the last few years, with average resale house prices in Toronto up more than 33% from the previous year. Hamilton's,

Kitchener-Waterloo's and Peterborough's resale prices are also up more than 30%, and in Barrie they are up by about 43%.

While a strong housing market reflects Ontario's strong economy, high prices make it difficult for many Ontarians to buy their first homes. This is especially true of young people in our province who are increasingly being shut out of the market.

Our government is concerned about rapidly rising housing prices and rent. Last week, the government announced the Ontario fair housing plan, a proposed suite of measures to help more homebuyers and renters find affordable spaces to call home. These measures include:

—a proposed 15% non-resident speculation tax;

—proposed amendments to the City of Toronto Act and the Municipal Act to give Toronto and potentially other municipalities the option to tax vacant homes, encouraging owners to sell or rent unoccupied units, which will increase supply; and

—all municipalities would have greater power to spur housing development on vacant lots by having the right to provide a higher tax on serviced land that has been approved for housing development.

Taken together, these measures would, if passed, help address supply and make housing more available and more affordable, particularly in large urban centres like Toronto, Hamilton and Ottawa.

We want to protect homeowners and avoid the unintended consequences of new policies to temper the housing market. That's why our next steps are thoughtful and measured. Our plan will keep the province competitive and help more people benefit from our economic growth while helping to address the pressures that they're facing from increasing costs of living and the pressures they feel from the growth in the value of the housing market.

I want to shift gears here for a moment. Many of us have cared for someone who needed our help—maybe a child, maybe a parent or maybe both. I know that my grandmother, who passed away a number of years ago now—it was very, very fortunate for our family that my mother was able to care for her. For many years, my grandmother lived with my mother, and she cared for her.

There are many people who are in that situation of caring for an aging parent but also raising their children. There are many people who are sandwiched between, again, caring for that young child but also an aging parent, being a caregiver to an ill loved one. This can be incredibly difficult. This is not an easy job, but it's a job title that many more of us are taking on, and the numbers show it. For example, an estimated 214,000 people now live with dementia and that number is expected to rise to 266,000 by 2022 and to more than 430,000 by 2038.

The responsibility of caring for someone living with dementia can take an enormous physical, emotional and financial toll on caregivers, whether they are family members, friends or even neighbours. Nearly half of people living with Alzheimer's or other dementias have caregivers who are distressed.

I can tell you that in my riding—this is now going back a year and a half or so ago when I held a consultation in Etobicoke Centre on the province's dementia strategy to hear what people would like to see in the dementia strategy—one of the things that really, really, really struck me was the number of caregivers who came and presented at the meeting and spoke about the toll that it's taking on them.

With this budget, this government's new dementia strategy will provide more than \$100 million over three years to support those people with dementia and those who care for them through better-coordinated and more enhanced services.

The strategy will include funding to expand province-wide access to community programs, enhanced access to care, provide more information and support as early as possible once a diagnosis is made, and improve training and education in dementia care for personal support workers, physicians, nurses and other front-line workers.

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In addition, this budget helps to lighten the load a little. We'll invest another \$20 million in 2017 for respite care. This funding will go towards personal support services or nursing support at home, allowing caregivers to schedule breaks from the crucial work of caring for a loved one. With these new investments in respite care, our three-year investment for respite care will total \$120 million.

But that's not all. The government recognizes the financial strain that caregivers can feel, and so with this budget, the government intends to introduce a new Ontario Caregiver Tax Credit, replacing the current caregiver and infirm dependant tax credits. This new, non-refundable provincial tax credit would streamline and extend support for individuals caring for ill family members, and will be in addition to the new Canada caregiver credit, starting in the 2017 tax year.

Supporting those who care for loved ones with health needs is part of our plan to create jobs, grow our economy and really help with their everyday lives. As I said, when I've spoken to caregivers, when I've spoken to family members who are caring for their aging parents, I know that these types of initiatives will help them very much.

Leading up to this budget, I travelled across the province as part of the pre-budget consultation process, and heard loud and clear from people across the province that they want us to invest more in our health care and in our hospitals, so patients and their families can get the right care when and where they need it. A balanced budget allows us to make these new investments, to meet the needs of patients today and in the future.

With this budget, the government is increasing health care investments by \$11.5 billion over the next three years. This includes a new \$7-billion booster shot to health care, and builds on our commitment that we made in the 2016 budget. This investment will improve access to care. It will expand mental health and addiction services and enhance the experience and recovery of

patients. It also includes \$1.3 billion to further reduce wait times, so people can get surgery faster, see a specialist faster, and access home and community care faster.

We will make targeted investments in MRIs and diagnostic equipment, cataract and cardiovascular surgeries, and hip and knee replacements.

But that's not all, Speaker. With this budget, we are committing to several new major hospital projects across the province, including a redevelopment project at Hamilton Health Sciences, renovations at Queensway Health Centre, Mississauga, and the development of a new hospital along the James Bay coast, adding to the 34 projects under way, with another \$9-billion investment over 10 years. This additional funding will provide faster access to care and help to meet the health care needs of our growing and aging population.

As I was referring to earlier, our costs of living are increasing as our economy grows. A strong rental market is one that balances affordability for tenants with the right conditions for continued investment in rental properties. As I pointed out, housing is essential, and everyone deserves housing choices that are affordable.

The government understands that the rising costs of renting or buying are creating significant barriers for too many people, too many families. The fair housing plan is a comprehensive way to address the recent price surges, protect renters and buyers, and bring stability to the real estate market so that affordable housing is available to everyone, so that Ontarians can continue to put down roots in the communities they love, like Etobicoke Centre, setting them and their children up for success.

To realize this vision, we have included a proposed amendment in Bill 127, the Stronger, Healthier Ontario Act, 2017, to increase housing supply. The City of Toronto Act, 2006, and Municipal Act, 2001, would be amended so that Toronto, and potentially other municipalities, may impose a tax on vacant residential homes in certain circumstances.

The proposed amendments would set out requirements for municipal bylaws and give Toronto, and potentially other municipalities, greater power in encouraging owners to sell or rent out unoccupied residential units, thereby increasing supply.

Bill 127 has many more positive changes. Ontario's agri-food sector, including primary agriculture, is a cornerstone of our economy and helps underpin growth in our rural communities. A fair and sustainable property tax system is essential for rural economic development and growth in our agricultural industry.

Currently, agricultural processing and commercial activities on farms are taxed at industrial or commercial rates, depending on the activity taking place. Our farmers need fair tax assessment to remain competitive, and a fair property tax system is essential for rural economic development and the growth of the agricultural sector, and to ensure we have fresh and fairly priced food on the table every day. So this is something that touches everyone.

We're seeking to amend the Assessment Act, the Municipal Act and the City of Toronto Act to provide

municipalities with flexibility to introduce property tax rates for small-scale, value-added and commercial activities on farms. These amendments would provide municipalities with the option to tax a portion of the assessment attributable to small-scale, on-farm, value-added or commercial activity at a reduced rate, resulting in an overall reduction in the amount of property tax currently paid in respect of these activities.

This initiative is the result of consultations that our government held during the past year with the Ontario Federation of Agriculture, the Association of Municipalities of Ontario, several individual municipalities, and the Ministries of Municipal Affairs and Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs.

Our government understands the importance of encouraging emerging innovations in the agricultural sector. By allowing municipalities to apply a reduced tax rate for small-scale, value-added activities on farms, we're creating new opportunities for Ontario's farmers to increase farm revenue, improve farm viability and create new jobs. We're also proposing an amendment to provide the regulations to give municipalities the power to make decisions regarding local priorities with respect to tax reductions for vacant and excess land.

Ontario continues to increase support for municipalities, fostering a mature and sustainable provincial-to-municipal financial relationship. Another such example is through our proposed amendment to the Municipal Property Assessment Corporation Act, 1997, to reduce the size of the board and to allow former elected officials and former employees of a municipality to be appointed to the board as municipal representatives. MPAC is responsible for the administration of the property assessment system, including the establishment of assessed values for all properties in the province. As such, MPAC is responsible for ensuring that values placed on properties are fair and accurate.

The legislation currently provides for 15 members: eight municipal and two provincial members, and five taxpayers. The proposed amendment would remove one municipal and one taxpayer representative for a total of 13 members. At the same time, we propose to broaden eligibility for board membership to ensure that we have a diverse set of experienced voices around the boardroom table. Currently, municipal representatives on the MPAC board are restricted to sitting elected officials, municipal officers or employees. If the board member ceases to be an elected official or an officer or employee, they are removed from the board, as of now. This amendment would allow former elected officials and municipal officers and employees to be appointed as well, therefore increasing the pool of talented appointees.

We are also focusing on the optimum return for dollars spent by incorporating more effective collections tools and mechanisms in collecting provincial crown debts in Bill 127, by proposing an amendment to the Ministry of Revenue Act, 1990. Collecting what is owed to the province reduces the burden for everyone, for all Ontarians, and ensures that everyone pays their fair

share. Money recovered contributes to investment in the priorities that I've talked about previously. The government needs to enhance administration and incorporate effective collections tools and enforcement activities as a way to improve the integrity of our fiscal system and to build our capacity.

Enhancing the integrity of the non-tax administration system also requires a focused pursuit of those who owe the government money. Improving collections tools and processes will ensure that money currently owed will be collected and available for those services where they are most needed, such as health care and education.

The Ministry of Finance currently provides collection services to other ministries for their outstanding non-tax debts. At the end of the day, this amendment allows us to take action on outstanding debts to ensure revenue integrity so that we are able to allocate valuable funds towards key public services, like our world-class health care system and education. Again, it's about making sure the money that is owed to the province is collected to make sure that everybody pays their fair share, so that we can support the services that matter to our constituents across the province.

Bill 127 also seeks to strengthen pensions and protect beneficiaries with proposed amendments to the Pension Benefits Act. Strengthening retirement security has been a key component of the government's plan to build up Ontario, and we're proposing to enhance the powers of the Superintendent of Financial Services to help strengthen regulatory oversight of Ontario registered pension plans. The amendments would give the superintendent the authority to order an administrator of a pension plan to hold a meeting to discuss specified matters. In addition, the superintendent would have the authority to order a plan administrator to provide members, former members, retired members and other persons entitled to benefits under the pension plan with information as specified.

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We're also proposing amendments to help address the issue of pension plan beneficiaries who are difficult to locate. Currently, the act and regulations require the administrator of a pension plan to provide a written statement about the pension plan to every former member and retired member once every two years. The proposed amendments that we have here would give the superintendent the authority to waive this requirement if he or she is satisfied that there are grounds to believe that the former member or retired member is missing. Therefore, this amendment would ease the administrative burden on plan administrators.

The government continues to develop proposed amendments to better protect pension plan beneficiaries. We'll take into account the experience of other jurisdictions and ensure effective and efficient regulation of the sector. That's really what these amendments that I've spoken about are all about.

Another proposed amendment in Bill 127 will allow the Ontario Securities Commission to continue providing

fair, vigorous and timely enforcement of our securities laws. The OSC devotes significant attention and resources to strengthening enforcement and investor protection. Securities regulators and self-regulatory organizations, or SROs, have struggled in many cases to collect fines and other monetary sanctions imposed on investment industry players who don't abide by the rules. Fines need to be paid, not simply levied.

The proposed amendments we have here would permit SRO orders to be enforced as if they were orders from the Ontario Superior Court. The SROs we are talking about are the Investment Industry Regulatory Organization of Canada and the Mutual Fund Dealers Association of Canada.

Under the current system, SROs must commence a civil action to enforce monetary penalty payments. The amendments would give SROs the ability to use enforcement mechanisms for court orders to collect monetary sanctions from individuals who have left the industry more expediently and, of course, less expensively. This is consistent with securities legislation in Alberta and Quebec.

The inability to collect some of the financial sanctions SROs order weakens their authority. It undermines the deterrent effect penalties should have in preventing misconduct in the sector. We're helping to reverse this trend by providing SROs with additional enforcement tools to better enable them to pursue their regulatory activities.

The proposed amendments would also provide that OSC staff cannot be required to testify or otherwise provide evidence—any book, record, document or thing obtained during the course of their work with the OSC—in civil proceedings. I have to emphasize that this does not include a proceeding under the Securities Act or a judicial review relating to such a proceeding.

Another proposed housekeeping amendment would provide the OSC with the authority to deal with applications under the Business Corporations Act that are required to be filed electronically. The OSC has indicated that its oversight is necessary to ensure that the operations and services of information processors are transparent, fair and available to everyone who is participating in the market. Information processors consolidate trading information from multiple marketplaces to provide market participants with full and complete information on securities they wish to trade. Therefore, we're proposing to give the OSC the ability to designate information processors and impose terms and conditions on their operations if the OSC considers it in the public interest.

Additionally, we propose to amend the definition of what is known as a clearing agency, and this is to protect consumers. This will help do a few things:

—first of all, capture exchanges carrying on clearing functions, addressing the fact that the majority of clearing agencies regulated by the OSC are now owned by exchanges.

—amend the exclusion for registered dealers so that it applies only when they are acting as an intermediary in

paying funds or delivering securities in connection with trades or other securities transactions. This reflects the treatment of other financial intermediaries.

—exclude payment systems, since their oversight generally falls within federal jurisdiction.

All of these changes that I've talked about with regard to regulating and overseeing the market are really designed to help better protect investors, consumers and the people of Ontario, who are putting away and expecting a return and safekeeping of their hard-earned money.

Another key area of interest for the government is regulating the production and flow of tobacco. Since 2015, the government has been taking steps to impede the flow of raw leaf tobacco to illegal manufacturers through the introduction of regulations that provide effective oversight. The proposed amendments would strengthen certain existing raw leaf compliance and enforcement provisions, such as requiring a person transporting raw leaf tobacco within Ontario, whose vehicle is stopped and detained, to produce documents relating to the tobacco being transported. The amendments would also clarify an interjurisdictional transporter's duties when transporting tobacco in bulk or raw leaf tobacco, and create offences and penalties in situations where transporters fail to keep specified documents and information in possession of drivers.

Furthermore, there would be offences and civil penalties for registrants failing to comply with record-keeping requirements.

The amendments would also require that tobacco retail dealers with a permit under the Retail Sales Tax Act transition to the Tobacco Retail Dealer's Permit as of July 1, 2018. Additional amendments include restricting the importation and possession of cigarette filter components, such as acetate tow, to registered manufacturers.

To promote compliance, we also propose to publish convictions under the act.

The government will continue to collaborate with our federal partners to ensure a consistent and co-ordinated approach to addressing tobacco issues. Our approach includes building collaborative relationships with First Nation communities to support a dialogue on ways to address this challenge as partners.

In Ontario, as I was speaking to earlier, one of the priorities for many people in my community in Etobicoke Centre, and for people in every riding represented here, is to have a world-class health care system, a universal health care system. The government continues to take steps to ensure we improve outcomes and overall patient experience, and increase access to quality health care.

To make our health care system more efficient and effective, we're proposing to amend the Nursing Act, 1991, in response to a government commitment to expand the scope of practice of registered nurses by authorizing them to prescribe drugs for certain non-complex conditions, and to communicate a diagnosis for the purposes of prescribing.

Speaker, I know that you, as a former nurse, would appreciate the value and importance of a measure like this.

I think it's essential that we maintain our very high standards, our excellent standards, as we build a health care system that puts patients first, enabling us to deliver better and easier access to care.

If the proposed amendments are approved, the College of Nurses of Ontario will be responsible for determining the requirements and parameters that are necessary to enable RNs to appropriately prescribe. The college would establish those in a regulation. This will help us on our path to sustaining the health care system for generations to come.

Another key area that the government is committed to is our electricity distribution sector. A modern and reliable electricity sector is an integral part not only of our quality of life but of our economy. It's important that local distribution companies have the capacity and resources to adopt modern technologies and deliver power in a reliable and cost-effective way. That's why we're proposing changes to the Ontario Infrastructure and Lands Corporation Act, 2011, as part of Bill 127.

Under the current act, Infrastructure Ontario may provide financing to a local distribution company that has been incorporated under the section 142 of the Electricity Act, for the purpose of generating, transmitting, distributing or retailing electricity, if 100% of its shares are held by one or more municipal corporations. The proposed amendment would allow Infrastructure Ontario to provide financing when two or more LDCs amalgamate, if the following criteria are met: firstly, that at least one of the corporations was a party to a financing agreement with Infrastructure Ontario at least six months before the application to amalgamate was submitted to the Ontario Energy Board; and, secondly, that at least 90% of the shares of the amalgamated corporation are municipally owned.

This amendment would allow Infrastructure Ontario to continue to fund the amalgamated corporation under the existing agreement, but wouldn't allow Infrastructure Ontario and the corporation to enter into a new financing agreement.

Part of our commitment to building Ontario up is the Infrastructure Ontario loan program, which provides affordable long-term financing to renew public infrastructure and deliver value to customers and residents all across the province. Since 2003, the loan program has continually evolved to support government priorities and provincial need.

Currently, there are 11 sectors eligible for loans, including local service boards, non-profits, affordable housing providers and indigenous health access centres. The IO loan program has been integral in financing infrastructure projects throughout our province, and has advanced \$8.1 billion in loans for over 2,300 projects across the province.

Our party is actually the only one in the Legislature with a credible plan to invest in public infrastructure, such as schools and hospitals, and we are committed to helping Ontarians invest in and maintain critical infrastructure in their communities.

1620

The government recognizes that consolidation can improve efficiency and the capacity of utilities to meet priorities, and that capital can play an important role in facilitating consolidation. The objective is to help meet the government's objective of removing barriers to LDC consolidations. Without changes to the eligibility criteria, Infrastructure Ontario would need to recall the outstanding loans. So spurring consolidation and encouraging efficiencies through this proposed amendment will benefit the entire sector, and the end consumer.

These are just a few of the changes proposed in Bill 127, the Stronger, Healthier Ontario Act. Bill 127 continues the government's plan to build a stronger Ontario, a healthier Ontario, by investing in our future while growing the economy and creating jobs.

I started by talking about some of the priorities that I heard from people in my community when I was knocking on doors, when I was meeting them for the very first time. I heard them throughout the election campaign and I hear them every single day in my constituency office. When I think about this budget, when I think about this bill and I think about the initiatives that I've spoken about, that Minister Sousa spoke about during his speech last week, when I think about the comments that have been made by my fellow caucus members here over the course of the last day or so as we've been debating the budget and the budget motion, to my mind, this is a budget that really takes incredibly important steps in tackling those issues, those priorities that my constituents have raised and, frankly, that constituents in all our ridings consider to be important.

What I wanted to do was to just walk through and summarize some of the things that are in this budget. I've talked about them in a little bit more detail, but I'd like to bring them together and summarize a little bit of what's in this budget. I want to start by saying that the foundation to this budget is a strong economy—a strong economy that allows us, in conjunction with sound financial management, to be in a fiscal position to be able to make the investments that need to be made in the programs and the priorities that I've just spoken about.

When I talk about the economy, I think about the fact that Ontario's economy is growing faster than all of the G7 countries—again, a reflection on the hard work of Ontarians, a reflection on the fact that the policies that are being put in place to support the economy are taking hold and are now making a difference. One of the greatest indicators of that is our unemployment rate, in and around 6.5%. The fact that that unemployment rate is the lowest in Canada of all the provinces, all the jurisdictions in Canada—but, really, it's not just the absolute numbers that matter. It's the progress on those numbers that I think is a great sign. So that unemployment rate isn't important for its own sake, but what's important is that, since the recession, Ontario has added almost 700,000 new jobs, and most of them are full-time jobs. That's 700,000 Ontarians, who live in all our communities, who have been able to gain employment—

or gain employment back, after the global recession which hit Ontario hard. I think it's a sign not only of greater prosperity for many people, but it's a sign that businesses are investing in Ontario. That's why we're one of the leaders in foreign direct investment. It's a sign that our economy is positioned to succeed in the years to come. So I'm proud of that. I share that economic story because it underpins what we're able to do in this budget.

I spoke on the health care file. We're talking about an \$11.5-billion investment in health care, and that includes the \$7-billion booster shot. It includes OHIP+, the pharmacare program for young people under the age of 25, which covers over 4,400 prescription drugs. This is about helping young people be healthier. It's also about making sure that we're helping Ontarians with their cost of living. This will cover, as I said, over 4,400 drugs, which means that it will cover some of the most expensive drugs out there and allow families who are faced with that difficult situation of having a young person who needs those highly specialized and expensive prescription drugs to be able to access them. That's really, really important, again, to our health, to the health of young people, but also for the ability of families to cope with the costs of living that continue to rise in our province. This will touch four million Ontarians; four million Ontarians are under the age of 25 and will be able to access the OHIP+ pharmacare program.

I mentioned this earlier, but there's \$9 billion over 10 years to build hospitals. I spoke about the hospital in Hamilton and I spoke about hospitals and the impact it's going to have across our province, including in Etobicoke. I think that this is really exciting.

Something I didn't mention earlier but is important in noting in my summary here is the investment in the operations of hospitals. We're not just building hospitals but we're also providing all hospitals with additional operating funds. That will allow them to provide greater access to care more quickly and provide higher-quality care. When I speak to my constituents, when I meet with my seniors' advisory group every month, health care is something I often hear about as being a priority. I think that these funds, this investment, will go a long way toward addressing some of the concerns that I've heard from people in my community, but especially my seniors.

It includes investment to reduce wait times. One of the things that I commonly hear from people, from seniors in my community, is how important it is to not just provide quality care and accessible care, but that we get those wait times down, particularly for those referrals to a specialist. So we're investing to try to address that issue as well.

I'm personally very excited about the dementia strategy, something that I know I and many in our caucuses have advocated for and fought for. This, I think, will make an incredible difference not just in the lives of those who are struggling with dementia and Alzheimer's, but those who are providing care, for those in the sandwich generation who are caring for their aging parents but also caring for their children. These are some of the highlights within health care.

Within education, I'm excited about what we're doing there as well. Again, underpinned by the fact that we've balanced the budget and it allows us to make this investment, we're putting an additional \$6.4 billion over three years into education. We're building schools—\$16 billion over 10 years to build schools. That, to me, is a reflection of the fact that we want to make sure that we provide the best education possible. Fundamental to that is making sure that students have access to the best facilities in the locations where they need them. That's what that investment is all about. It will make a real difference in the lives of so many families and in the quality of education for so many young people.

We're also making investments that are important on the issue of reducing class size. When I hear from parents who talk about how they think education could be improved, this is one of the areas they talk about a lot. I'm proud that we're continuing to make progress in this area.

Those are some of the initiatives that I am particularly excited about within education in this budget.

One of the things you've heard me speak a lot about, Speaker, not just here in the Legislature but in our conversations and in my work within the Ministry of Finance and with my colleagues, is post-secondary education, making sure young people have access to post-secondary education and making sure young people can make more informed choices about their futures, about their education and about their careers. This budget helps to address those issues.

The new OSAP will be extended to provide access to free tuition for 210,000 young people. We're increasing the threshold at which a young person has to start repaying their OSAP loans from \$25,000 per year to \$35,000 per year, easing the burden of any OSAP loans that they are carrying.

The Career Kick-Start program: That will provide young people with experiential learning—a critical step to not only allowing them to get that first bullet on the resumé, but allowing them to have experiences that allow them to be informed about the choices ahead of them and the careers they can pursue in a very meaningful way. We're really proud of the steps we're taking with regard to young people in their pursuit of their careers.

There are a number of things that really touch people in the areas of not just the cost of living, but helping them with their everyday lives. I've talked about pharmacare. Child care is another important one that I'm really proud of in this budget. This will really make a difference: 100,000 new spaces across Ontario over the next four years; 24,000 in the coming fiscal year. The new OSAP that I just spoke about: That will make a difference in the cost of living for families, but obviously also in the opportunities that are extended to their children.

I'm particularly excited as well about the initiatives we've taken with regard to housing. Whether it be the tax on non-resident buyers of property, whether it be extending to municipalities the option of taxing vacant homes, or a number of other measures, these are the measures

that will allow housing to become more affordable for so many families. That's something that we on this side take great pride in. This is something that is a priority for people, and we've responded in a comprehensive, thoughtful way. As someone who had the opportunity to work on this, particularly on the issue of the affordability of buying homes, with Minister Sousa and others in our caucus, I am particularly proud of the work that we've done there in responding to the needs of Ontarians.

1630

There are a number of things in this budget that also speak specifically to seniors. I've mentioned some of them, but as someone who represents that community in Etobicoke Centre—which has one of the highest percentages of seniors of any riding in the province—I can't help but be enthused and excited about some of these initiatives: the dementia strategy, something that I've spoken a little bit about; the transit tax credit for seniors, so seniors will be able to get a tax credit for their use of transit; the investments in long-term care; the investments to support caregivers, but also the tax credit to support caregivers.

All of these initiatives, and there are many others—the things I've talked about in health care as an example and the cost-of-living measures that I talked about a few moments ago—all of these things really help seniors. I'm proud of the package of things that the government has come up with to really enhance the quality of life for seniors, but also support them with the costs of living.

I think one of the things that, at the end of the day, underpins our ability to make these investments and underpins the quality of life of Ontarians is the need to create opportunity in the province. There are a number of measures that are going to be doing that. The Career Kick-Start program is an example of that; the new OSAP which allows access to post-secondary is an example of that; and the investments in new technology.

But perhaps most impactful are the investments in infrastructure: \$190 billion over 13 years, and we continue to increase the amount we're investing there. That is hospitals, it's schools, it's roads, it's transit, it's making a difference in the everyday life of people and their quality of life, whether it be in the quality of their health care, the quality of their education or their commute times. It also really makes a difference in driving our economy. Not only are these investments creating jobs, but, more importantly, that infrastructure underpins our ability to attract investment, to attract the most talented people from around the world and to really create jobs and prosperity for everyone. I'm really proud of the initiatives that we're taking there.

I think lastly what I'll say is that one of the areas that I've spent a lot of time on with Minister Sousa as his parliamentary assistant, or prior to that with Minister Matthews at the Treasury Board, is making sure that we make the most of every tax dollar that we collect and make the most of every tax dollar that we spend. The people of Ontario deserve that. The people of my community deserve that and ask for that.

I have worked—and I know a lot of members of our caucus and of our cabinet have as well—towards that goal very, very hard. That hard work, that discipline in financial management, has allowed us to make better use of taxpayer dollars and has allowed us to balance the budget. That has allowed us to make all of the investments that I just spoke about, the investments that are going to touch on the lives of the people of Ontario.

When I started, I talked about the priorities that I heard from my constituents in Etobicoke Centre, priorities I know that we all share and that all of our constituents share. We've made investments in health care, we've made investments in education, we're continuing to build infrastructure, we're continuing to help people with the costs of living and we're addressing issues within the housing market. We've done this as a result of a strong economy and through sound fiscal management that has allowed us to balance the budget.

I'm proud of the fact that we've balanced the budget. We're going to balance it next year and we're going to balance it the year after that—three years in a row at least—and that's a sign of the hard work of the people of Ontario and the hard work of this government. So, as a result of this work, as a result of those investments, I sure hope that I can count on the members opposite to support this budget not because it's good for them or their party, but because it's good for the people of Ontario.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Questions and comments?

Mr. Jim McDonell: I think I can smell some wood burning here, but I'm not sure what it is.

I think people in Ontario are getting tired of the charade. They talk about the schools they're opening, but they're not talking about having a record of closing more schools than any other government in the history of Ontario. That doesn't include the 300 that are still being talked about over the next couple of years.

We see hydro discussion, but nothing in the budget. It's hard to get a real indication of what's going on here, because nothing is displayed. We have a budget that typically shows next year's cash flows and the year after. Those are gone. So, again, why the change? Are they afraid we might see something, or that their numbers don't add up—which, I guess, they don't add up. I'm waiting to hear our critic talk about it, because I think he'll make some very good points.

We talk about the jobs created. I got a letter from a young student in my riding who talks about us having the worst youth unemployment rates east of the Rockies, and he's right. Thank God for Alberta's economy going into the toilet, or we would no longer be above the average. It took other areas of the country, for external reasons, having serious problems—Newfoundland, in the same way, with the oil industry—so that we finally came up above the average. It just happened to be with the price of oil.

But that should have been a real benefit to us, because the price of oil went down and the price of energy went down—except that it all didn't go down. The price of

electricity skyrocketed, even though natural gas rates are lower than they've been in decades. We see the rates of electricity going down in our neighbours because they were utilizing natural gas to generate electricity. But this government just couldn't get it right, on so many issues.

He talked about the 4,500 drugs in OHIP+. Great idea, except that they're the same drugs that are currently there, that aren't the innovative drugs we're looking for and that we hear of every day.

We were looking forward to a change.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): The member from Kenora–Rainy River.

Ms. Sarah Campbell: The challenge will be in trying to poke holes in what the member from the Liberal Party had talked about when he was trying to sell all the benefits of the budget, and trying to do that in two minutes. Certainly, it's something that we could go on and on about.

What I really wanted to focus on is the area of education. This budget doesn't come even close to undoing the damage that has already been done by this Liberal government over the past 14 years. In fact, it doesn't even undo the damage that was recently done by this Liberal government.

It's a patchwork of policies that gives with one hand and takes back with the other. One of the examples is that this government likes to pat itself on the back over its policy that gives families with incomes under \$50,000 enough money and grants to cover the average cost of tuition. But at the same time, this government is cutting special education funding by \$4.6 million across the province, and cutting the Rainy River District School Board's special education fund by \$91,000.

It can't be an either-or situation with education funding. It needs to be cohesive; it needs to be consistent across the province. But we all know in this room, and we know across Ontario, that if we don't give the kids the tools that they need from a very young age, they will not be able to take advantage of post-secondary education, even if it is free. So it's a policy that does not make sense.

If this government is truly concerned about helping kids and giving kids the tools that they need to succeed later on in life, and not just concerned about flashy titles and flashy black covers of budgets, then they will come up with a policy that makes sense and properly supports our youth.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Questions and comments?

Mr. James J. Bradley: I thought that it was an excellent address which really outlined the benefits of this budget.

It has been well received around the province. I can tell it was well received because my local right-wing radio talk show didn't phone me to ask me for my reaction, so it must mean that it's a good one. The local newspaper, the local Postmedia, didn't call me to ask me. I gave some comments before the budget, but then after the budget, they didn't phone me to say, "Isn't it great, that what you asked for, you got?"

Anyway, we're very pleased in Niagara to have the Niagara Falls hospital, the one to look after Niagara south. Jim Diodati, the mayor, was delighted with it. My good friend Wayne Gates, the member for Niagara Falls, was delighted to see that there was funding for the green light on this hospital. It's going to be excellent for the Niagara Peninsula as a whole. Just as people all over the Niagara Peninsula use the brand new, \$759-million hospital in St. Catharines, they will be using that one in Niagara Falls. There are investments all over the Niagara Peninsula and elsewhere in the province.

I was particularly pleased with health care, because I've been campaigning with my friend the Minister of Health, to ask him to put certain things in the budget if he could propose them. The Minister of Finance was prepared to put them in.

I see increases in funding for education. I know my friends in the teaching community will be delighted to hear the news that there's more funding there. We're building all kinds of new facilities and infrastructure.

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When I hear my friends on the Conservative benches—in one question they get up and say, “We've got to look after the debt in this province. You can't go on a spending spree.” And then the other members get up and ask us to spend more in specific areas. I forgive them because they're members of the opposition, and they're really good people from time to time, but they know the budget is a good budget.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): The member from Prince Edward–Hastings.

Mr. Todd Smith: I beg to differ with my colleague from the opposite side.

It's amazing, actually, sitting and listening to a member from the government speak for an hour. When a member from the government speaks about the budget and the first thing they brag about is the fact that it's a balanced budget, when everybody out there in the province knows it's not a balanced budget, it kind of makes everything else they're saying after that seem like rubbish, to be honest. But the thing is, that's the way this government has operated for 14 years, and I think, finally, the people of Ontario are starting to get the act. It's getting a little bit tired.

For months and months and months, our finance critic and our party were talking about the fact that this wasn't going to be a balanced budget because of all of the different reasons, and then we even found out some new ones in the budget as to why it wasn't really a balanced budget. The whole underpinning, as the member opposite liked to say about this budget, is the fact that it's based on a false reality. They did not build this budget on a foundation of rock. They built it on a foundation—it's not even sand. It's more like a foundation of ice cream, because it's melting underneath them. It's not built on anything stable.

The main talking point for the members of the government over the last few days about their budget is about their pharmacare program, but when you look at

the budget, it doesn't even say in the budget how much money this program is going to cost. It wasn't until after the fact—when we were in our budget lockup and looking at what the cost of this centrepiece of the Liberal budget in 2017 was going to be, it wasn't there. There was no cost involved. We found out after it was \$465 million, but is that actually based on fact?

The whole thing is based on a false reality. We'll get the straight goods in a moment from the finance critic of the PC caucus.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): The member from Etobicoke Centre has two minutes.

Mr. Yvan Baker: Well, it's interesting. The PCs, the opposition, like to find fault in what the government does, and then when the government does something really well, they claim it never happened. For example, they just claimed that the Ontario economy is not performing well relative to its other provincial counterparts, when I just outlined a tremendous amount of evidence to support that we are performing well relative to those other jurisdictions.

I've stood here for months, for years, listening to the opposition say, “You need to balance the budget. You need to balance the budget.” We balance the budget and they say, “Oh, it's not really a balanced budget. It's not really a balanced budget.” And then, the PCs—if you can believe it—can't find anything to criticize, so they get up and start complaining that they think there are gaps in coverage in the OHIP+ pharmacare program, a pharmacare program that they don't support. They don't support pharmacare at all on that side, and yet they're identifying gaps in our program.

Interjections.

Mr. Yvan Baker: I know I'm right when I hear that much heckling from the members opposite, Speaker.

The question for the opposition is, what would you cut? You want to start paying down the debt? What would you cut? Which infrastructure projects would you cancel? How many people would you let go? What programs would you cut?

What I'm hearing from the PCs, what I'm hearing from the opposition, is the same thing we hear year after year, term after term. During Mike Harris's days they cut, slashed and burned essential services. Then they took the 407, sold it off for a song, and they used it to balance the budget. They did that. The last time they campaigned on 100,000—

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Okay. Stop the clock. We'll give him a few more seconds.

Just a little friendly reminder from your friendly deputy Speaker that I have a list of people that were named this morning, and some of those people—

Interjection.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Not named, warned—sorry. Some of those people are being rather loud right now, so I would tread carefully.

Continue.

Mr. Yvan Baker: During the Harris days, they cut, slashed and burned essential services. Last election, they ran on 100,000 job cuts. Now they're basically saying they're going to cut, slash and burn again. That's the only way they can achieve what they're saying.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Further debate?

Mr. Victor Fedeli: Good afternoon, Speaker. Settle in for an hour of fact-filled fun with Fedeli Focus on Finance, hot off the press this morning. The budget issue is out. You can go to www.fedeli.com and download your own copy if you don't want to hear me talk about it.

I can tell you right off the bat, with an answer to the member's question, "What would you cut?"—well, I can think of starting by cutting some Liberals. That would be a good cut to take. That would also mean that we would cut waste, mismanagement and scandals. That would be automatic. If you want to know what we would cut, those are the three things we would cut: waste, mismanagement and scandals.

Let me start off. I'll go back to an earlier version of Focus on Finance, the one just before the end of the year, where the Financial Accountability Officer gave us his take on what's going to happen in the budget and what's going to happen with the economy and basically where our finances truly are. I'll get around to talking about some of the numbers that the government provided, but let's just talk about reality for a second.

The Financial Accountability Officer came out with their fall economic statement, and it has shown that a balanced budget can only be temporarily achieved through revenue generated from one-time asset sales, the use of contingency funds, revenue from cap-and-trade and new taxes. Interestingly enough, this alleged balanced budget, which I'm going to call an artificially balanced budget, did, indeed, come from all of those sources that the Financial Accountability Officer came from, and not from sound fiscal management or a strong economy—absolutely not, as a matter of fact. The message from the Financial Accountability Officer's report is very clear: The government's promise to balance the budget by 2017-18, just in time for the next election, can only be met using artificial solutions.

In his Economic and Fiscal Outlook, he states that in his report, he believes the budget has an actual deficit of \$2.6 billion. That's where his number is. He wouldn't have known at this time that Prime Minister Justin Trudeau was giving an extra \$1.5 billion in infrastructure funding. That would bump this up to \$4 billion. And he wouldn't have known at the time that the land transfer tax was going to be so astonishingly high here, particularly in Toronto. That added several hundred million more than the several hundred million more from last year. That accounts for the number we're going to use, which is a \$5-billion hole in the budget.

He's pretty close, actually. If you use his number—\$2.6 billion—plus those extra items that came in that he would never have known about when he did his own Economic and Fiscal Outlook, we're both on the same number: a \$5-billion hole in the budget.

He goes on to add, "Ontario's budget would be expected to remain in deficit over the next five years," and will "steadily deteriorate to \$3.7 billion by 2020-21." That would make it, of course, 13 years of consecutive deficits by the Liberal government.

He wraps up the report by saying, "The outlook for the budget balance ... has deteriorated," and concludes, "Ontario's budget would be expected to remain in deficit over the next five years."

Our numbers line up with the FAO's numbers. They happen to be the real numbers. You'll see as I break down some of these in a minute.

It's interesting that the Financial Accountability Officer is talking about the fact that they've raided the contingency fund for about \$600 million. He planned, at this time, on about \$800 million in one-time asset sales. We're going to learn it was a lot more than \$800 million, as they began to sell the LCBO headquarters down at the waterfront and the OPG headquarters just across the street here. Those brought in hundreds of millions more than he would have anticipated.

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But what he does bring to light is that administration fees brought in big money. We're talking \$2.5 billion. As an example, vehicle and driver registration fees. These are real pocketbook issues. Vehicle and driver registration fees have increased by \$503 million just in the last four years. That's just the increase in them. That's not the revenue that they bring in from those vehicle and driver fees; just the increase alone is 503 million bucks in four years. Other licensing fees: hunting, fishing, camping. Those rose \$228 million in the last four years. Again, that's just the increase.

Despite all this promise from the Premier of no new taxes, they're all in there, Speaker. If you hunt or fish or go camping, drive a car, get married, need a special event permit, whatever it is that you need, it got more expensive. Life got more expensive under this Liberal government last year and again this year, and in the years prior to that as well.

It seems that the Financial Accountability Officer had it absolutely right when he said, "Achieving and maintaining budget balance will likely require additional measures to raise revenue...." Again, in his news conference, he outlined to the media that the sale of one-time assets over 10 years would bring in \$5.7 billion to \$6.1 billion in order to help artificially balance the budget, because now that those assets are sold, you don't have any more. You don't have another OPG building across the street to sell. You don't have another LCBO building. But they do have a couple of more things they listed in the budget. They've got the Seaton property and the Lakeview property in Mississauga. Those will bring in big dough, and they'll use that money next year to bring in yet another artificial balance. That's their plan. They've outlined that in the budget already.

The Financial Accountability Officer said they're either going to have to raise revenue or lower expenses. I think you'll hear me talk about the budget's \$6 billion in

more spending, so they didn't lower their expenses. They obviously took the "Hey, let's raise the revenue" approach, and so they've gone into your pocket. As I say, whether you drive a car or hunt or fish or get married or what have you, all your costs have gone up.

I want to talk now a little bit more about the results of the Financial Accountability Officer's forecast and where we really did end up. The 2017 budget is absolutely more proof that families will continue to pay more and get less. That's the reality of where we are in Ontario. So while the government has announced that they have balanced the budget—I put air quotes around the word "balanced"—this is indeed far from reality. We have talked for months in this Legislature—in fact, for years, ever since we got the gas plant scandal documents that showed us why they cannot balance, that they are not on a path to balance. Ever since we got it from the government themselves that they have no path to balance, we've been able to stand here on solid footing and share the story of why they can't balance. That indeed is what's happening.

The government has said in those documents, "We are not on a path to balance." It's unfortunate for them that they got caught in the gas plant scandal and had to turn all those documents over because I'm going to read a little bit more from one of them later. We now have in their own words what I would actually call the truth, because they didn't know we'd ever see those documents. Never in their wildest imaginations would they have imagined that we would have obtained 300,000 financial documents, which continue every week to give us a treasure trove and shine a spotlight onto what they really are all about when they don't think we're ever going to be able to see this.

The government started adding this "asset optimization"—that was their fancy words for the sell-off of buildings and businesses like Hydro One. They started using that only a few years ago. If you look at the budget back in 2013-14, you're going to start to hear these things.

In 2014, they added \$1.1 billion to help lower their deficit or to improve on their deficit. Primarily that was from the sale of their General Motors stock. They put \$1.1 billion right into revenue, by the way, which of course didn't occur the next year, so they had to scramble and find something else to make up that missing revenue. That's why this is an artificial balance. There's a structural deficit. That money's spent but there's nothing coming in, unless they keep selling, and when the merry-go-round stops they're going to be in trouble or we, as the taxpayers, are going to be in trouble.

And 2016 was a real banner year, where they booked an additional \$2.2 billion over their 2015 forecast. The budget states that that \$2.2 billion came in "due to higher revenue from asset optimization in 2015-16...." That means they sold something. It went on to say that it consisted primarily of revenue from the sale of Hydro One. So that money went smack dab right into revenue. That isn't going to occur every year. Yes, maybe next

year it will, but in subsequent years, it's not going to recur. You don't have another Hydro One to pick out of your pocket and sell.

We, the taxpayers, are in a world of hurt here, Speaker, because first of all they're spending as if they believe they've balanced the budget when, in fact, they know they haven't; and that money is gone forever as well.

They also received \$800 million more in that last budget in land and sales taxes "due to Ontario's strong housing market...." As long as the housing market is as powerfully strong as it is, they're going to have this extra revenue. If it drops back down to the traditional revenue they've earned over the last 10 years, we're in a world of hurt again.

In this budget we hear the finance minister continue to say, "We've overachieved." It becomes a joke here. We all laugh when we hear that because a significant amount of the revenue isn't from overachieving. It's not from, as they said earlier, a strong economy or sound fiscal management. Here's where it's from, Speaker: It's plain and simple. It's all from one-time sources.

Let's start with a \$1.5-billion increase in infrastructure revenue from the feds. That's just the increase. Traditionally, it's about \$100 million from the feds in infrastructure; that's the traditional number we get. All of a sudden now it's billions higher, and it's in fact \$1.5 billion higher than last year. That again is not going to last forever, yet you've baked in your expenses as if you're going to get that money forever.

Land transfer tax: First of all, it was up \$600 million last year, and it's up a further \$400 million this year. That's a billion dollars more that the land tax revenue is up than traditional years. Again, if and when that falls back down to normal levels, we're out another billion dollars, except in the budget we've already baked now in the expenses of that billion going forward forever. That's why this is not truly balanced. These are one-time sources.

One-time asset sales are up \$1 billion. They're up to \$3 billion. We're booking \$3 billion a year now in asset sales. That can't last forever. We simply don't have those big assets left to sell.

When they finish off the Seaton and the Lakeview, as I mentioned, and when they finish the sale of Hydro One—although we're calling for them not to—that's it. Where do you get another \$3 billion a year to pump in? But we're spending that extra \$3 billion a year as if it's revenue now and we're going to have it forever. This is flawed logic. Anybody who ever took a financial literacy program would realize that this is not sustainable. That cannot continue.

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Finally, they added \$500 million from the teachers' pension plan as a line item. The Auditor General told them, "You cannot do that." The auditor stood up and said, "These numbers are so high now, they've become material." That means they're big enough now to warrant attention. Before, in the past, they were small enough that

they did not warrant the attention of the auditor and they were fine the way they were. She has claimed now—and we agree with her, as we agree with everything from the Auditor General, as opposed to this government, which continues to belittle the Auditor General, in very, very unsavoury ways, at everything she ever says. She has now said that that is so large, it needs to be handled differently. I'm sorry they don't quite understand that basic math.

That money is now booked, so all of a sudden, should the stock market pull back and those pension fund surpluses are not there, as happened in my role as mayor of the city of North Bay—I recall when there was a pension holiday and then, all of a sudden, the stock market fell and everybody had to double up into their pensions—this isn't going to be there. The point is, you can't be using these unusual or one-time assets and sales to pretend you balanced the budget.

So what does the government do? They come out with a budget: "We balanced." We come out with the information based on the Auditor General and the Financial Accountability Officer that says, "No, you haven't. Quit telling the people of Ontario you balanced when you darn well know you haven't." What do they do? They go on the attack. That's this government's usual method.

The Minister of Energy starts in the Sudbury Star: "Vic Fedeli ... claimed last week the Liberals are cutting \$70 million from the budget of the Ministry of Northern Development and Mines." That was my claim.

Mr. James J. Bradley: Not true.

Mr. Victor Fedeli: Oh, we heard from this former minister, "Not true." I'll read you the budget page in a moment. I'll refer to the page in the budget.

"Vic's claim that we cut \$70 million from MNDM is absolutely not the case," Thibeault said."

He's followed up by his friend the Minister of Northern Development and Mines: "It's clear from his comments that Vic Fedeli doesn't have the facts about our budget."

Well, let me go to page 241 here. Let's see who's telling the truth. Page 241: Oh, my heavens, Speaker, this is amazing. Last year, the Ministry of Northern Development and Mines budget was \$837.4 million; this year, it's \$767.1 million. Let me see, carry the one—it's \$70.1 million less.

Mr. Robert Bailey: Say it ain't so.

Mr. Victor Fedeli: I'm sorry, I have to tell you that it is so. It's \$70.3 million less—I carried the one. It's \$70.3 million less.

In fact, if you go a little further—they're going to say, "Oh, there was some one-time money last year. That's why it's less." Let's forget that for a second. Let's go all the way back to 2014. The budget in 2014 was \$804 million. Here we are, years later, and we've gone from where the budget was way back in 2014. We're still \$37 million less than we were back in 2014 dollars, not even allowing for the difference in what the dollar bought back then.

The first thing they do is they send ministers out to say, "Aha, that's wrong. He's wrong." So on page 241 of

their budget, something is printed wrong. Perhaps there's a typing error. We should get the ministers who have said that it's not reduced by \$70 million. What did they say? "The claimed cut of \$70 million is absolutely not the case." That's what we hear from a cabinet minister. So (a) they didn't read the budget, which is probably what happened, because I think we caught them off guard; or (b) they have been told that there is a cut, and they just go out there and say anything they want. That's exactly why nobody believes them when they say they balanced the budget, because they can't even tell the facts about what is in the budget to the people of Ontario. They have to go ahead and make something up instead, something that fits their narrative better.

It's not a very good narrative when you say, "Oh, we're doing all these great things for the north," when you've actually cut the budget by \$70.3 million. If you really want to take it further, you can look at the Ministry of Natural Resources' budget as well, which fell from \$861.8 million to \$824 million. That is what's happening in northern Ontario, and it is right out of their own book. You can get the PDF; it's page 241 in their own book.

Speaker, it doesn't stop there. When you listen to these cabinet ministers, and you wonder why people in Ontario become so cynical when you have a little stretch goal like that, or a little white one in here—well, let's get a little more serious and look at some of the things.

I was sitting here the other day, and I was shocked when the minister responsible for small business—he surprised me, actually, because he stood up and said, "Mr. Speaker, I'm proud to say that the small business tax rate in Ontario is among the lowest in North America." There was a big clap and a big roar, and everybody stands and cheers. I'm thinking, "Our small business tax rate in Ontario is 4.5%."

I was at the mining show, as mayor of North Bay, some years ago in Las Vegas, and I met with the Las Vegas mayor. All of the northern mayors met with him to talk about what mining potential there is from our equipment. He was boasting. He was trying to lure our companies down, saying, "Our tax rate is zero." I'm thinking, 4.5% and zero—zero is a lot less than 4.5%. So I thought I would do a little checking to see.

Yes, 4.5%, by the way, is not lower than zero, so we don't have the lowest. It's funny that there are also six states that have a tax rate of zero. North Dakota is 4.31%, and North Carolina is 3%. I could go on, Speaker.

Not only are we not the lowest in north America; further checking shows that we happen to be the second highest in Canada.

You stand up and you throw these things out, and you use your bully pulpit as the government: "What we say stands. No matter what you say, it doesn't matter. We're right." Well, no, you're not right, and it's about time you started dictating the actual facts here.

To the minister—yes, again, a financial literacy program.

Minister of Economic Development and Growth: This is one that's a little more concerning because of the

breadth and depth of the inaccuracies. It goes right to the statement that the member gave for his hour-long speech, when he talked about the fact that it was a robust economy, and their fiscal management—what did he call it—the sound fiscal management that got us out of this mess that they got us into.

Speaker, the Minister of Economic Development and Growth talked about—I was at the speech he gave at the scrum, but he also wrote a letter to the editor. He talked about Ontario's economic growth, our foreign direct investment—which you also heard the member speak about—and employment growth.

These are areas where you would expect information from the Minister of Economic Development and Growth. I was quite surprised that he stated that our economy is growing faster than the US. But last year's numbers, that he was basing this on, showed that Arkansas, Washington and Oregon all had higher annualized growth, while Colorado matched Ontario. Again, how do you say that our economy is growing faster? I've just mentioned four that it's behind.

He also stated that Ontario is the top foreign direct investment destination. This is also quite a surprise. I'm fairly sure that it's quite a surprise to several states. They talk about this; the finance minister said it many, many times here. Actually, he has stopped saying it lately, because he knows it's not accurate, but I guess he hasn't quite told his colleagues. The Minister of Economic Development and Growth, you would think, would know that Ontario is not the top foreign direct investment. Our investment dropped from \$7 billion to \$4 billion. We've fallen to fourth place, behind California, New York and Texas. So you make these statements and you use your bully pulpit that you're the government and what you say is it, when the facts don't substantiate anything you've said. Here's the example. I'm pretty sure that California, New York and Texas would be quite surprised to hear him saying that.

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The more serious concern was the employment comment that he made at that function I was at. Then he also wrote it in a letter to the editor. This really surprised me. He said in the letter to the editor that our unemployment rate is “the best in Canada,” and, “We're leading the country in job creation.” Again, it sounds great. It fit the narrative that he was delivering that day, but sadly, it's not based on facts. The facts are indeed quite different than what the minister had said. Our unemployment rate is higher than in BC, Manitoba and Quebec and tied with Saskatchewan—this is all at the time that he said it. In fact, one of those gas plant scandal documents that I was telling you about talked about—and we've extrapolated it. It says here that “there are fewer jobs today relative to the population than before the recession.... Employment growth has not kept up with the growth of the working-age population.”

So you see, Speaker, when they stand and give you one little stat—“We've created 700,000 jobs”—job growth has not kept up with the population increase.

We've tracked it since then, by the way. I know it doesn't fit their narrative, but they make things up. That's exactly what they do, and quite frankly, Speaker, we're on to them. I think the people of Ontario are on to them as well.

The finance minister announced that not only are they balancing this year but next year and the year after that too. This is what he said. I heard the member repeat that same thing when he said that it “is a strong economy” and “sound financial management.” Well, again, the Financial Accountability Officer had a lot to say about that: His forecast was that we're going to be in deficit for five years because he is not taking into account these one-time sales.

But Speaker, it's pretty hard to tell where the government was going because in this book of theirs there are only forecasts to 2017-18. It stops at the election year. It doesn't show the rest of the numbers. There are no numbers beyond 2017-18. If you take any previous budget, even last year's budget that the government did—the numbers in last year's went out to 2018-19. That would mean that, at the very least, this would have to go out to 2019-20. They've kept those years out of here. They only show it up to when the last of the asset sales are because they know pretty darn well what's going to be in the budget following that when you don't have another Hydro to sell, you don't have another lake lands property, you don't have another Seaton property, you don't have another OPG building, you don't have another LCBO—you run of buildings to sell. So what do they do? They just stopped publishing any numbers beyond next year and beyond what you traditionally publish in a budget—including themselves, for that matter.

The reasons that they've not put those numbers in the budget, in addition to the fact that they have no more assets to sell and that it's going to be an incredibly bleak set of numbers—they don't know what the feds are going to give anymore. They don't know what the pension number is going to be. You see what I'm saying, Speaker? All those one-time and unusual costs: You can't guesstimate those, and many of them aren't going to come again. You've got this gaping hole in the budget that will become very evident when they don't have anything more to sell, especially in 2018-19, so they just didn't put it in the budget. That's the most glaring omission in this document and an indictment of this government's comment that they are balancing, because now you know not only what I said before but what they didn't say here because they can't.

In addition, there is some pretty startling news coming up. Again, when the member talked about the strong economy, let's see—if he actually read the budget, he would find four stats in here that are rather alarming. I know they're buried down there in the budget, very deep in the budget, and the odd one is spread around a couple of pages. But the reasons become evident as to why they couldn't put the future years in here.

This is according to the Liberal government: Ontario's economic growth is forecast to fall from 2.7% to 2.3%

this year, and down to 1.7% in 2020. Speaker, without that growth, it means the revenue is not going to be there. That's why they didn't publish any numbers past 2017-18. They can't. They're going to be bad.

Here's another one—and again, right out of this book: Our employment growth will fall to 0.9% in 2020. Job creation—again in the book; these are the Liberals' numbers—will tumble from 94,000 jobs next year to 66,000 in 2020. And housing construction starts—where all that land transfer revenue was coming from—are scheduled to slide from 75,000 in 2016 down to 68,500 in 2018.

Each of those four items, which I have read from the Liberal budget, affect revenue. So what do they do? Just ignore putting the year that those lower revenues would show up. Just ignore them. Why bother printing real numbers in a budget bill? What, you're going to mess up a pretty budget with actual numbers? Who does that?

In fact, the book itself is unusual. The book itself is 70 pages shorter than the last several budgets, and it's chock full of pictures. There are pretty pictures here. All throughout it are colourful chapter headings and very pretty pictures, I must admit. And they've got all of these little half-page infographics everywhere that chew up an immense amount of space and don't really say anything. When you actually take the numbers of a budget out, and don't let anybody see where the revenue is going to fall to and how the expenses are going to soar, and that one-time revenue is all gone—heaven forbid. You can't show any of that reality, so just take all of that out of the budget for the first time and fill it with pretty pictures and cut 70 pages out of it. That's what you can do.

It appears more to be an election positioning budget than a financial document, because the finances are actually missing on the revenue and expense page. It's gone. Why would you dare want to show those numbers?

Let's go back. I just talked about the four different trends in housing and job numbers and our economic growth, how they're trending downwards. One is tumbling by almost a third—the economic growth—according to their own forecast. Let's just take a second and see why. Why do they think that, and what's happening in Ontario that brings them to this conclusion? I can't disagree with those particular numbers. They're based on other experts, as well, who back those up, unlike the fact that they've come to a balance, which is not backed up.

When you look in January—now, many of us were on the pre-budget consultation tour throughout Ontario, and we heard loud and clear from business, organizations and families who have to choose between whether to heat or eat. We heard from all of these groups. Hundreds upon hundreds either presented in person or sent in their documents—many, many hundreds.

At the same time, there were a pair of reports that came out in January, one from the Ministry of Finance itself, their economic accounts—again, just another number that says, “Wow, we've got some trouble here.” The economic accounts noted that business investment in

the province declined by 0.8%, and that includes a drop of nearly 6% in investments in machinery and equipment. It's very alarming, Speaker, for our once-robust manufacturing sector, which was hollowed out here in Ontario due to skyrocketing hydro rates since 2009, to know that there has been a 6% drop in investments. That's an alarming statistic. It might not sound like much, but when you're not buying that equipment, that means you're not hiring people to run that equipment. That means you've lost that confidence in the economy and what's happening around you. Something has spooked you, if that trend all of a sudden drops. That's very alarming. Business investment, as well, declined by 0.8%.

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We've heard from others—and you'll hear from some in a minute here—that they just leave Ontario. We've heard about the greenhouses that have picked up and moved.

I've told this story two or three times here: I was visiting a greenhouse—when I was energy critic, actually—in the Chatham-Kent area. It was fabulous. I had never seen anything like that, being from northern Ontario. This is a greenhouse that is so vast that you could put many of the large North Bay buildings inside and still have room to play football. It's massive and impressive. They wanted to expand. They wanted to double—double, if you can imagine that—the size of this facility. I left there, and I remember coming home and thinking, “Wow, that is just amazing; what an amazing business.” They were taking advantage of the climate and all these good things. I ran into him about a year or so ago here at Queen's Park. He was here for the vegetable growers' lobby day. I said to him, “Peter, I haven't seen you in a while. Did you go ahead with that expansion?” He said, “Yes, we did, Vic. We spent \$100 million expanding, doubling the size of our business, but we did it in Ohio because of the hydro rates here in Ontario.” Can you imagine, Speaker, a \$100-million investment across the border, which is—when you hear that our investments are falling, you can begin to appreciate that it is a genuine concern of the government.

He also told me about his buddy, who I had met, and he said that he doubled the size of his business. He spent \$85 million US doubling his business, but he did it in Pennsylvania.

Speaker, you can appreciate the alarm and the concern that the market has when you hear these stories.

The second document that came out was from the Financial Accountability Officer, and he talked about how Ontario has experienced a decrease in the share of both full-time and private sector positions, and that “the employment rate ... remains well below pre-recession levels.” This is also alarming. The government continues to use the recession as their excuse for everything.

I've said this here before: In my first week or month here, back in 2011, Dwight Duncan was finance minister at the time, and I remember him standing up and saying—he was blaming the tsunami on why our economy had tanked. I was thinking—I mean, I was a brand

new MPP—is this what it’s going to be like at Queen’s Park? I’m a lifelong entrepreneur, in business all my life, and I served as a two-term mayor, and I came here to Queen’s Park and I heard that. It was right at the beginning. I thought, “Wow, you can say anything you want here and nobody is going to challenge you? It was the tsunami?” He was talking about the Japanese tsunami of years ago: “That’s what affected our economy here in Ontario. That’s why.” And I thought, “Oh, my gosh.”

Interjections.

Mr. Victor Fedeli: It’s funny how the volume chirped up here, Speaker, since—

Hon. Steven Del Duca: That’s not what he was talking about.

Mr. Victor Fedeli: You can check Hansard, because that’s what he said.

I have written about this. I couldn’t believe that the minister would be able to use that kind of excuse here in the Legislature and just absolutely make it up.

I can tell you that when he also said that the prospects for youth remain stagnant, with unemployment rates of nearly 15%, well above the national average, those numbers are on top of the earlier news that I gave about us dropping—and he repeats this here—from first to fourth place in foreign direct investment. We were cut in half, from 12% to just 6%, last year. Those are startling numbers.

Then we get into the pre-budget consultations. We went to many communities in Ontario. The government called Mr. Craig Wright as their witness, to do a deputation on the state of the economy in Ontario. He is Royal Bank’s chief economist and senior vice-president. It was interesting. Here’s his quote—this was the government witness; I’m sure they were cringing afterwards. He said, “I think electricity is one of the many areas that makes Ontario investment less attractive than only a short while ago.”

So it’s not us saying these things. It is the Financial Accountability Officer who gave us the stats; it is the Ministry of Finance which gave us the stats. And their own witness, giving a deputation, said, “I think electricity is one of the many areas”—he was picking on electricity, yes, but he also pointed out a very important point: Ontario is a less attractive investment than only a short while ago.

Then we heard from Maple Leaf Foods. He said, “Our electricity price ... increased by 18% in 2016...”

“I think anyone would agree that 18% is a large increase....”

“It would have been a 65% saving on our electricity bill, if we had operated in Manitoba instead of Ontario.”

It’s very interesting, Speaker, that a solid Ontario business knows that their rate would be 65% less.

Norm Beal, the CEO of Food and Beverage Ontario, also weighed in on the skyrocketing Ontario prices. He said he’s hearing from his members who receive daily calls from US jurisdictions asking them to relocate for cheaper hydro. He told the pre-budget consultations that his members are telling him, “We’ve had enough. We’re

starting to look at the alternatives south of the border.” Boom. It’s very, very concerning here.

The London Chamber of Commerce came and gave a deputation. They said, “Many decisions are being made ... because of the high cost of electricity, and companies are looking at other, more competitive jurisdictions....”

So here we go again. You’ve got company after company, association after association and family after family telling us what’s happening in Ontario.

I think Frank Dottori is the most revered forester in Ontario. He is the CEO of his own company, White River Forest Products. He was the founder and, for many years, the former CEO and president of Tembec in Temiscaming—and they have places in Huntsville and Kapuskasing. He said, “Most jurisdictions use energy costs to promote economic development, not to kill jobs, which is what we’re doing in Ontario.”

Again, Speaker, what I said earlier is that if you drive a car, if you heat your home with gas, if you go camping, hunting or fishing, or get married or need a special-event permit, here in Ontario you pay more.

Speaker, let’s look by the numbers at what was in that budget. They talked about how program spending is now up \$6 billion to a record \$141 billion.

I’m going to talk about our debt. First of all, our debt has increased from \$302 billion in 2016-17 to \$312 billion in 2017-18. Again, this is this balanced budget. Our debt is up \$10 billion. This is from the government’s budget. It is projected—this is our debt—to increase to \$323 billion by 2018-19. Our debt is projected, according to this document, to reach \$336 billion by 2019-20.

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These are big numbers. We’re talking about \$336 billion. Just to put it into perspective, when this Liberal government took office, our debt in Ontario was \$139 billion. It took 137 years to get it there, and it took this government a decade and a half to add \$200 billion to it. Interest on the debt rose from \$11.2 billion every year to \$11.6 billion.

Now, you might wonder, “These are all big numbers. What the heck is he talking about? What does that mean to me? What does that mean to me at home? What’s that going to do to my family? How does that have anything to do with me, what our debt is? What do I know if the debt goes from \$312 billion to \$336 billion? Who cares that they added \$200 billion to the debt? Who cares that it took 137 years?” I’ll tell you why balancing matters and why debt matters.

The Auditor General has devoted considerable space in both her 2014 and her 2015 annual reports to Ontario. She talks specifically about the growing debt burden. This debt, she says, has significant implications on your day-to-day life. Specifically, she wrote, “The negative impacts of a large debt burden include debt-servicing costs that divert funding from other programs....” So she’s saying, “You know what? That \$1 billion a month that you spend on interest? That could have gone toward a lot of other things.”

What does that mean to you at home? That’s why they fired 1,500 nurses here in Ontario.

Ms. Cindy Forster: It's 1,600.

Mr. Victor Fedeli: It's now 1,600? Thank you, member from Welland, for upping that.

My own local hospital is a pretty good example. We call it the ground zero of where all these cuts in the hospitals and front-line health care are happening. They have fired 388 front-line health care workers at the North Bay Regional Health Centre in the last five years, and that includes 100 of the 1,600 nurses who have been fired in Ontario, period. This is exactly what the Auditor General was referring to when she called it the crowding out of the services we in Ontario need. That's why you have cataract surgeries cut. That's why you have diabetes testing strips removed. That's why you have physiotherapy for seniors reduced from 100 to four. Speaker, this is exactly what the Auditor General was talking about when she said, "You've diverted a billion dollars a month." This is what's going on.

That's why people should care whether this government says they have a balanced budget when they don't, and that's why they should care that they're adding \$10 billion to our debt this year, because they continue to make us the largest subnational debtor on the planet. What the heck does that mean? It means we're not a country—we're a subnational—and we have the largest debt on the planet. This is not the kind of thing that you want to be number one at. You should be ashamed, ashamed that you've added \$200 billion to the debt.

In her 2015 report, the AG instructs the government to provide "long-term targets for addressing the current and projected debt"—they didn't do that—and to "develop a long-term debt-reduction plan outlining how it will achieve its own target"—they didn't do that either. Speaker, nothing. Our debt has ballooned, and nothing—crickets—from the government side.

So we're very concerned when the government says in the speech, "We're building schools," when they've closed 300; we think the number is closer to 600, but they've admitted that they are closing 300 more. In fact, the Liberals have closed more schools than any other government in our province's history. That's a pretty scary statistic, that this government, again, doesn't like you to pay attention to.

I'm going to review for the next couple of minutes, because in order to reach balance, the government used \$1.8 billion from cap-and-trade—and I think, in fact, I might actually talk about that for a bit because it's so scary what they did. I'll have to choose my words carefully, Speaker, because what they did I don't think is right. I think it was done on purpose—and you'll see what I mean when I say this.

The government continues to say that they're using the funds from the sale of Hydro One and from cap-and-trade to go into the Trillium Trust and use it for infrastructure. On the surface, they're correct: That is where they are going to take that money and they're going to put it in there. But—and here's the big one—they slipped one sentence in. If you look at the budget bill last year, Bill 144—quite a lot of pages; it might have been 60 or 70

just of the bill, not of the budget book itself, which was close to 400 pages—there is one sentence very close to the end of the bill that helps them sell Hydro One and use the money to lower their deficit. Bill 144, schedule 22, section 7, paragraph 2 states: "To reimburse the crown for expenditures incurred" to fund the costs relating to infrastructure.

Speaker, all the things they say to you, none of that is based on fact. This tells you that they're using the Hydro One money to reimburse themselves for money already spent on infrastructure. So what that says is, on the surface, when they say, "We're going to put it into infrastructure," they do, but the money that's already in the infrastructure budget, they then take out and artificially put against the deficit. That's what is so horrendous and horrific about this. They're saying one thing to the people, but they are not following through with what they're saying—I'm trying to be ginger about this. We're talking about billions of dollars here.

The Ottawa Citizen had a quote—they kind of figured it out, way back in 2015; it took them about two seconds to figure it out, because the day after that bill came out and we wrote about this, they said, "A reasonable person might wonder why we need to sell most of a significant public asset ... just to keep doing what we have been doing for years"—that's paying for infrastructure. "The real answer, I suspect, is that putting some billions of new money into the province's transit trust will enable the government to quietly shift existing money to help it reduce the deficit or pay for other spending." Bingo. The light came on at the Ottawa Citizen back in April 2015. They nailed it. I cannot say it any better than that, Speaker.

They moved on, and I guess what was good for schedule 22 of Hydro One would probably work equally well for cap-and-trade. So that is Bill 172. Again, they did the same thing: Schedule 68, section 2, item 3 states that they can use the money "to reimburse the crown for expenditures incurred" for transportation, public transit vehicles and infrastructure. Again, they put the revenue into infrastructure because the minister says, "No, no, no. We can't put the money anywhere but the Trillium Trust for infrastructure." He is accurate, but it doesn't tell you the next sentence, which is that the money that was already budgeted for infrastructure is coming out to artificially balance our budget. That's the part that is missing. That's the secret they don't want you to know about. Again, they put the revenue into infrastructure. They took the money already budgeted for that infrastructure and applied it to the deficit. That is it in a nutshell. It's an easy way for them to tell people one thing when the real intent is completely different.

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What is so heinous about it is the fact that they've never admitted this, yet it's printed in their own bill. It's buried, and I mean buried. The bill is, as I said, 70 or whatever pages, all just text, just details and text. One line in an entire book is all they needed to be able to pull this trick. It worked so well for Hydro One, they thought,

“We’ve got a way to do it now.” They did it with the cap-and-trade money as well.

That’s why, when you look at page 239 in the budget, you will see that they’ve got the cap-and-trade revenue. They call it “carbon allowance proceeds”: \$1.778 billion. It’s listed here in revenue. When you see sales, they’ve got \$3 billion. Some of that would be the normal sales of surplus cars, that type of thing, that we have from time to time throughout the province. Some of it is going to be legitimate. But this includes the sale of Hydro One. There was an addendum in last year’s budget that tells you that that number includes the sale of Hydro One. They went so far as to admit it there.

They’re here in the revenue. In the 2015 budget, the infrastructure expenditures didn’t change from the year before, but they added this one time-revenue. All of a sudden, now they needed to sell Hydro One and eventually cap-and-trade money to make it balance. They didn’t need it to balance back then, but it’s like the lights went on and they thought, “Wow. We can tell the people this when we’re really doing this. They’ll never know.” Who is going to read one sentence, one little line in a bill of dozens and dozens and dozens of pages of the most boring schedules and subsections? That’s what they’ve done. It’s a bait and switch. It’s a shell game. You can take any metaphor you want and you can talk about what they’ve done.

What they did was tell the public one thing when something completely opposite and much more dangerous to the economic well-being of the province has been done. It’s been a charade. If it wasn’t so sad, it would be laughable. All of these people are complicit in this—either that, or they haven’t read the budget. As I pointed out earlier, it would appear last year the members didn’t read the budget. Certainly this year, a couple that I pointed out already obviously didn’t read the budget or they would understand the cuts that came in two of the ministries I quoted from page 241. It’s apparent that they’re just going to go with their talking points and not actually read any of the budget.

We have a crippling debt in Ontario. This is your legacy: a crippling debt in Ontario. You’ve got a \$5-billion hole in the budget. The FAO pointed that out. We’ve illustrated the numbers, how it came about. This is only the government trying to create the positioning of these economic stewards looking good a year ahead of an election. But again, Speaker, when things don’t add up in Liberal Ontario, that means one of two things: either higher taxes or more cuts, and we saw both. They cut the budget in northern Ontario; they cut the budget of natural resources. We heard about the library cuts today, so there are cuts all buried through here. Don’t let anybody kid you about that.

The higher taxes—there are the usual sin taxes: tobacco and liquor. Here’s what they did so they don’t have to announce that next year. They made all those sin taxes, as they’re called, automatically increased every year now. So in next year’s budget they’ll be able to say, “No new taxes.” No new taxes because they’re now built

in, just like they did last year when the former Minister of Natural Resources at that time said there were no new increases.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Questions and comments?

Miss Monique Taylor: It’s always a privilege to be able to stand and have a few moments to talk about the things that are going on before this House, and to congratulate the member from Nipissing for his very thorough depiction of what the Conservatives believe the bill looks like. He spoke a lot about numbers, and I’m going to talk about some different numbers that I see in the bill or didn’t see in the bill.

First of all, a \$15 minimum wage: How great would it have been for the people of this province to see a \$15 minimum wage? That was not in the bill. How about the 85% of Ontarians who want Hydro One to remain public? There’s nothing in the bill that’s going to bring Hydro One back to the people of Ontario, which is really unfortunate. Like I said, 85% of the people of this province want Hydro One to stay public.

Nothing to protect the 300 schools that are on the chopping block. And, to continue to talk about schools, how about the 15 school boards in this province that will see a cut of \$4.6 million to special education? Special education is a place where this government is failing 100%, and now to have a \$4.6-million cut on top of the chaos that’s already happening there—those are some serious figures.

How about zero dollars for children’s mental health? We have 12,000 children on the wait-list for mental health services in this province, and that’s not the simple little fixes of mental health; this is moderate to severe needs, and they got zero dollars in this budget.

How about the hospitals that claim they’re underfunded by \$300 million?

There’s a lot of work to be done in this province, and, unfortunately, it doesn’t look like the Liberals are up for the challenge.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): The member from Etobicoke Centre.

Mr. Yvan Baker: Well, I tell you what. What I just heard from the member opposite from the PC Party: He can’t find something to criticize in the policy, the truth doesn’t suit him, so he spins a story. It really is unfortunate—spins a conspiracy.

I have to tell you that when I heard him talking about how all it takes is a financial literacy course, a little bit of financial literacy to understand this budget—I’m not going to take lessons from that member or from that party on financial literacy. This is something I’ve done throughout my career. I have two business degrees. I worked as a management consultant to companies to help them invest their money. I know a balanced budget when I see one. This is a balanced budget.

Let me tell you this: The member opposite talks about cap-and-trade money. We’re not using cap-and-trade proceeds to balance the budget. Those monies are being dedicated directly to green projects.

He talks about the sale of assets. If you look at governments, PC, NDP and Liberal governments at all levels of government, what happens is that, every year, inevitably governments sell assets and buy assets. During that, there's an accounting treatment that leads to certain gains which he's talking about. That's not using assets to balance the budget; that's a standard practice that happens every year. It happened in their administration—it happened a lot more in their administration because they used the 407 to balance the budget, if you can believe that. Now he has the gall to come here and tell us that we can't use standard practice and standard accounting.

He talks about pension assets. We've been clear. There's a disagreement between the public servants, the professional hard-working public servants who put together the accounts for the government, and the Auditor General. We commissioned an expert panel of leading accounting experts from across the country. He disagrees with them. He won't listen to them. He won't listen to the experts. He won't listen to the public servants. He won't even listen to the FAO, whom he likes to quote a lot. The FAO said that given the flexibility built into the fiscal plan, "the province should be able to achieve its commitment of balancing the budget in 2017-18." That's the FAO he likes to quote.

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My question to them is, what would they cut? If they want to pay down the debt, if they want to claim that there are holes in this budget, what would they cut? Health care, education, infrastructure—that's what they would cut.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): The member from Sarnia–Lambton: questions and comments.

Mr. Robert Bailey: It's a pleasure to rise and comment on the member from Nipissing. It's the best hour I've spent, listening intently to the member as he laid it out in great detail.

Most of all, he used their own book, their own budget, and quoted it, chapter and verse, and proved, without a doubt, that there is a hole, a \$5-billion hole, in that budget. He went on at great length, being able to prove that with his remarks. He quoted the different pages where you can find that.

I'd certainly recommend to the viewers at home in Sarnia–Lambton and across the province to refer to Fedeli's Focus on Finance. You can get all the details there. It's available online. It's a great budget synopsis.

We talked about the asset sales. I was really interested in the member from Nipissing when he explained about reimbursing the crown, taking money that was already allocated and reimbursing it. It's taking money that has already been spent and counting it twice, I guess is what you'd say. They're counting it twice. So there certainly is a hole in that.

I think that when you use their own document and go back and talk about that and show the shortcomings—I think that a number of people are going to comment on this. I know there will be a debate again tomorrow and again next week. I look forward to the member from

Nipissing as he sums up. I know he's going to be kind of the cleanup hitter. He'll put this all together, as we finish this debate here today. He's doing a great job.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Questions and comments?

Ms. Cindy Forster: I want to thank the member from Nipissing. We enjoyed his speech. When Vic gets up to speak, we call him the man with the three Fs—Fedeli's Focus on Finance.

We heard from the member from—where was that from?—Etobicoke Centre. Some of his comments were like the pot calling the kettle black. He's talking about the PCs and the member from Nipissing not listening to the experts.

All of the officers of this Legislature told you guys not to sell off Hydro One, and you didn't listen to any of those experts. You didn't listen to the Financial Accountability Officer. You didn't listen to the Integrity Commissioner. You didn't listen to the Auditor General. You didn't listen to anything. We pay those people hundreds of thousands of dollars a year to be the watchdogs of the government, to make sure that what we're doing is in the best interests of the people of Ontario, and you ignored each and every one of them, even when they put it in writing.

You talk about your experts. Your Ed Clark: One day he's telling you not to sell off public assets, and then six months later, he's telling you to go ahead and do it. That isn't an expert, in my view. An expert actually has some integrity. They stick to their principles.

I only have a couple of seconds left. There are a lot of things missing in this budget. The member from Hamilton talked a bit about them, but there is nothing to improve the quality of work for the workforce in this province, many of them working in temporary, precarious jobs at minimum wage. At the very least, a \$15 minimum wage in this province would have gone a long way, along with universal pharmacare for those low-income workers who can't afford to buy their own drugs.

My comments for that piece.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): The member from Nipissing has two minutes.

Mr. Victor Fedeli: I thought about how to end this, and I'm going to end it kind of the way we started.

First, I want to thank the members from Hamilton Mountain, Etobicoke Centre, Sarnia–Lambton and Welland.

I've told the stories about each of these ministers who made things up and shared them in the Legislature because it fit their narrative. Let me start with a story from last year's budget, when our leader, Patrick Brown, was questioning the Premier and began with "this budget increases virtually every government service fee. Fees for driver and vehicle licensing are going up. Camping in provincial parks, fishing and hunting licences just got more expensive. Everything from liquor licences to event permits for charity fundraisers" go up. This is our leader, Patrick Brown, sharing that.

The next day, the former Minister of Natural Resources chimed in with "a rebuttal directly to the Leader of

the Opposition.” He said, “Somewhere along the line” you have to correct your record. “He stood on his feet ... to tell people ... that recreational hunting and fishing licences are increasing; in fact, he’s wrong. I just want to say that clearly, Speaker: Recreational hunting and fishing licences are not increasing.... If he’s not going to correct his record, then I’m going to ... do it for him. Unequivocally, that is not the case.... It’s wrong.” That’s the former Minister of Natural Resources.

The very next speaker happened to be me, and I said to him, I have the budget here, I’m holding page 191, and it says, “Starting in 2017-18, fees will be adjusted annually to keep up with inflation....” Examples of the fees include ‘fees charged for driver and vehicle licensing, camping ... fishing and hunting licences, court applications, liquor licences’” and it goes on and on and on.

Again, the minister obviously didn’t read the budget last year or this year, because he was wrong again this year, as you know, as I said earlier. He makes an accusation to fit his narrative: “I don’t care what you say. I’m saying this, so it’s right.” They’re using their bully pulpit to purposely deceive the people.

Second reading debate deemed adjourned.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Pursuant to standing order 38, the question that this House do now adjourn is deemed to have been made.

ADJOURNMENT DEBATE

LYME DISEASE

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): The member for Haldimand–Norfolk has given notice of dissatisfaction with the answer to a question given by the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care. The member has up to five minutes to debate the matter, and the minister or parliamentary assistant may reply for up to five minutes.

The member from Haldimand–Norfolk.

Mr. Toby Barrett: I asked for this late show. I wanted an opportunity to elaborate on my questions about Lyme disease and what is being done to help the growing number of people affected.

Two years ago, we put forward a private member’s bill. It was Bill 27, An Act to require a provincial framework and action plan concerning vector-borne diseases. It was passed in this institution with unanimous consent.

Bill 27 was an act, again, requiring a provincial framework. It called on the government to tackle the issue of Lyme and other infectious diseases on several fronts. The main thrust of the legislation: establish guidelines for prevention and establish guidelines for the identification, treatment and management of these emerging vector-borne diseases. It called on and mandated the Ministry of

Health to include preparedness guidelines, the sharing of best practices and the acceleration of research.

One goal was to create and distribute standardized educational materials for use by health care providers and literature—brochures—that would be up-to-date and readily made available to the public.

My question—my series of questions—is, very simply, what progress has been made on the several mandates contained within the legislation?

Number one was education. If we can make people more aware of Lyme, for example, and make them more aware of the need to look for ticks and what to do if they find one, that’s one of the first steps in the battle.

Guidelines for prevention of tick contact: It’s really nothing new. The important thing is to get the word out, maintain an ongoing educational campaign and make people aware of the importance, for example, of wearing light-coloured clothing so that they can see any ticks that may be near them; the use of DEET; avoid tick-prone areas—a few of the good things we should know about.

Identification of ticks: Part of the campaign is that people need to know the difference between the very small blacklegged tick, the deer tick, as compared to the much larger dog tick—all important stuff for people, many of whom may not be aware of these differences.

1800

Treatment and management of these kinds of diseases are key; the sharing of best practices and the acceleration of research are vital.

With respect to research, so little is known; so little really seemed to be gathered together. I understand—speaking with so many people—that there continues to be resistance within the medical community for examining certain approaches. Of course, on the other side of it, there are so many misconceptions out there, primarily on social media.

Again, the question: What kind of progress are we seeing on this front? What work has been done? There will be future epidemics.

So many people are travelling to the United States for treatment or for confirmation of tests. This can be expensive. This is a situation where people pay out of pocket and have come to realize that the health care system is not there for them.

Kudos to the non-profit organization the Gabe Magnotta Foundation for their work with respect to management and research.

I am asking for an update on progress with respect to research to date.

Earlier this year, the Public Health Agency of Canada changed the case definition for Lyme disease. They put out a bulletin; the definition has been revised. The technical task group has listed Ontario as one of the provinces implementing the change in this definition. Again, another question for the ministry: Could they expand on how this change will impact people suspected of having Lyme? Will it make diagnosis easier or will it make it tougher to try and find out what is going on and what should be done about it?

Speaker, we have a law. I'm just asking for some action on the problem.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): The parliamentary assistant, the member for Ottawa South, has five minutes.

Mr. John Fraser: Thank you, Speaker. It's a pleasure to respond to the member from Haldimand–Norfolk. I want to thank him for his advocacy on this issue. As he would know, our government is committed to protecting the people of Ontario from Lyme disease, and we're strongly committed to evidence-based decision-making to ensure that patients get what they need.

Last summer, we launched Combatting Lyme Disease Through Collaborative Action: Ontario's 10-Step Education and Awareness Plan. The 10-step plan on Lyme disease provides information about Lyme disease and outlines the steps our government is taking to protect Ontarians from the disease. The plan was developed in consultation with stakeholders through the Lyme Disease Stakeholder Reference Group, which included Lyme disease advocacy organizations representing patients with Lyme disease, outdoor and trails organizations, and professional associations and colleges.

The plan also builds on the efforts of many agencies, communities and individuals who are already doing so much in the field of Lyme disease and advocating on behalf of patients. The plan is the first step in the Ontario government's efforts to protect the people of Ontario from Lyme disease.

In addition to this plan, the minister reached out to family physicians and nurse practitioners in order to increase awareness of Lyme disease. In his letter to family physicians and nurse practitioners, he identified the complexity of Lyme disease and reinforced that diagnostic tests provide only supportive evidence and that these test results should not be the sole evidence for diagnosis. He encouraged doctors and nurse practitioners to exercise their own clinical judgment to diagnose Lyme disease.

We will follow this work by continuing to engage with stakeholders and the medical community to explore research and diagnosis in order to combat this disease and to improve the care, treatment and support for Ontarians with Lyme disease.

When we talk about the 10-point plan, it informs the general public and health care providers on the risks posed by Lyme disease, and it aligns the federal, provincial and local public health Lyme disease initiatives, where it's appropriate, to promote synergies and collaboration on common issues of concern.

We know that this is an issue not just here in Ontario but indeed across Canada and that there are approaches being taken by many of our public health units.

It also strengthens the engagement and collaboration with Lyme disease stakeholder groups in Ontario and undertakes activities to address care, treatment and support on these issues.

Mr. Speaker, I know that the minister is committed to work in this regard. I know that he has been working

very collaboratively with members on the other side, particularly the member from Algoma–Manitoulin, who I want to thank for his advocacy and efforts in this regard. I appreciate the chance to respond to the member from Haldimand–Norfolk.

I want to thank you for your time.

ROAD SAFETY

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): The member from Chatham–Kent–Essex has given notice of dissatisfaction with the answer to his question given by the Minister of Transportation. The member has up to five minutes to debate the matter, and the minister or parliamentary assistant may reply for up to five minutes.

The member from Chatham–Kent–Essex.

Mr. Rick Nicholls: I asked for this late show to indicate my complete dissatisfaction with the response from the Minister of Transportation earlier today in question period with regard to asking our government members to support a simple measure to enhance student safety through the support of school bus cameras.

I was specifically dissatisfied with the minister. Instead of addressing the safety benefits of the amendment we were advocating for the benefit of our children, the minister chose to make some rather partisan arguments pertaining to our motives.

The government wants to amend the Highway Traffic Act to enhance safety. My thought was that if we're already opening up the act, then let's get some other initiatives in there that have received strong support from the Legislature.

My motivation is simply to protect our students, our children. Speaker, I will use every available tool to bring this issue forward. I'm not going to apologize for protecting our children.

It's clear to me that a major reason that the government wants to shoot the idea down is that it's coming from the opposition instead of perhaps its own benches.

A little history lesson: Back in 2014, when I first tried to get a bill passed on this issue—it was known at that time as Bill 50—I was quite clear that my bill would in no way make school bus camera systems mandatory in all buses.

Despite that fact, multiple government members stood up and expressed hesitancy to support my idea, over the fears that making camera systems mandatory would present extra costs. It was clear to me then that their minds had been made up, and they were just looking for reasons, perhaps, to keep the bill from passing, whether they were real reasons or not.

My proposed amendments have, in fact, enjoyed strong support from colleagues on all sides of the House. I've spoken with them about it. Some of these colleagues who have expressed support for my bill suddenly changed their tune in committee.

Despite today's unfortunate events at committee, I will not stop advocating for student safety. I will never stop advocating for community safety as well.

Here we have it: Three years after I first introduced my bill, the government is saying that they're not there yet. To that I ask: Where have you been over the last three years?

Currently, Bill 94 has been passed at second reading. Today in committee, we attempted to get Bill 94 put into Bill 65, to enhance and make stronger Bill 65. I'm talking about an isolated amendment. But unfortunately, there was discussion around that, and as a result, the members on the government side decided to say no to the amendment. As a result, it was lost.

Where are we now? I am imploring the government side to take Bill 94 and get it into committee as quickly as possible. If they have better amendments for Bill 94, so be it. This is not a partisan bill. This bill is to protect our children.

As I look at what needs to happen, we're kind of in a race against the clock. Yes, I know we want to make things better, but we also have a timeline here, the way I see it.

Bill 94 was introduced back in February of this year. Here we are, in the early stages of May, and it hasn't been called into committee because government bills apparently take precedence over non-government bills.

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The clock is ticking. Our students will be finished school by the end of June. If we could get—and we only have three weeks here, so it's not looking good—Bill 94 into committee, with amendments, through third reading and have it reach royal assent, we could very easily have put together a public relations program that would in fact enhance public awareness and education about the dangers of passing school buses while the lights are flashing and the stop arm is out, and the kids would be ready when they went back to school in September.

Again, I implore the government to push forward and help us get Bill 94 into committee as soon as possible.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): The parliamentary assistant, the member for Kitchener Centre, has five minutes.

Ms. Daiene Vernile: While I am pleased to be here today to talk about student safety as well as our commitment to road safety, it's really unfortunate that we have to be here under these circumstances.

I've just come out of committee, where we only had a couple of motions to get through in order to advance this very important road safety bill, but the MPP for Kitchener–Conestoga made a complete mockery of the process by filibustering. The PCs say that they care about road safety, but clearly they do not, because they wasted time and they wasted taxpayers' money in the process.

Today, the Minister of Transportation provided an answer to a joint question from the MPP for Chatham–Kent–Essex. I want him to know I have a tremendous amount of respect for him. I heard your passion today in committee and I support your bill in principle. We also had a question from the MPP for Kitchener–Conestoga.

In the minister's answer, he reiterated what has become absolutely clear to me and the Liberal and NDP

members on the Standing Committee on General Government, as well as our government as a whole: The PCs' reaction to the Safer School Zones Act has been concerning, disappointing and misleading, to say the least.

Today, I watched as the MPP—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): The member will withdraw that last comment.

Ms. Daiene Vernile: I withdraw, Speaker.

Today, I watched as the MPP for Eglinton–Lawrence held a joint media event with local road safety advocates. These are advocates who have had to become such because of the area around their children's school, Allenby Junior Public School, on Avenue Road. It's just up the street from here. It's become so unsafe. One of the parents said that they're under siege. They've got about 800 students who are at the school, and every day they have to cross Avenue Road. It's very precarious for the students and their parents.

They're looking for real, tangible solutions to the unsafe conditions that they see on Avenue Road, a road that the PCs tried to block from being included in the legislation. The PCs have tried to slow down the passage of this bill—a bill with measures that municipalities have been asking for for many years. I think the PCs took issue with the minister comparing the reckless actions the party opposite has taken in committee with their school bus camera proposal.

But ultimately, by including this former PMB as an amendment to Bill 65, one of over 300 amendments submitted by their party on a bill that's only eight pages long, the PCs have shown that they don't think it should be taken seriously or debated on its own merits.

I will discuss this proposal today as I did just recently in committee, but under very different circumstances. It goes without saying that the safety of our children is our top priority. Every day, over 800,000 students travel in a school bus here in the province of Ontario. When a parent waves goodbye to a child stepping onto a school bus, they want to know their child is going to have a safe ride to and from school.

According to research conducted by Transport Canada, travelling on a school bus is 16 times safer than travelling in a family car, based on the number of passengers and kilometres travelled. That makes school bus transportation the safest form of transport for school-children in Ontario.

We know that school buses carry precious cargo, and that's why we have one of the toughest and most stringent school bus inspection programs in North America. We fully support measures to keep our school-children safe, and that's why we do support and did support the member from Chatham–Kent–Essex on his private member's bill when we debated it.

However, as I've previously said, today we were looking at this proposal under very different circumstances when it was rushed into committee as one of over 300 amendments. But the PCs failed to provide com-

mittee members with a real opportunity to look at the proposal.

Let's get back to the school bus cameras. Under the Highway Traffic Act, all motorists must stop for school buses when a bus is stopped and its overhead red signals are flashing. Currently, there are various municipalities that are using this.

Speaker, I want to just get to the very end of this where I can make my point. Currently, the technology only catches those who pass when a stop arm is out, not when the overhead lights are flashing, which is the offence under the Highway Traffic Act. This directive—we heard this afternoon while we were in committee from a legal expert. You can charge someone; however,

it may not pass in court when debated because the cameras can only take a picture of the arm, not the flashing lights.

Again, it's unfortunate that the PCs decided to include this as one of over 300 amendments. This is a proposal that should be looked at on its own merits. I know that the Ministry of Transportation is going to give it very serious consideration.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): There being no further matter to debate, I deem the motion to adjourn to be carried.

This House stands adjourned until 9 o'clock tomorrow.

The House adjourned at 1816.

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