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Lundi
15 novembre 2021

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Président : L'honorable Ted Arnott
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Service linguistique et des publications parlementaires
Salle 500, aile ouest, Édifice du Parlement
111, rue Wellesley ouest, Queen's Park
Toronto ON M7A 1A2
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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

Monday 15 November 2021

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

Lundi 15 novembre 2021

The House met at 1015.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Good morning. We begin this morning with a moment of silence for inner thought and personal reflection.

Prayers.

ROYAL ASSENT SANCTION ROYALE

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): I beg to inform the House that in the name of Her Majesty the Queen, Her Honour the Lieutenant Governor has been pleased to assent to a certain bill in her office.

The Deputy Clerk (Mr. Trevor Day): The following is the title of the bill to which Her Honour did assent:

An Act to amend the Remembrance Week Act, 2016 /
Loi modifiant la Loi de 2016 sur la semaine du Souvenir.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

NORTHERN HEALTH SERVICES SERVICES DE SANTÉ DANS LE NORD

Mr. Guy Bourgouin: I rise in the House today to speak on behalf of the constituents in my riding of Mushkegowuk–James Bay about the crucial shortage of doctors and nurses in the region. Speaker, it has been a known fact for quite some time now that having access to family physicians in the north is an ongoing challenge.

Parlons plus particulièrement de la situation de crise dans mon comté. À Hearst, cette municipalité vit depuis quelque temps une pénurie de docteurs. Dans cette ville, il y a à peu près 1 500 patients orphelins, ce qui représente près de 29 % de la population. La salle d'urgence de l'Hôpital Notre-Dame de Hearst est toujours à un cheveu d'être obligée de fermer parce qu'ils n'ont pas de médecins disponibles pour couvrir.

Speaker, if the doctor shortage was not enough to deal with, hospitals in my riding are also having a nursing shortage. In Smooth Rock Falls, they have tried—and continue to try—to recruit by offering incentives to attract nurses, and they still cannot get the human resources they need to cover the shifts.

Monsieur le Président, je demande à ce gouvernement d'agir à cette situation de crise : qu'il investisse dans des programmes qui répondent aux enjeux et aux besoins spécifiques au Nord. Il n'est plus le temps de réagir; il est grand temps d'agir.

When will the Ford government learn to listen and commit to finally taking action to ensure everyone in

northern Ontario can get a family doctor, and address the nursing shortage?

1020

THANKSGIVING FOOD DRIVE

Mr. Deepak Anand: The last 18 months have been tough. Food banks saw a 26% increase in first-time visitors across the province. COVID-19 has affected every fabric of our society.

However, that has not stopped our province—the people of Ontario—from working together to ensure no one is left behind. They have displayed the true Ontario spirit. I would like to spotlight our community ambassadors, Dev Tiwari, Cathy O'Connor, Sukhvinder Sharma, Keyur Shah, Bhavesh Patel and Angie Munnick, for stepping up and supporting our office's community food drives.

I am thrilled to share that the ambassadors from Mississauga–Malton have collected over 1,500 pounds of food for Mayor Bonnie Crombie's annual Thanksgiving food drive, to ensure fellow neighbours can enjoy meals with their loved ones during the festive season.

Achievements like this would not be possible without a true team effort. Thank you. Thank you to the residents of Mississauga–Malton and to my wonderful office staff for always being there to lend a hand to our community during tough times. I am looking forward to your support for the blood donation drive on December 18.

Let's continue to work and serve the community through the Ontario spirit. That is what will get all of us ahead on the road to recovery.

OPTOMETRY SERVICES

Mr. Chris Glover: November 14 was World Diabetes Day, marking 100 years since Banting and Best discovered insulin in a lab just a few hundred metres from this Legislature, at the University of Toronto.

But as well as insulin, people with diabetes often need eye care. Jacob Wolfe lives in Spadina–Fort York and has type 1 diabetes. He has been unable to update his prescription because this government refuses to negotiate a fair deal, leaving optometrists paying an average \$27 out of pocket to examine an OHIP-insured patient. It has been 76 days since seniors and children have been able to receive OHIP-covered eye exams. My constituents have sent hundreds of emails and thousands have signed petitions asking the government to negotiate in good faith with optometrists.

There are people like Dr. Melissa Yuen, of Dr. Yuen Optometry in Spadina–Fort York, who simply wants to assist her clients but can't keep paying out of pocket for it. The impact is far-reaching, affecting people from the ages of seven to 70. Bob Whalen is 70 years old and a constituent and he can barely read because he needs a new prescription. Another constituent, Jagbir, has a seven-year-old daughter who needs prescription glasses but hasn't been able to get an eye exam because of this government's refusal to negotiate. He says that this is having a negative impact on her learning and her well-being.

Mr. Speaker, we are imploring this government to negotiate a fair deal with optometrists so that residents like Jacob, Bob and Jagbir's daughter can get the eye care that they need.

THANK-A-VET

Mr. Will Bouma: I rise in the House today to acknowledge a memorable event which recently took place in my riding of Brantford–Brant. For 24 years, on the Saturday prior to Remembrance Day, the Thank-A-Vet committee has chosen to honour local veterans, widows, widowers and Silver Cross mothers. For the past 22 years this took the form of a wonderful luncheon attended by local veterans and their families and members of the community.

The pandemic forced the organizing committee to pivot, and on Saturday, November 6, for the second consecutive year, I was able to participate in delivering gift bags to the homes of veterans and their families. The gift bags contained a wonderful assortment of community-donated gifts, including a gift certificate for a lunch at a local restaurant.

While we wish we could have honoured them collectively, this was still a wonderful way to remember the tremendous service and sacrifice of our veterans. I would like to give a special thank you to my newly elected colleague MP Larry Brock and the work his office staff also did in making this year's event successful.

Thank-A-Vet provided an opportunity to salute our local patriotic men and women who served our great nation, and to thank them in person. While their number decreases year by year, their legacy of fighting to preserve freedom remains.

AFFORDABLE HOUSING

Ms. Suze Morrison: If you ask any Torontonian what our national bird is, don't be surprised if someone answers "the construction crane." The Rider Levett Bucknall Crane Index tracks how many cranes dot the skylines of North American cities and found that Toronto has a whopping 43% of all the cranes counted in the 14 cities that they track.

The Conservative members opposite will cry all day that the source of Toronto's affordable housing crisis is a lack of supply. But how can we have more cranes in the

sky than all of Los Angeles; Seattle; Washington, D.C.; and New York combined and still manage to have a supply problem?

The problem, Speaker, is we aren't building the right kinds of housing. We don't need more multi-million-dollar condos on every single corner. We need investments in affordable housing. We need real rent control and stronger inclusionary zoning rules—rules that allow cities to require developers to build affordable housing within their projects.

I recently spoke with Darren, a constituent of mine who lives in the Church and Wellesley Village, who also wants to see stronger inclusionary zoning rules put in place. Darren lives in a behemoth 42-storey tower, but sadly, only half of the units on the second floor were designated as affordable rentals. But worse, because this building, this condo was built after 2018—when this government cut rent control protections—these units aren't even rent-controlled.

We need this Premier and his Conservative government to stop pandering to the profits of developers and start putting affordability for tenants first.

LAND USE PLANNING

Mr. Mike Schreiner: I spent constituency week meeting with people in Guelph, farmers in Wellington county, folks from Caledon, Vaughan, Halton Hills, Orangeville—all opposed to Highway 413; none of them a downtown Toronto elite.

I attended a rally in Bolton against the Premier's highway schemes. Well over 100 people took time out of their busy Saturday afternoon to wave signs against Highway 413, the same signs on local people's lawns along the highway's proposed route. None of them are downtown Toronto elites that can afford a \$1,000 fundraiser.

Speaker, let's be clear: The only elites pushing for this highway are wealthy land speculators and PC donors who will cash in big time if the Premier builds this highway, paving over paradise to put up a linear parking lot.

People who live and farm in the area want to protect the farmland that feeds us. They are opposed to paving over the wetlands that clean our drinking water and protect us from flooding. They are opposed to putting more stress on the rivers they love to fish. They are opposed to paving over the greenbelt. They are opposed to the Premier making life less affordable for people by forcing them to commute farther distances to find an affordable place to call home.

They want \$10 billion spent on better transit, affordable housing, health care, and climate action—not a highway that will pave over the places they love.

PATTY'S PLACE

Mr. Stephen Crawford: It's an honour to be in the Legislature here today and to bring awareness about important organizations in my riding of Oakville.

Last month, I had the honour of attending the virtual grand opening of Patty's Place, a new dementia care facility operated by Acclaim Health. As the population ages, Patty's Place will be critical in filling a growing need by servicing individuals living with dementia.

Patty's Place is a state-of-the-art facility that is tailored to the needs of its clients. In fact, before construction, clients were consulted on the facility design and which features should be included to provide the best care for them.

Patty's Place is a comfortable and inviting home. The features include an adult day program, and it is the only facility in Halton region to have beds for short overnight stays. The 3D immersive technology room, which is the first of its kind in Canada, is designed specifically for people with dementia.

I have a personal connection to Patty's Place. It's named after Dr. Patty Plaxton, who was my family's physician for many years. In fact, it was Dr. Plaxton who delivered the wonderful news to my wife, Najia, and I that we would be having twins.

Dr. Plaxton is now living with early-onset dementia. She practised medicine in our community for over 20 years. Her dedication to the community is honoured in the name of the new facility.

I want to thank the residents of Oakville and Halton region for their support and contributions to building this fantastic facility. I also want to extend a personal thank you to everyone at Acclaim Health for the fantastic work you are doing. I am so grateful to you and all the members of Acclaim Health and all the members of the community that have participated in raising funds for this fantastic facility.

1030

CHILD CARE

Ms. Marit Stiles: By the end of the last government's term, Ontario had the second-highest child care fees in Canada and Toronto had the most expensive fees in this entire country. We have heard so many promises of change over the years, but the fact is that this Conservative government has failed to deliver on affordable child care.

Today, parents in my riding of Davenport are paying a median fee of \$1,578 a month, and that's if they can find space at all. Most cannot. On top of that, COVID restrictions and staffing pressures have seen spaces close just as parents are returning to the workplace. Families at Rawlinson school, for example, are finding that their child care centre is turning them away and they're letting children go because they are so short on rooms. Worker retention remains a major issue because wages have not kept up.

The one hope for families rests with an offer from the federal government, which has finally, finally come around to the idea of funding universal, affordable child care programs. Over the weekend, I was pleased to hear that Alberta became the latest province to sign up, joining seven other provinces and a territory. But Ontario is

lagging behind once again, and we've got federal officials telling the Toronto Star last week that the province has yet to even submit a formal plan to them.

While this government drags their feet, families, especially women, are paying the price. It's time for the government to stop wasting time. Sign the deal. Let's deliver \$10-a-day child care to the people of Ontario.

WEST LINCOLN MEMORIAL HOSPITAL

Mr. Sam Oosterhoff: The rebuild of the West Lincoln Memorial Hospital has been one of my top priorities since being elected as the MPP for Niagara West. I was born in the hospital, I campaigned for the hospital and I remain committed to seeing the rebuild of this hospital to completion, with shovels in the ground upcoming soon.

This summer, the request for proposals went out as part of a hugely important next step in getting these shovels in the ground. As part of our comprehensive plan to end hallway health care, the Ontario government made an additional investment of over \$15 million earlier this year to support the planning and design of the new hospital. Once complete, this new state-of-the-art facility will replace the existing aged building, improving capacity, expanding access to quality care and helping end hallway health care for patients and families in west Niagara.

Getting to this stage of the project planning required an immense amount of work from the hard-working staff and planners who have helped us get here, and I want to thank them for that work.

Once complete, the new West Lincoln Memorial Hospital will have a modern, up-to-date facility with capacity for over 61 beds; a larger 24/7 emergency department; maternal and newborn services; modern surgical suites to deliver care with the best technology available; and outpatient care services, including minor surgical procedures such as endoscopies.

I want to thank our local municipal and community leaders, supporters, volunteers, doctors, nurses and front-line health care workers for their tireless advocacy. It's one of the most important regional projects in Niagara West. I also wish to acknowledge the hard work that continues to go forward, and I look forward to seeing shovels in the ground. Together, we will build the new West Lincoln Memorial Hospital.

QUESTION PERIOD

COVID-19 IMMUNIZATION

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Speaker, my first question this morning is for the Premier.

As we all know, COVID cases are up in Ontario. About a month ago, the Premier asked for some advice as to the use of mandatory vaccine policies for schools and hospitals, but of course he got that advice and then flat out refused to take it. Instead, he listens to anti-vaxxers.

In long-term care, 98% of staff have had their first shot and 95% are fully vaccinated, which shows that this policy

in fact works. Why will this Premier not guarantee the same level of protection for patients and students and stop coddling anti-vaxxers?

Hon. Doug Ford: Through you, Mr. Speaker: Because of the great work of the CEOs and public health and the front-line health care workers, that's the reason we're at 98% of health care workers.

But we also have to keep in mind the backlogged surgeries, the diagnostics, the cancer screenings. That's what we have to keep in mind. That's the reason we sent out a letter to all the hospitals to get a better gauge on what's going on. But I'm so proud of our front-line health care workers and the job they have been doing throughout the pandemic, and I'm so proud that they've hit 98%.

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

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Speaker, the science table advised the government, "Requiring that health care workers be vaccinated ... is evidence-based and protects the public." Long-term-care residents and staff are safer because of that mandate. Newborns in hospitals should be safe too, Speaker.

Fans at Raptors games need a vaccine, but the Premier doesn't think workers in schools and hospitals should have it. How can the Premier ignore the best scientific advice for a mandatory vaccine policy and leave patients, students and staff at hospitals and schools at risk?

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): To reply, the Deputy Premier and Minister of Health.

Hon. Christine Elliott: Protecting the health and well-being of all Ontarians has been our primary objective since this pandemic began. That applies to everyone.

We appreciate that most of our health care workers and workers in schools have already been vaccinated. We're very grateful for that. But the other reality is that, in addition to protecting people from COVID, we also have thousands and thousands of people who have been waiting for over a year to have necessary surgeries done: hip and knee replacements, cataract surgeries and other necessary surgeries. We need to make sure we have the health human resources available in order to do that so that people can be well, can be free from pain and can go back to work. They can go back and enjoy the activities they want to enjoy. So this is not an easy determination to make. We have to weigh, on a basis of an assessment of risk, what is more dangerous: to require vaccination or to give up on all of those other people who need our help. We are not going to give up on them.

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

Ms. Andrea Horwath: The bottom line is that vaccine mandates work. They protect staff and they protect the public. The TDSB had minimal disruption with their mandate. Many hospitals—the University Hospital Network, for example—already have mandates for vaccines as a policy in the hospitals. They know what this Premier refuses to acknowledge: that it is the best way to protect patients and staff.

When is the Premier going to stop listening to anti-vaxxers—stop coddling that segment of the population—and start listening to the advice of the science table and other experts who clearly say it is absolutely the right thing to do to have a mandate for vaccines in hospitals and schools.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The Premier.

Hon. Doug Ford: Through you, Mr. Speaker: I don't know who the Leader of the Opposition is trying to convince. I have been out there for 20 months, every single day, promoting people getting vaccinations. As the Leader of the Opposition is—I don't even know where she is. We're going to continue making sure we encourage people, all front-line health care workers, to get vaccinated. We're going to make sure all education workers get vaccinated. We're out there every single day promoting it.

We allowed the hospitals to have the flexibility because what is good for downtown hospitals isn't necessarily good for far, northern and rural hospitals that need more health care workers. We're giving them the flexibility, because the difference between us and the NDP and the Liberals is that we believe the hospitals are experts. They know what they're doing. That's why we gave them the flexibility.

CHILD CARE

Ms. Andrea Horwath: My next question is also for the Premier. This morning, Alberta is signing a \$10-a-day child care deal with the federal government. The Premier may not know it, but in fact families are struggling to make ends meet these days. The cost of living is up, rent is up, the price of milk is up. Ontario families need quality, affordable child care.

The question to this Premier is, why is he so unwilling to cut a deal for \$10-a-day child care for Ontario families?

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): To reply on behalf of the government, the Minister of Education.

Hon. Stephen Lecce: I want to thank the member opposite for the question. This Premier and our government has invested, every single year, \$2 billion to help deliver quality child care and make it more affordable. Given that the former Liberal government increased child care costs—under the former Liberals, by 40% over the national average. The second province with the most expensive child care in Canada was Ontario under the former Liberals; the worst was the New Democratic province of BC. We know that we can do better than the NDP and Liberals. We know we can set a higher standard.

We also know the federal government needs to pay a fair share. They contribute 2.5% of Ontario's contribution to child care, but they could do much, much more. We know, and we believe, that a good deal is on the horizon, but it requires the federal government to accept three core principles. The first is flexibility; the second is respect for all parents—all families deserve support from this federal government; and the third is sustainability, so we do not see a program that is viable for five years and then declines in year six, fees hike, and parents ultimately pay the price.

1040

We want a long-term commitment that is going to benefit all families. That's what we are fighting at that negotiating table.

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

Ms. Andrea Horwath: The federal minister responsible said this: "We actually haven't received any numbers from the government of Ontario.... Every other province has managed to send us an action plan from which we've been able to have negotiations. But quite frankly, we're still waiting for Ontario."

Parents need some breathing room. They can't wait forever. The cost of child care, first under the Liberal government and now under this PC government here in Ontario, is the highest in the country. The fees, in some cases, can be more than the cost of a mortgage. So why doesn't this Premier want to make life just a little more affordable for families with children by providing them with \$10-a-day child care like the rest of the country has been able to do?

Hon. Stephen Lecce: In fact, the Premier does want to do that. That's why in his first budget, he introduced a child care tax credit to reduce fees, and I will remind the member opposite you voted against that. So did the Liberals, by the way, in each successive budget. In the last budget, we enriched that tax credit to provide roughly \$1,500 per child in savings. We recognize that that in itself is not going to make child care affordable, which is why we expect the feds to pay their fair share—2.5% is clearly insufficient.

What we're doing on this side of the House—and I would expect all members to unify behind our government—is that there is a full-day kindergarten program in Ontario for four-year-olds and five-year-olds; 260,000 kids are getting full subsidies by the provincial taxpayer. Why is it that New Democrats and Liberals do not agree with the premise that the federal Liberal government should pay their fair share and support Ontario, which has one of the most mature programs of child care in the nation?

We're proud of that. We know there's more to do. We're going to continue to advance flexibility, sustainability and a program that supports every mom and dad in the province of Ontario.

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

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Tax credits don't build affordable, quality child care spaces for families in this province. This government just doesn't get what families are going through. In fact, their low-wage policies are hurting all Ontarians. High child care fees are squeezing families. The cost can be more than a mortgage, as I've already mentioned. Women who have been hit hard by this pandemic need affordable, quality, reliable child care to get back to work. Affordable child care is not just good for families, it's good for the economy as well.

The question to this Premier is: Why is he so unwilling to get a deal for Ontario families to make affordable child

care a reality here? Give those families a break, because the cost of living is going up and they need reliable, affordable child care. Why will he not provide it?

Hon. Stephen Lecce: We are working hard to get a good deal. If I could cite the day care operators of Ontario executive director, who said just days ago, "The wrong deal for Ontario could leave families with fewer licensed child care spaces and paying much, much more for them," in the context of supporting Ontario's independent licensed child care operators, who are encouraging the province to take the time to negotiate this with the federal government to get it right.

Mr. Speaker, we want a deal. We've been at the table for months. The member opposite may recall a federal election called by the federal Liberal government themselves impeded our ability to conclude it. But the Premier and this Progressive Conservative government believe at our core that the federal Liberals can give this province a better deal, with long-term sustainable investments that parents deserve. We do not want to sign a deal—maybe a good headline on day one and leads to higher prices in year five. We want something that is sustainable, that is enduring and that respects the interests of all families, of all parents in how best they choose to raise their kids.

INDIGENOUS AFFAIRS

Mr. Peter Tabuns: My question is for the Minister of Indigenous Affairs. This weekend, the Toronto Star revealed that the Ford government has approved eight mining exploration permits. These permits will allow companies to drill for gold on the area that the Grassy Narrows First Nation has declared as an Indigenous protected area, but the government didn't notify Grassy Narrows nor consult with them to get consent. Speaker, did the minister not realize that this was Grassy Narrows territory when he issued the permits, and how could that possibly have been missed?

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): To reply on behalf of the government, the member for Peterborough-Kawartha.

Mr. Dave Smith: Thank you very much for that question. It gives me an opportunity to clarify some things.

The exploration activity is not actually mining activity. Mining is a multi-step process that we have to go through, and it begins with the exploration permit. But an exploration permit does not allow the exploration company to engage in mine development, construction or production of the mine. It is a multi-year process that we have to go through.

Ontario is committed to the success of First Nations and seeks to work proactively with First Nations, including ANA, to achieve positive outcomes, including healthy communities, good jobs and economic prosperity.

Mining claim registrations in the area can likely be attributed to an increase in mineral commodity prices, absolutely. But the overwhelming majority of mining claim registrations and exploration projects do not result in an operating mine. I'll have more to say in the supplementary.

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

Mr. Peter Tabuns: Again to the minister—that was one of the weakest first answers I’ve ever heard.

Anyway, the people of Grassy Narrows have lived through decades of pain with basic human rights denied and ignored by successive Liberal and Conservative governments. Now the Ford government is plowing ahead to do even more damage. Issuing these permits is a violation of the Mining Act and section 35 of the Constitution, the duty to consult.

Grassy Narrows says the mining exploration will compound the harm that mercury and clear-cut logging have already done to their land and their people, and that harm has been considerable. You know that, Speaker.

Will the minister cancel these permits immediately and withdraw mining and clear-cut logging from Grassy Narrows territory?

Mr. Dave Smith: The ministry has worked in good faith with ANA and their neighbours to identify community views and positions on the no-harvest area and seek a balanced path forward that can be applied through the next decade with the Whiskey Jack Forest management plan.

The crown takes its duty to consult with Aboriginal communities very seriously. We’ll continue to consult with all First Nations on mining exploration and development activities where such activities have the potential to adversely affect a community’s established or credibly asserted Aboriginal or treaty rights. We are committed to satisfying this constitutional obligation.

CURRICULUM

Mr. Will Bouma: As Ontario begins to exit the Roadmap to Reopen, we are also proud of our school community that has continually been kept safe and learning since the start of this school year.

Beyond the measures that this government has taken, we know that many students that are racialized or from lower-income families are facing barriers to success in the classroom. Studies have found that students that are racialized, Indigenous or from lower-income families are disproportionately affected by academic streaming in secondary schools.

Can the Minister of Education tell this House what steps the government has taken to ensure that barriers are removed for all students to achieve their fullest potential?

Hon. Stephen Lecce: I want to thank the member for Brantford–Brant for his question and the advocacy from so many families in this province to remove the barriers that many young people face every single day, particularly racialized and Black and Indigenous children in Ontario.

Our government and our Premier have made a commitment to dismantle those barriers, to take them on with a plan that is decisive that includes the end of streaming for grade 9 children. We started in grade 9 with math this past September—transformational in helping to create pathways for young people to pursue their full

potential, including in the skilled trades, in college and university, as we hope to instill a greater emphasis on life and job skills, particularly the new math curriculum that deals with financial literacy and coding and the skill sets that young people need to succeed.

That is the same vision we have for all the curriculum we’re teaching children, which is why we were proud last week to confirm the province will end streaming in Ontario for grade 9, right across all grades, with the aim of lifting up the performance of all children and helping them succeed in this province.

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

Mr. Will Bouma: Mr. Speaker, I’d like to thank the minister for his response. It is great to see that Ontario students are being given an equal chance to succeed in math, something that the former government did not do for thousands of Ontario students.

Beyond the importance of mathematics, we know that barriers do not stop at one course. Courses in science, geography and English are still being streamed into academic and applied streams.

1050

Can the Minister of Education update this House on how he plans to ensure all students in grade 9 are given a fair chance at success in the classroom?

Hon. Stephen Lecce: Indeed, there is more work to do to help end some of the barriers that are impeding young people’s performance and success in Ontario, particularly when we look at the disproportionality, that children who are Black, for example, were being streamed into applied courses at two or three times the rate of other children in Ontario. Quite obviously, there is a systemic problem we must confront. I’m proud, as a Progressive Conservative, to take this challenge on, to focus on it over the past many years, with an aim of providing a centralized path to success for all kids, including in new destreamed courses for grade 9 science, for English, for geography. These are foundational skills which will be modernized for next September.

We know the disproportionality exists; that’s why the government took action last year to end streaming. It’s why this government for the first time in the history of Ontario brought in a supervisor in Peel region due to racism. We’re going to continue to confront racism in all of its forms and work hard to give every student a pathway to success in Ontario.

OPTOMETRY SERVICES

Ms. Jessica Bell: My question is to the Minister of Health. For four months now, seniors and kids have not had access to OHIP-covered eye care in Ontario—seniors like David Allgood, a resident in my riding of University–Rosedale. In October, David’s regular eye exam was cancelled because the Ford government refused to negotiate with optometrists. Just a few days later, David started experiencing vision problems which impacted his ability to read, write and drive. David pleaded with his

optometrist for a visit but was declined and was referred to the emergency room.

David is angry that the Ford government put his eyesight at risk, and he's angry the government is promoting unnecessary and costly visits to the ER.

This is my question: Why is the government further burdening hospital emergency rooms when they could just pay optometrists a fair price for their services?

Hon. Christine Elliott: Thank you very much to the member for the question, because it gives me the opportunity to correct some inaccuracies that are out there right now. The first is that the government of Ontario has never refused to pay for OHIP services for children and for seniors. We are ready, willing and able to provide those services, but the fact of the matter is that the Ontario Association of Optometrists is not prepared to do so. We went to the table with them for mediation. They disagreed with some of the ways to proceed, but we decided to move ahead in any event. We did receive a letter that asked why we weren't providing the services. The answer is we are ready to.

We are urging the Ontario Association of Optometrists to come back to the table. We want to reach a deal with them. We know they've been treated badly by other governments. We want to fix that, and I'll speak in my supplemental about what we are prepared to do.

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

Ms. Jessica Bell: Back to the Minister of Health: David later learned he had a hole in his retina, which, left untreated, could cause permanent blindness. And David is just one of the thousands of people in Ontario who have had their eyesight put at risk because of this government's failure to negotiate in good faith.

For decades now, successive governments have failed to increase OHIP funding to cover the cost of basic services like eye exams for children and seniors. We knew this situation was coming, and it could have been prevented. In fact, I sent a letter to the Minister of Health over a year ago, urging the minister to engage in dialogue with optometrists so service wouldn't be restricted.

This is my question: When will this government stop putting Ontarians' health and eyesight at risk and return to the negotiating table to reach a fair deal?

Hon. Christine Elliott: In fact, we take the health and well-being of every single Ontarian to be very important, and we are prepared to sit down at the table with the Ontario Association of Optometrists. Because of the fact that they haven't had an agreement since 2011, we've already paid \$39 million into their accounts to cover what they would have received had they been paid at the same rate as physicians for the last decade. That is what the association asked for.

We also agreed to go into mediation with them, which is what the association asked for. We agreed to the mediator that they asked for. We also have agreed that we would pay to start an 8.4% increase going forward but retroactive to April 1, recognizing, again, that they wanted to be paid at the same level that physicians would have

been paid. And we are prepared to set up a working group to discuss the issues with respect to overhead that the association has asked us to do. We are ready to do that today if the Ontario Association of Optometrists will come back to the table. That's all we're asking them to do, and we're ready to go.

COVID-19 IMMUNIZATION

Mr. John Fraser: My question is for the Premier.

Health Canada is expected to announce the approval of the Pfizer COVID-19 vaccine for children aged five to 11 within the next two weeks. This is good news, because one in five cases are those school-aged children here in Ontario. We know that immunization against COVID-19 will not only protect children from the Delta variant but their families and those around them as well. We also know that universal vaccinations have protected children and their families for decades here in Ontario.

Speaker, through you, will the Premier protect our children and their families by making COVID-19 vaccinations universal in schools, like we have done for so many other vaccines in this province?

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

Hon. Christine Elliott: Thank you very much to the member for the question. What we are doing is finalizing our plan for the vaccination of children aged five to 11. This is something that each and every public health unit has been asked to do. They are ready to go. As soon as the approval from Health Canada comes forward, we will be ready to start those vaccinations.

The vaccination plan in every different region will look different, but it's fair to say that many of the vaccination clinics will be done in schools, perhaps not during school hours. But we also have a vaccination line for people to call if they have questions about vaccinating their children. They can call the children's hospitals, speak to a specialist, make sure it's safe for their children. We receive a large number of calls to those clinics and we anticipate that most parents will move forward with having their child vaccinated. They recognize that that's the healthy and safe thing to do.

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

Mr. John Fraser: Well, Speaker, the government can start today by adding those over 12 to the Immunization of School Pupils Act, because we've had those vaccines approved for months and months now. We've implemented universal vaccinations for polio, mumps, measles, rubella, meningitis, whooping cough and chicken pox. That system has been in place for decades, and it has actually helped schools and public health units manage infectious diseases and outbreaks. It has been there for decades. It's a tool that's ready to go.

The Ontario Public School Boards' Association, Toronto District School Board, the Ottawa district school board and public health experts have all called for the government to make these vaccines part of that universal list. And it's a reasonable thing for families to expect that.

So, Speaker, why is the Premier not listening to parents and experts and schools who are calling on this government to ensure kids aged five to 11 are vaccinated against COVID-19 in order to keep them safe?

Hon. Christine Elliott: Our government has been taking every step possible to keep everyone safe in Ontario, from children to seniors and everyone else in between. As of today, we have 88.7% of our population aged 12 and over having received one dose of the vaccine and 85.6% receiving two doses. That's one of the highest rates, not just in Canada but in the world, and we're going to continue to do that.

We have a last-mile strategy we are using, where we have GO-VAXX buses going to areas where we have large numbers of people who are unvaccinated. We're still having the clinics; we're still doing it through primary care. And we'll continue to do that with the children as well. Currently, of 18- to 29-year-olds, 79.2% have been fully vaccinated; 12- to 17-year-olds, 80.1%. Some of that is because some of the children who were 11 turning 12 didn't receive the notification that they could move forward until more recently. But our numbers continue to go up, and we're going to get everybody vaccinated in Ontario who wants to be vaccinated.

GOVERNMENT SERVICES

Mr. Sam Oosterhoff: My question is to the President of the Treasury Board.

In my riding of Niagara West, we've seen that the pandemic has revealed how Ontario's programs and front-line services need to be more reliable, more accessible and convenient. We saw that the last government said no to reducing red tape, no to supporting small businesses and, frankly, no to supporting the people of this province.

My constituents want to know what this government is doing to make services more accessible, reduce red tape and simplify policies for all Ontarians. My constituents have long demanded simpler, faster and better services, but never more so than during a pandemic.

1100

Speaker, my question through you to the President of the Treasury Board: How will the minister advance our public services and ensure that Ontarians are receiving these services in a rapid fashion?

Hon. Prabmeet Singh Sarkaria: I'd like to thank the member for Niagara West for that excellent question. With more and more people accessing digital services, we can't afford to be an off-line government in an online world. The government is listening to Ontarians and is exploring how programs and services can be improved. We've worked hard to cut red tape, reduce inefficiencies and create a better experience for the people of Ontario.

While this work has proceeded, the COVID-19 pandemic has meant we had to accelerate and innovate our approach to moving Ontario onwards. Our government launched the \$500-million Ontario Onwards Acceleration Fund to support this work. The fund will reinvest in public

services and will accelerate transformation across government by supporting innovative ideas and providing opportunities to pilot new technologies.

Mr. Speaker, we are undertaking an across-the-board modernization of the entire government. We are moving Ontario onwards.

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

Mr. Sam Oosterhoff: Thank you very much, Speaker. To the minister through you: I have to say, I have heard from many constituents who appreciate that they don't need to spend as much time waiting in line for approvals; they don't need to spend as much time waiting in line at ServiceOntario. But there are indeed ways that the government has cut red tape and ensured that we're able to access government services in a rapid fashion.

But, Speaker, there is more that we can do. There's more that we can do, and I want to hear a little bit more from the minister about what Ontario is doing to encourage and accelerate transformation across government, support innovative ideas and also provide opportunities to pilot new technologies. I am also wondering how the government plans to fund innovation in this province.

Hon. Prabmeet Singh Sarkaria: I would like to thank the member again for that very important question.

The world has changed, and our government must change with it. The new Ontario acceleration fund will help with the implementation of projects that will make a difference in how people and businesses experience services in Ontario. Mr. Speaker, everyone will benefit from a more efficient government. For example, a small business owner can register for licences online and permits online, and even open their accounts online; or Ontario farmers can choose to renew a farm vehicle online, rather than or instead of visiting a ServiceOntario location in person.

Mr. Speaker, we are expanding the range of programs and services available online, simplifying the government's role in people's lives and their businesses. We are going to be putting people at the centre of everything we do, continue to reinvest in our services and accelerate transformation across government.

HOSPITAL FUNDING

Ms. Sara Singh: My question is for the Premier. Back in March, the Premier told the people of Brampton, "We're building a new hospital. It's going to be a beautiful, state-of-the-art hospital."

The problem for Brampton, though, Speaker, was that the Premier hasn't made the investments necessary to bring a new hospital to our community, and he certainly hasn't put any shovels in the ground either. Now, folks in Brampton are once again raising concerns that this over-promised and under-delivered plan isn't even going to meet the needs of our growing city. We learned last week that we may be only getting 250 beds over seven years, well short of the 850 beds that the city requested when they declared a health care emergency in Brampton.

So, Speaker, my question, again, through you to the Premier, is: When is this Conservative government going to stop playing political games with our community and finally commit to a stand-alone, brand new hospital for the people of Brampton?

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The Minister of Health to respond.

Hon. Christine Elliott: Thank you to the member for the question. Our government has made a commitment to the people of Brampton. We have been hearing, for a long period of time, about how this rapidly growing community needs more hospital development. We have made the agreement to revitalize the existing hospital, to create an emergency department there, to create an acute care centre there, and to build it up into a full-grown hospital. That is a commitment we have made and that is a commitment that we are going to keep.

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

Ms. Sara Singh: Speaker, families in Brampton are sick of Liberals and Conservatives using our community as election pawns. Decades of broken promises, underfunding and inaction from both Liberal and Conservative governments have had real consequences for the people of Brampton.

Our only hospital is routinely over capacity. People leave our community to get health care services. Surgeries are delayed, with exceptionally long wait times, and health care staff are run off their feet. Our city receives \$1,000 less per capita in health care funding. My heart breaks thinking of what our community goes through. It is unfair, and the people of Brampton deserve so much better, Speaker. We deserve a full-service hospital, full stop. We need more than empty promises from this government. We need shovels in the ground and we need beds that keep up with the growing demand in our community.

When is Brampton going to get the new hospital that our community deserves and that we have been promised?

Hon. Christine Elliott: The member is absolutely right: The people of Brampton do deserve better, and they are going to get better. But let me just quote what the mayor of Brampton, Mr. Patrick Brown, recently said: “Brampton got nothing for two decades—for 20 years we were ignored despite having institutionalized hallway medicine. Frankly, this should have been done 15 years ago.

“We’re getting \$1 billion, the largest investment in health care in our city’s history.

“This is a significant step forward, this is progress, and I don’t think there is any mayor in Canada that would not be elated with a \$1-billion investment in their community.”

Speaker, the opposition party should listen to what Mayor Brown said when he encouraged people not to play politics with a new hospital.

MUNICIPAL PLANNING

Mrs. Belinda C. Karahalios: Good morning. My question is for the Minister of Municipal Affairs and

Housing. On August 27, 2021, the minister approved an MZO request to fast-track the building of a one-million-square-foot industrial warehouse in the village of Blair, in my riding of Cambridge. The initial public consultation on rezoning the area was done in 2012, completed six years ago, and the consultation was done for a different use of the land altogether, not for one big, massive industrial facility. Despite the fact that the consultation was done that long ago for a different facility, and the user of the new facility remains a secret mystery, and Blair residents are against the project, and Six Nations were not consulted on the development, the minister approved the project anyway.

My question for the minister is: Why did he approve the MZO?

Hon. Steve Clark: I want to thank the member for the question. Our government has been very clear on all minister’s zoning orders on non-provincially owned land: It comes at the request of the municipality. It has been very clear that the city of Cambridge has requested this order. I wrote the mayor and asked specifically: From a council perspective, had they done their due diligence in terms of consultation with the local community? The city came back and again confirmed not only that they had done their due diligence, but they also reaffirmed that they requested a minister’s zoning order.

Speaker, we have been very clear with the city of Cambridge, with the local council, on this project. We expect that they do their due diligence before they ask for this order.

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

Mrs. Belinda C. Karahalios: Well, despite this government’s claim that it is for the people, it isn’t listening to local voices when it comes to big government programs, instead hiding behind the decisions of local councils who are going rogue and not representing their constituents, whether it is approving the construction of the largest wind farm in Ontario, the Nation Rise Wind Farm in Stormont–Dundas–South Glengarry; or allowing Cambridge city council to move forward with a request for a drug injection site; or now hammering through this MZO, all against the will of local residents.

This government is showing contempt for the province’s own consultation rules and residents of local communities. What assurances are in place to hold municipal councils in check when they go rogue on their constituents and try to hammer ahead with programs against the will of their residents?

Hon. Steve Clark: Again, in terms of this minister’s zoning order and this council—I’m not going to speak to those other two matters that the member brings up, because they have nothing to do with the minister’s zoning order in Cambridge—we’ve communicated to the mayor and the council. We’ve been crystal clear: If the community does not do the Indigenous consultation, I will revoke the MZO. I have written two letters to the mayor and indicated that it’s our expectation that they’re going to do these consultations, that they’re going to have these

discussions. I wrote them once; I wrote them again; and I've given them a deadline. They've got to move forward with those consultations or it will be revoked, plain and simple.

1110

NURSES

Mr. Norman Miller: My question is for the Minister of Colleges and Universities. Speaker, as you know, Ontario is facing a shortage of nurses. In my riding, Muskoka Algonquin Healthcare, West Parry Sound Health Centre and local long-term-care facilities all struggle to find enough nurses. There was a shortage of nurses before the pandemic, but COVID-19 has only made the shortage worse.

Can the minister tell us what tangible actions the minister has taken to address the nursing shortage in Ontario? And will the minister commit to creating more nursing spots and programs by the 2022 academic year?

Hon. Jill Dunlop: Thank you to the member from Parry Sound–Muskoka for that important question.

This past year, the COVID-19 pandemic has demonstrated how vital nurses are to our health care system. Our government has taken the necessary steps to address the nursing shortage in Ontario. Specifically, in my ministry we have worked in collaboration with colleges and universities to create programs to maintain excellence in nursing education, while also expanding choices for students. Last month our government said yes to new stand-alone, four-year bachelor of science in nursing degree programs at both Georgian College and St. Lawrence College. These programs are in addition to the 15 universities and 22 colleges offering baccalaureate nursing programs in collaborative partnerships.

By allowing both colleges and universities to have stand-alone degrees, our government is increasing choice and reducing barriers to access high-quality, local education for our students. This is a bold and progressive move under our government that will provide our students the opportunity to complete a highly sought-after degree close to home and ultimately keep the talent in local communities to help address any skills shortages.

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

Mr. Norman Miller: Thank you to the minister for that answer. It's great to hear our government is actively taking steps to address the nursing shortage in response to the needs of our health care system.

When we consider the importance of nurses, we must also take into account the needs of the long-term care sector. Our government is mandating increased care in long-term care, and that, it seems to me, will require even more nurses. Speaker, through you to the minister: What is our government doing to support the addition of nurses to long-term care homes? And what is our government doing to support the upskilling of nurses and personal support workers?

Hon. Jill Dunlop: Thank you again to the member for that question. I was pleased to join the Minister of Long-

Term Care in announcing our government's investment of nearly \$35 million to increase enrolment in nursing education programs. This investment will enable Ontario's publicly assisted colleges and universities to accept an additional 1,130 practical nursing diploma students, as well as 870 bachelor of science in nursing degree students for the September 2021 and January 2022 intakes.

Increasing enrolment in nursing education programs is progress in ensuring that Ontario's health care system has the highly qualified staff needed to provide world-class care for Ontarians and our loved ones. Just last week, we joined the Minister of Long-Term Care to announce two innovative programs, the Bridging Educational Grant in Nursing and the Nursing Program Transformation in Ontario's Colleges, to increase access to nursing programs at publicly assisted colleges.

Our government will continue to say yes to our partners to provide students with the education and skills they need for rewarding careers that fuel a responsive and highly skilled labour market.

TENANT PROTECTION

Ms. Suze Morrison: My question is for the Premier. In 2018, this Conservative government legislated a massive loophole in rent control rules in Ontario. For tenants living in newly built apartments there is absolutely no limit to how much their landlords can increase their rent by.

I recently heard from Rahool, a constituent in my riding of Toronto Centre. He lives with his family in a new condo in the Church and Wellesley Village. Last month, Rahool received notice from his landlord that his rent would be going up by 23%, which is more than \$400 a month, Speaker. Rahool and his family want to know when this government will finally help young families like his and restore rent control for all Ontarians.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing.

Hon. Steve Clark: I want to thank the member for the question. We were clear in the fall economic statement in 2018 that we were going to commit, as we did during the election, to protecting tenants in rent-controlled buildings. We made a decision that has resulted in the most purpose-built rental construction in our province since 1992. So we've made a decision, on a supply basis, to have more purpose-built rental. It was part of our More Homes, More Choice Act, our housing supply action plan. We've been clear in our direction.

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

Ms. Suze Morrison: Respectfully, back to the minister: Allowing tenants like Rahool and his family to be gouged by their landlord is not protecting them. Rahool just wants an affordable home to raise his young family in. His income isn't going up by \$400 a month, and his family is unable to move while his wife recovers from a C-section after recently giving birth to their second child.

Rahool told me, "We had no idea our unit had no rent protections and weren't told the unit had no rent control

by our landlord when moving in. If we knew our rent could increase by any amount our landlord wanted, we would never have chosen to rent ... here.” He went on to say, “I wasn’t born here, but I didn’t think this kind of thing could happen in a country like Canada to my family.”

When will this government finally accept that its rent control loopholes are unfair, they are unjust and they are hurting Ontario families like Rahool’s?

Hon. Steve Clark: Increasing the supply of purpose-built rental is a priority of our government. We want to ensure that everyone who is a tenant has a safe, secure place to call home.

But again, we’re not going to go back to the “no” policies of New Democrats and Liberals. We want to build upon the fact that, as I said earlier, we have more purpose-built rental in this province than we’ve seen since 1992. And it doesn’t matter what metric you use, Speaker—it doesn’t matter whether you look at RBC in terms of their economics, Urbanation or CMHC—the numbers are there.

What do we have to do, Speaker? We have to build upon those numbers. We have to, again, work with our partners at the federal and municipal governments to build more housing supply. This isn’t a one-and-done policy, Speaker. We made our housing supply action plan, but there is much, much more we can do to increase the supply of housing of all types.

GO TRANSIT

Ms. Kathleen O. Wynne: My question is for the Minister of Transportation. Speaker, the Milton GO corridor is the third-busiest GO Transit corridor in the GO system. Tens of thousands of jobs rely on the corridor. By one count, it’s 143,000 jobs. Milton is one of the fastest-growing communities in the country, and this corridor would provide service to thousands of families who are in need of better transit options.

I know that there has been a protracted discussion with CP Rail in order to ensure safe passage of both freight and passenger trains, but my understanding is that those discussions have progressed and that it’s now time to take action. On September 14, Mississauga called on the federal and provincial governments to work together to complete full-day, two-way service to Milton, and this was in response to the August announcement of the federal commitment to fund 50% of the cost of delivering this expanded service. In fact, I believe that the federal minister is at Queen’s Park today.

Mr. Speaker, will the government commit to matching federal funding to deliver two-way, all-day GO train service every day from Union Station through Mississauga to Milton?

Hon. Caroline Mulroney: I thank the member opposite for the question. It’s an important question, because we know that the Milton GO corridor is really among the most congested corridors in Ontario and more needs to be done to ensure safer and more efficient travel. As the population in the region grows, transit needs to grow with it.

But, Mr. Speaker, I find the member opposite’s question ironic. She and her government had 15 years to make two-way, all-day GO service to Milton a reality, but they failed to deliver. In fact, in 2014, Mr. Del Duca told members of this House, “Our government has a commitment and will deliver two-way, all-day GO service to Kitchener-Waterloo, to Milton, to Barrie and along all of our corridors over the next decade. That’s our plan; we’ll get it done.”

The member opposite is correct: I have a meeting this afternoon with the federal Minister of Transport to discuss how we can move forward on this. There are commercial negotiations under way. Our government is committed to moving forward with this. We know how important it is, and unlike the previous government, we will get it done.

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

Ms. Kathleen O. Wynne: You know, Mr. Speaker, one of the reasons that governments like the previous Conservative government under Mike Harris don’t invest in long-term infrastructure projects is that you don’t get to cut the ribbon. The reality is that most of the projects that this government is involved in, and is going to cut ribbons on, were begun under a Liberal government, because under Conservative governments those projects don’t start.

1120

So, Mr. Speaker, yes, we did not get to the point where we were delivering full-day, two-way GO service to Milton, because those conversations with CP that I talked about were ongoing. Now they are completed, because they were started under a Liberal government.

Mr. Speaker, I am asking the minister: It is not 1916, when what this province did was build roads. It is not the Department of Highways. Highway 413 is not necessary. What we need is two-way, all-day GO service. Will the government commit to pay its share of the funding, to which the federal government has already committed?

Hon. Caroline Mulroney: I thank the member opposite for the question. She might not like it, but as she knows, our government unveiled the most ambitious transit expansion plan for the greater Toronto area, more than any government ever has, with \$28.5 billion. We achieved—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Stop the clock. I would like to hear the Minister of Transportation answer the question, and I could hear her, perhaps, if the members of the government side weren’t yelling at the same time.

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The member for Ottawa South is going to come to order.

Start the clock. The Minister of Transportation.

Hon. Caroline Mulroney: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

We unveiled the most ambitious transit plan in the history of Ontario. The member mentions and is asking about working with the federal government. We understand it’s important to work with other levels of government. In fact, it was our government that achieved a

historic partnership with the city of Toronto, York region and the federal government to deliver on transit. We are going to continue to work with our partners to deliver value for taxpayers in the province of Ontario and transit, unlike the previous government.

In 2015, Mr. Del Duca again told members in this House, “The Milton corridor itself will have service every 15 minutes or better during the morning and afternoon peak travel periods.” It’s another empty promise by the Liberals. We know how important it is to work with all levels of government—

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

EDUCATION FUNDING

Ms. Marit Stiles: This question is for the Premier. Speaker, in this month’s fall economic update, the base funding for education was cut by half a billion dollars, down from \$31.3 billion in March to \$30.8 billion. For families who have seen their kids packed into classrooms like sardines or struggling through hybrid classes that put saving money ahead of learning and support, the fact that this government would be making deep cuts to our community schools is just unconscionable.

Can the Premier explain to parents how he can possibly justify cutting half a billion dollars from Ontario’s schools?

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

Hon. Stephen Lecce: Mr. Speaker, that is simply utter nonsense. The government, in the fall economic statement, increased investment by \$230 million more than we were projected to spend—the last budget, up \$600 million year over year, as reported by the public accounts. It’s black and white for every member to see.

Everyone knows that this Premier has increased investment every single year, the highest level of investment in public education in the history of this province, because we believe in public education: an over \$1.6-billion investment in COVID resources; a \$600-million historic investment to improve air ventilation, given the massive repair backlog inherited from the former Liberal government. We are investing \$85 million in learning recovery, a leading investment focused on early learning, on reading, as well as mathematics, and we’re investing more to support tutoring in Ontario, to help more students get access to the reading gaps they deserve.

We’re going to continue to invest in mental health, a four-times increase, and make life better for families, for students and for education staff in this province.

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

Ms. Marit Stiles: Speaker, the minister is spinning so fast, he’s going to lift off. This minister’s weak excuses—no one is buying them.

Read your own fall economic update: \$500 million cut, half a billion dollars cut. Parents, school boards, education workers and all our kids have done their very best to make

this fall semester work. After 26 weeks of school closures, our kids should be getting more support right now, not less. There is no news in there about the second half of COVID funding to help boards plan for next semester. There is nothing in there on the rapid testing program, which is just confusing and inaccessible. Vaccine rates among eligible youth continue to lag. And the plan for the five- to 11-year-olds has been left to public health units to figure out.

Speaker, will the Premier commit today to reversing these planned half a billion dollars in cuts to schools and step up to help address the challenges that they are facing, yes or no?

Hon. Stephen Lecce: We increased investment last year, in the last budget, by \$600 million year over year. In the most recent fall economic statement, as reported within our fiscal plan, there’s a \$230-million increase in investment when it comes to what we’re expected and projected to spend this year. We’re investing more than we even anticipated, which is a \$600-million increase.

We have put \$1.6 billion in COVID resources, \$85 million in learning recovery. Mr. Speaker, we’ve increased for school boards the vehicle by which we provide funding, the grant for students, by an additional \$561 million. That couldn’t be further from the truth. Investments are up in every measurement.

In mental health, something I think all members are committed to, we have increased investment by four times what the former Liberal government was investing. This year alone, we’ve hired 1,200 net new teachers. And the hiring continues: 2,000 more staff in school boards right across Ontario, reported by the boards themselves.

We’re committed to safe schools. We’re proud that two million children are learning within our school system today. We’re proud of the ventilation system that has been improved in every school.

We know there is more work to do. With high vaccine rates, we know we can continue to keep kids—

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

OPTOMETRY SERVICES

Mr. Mike Schreiner: Good morning, Speaker. My question is for the Premier. A veteran approached me after Remembrance Day ceremonies in Guelph last Thursday. His eyesight has declined and he desperately needs access to an optometrist, but neither he nor his grandkids can make an appointment for eye care.

It’s wrong that seniors and children cannot access eye care in Ontario. It is wrong that optometrists lose over \$30 for each OHIP eye exam. On behalf of this veteran and thousands of people across Ontario, I am asking the Premier, will he do basic math and cover the full operating cost of delivering an OHIP eye exam in this province?

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

Hon. Christine Elliott: Thank you to the member for the question. I can certainly agree with you that it is wrong that people are not receiving the services that they need to

receive, to receive quality eye care. That includes seniors. That includes people under age 18. But the government of Ontario is ready, willing and able to pay for these OHIP-covered services. Sadly, the Ontario Association of Optometrists is not.

Now, I think it's very important that anybody who needs eye care should know that the College of Optometrists requires the optometrist, even if they are not providing the care themselves—for someone who needs urgently required health care, the college says that the optometrist must refer them to someone who will provide that service. That is important for everybody to know: to first discuss it with your optometrist and then get a referral to somebody who can help you.

However, I think it's also important to say that we are ready, willing and able to sit back at the table at mediation with the association. We have asked them to do so several times. We have made a \$39-million payment into their accounts already. We're ready to increase their fees by 8.4%, retroactive to April 1, and we are ready to sit down and have a working table today if they're willing to go back to the table to talk about their overhead costs.

We know that they have been put back by previous governments. We want to make it right with optometrists. We want them to come back to the table so that we can continue to provide those services—

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

Mr. Mike Schreiner: Speaker, with all due respect to the minister, I ran a small business for many years. You cannot have your business continue if you are losing money on each exam. So, yes, the government says it will continue to pay OHIP eye exams. But if you're losing \$30 every time you give an exam, how can you continue to do that? The government says, "We've offered an 8% increase." That means instead of losing \$30, they're losing around \$27. It's still not sustainable.

The minister says the government is willing to negotiate. They say it in the House. They said it on social media. It's my understanding that the OAO president has provided the minister, through a letter, his cell number to begin negotiations. So my question to the minister would be, can the minister inform this House and the people of Ontario how many formal outreaches have been made to the OAO through a letter or a phone call asking them to come to the negotiating table since September 1 when services were withdrawn?

1130

Hon. Christine Elliott: I would say the answer is many. As I mentioned, in the letter I received from the leader of the official opposition and the president of the OAO, they asked me, in my capacity as minister:

"That you direct the Ministry of Health to immediately commence intensive negotiations with the OAO concerning OHIP optometry fees.

"Further, the negotiation process must include a mediation and fact-finding process that results in a public report in the event that the parties are unable to reach an agreement."

We said yes. We honoured the OAO's request to commence mediation, only to have the OAO reject the mediator's terms and walk away from the table.

The Ministry of Health has agreed to the conditions required by the mediator to resume negotiations and is ready, willing and able to continue those discussions with the OAO. But I would say that given the OAO's engagement of legal counsel to support their negotiations and the mediator's regular outreach to counsel to explore the continuation of our talks, the OAO is very well aware—

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

ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION

Ms. Jennifer K. French: My question is to the Premier. I was proud to stand recently with the leader of the official opposition, the MPP for Hamilton West–Ancaster–Dundas, councillors from the Mississaugas of Scugog Island First Nation, Regional Councillor Dies, EANAP and many community and environmental voices at Carruthers Marsh in Ajax. We were there to commit to protecting this vitally important area and to adding the Carruthers Creek headwaters to Ontario's greenbelt when the NDP form government in 2022.

The Carruthers Creek headwaters are comprised of prime agricultural lands containing sensitive hydrological features and are completely surrounded by greenbelt. The watershed is vulnerable and invaluable, and we must protect it.

The Ontario NDP is committed to protecting the Carruthers Creek headwaters when we form government; however, Speaker, it needs to be protected now. Will this Premier commit to adding the Carruthers Creek headwaters to the greenbelt?

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): To reply, the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing.

Hon. Steve Clark: I want to thank the member for her question. As she knows, from February to April our government launched a 61-day consultation to grow the greenbelt, which could lead to its largest expansion since its inception in 2005. We made a commitment in both the 2020 and the 2021 budgets that we were committed to not just protecting but expanding the greenbelt as one of our greatest treasures.

We are still consulting in terms of urban river valleys and the Paris-Galt moraine. We'll continue to work with our partners on their advice as we move forward. Thank you for the question.

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

Ms. Jennifer K. French: Again to the Premier: Talk is cheap with this government. A three-year-old PC Party campaign promise made by the now MPP for Ajax and a recent and reactionary damage-control Facebook post isn't good enough.

The MPP for Ajax has been in cabinet for the last three years with the exception of his short but infamous vacation, and yet he still said nothing about this until the NDP

raised the issue. He was silent during his time as environment minister and was silent during the government's consultations on expanding the greenbelt, which recently concluded with absolutely no commitment to adding the Carruthers Creek headwaters to the greenbelt. Clearly, if this government wanted to protect the Carruthers Creek headwaters, it would have done so.

The minister can knock on doors and say whatever he wants, but I can't imagine that that member speaks for the government. Is the MPP for Ajax again going rogue by making environmental commitments, or will this government make the right decision and add the Carruthers Creek headwaters to the greenbelt?

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): To reply, the Minister of the Environment, Conservation and Parks.

Hon. David Piccini: Thank you to the member for that question. It's under our Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing that we've launched an expansion of the greenbelt—as he said, potentially the largest expansion in Ontario's history, but, Speaker, we're not done there.

Some of my first actions as minister were to expand our green space in the province. We expanded Normandale beach, adding it to Turkey Point Provincial Park. We expanded the waterfront trail, an important asset as that member would know, and we would continue to encourage that member to engage her constituents and constituents throughout the Durham region on important investments that can be made, including as part of our greenbelt consultations.

Under the previous Minister of the Environment, we launched Ontario's Made-in-Ontario Environment Plan, which led to the largest freshwater cleanup of its kind, again, important to the residents of Ajax and Durham.

We're going to keep acting on the environment, keep expanding green spaces and leading historic reductions in greenhouse gas emissions. We're going to keep doing that, and I'd encourage her to join us in that.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): That concludes our question period for this morning.

This House stands in recess until 1 p.m.

The House recessed from 1135 to 1300.

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

NORTHERN HEALTH TRAVEL GRANT ADVISORY COMMITTEE ACT, 2021

LOI DE 2021 SUR LE COMITÉ CONSULTATIF DES SUBVENTIONS AUX RÉSIDENTS DU NORD DE L'ONTARIO POUR FRAIS DE TRANSPORT À DES FINS MÉDICALES

Ms. Monteith-Farrell moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 46, An Act to enact the Northern Health Travel Grant Advisory Committee Act, 2021 / Projet de loi 46, Loi édictant la Loi de 2021 sur le Comité consultatif des subventions aux résidents du Nord de l'Ontario pour frais de transport à des fins médicales.

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

First reading agreed to.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Would the member care to briefly explain her bill?

Ms. Judith Monteith-Farrell: The bill enacts the Northern Health Travel Grant Advisory Committee Act, 2021. The act requires the Minister of Health to establish an advisory committee. The committee's mandate is to make recommendations for improving the facilitation of reasonable access to health services for people in northern Ontario by means of reasonable, realistic and efficient reimbursement for travel costs. The committee is required to consult with all relevant stakeholders, including, at minimum, the stakeholders specified in the bill. The committee is required to report its recommendations to the minister. The minister is required to inform the assembly of the recommendations that the minister will implement.

POET LAUREATE OF ONTARIO AMENDMENT ACT (FRENCH-LANGUAGE POET LAUREATE OF ONTARIO), 2021

LOI DE 2021 MODIFIANT LA LOI SUR LE POÈTE OFFICIEL DE L'ONTARIO (POÈTE OFFICIEL DE L'ONTARIO DE LANGUE FRANÇAISE)

Madame Collard moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 47, An Act to amend the Poet Laureate of Ontario Act (In Memory of Gord Downie), 2019 with respect to the establishment of a French-language Poet Laureate / Projet de loi 47, Loi modifiant la Loi de 2019 sur le poète officiel de l'Ontario (à la mémoire de Gord Downie) concernant la création de la charge de poète officiel de langue française.

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

First reading agreed to.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): I would like to invite the member for Ottawa–Vanier to briefly explain her bill.

Mme Lucille Collard: La Loi de 2019 sur le poète officiel de l'Ontario (à la mémoire de Gord Downie) est modifiée pour ajouter un poète officiel de l'Ontario de langue française en plus du poète officiel de l'Ontario de langue anglaise déjà prévu dans la loi. Des modifications sont apportées à la loi pour tenir compte des deux charges de poète officiel de l'Ontario. La loi est également modifiée pour exiger qu'au moins deux des membres du comité de sélection d'un poète officiel de l'Ontario de langue française soient en mesure d'évaluer les oeuvres originales en français des candidats à la charge.

SUPPORT WORKERS PAY
ACT, 2021

LOI DE 2021
SUR LA RÉMUNÉRATION DES PRÉPOSÉS
AUX SERVICES DE SOUTIEN

Mr. West moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 48, An Act respecting minimum pay for support workers / Projet de loi 48, Loi concernant la rémunération minimale des préposés aux services de soutien.

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

First reading agreed to.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): I invite the member for Sudbury to briefly explain his bill if he wishes to do so.

Mr. Jamie West: An Act respecting minimum pay for support workers basically is an opportunity for this government to amend what they have been doing with these temporary enhancements to public support worker pay.

As we know, many seasoned PSWs have teenage and young adult children who are making more money than they are. We all recognize in this House how important PSWs' work is, and that they're underpaid and undervalued.

In order to attract PSWs to the role and retain them, we need to pay them a livable wage, a fair wage. This act would ensure this happens and that it is continually evaluated so that the pay never falls backwards due to cost-of-living increases.

PETITIONS

AFFORDABLE HOUSING

Mr. Chris Glover: My petition is entitled "Affordable Housing.

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas under Conservative and Liberal governments, rent prices have skyrocketed, home ownership is completely out of reach for many, and affordable housing and assisted living space wait-lists far outstrip availability;

"Whereas in Ontario, half of renters give more than 30% of their income to their landlords, and where 20% of renters give more than 50%;

"Whereas Ontario's wait-list for affordable housing has grown to more than 185,000 families, and seniors now account for over 35% of the people waiting for affordable housing, putting Ontario on the brink of a homelessness humanitarian crisis;

"Whereas instead of tackling the housing problem, the Conservative government cancelled rent control on new units, forcing double-digit increases in rent, has refused any direct relief for renters during the COVID-19 pandemic, and abandoned Ontario's target of ending homelessness by 2025; and

"Whereas everyone deserves a home—a stable, decent, place they can afford;

"Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to build 100,000 homes over the next decade consisting of 70,000 affordable housing units, as recommended by the Ontario Non-Profit Housing Association and the Co-operative Housing Federation of Canada, and 30,000 supportive housing units with wrap-around supports for people with mental health issues and addictions, as recommended by the Canadian Mental Health Association."

I fully support this petition. I will endorse it and pass it to page Nathaniel to take to the table.

OPTOMETRY SERVICES

Ms. Peggy Sattler: I have a petition signed by hundreds of London West seniors and families who depend on their local optometrists for high-quality eye care. I'd like to thank the offices of Dr. Allan Bernardi, Dr. Greg Cook, Old South Optometry, Byron Optometry and FYidoctors for sending in these petitions.

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the Ontario government has underfunded optometric eye care for 30 years; and

"Whereas the government only pays on average \$44.65 for an OHIP-insured visit—the lowest rate in Canada; and

"Whereas optometrists are being forced to pay substantially out of their own pocket to provide over four million services each year to Ontarians under OHIP; and

"Whereas optometrists have never been given a formal negotiation process with the government; and

"Whereas the government's continued neglect resulted in 96% of Ontario optometrists voting to withdraw OHIP services beginning September 1, 2021;

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

"To instruct the Ontario government to immediately commit to legally binding, formal negotiations to ensure any future OHIP-insured optometry services are, at a minimum, funded at the cost of delivery."

I support this petition. I will affix my signature and give it to page Isabella to take to the table.

1310

VOLUNTEER SERVICE AWARDS

Mr. Will Bouma: "To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas army, sea and air cadets are some of the best of our youth;

"Whereas the young men and women of Canada's cadets volunteer and serve their communities with honour and distinction; and

"Whereas their development and service within our community are admirable and should be emulated; and

"Whereas their teamwork, dedication, and discipline are qualities worthy of recognition; and

"Whereas the Cadet Citizenship Recognition Act, if passed, would create an annual award for a nominated

cadet from within each local cadet corps to celebrate their remarkable acts of citizenship;

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

“That the Legislative Assembly of Ontario vote on and pass the Cadet Citizenship Recognition Act.”

I fully support this petition, will be affixing my signature thereon and giving it to page Hayden.

OPTOMETRY SERVICES

Ms. Sara Singh: I’m honoured to present this petition to save eye care in Ontario. I’d like to thank Dr. David Bookman at Vodden Medical Centre and patients at the clinic for bringing this petition to our office.

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas the Ontario government has underfunded optometric eye care for 30 years; and

“Whereas the government only pays on average \$44.65 for an OHIP-insured visit—the lowest rate in Canada; and

“Whereas optometrists are being forced to pay substantially out of their own pocket to provide over four million services each year to Ontarians under OHIP; and

“Whereas optometrists have never been given a formal negotiation process with the government; and

“Whereas the government’s continued neglect resulted in 96% of Ontario optometrists voting to withdraw OHIP services beginning September 1, 2021;

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

“To instruct the Ontario government to immediately commit to legally binding, formal negotiations to ensure any future OHIP-insured optometry services are, at a minimum, funded at the cost of delivery.”

I am happy to add my name to this and send it off with page Joel.

OPTOMETRY SERVICES

Mr. Joel Harden: I have a petition to save eye care in Ontario.

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas the Ontario government has underfunded optometric eye care for 30 years; and

“Whereas the government only pays on average \$44.65 for an OHIP-insured visit—the lowest rate in Canada; and

“Whereas optometrists are being forced to pay substantially out of their own pocket to provide over four million services each year to Ontarians under OHIP; and

“Whereas optometrists have never been given a formal negotiation process with the government; and

“Whereas the government’s continued neglect resulted in 96% of Ontario optometrists voting to withdraw OHIP services beginning September 1, 2021;

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

“To instruct the Ontario government to immediately commit to legally binding, formal negotiations to ensure

any future OHIP-insured optometry services are, at a minimum, funded at the cost of delivery.”

I’m happy to sign this petition and send it with page Isabella to the table.

ADDICTION SERVICES

Ms. Judith Monteith-Farrell: This petition is entitled “Prevent Overdoses in the North.”

“Whereas northern Ontario has some of the highest rates of opioid-related deaths in the province and this number continues to grow; and

“Whereas we need urgent action from the provincial government to save lives in the north;

“Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to declare the opioid overdose crisis in northern Ontario a public health emergency, and commit funding for comprehensive, evidence-based local health and community initiatives such as harm reduction strategies, awareness programs, anti-stigma training, residential treatment, and overdose prevention services.”

I am sad to sign this petition but will sign it and give it to the page to bring to the table.

OPTOMETRY SERVICES

Ms. Marit Stiles: I’m pleased to present this petition on behalf of the thousands of residents in my riding who have signed the petition and written to me about this issue. It reads as follows:

“Petition to Save Eye Care in Ontario.

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas the Ontario government has underfunded optometric eye care for 30 years; and

“Whereas the government only pays on average \$44.65 for an OHIP-insured visit—the lowest rate in Canada; and

“Whereas optometrists are being forced to pay substantially out of their own pocket to provide over four million services each year to Ontarians under OHIP; and

“Whereas optometrists have never been given a formal negotiation process with the government; and

“Whereas the government’s continued neglect resulted in 96% of Ontario optometrists voting to withdraw OHIP services beginning September 1, 2021;

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

“To instruct the Ontario government to immediately commit to legally binding, formal negotiations to ensure any future OHIP-insured optometry services are, at a minimum, funded at the cost of delivery.”

I could not agree more with this petition, and I’m pleased to affix my signature and hand it over to page Joel.

COMMUNITY PLANNING

Ms. Jessica Bell: This petition comes from the Kensington community. It reads:

“Give Communities a Say on Cannabis Retail Licensing.

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas cannabis is a legal, regulated product and should be available in a way that meets community needs; and

"Whereas the Ford government's licensing approach has led to communities with no retail stores at all while other neighbourhoods are seeing increasing concentrations of them at the expense of other shops and services; and

"Whereas municipalities have no authority to determine the location of cannabis retail shops in a given area or their proximity to one another...;

"Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to...:

"—align the process for new cannabis retail licences with that used for liquor licences;

"—give municipalities and, through them, the local community, a greater say in the licensing process;

"—ensure access to legal cannabis is maintained without pushing out diverse businesses that make our local economies thrive."

I fully support this petition. I'll be signing it and giving it to page Nathaniel.

OPTOMETRY SERVICES

Mr. Chris Glover: I read this petition that was submitted to me by Dr. Abraham Yuen of Richmond University Vision Care.

"Petition to Save Eye Care in Ontario.

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the Ontario government has underfunded optometric eye care for 30 years; and

"Whereas the government only pays on average \$44.65 for an OHIP-insured visit—the lowest rate in Canada; and

"Whereas optometrists are being forced to pay substantially out of their own pocket to provide over four million services each year to Ontarians under OHIP; and

"Whereas optometrists have never been given a formal negotiation process with the government; and

"Whereas the government's continued neglect resulted in 96% of Ontario optometrists voting to withdraw OHIP services beginning September 1, 2021;

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

"To instruct the Ontario government to immediately commit to legally binding, formal negotiations to ensure any future OHIP-insured optometry services are, at a minimum, funded at the cost of delivery."

I fully support this petition. I will sign it and pass it to page Alfie to take to the table.

OPTOMETRY SERVICES

Ms. Judith Monteith-Farrell: This petition is from many citizens in Thunder Bay.

"Petition to Save Eye Care in Ontario.

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the Ontario government has underfunded optometric eye care for 30 years; and

"Whereas the government only pays on average \$44.65 for an OHIP-insured visit—the lowest rate in Canada; and

"Whereas optometrists are being forced to pay substantially out of their own pocket to provide over four million services each year to Ontarians under OHIP; and

"Whereas optometrists have never been given a formal negotiation process with the government; and

"Whereas the government's continued neglect resulted in 96% of Ontario optometrists voting to withdraw OHIP services beginning September 1, 2021;

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

"To instruct the Ontario government to immediately commit to legally binding, formal negotiations to ensure any future OHIP-insured optometry services are, at a minimum, funded at the cost of delivery."

I will sign this petition and give it to page Ella to bring to the table.

1320

ABUSE AWARENESS AND PREVENTION

Mr. Michael Mantha: Once again, I want to thank Charmaine Loverin for presenting me with these many petitions. The petition is entitled "Loverin's Law.

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the government of Ontario does not provide direct use of education and real life skills language, nor prevention tools about abuse in elementary (specific to first reader ages Grade 1+), middle schools and high schools; and

"Whereas the government of Ontario does not provide direct use of education and real life skills language, nor prevention tools for five top abuse situations facing many Canadian and diverse families today: physical, neglect, emotional, verbal and sexual, grooming; and

"Whereas abuse affects ages younger than 5 and 93% of abuse happens in the hands of those that young people or youth are supposed to trust; and

"Whereas statistically two in five girls and one in six boys are currently abused in Canada today, not including unreported; and

"Whereas abuse has no culture, status nor religious divide and is a long-term injury that causes stigma, shame, guilt, anxiety, even isolation that can result in bullying, self-harming behaviours, depression, youth addiction and even suicide; and

"Whereas early education, including evidence-based and new community prevention programs, will greatly benefit intervention, awareness and empowerment for prevention of bullying, addiction and suicide for victims and early offenders;

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

"Request an act to designate an 'annual awareness of abuse prevention week' in all Ontario primary, middle and

high schools, and to provide for abuse curricula for healthy families and safe community policies, administration and accountability” by 2020—we are now in 2021.

I agree with this petition. I will affix my name and present it to page Felicia to bring to the Clerks’ table.

OPPOSITION DAY

GOVERNMENT POLICIES

POLITIQUES DU GOUVERNEMENT

Ms. Andrea Horwath: I move opposition day motion number 4:

Whereas the cost of living is the number one concern for many Ontarians, and many are worse off than they were in 2018; and

Whereas hydro rates have increased every year since the Ford government took office despite the Premier’s promise of a 12% rate cut, and skyrocketing costs for food, housing, transportation, auto insurance and gasoline are higher than ever while wages remain flat; and

Whereas the Ford government’s three-year, ongoing low-wage policies are among the leading reasons for low and stagnant wages across Ontario; and

Whereas the previous Liberal government’s inaction on the minimum wage from 2014 to 2017 added to the challenges faced by Ontario’s lowest-paid workers and increased the gap between the very wealthy and working Ontarians; and

Whereas Premier Ford’s 2018 cancellation of the minimum wage increase hit front-line and essential workers hardest, resulting in at least \$5,300 in lost earnings since January 1, 2019, for full-time minimum wage workers, and the proposed \$15 minimum wage fails to keep up with inflation; and

Whereas government inaction on the housing crisis, affordable child care, paid sick days and meaningful supports for struggling small businesses has caused more and more everyday Ontarians to fall behind;

Therefore, the Legislative Assembly calls on the Ford government to end its low-wage policies and develop a meaningful plan to tackle Ontario’s cost-of-living crisis by restoring the lost earnings of workers affected by the Premier’s minimum wage freeze; taking real action on unaffordable rent and soaring home prices; working with the federal government to implement \$10-a-day child care; providing financial assistance for small businesses affected by the pandemic; and keeping its promises to lower the cost of hydro, auto insurance and gasoline.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Ms. Horwath has moved opposition day number 4.

I look to the Leader of the Opposition to lead off the debate.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Thanks very much, Speaker. When we filed this opposition day motion, I was a little concerned because we thought we might be in a situation where the \$10-a-day child care commitment would have

been made by this Ford government—the deal would have been struck by the time we got to the debate of this particular motion. Of course, we learned this morning, just today, that Alberta has struck a deal on \$10-a-day child care, and that families in Ontario are still waiting for their government to provide some relief. As I said earlier today, it’s shocking to see how out of touch this government is, not understanding how expensive child care is in our province. That’s something that they could have fixed right now. That’s one little bit of help that families could have right now if the government got its act together and pulled together that \$10-a-day child care deal. But of course, they’re dragging their feet, and it’s families and children who suffer—and particularly women, who are impacted significantly harder by the pandemic in terms of economic impact than any other group and need that affordable child care to re-engage in the workforce. As we all know, affordable child care is not only good for families, but it’s also good for the economy. Women do need to have child care available for their children if they’re going to get back into the workforce.

No matter where we live in Ontario, no matter who we are, what part of this province we live in, where we call home, when we made Ontario our home, people have a desire for some of the same basic things—things like making sure you can build a good life for you, for your family in a community that you love. That’s something that no matter where I travel in this province, whether it’s Thunder Bay, where I was just last week with my colleague the MPP for Thunder Bay–Atikokan; whether it’s in the Niagara region, which is where I was on Friday with the MPPs from Niagara Falls, from Niagara Centre and from—where is the other MPP from? Who am I missing?

Interjection: St. Catharines.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: The MPP for St. Catharines.

We talk to families, we talk to people when I travel around the province. No matter if it’s the communities I’ve mentioned or if it’s Windsor or it’s Kingston or it’s my hometown of Hamilton or London or Oshawa or Pickering or Ajax, the bottom line is, people have the same fundamental desire to build a great life, to work hard and be able to have their dreams come true.

What we know for sure is that people are not feeling that optimistic these days about being able to build their dreams, to be able to give the next generation the opportunities that, for some, are the kinds of opportunities that their parents had or their grandparents had. For others, it’s having a brighter future, building a brighter future than what their parents or grandparents had—doing things like buying a home, getting ahead of the bills, saving for the future, enjoying quality time with your loved ones because you have some financial security. That’s not how Ontarians are feeling these days, and the government can and should be doing something about it.

We know that, for years, everyday folks have been working very, very hard to achieve the life that they strive for. But what we now see is, for everyday working folks, much of their struggle continues to become worse as this

government ignores many things that they could be putting in place that would help people to benefit from the very economy that they in fact fuel. I think a troubling piece, really, is that people work hard—we watched it through the pandemic: The hard-working front-line folks who allowed the rest of us to stay home are the ones this government treated very, very badly all the way through. That continues to be the case as we speak today. Cancelling that minimum wage was a big mistake that this government made early on, and people suffered \$5,300 in losses—just to have that minimum wage increase gone forward the way it should have. So those folks could have been better off, but after several years now with this government's low-wage policy, in fact, they aren't better off. They're struggling, and they continue to struggle.

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Prices in the meantime, of course, are going up. Wages are stagnant, and prices are going up. Everything from, as mentioned in the motion, Speaker, gasoline to auto insurance to transit costs is going up. Buying or renting a home is becoming very, very difficult for people. The cost of groceries, putting food on the table, milk—these are all things that are going through the roof in terms of price increases.

Electricity, hydro: Let's face it. After the former Liberal government privatized Hydro One, hydro bills just continued to skyrocket and go through the roof.

The cost of telephone—well, people, I guess, don't have land lines anymore, but certainly the contracts for cellphones, the Internet and so much more continue to skyrocket.

Families are not seeing their wages go up to pay for those extra costs.

We know the Liberals had 15 years and they really didn't do anything to help people out in this regard. We watched as they, as I said, sold off Hydro One and drove the prices through the roof. We watched as housing prices began to spiral out of control in those 15 years of Liberal government. We also saw a lack of any attention whatsoever to affordable housing, to help people make sure they could keep a roof over their heads. We saw as that Liberal government allowed child care costs to spiral out of control, creating a situation—which, of course, this government continues with—that has led to families literally having child care costs that are the same as mortgage costs, \$1,800, \$1,700 a month for child care. People can't afford that, Speaker.

That's why we watched as many women chose to—well, they didn't have much of a choice, actually. They ended up having to stay home and not go back to work post-pandemic—or since the workplaces have opened up again, at least. We're not quite post-pandemic yet. They don't have the choice because they just can't afford to pay for the child care they need to make sure their kids are getting the early learning and attention—of high quality at a decent price.

When you think about the Liberal government—it was pretty frustrating to watch as the minimum wage stagnated between 2014 and 2017. We all watched how that government didn't do anything until they thought they were going

to lose the election, and then, all of a sudden, the announcement came on minimum wage.

Shamefully, this government cancelled that minimum wage increase. They should not have done that.

We have called time and time again for this government to do things like regulate gas prices at the pumps. There are many states in the US and there are provinces here in our country that have regulated the price of gasoline. Why? Because we see people constantly get gouged when it comes to the price of gasoline. I was talking about having been up in Thunder Bay. You can ask any one of our northern members the difference between the price of gasoline here in the south versus the north. Even between northern communities, sometimes the prices are significantly different. We need to have some consistency there. There's no doubt—and I think northerners know this—that there might be a small difference because of transportation costs. But it's horrendous—what's the price of gas up in Manitoulin Island right now?

Mr. Michael Mantha: It's \$1.59.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: It's \$1.59 in Manitoulin Island now. That's a lot of money for gas.

Interjection: It's cheaper to buy pop.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: It's cheaper to buy pop. It shouldn't be that way, Speaker.

Even in southern Ontario, we see that the prices have gone up. We also know that there's disparity—I have a brother who lives and works in Woodstock. He tells me about travelling the back roads as he's winding around southern Ontario, and he has told me that he has skipped a particular gas station, thinking he has enough gas to get where he's going, only to find when he gets to the destination that the gas is five or six cents more expensive at that next gas station. There's no need or reason for that.

There needs to be regulation of gas at the pumps. That's something that my colleague the member for Timmins has raised a number of times in this Legislature. Stopping the pain at the pump is something that the government could do to try to give people some relief.

We saw with the low-wage policy here in Ontario, as this government decided that they were going to disrespect, devalue some of our public sector workers by bringing in a piece of legislation that holds back their wages—so, of course, they're now in a situation that inflation is eroding those wages. That not only impacts those particular people, but it impacts all of Ontario. When you have low-wage policies, all of Ontario is negatively impacted. So that's another thing this government can do—get rid of Bill 124. Take the wage cap off of our valued public sector workers, health care workers, education workers. All kinds of staff who help us to have a good life here are being really hurt financially by this government, and with the costs of everything going up, that needs to be fixed.

It really does seem like when it comes to the Premier's buddies, they get a lot of attention, they get whatever they ask for, but everyday folks are ignored. If you don't happen to be a buddy of this government—one of the cabinet ministers or the Premier himself—then you're out

of luck, then you suffer and your life gets harder, while they get all the benefits and all of the attention from this government.

Everything is skyrocketing, and the government is not doing a single thing to help families through. In fact, when—this was unbelievable, but it happened. People weren't driving during the pandemic, especially between the first and second waves. Cars were not on the road. All of a sudden, instead of having a reduction in auto insurance for drivers because they weren't driving and there were much fewer accidents, the government actually allowed insurance giants to raise the rates, to increase their profits. It makes no sense. People were so frustrated and angry that their government—instead of having everyday families' backs, they had the backs of the insurance industry. It's shameful—completely wrong-headed priorities with this government.

Certainly, we know that people who are interested in growing their family and having children have put those decisions off because they can't afford the costs of child care in this province. People deserve so much better than that.

In a province with such wealth, it's absolutely disgraceful that we see people struggling the way they do.

What the government needs to do is to actually start working the backs of middle-class families, of everyday working families. That's what the government should be doing.

We can take real action on sky-high rents and housing costs. We can take action to bring down the costs of hydro, of auto insurance, of gasoline. We can actually make some decisions and get that \$10-a-day child care implemented here in Ontario.

We also have to think about all of those businesses that were suffering through the pandemic. We can actually help them as well, with another set of grants to help them get through. They're still not at the kind of capacity that they were at before the pandemic hit. There are still people who are not going out and frequenting the small businesses that they used to. We need to help those folks to not only see the end of the tunnel but get well beyond the end of the tunnel. That's why we need to be helping those small businesses as well.

Look, \$5,300 is what people lost. What we know for sure is that the minimum wage should be at least around the \$17-an-hour mark. This government needs to abandon its low-wage policies and bring back the type of wage where people can actually have a chance at building a decent life.

What I'm hoping for is that all of these great ideas are taken up by the government.

Let's start to repair decades of damage from the Liberals and the Conservatives, who spent a lot of time looking after their buddies and their insiders—but not so much on affordability of everyday life for families.

1340

As we know, this government tends to just walk away, ignore, not pay attention to what's happening as crises spiral out of control. We're in an affordability crisis right

now. This government has tools it can undertake to help families get through it.

What I would ask is that every party here, every member here, support these suggestions and help give some relief to everyday families in this province.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): Further debate?

Ms. Jessica Bell: When I go door to door in my riding and ask people what matters to them, affordability is the top issue that comes up, and the biggest expense that people face is their housing costs. University-Rosedale has some of the most expensive housing in Canada, and average rent for all properties is now close to \$2,400 a month.

Over a third of Ontarians now pay unaffordable rent, meaning that they are forced to choose to make that impossible choice between rent, food and paying the bills.

And owning a home? That is completely out of the picture for anybody who doesn't already own one or who isn't one of the wealthiest high-income earners in the country.

A new National Bank of Canada report that recently came out showed that in Toronto, a household now must make \$205,000 a year of household income to afford an average home, must save for 28 years for a down payment. Let's just put that in a historical context: That is five times more than what previous generations paid—five times more. That is how unaffordable the housing sector has gotten.

What is this government's response to the housing affordability crisis? Let's see. In their fall economic statement, the government said that they were going to establish a task force to study the problem. Studying the problem is the oldest trick in the book to convince people, who are not going to be convinced, that you are interested in taking action on a problem that you already know exists and that you're actually going to take steps to address the problem.

Now let's be super clear: This government has shown no interest in taking any reasonable steps to address the problem at all. In fact, this government has made it worse. This government has made it very clear that in Ontario, it is investors first and homeowners, and renters way back there, when, in fact, homes should be for people first. That should be the priority.

If this government is looking at solutions that they can think about in their task force, they can bring in real rent control to apply to all buildings, to help people who cannot afford their home anymore. They could ban needless above-guideline rent increases. They could build supportive housing.

The city of Toronto is asking for \$45 million so that they can address the homelessness crisis we have in our city. You could implement that, instead of cutting funding to housing in municipalities—which you're doing in your fall economic statement.

This government could clamp down on speculation and bring in a vacant-home tax. Get this: The OECD says that there are 1.3 million vacant homes in Canada and there are

235,000 homeless people. So there are five vacant homes for every homeless person in this country. We brought in a motion to bring in a vacant-homes tax—and what did you say? “Not interested, thank you.”

This government won't take action. They can't do it. You're beholden to investment interests. We will. An NDP government will prioritize making homes affordable for people so our province becomes more affordable for all.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): Further debate?

Mr. Chris Glover: It's so important that we speak about this issue. This is the number one issue that I'm hearing about from both residents and business owners in Spadina–Fort York: It's the unaffordability of Ontario in the wake of this pandemic—but it's the growing unaffordability that has been happening for decades.

Businesses are continuing to struggle, particularly arts and tourism businesses, and this government is not giving any more support.

People are struggling because of skyrocketing housing prices and food prices, gasoline and utility prices.

We have the highest daycare costs in Canada, and this government is refusing to sit down with the federal government and sign the deal, like every other province in this country has done, for \$10-a-day daycare.

You froze the minimum wage three years ago, and that cost minimum wage earners \$5,300, because you froze it below \$15 an hour. Those are the lowest-paid workers in this province. You took \$5,300 out of their pockets.

The impact of this unaffordability—I see it at the door; I hear it from constituents.

Last week, I met the Fraser family. The person who came to the door was Marion Fraser. She's a great-great-grandmother. She has been living on the street where she lives for 81 years, as have all of the generations who followed her, and I met at the door four of those generations. Her great-granddaughter Amanda has just had a baby of her own. The family is concerned because housing prices have gone up so much that she's afraid that the family is going to have to move out of this neighbourhood, where they've lived for 81 years.

And yet, this government has done nothing to make housing more affordable. In fact, they cut the Ministry of Housing's budget by \$161 million per year when they got into office in 2018.

Another person I spoke to is Stephanie Reid. She's a single mother in a condo in my riding. She says that her costs are exploding. Her utility bills have been over \$220 some months, she has to pay another \$225 for parking, and her rent was raised in the middle of the pandemic. So after all of these expenses—she is working extremely hard, but she's struggling to make ends meet for her and her daughter.

Zach Greenwald wrote to my office and said, “I grew up in Toronto and there is nothing I want more than to be able to raise a family here but it is so far-fetched and it doesn't feel like anyone truly cares. I have worked hard, have a BSc degree and earn a decent salary.... Despite all

that, I am burdened with student loans and insane housing costs that make a future in this city feel impossible.”

Business owners are echoing the same issues. They are saying that they need more government support to get through the rest of this pandemic.

It's time for this government to step up and make housing, to make costs more affordable for both residents and small business owners.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): Further debate?

Ms. Sara Singh: It's always an honour to rise here, and I'm happy to speak today to the motion to help make life more affordable for people in Ontario.

As we heard from the Leader of the Opposition, essential workers across this province are exhausted. They are burned out, and their mental health is suffering. This government hasn't done anything to help make life easier or more affordable for those essential workers who put their lives on the line for us throughout this pandemic—people like our health care workers, who are being stifled because of Bill 124, which is going to keep their wages stagnant. The government has an opportunity to repeal Bill 124 to help make life more affordable for our front-line health care workers, but they have chosen time and time again not to support those health care workers and help them make life more affordable and help them deal with the stresses that they have to incur.

The other challenge that we hear—and I'm sure every single riding in this province hears from small business owners who are struggling and have been forced to close their doors because of rising costs. Insurance is something that this government has the power to regulate. They have a majority government. With the stroke of a pen, they could help regulate the rates, whether that's our auto insurance rates, whether that's commercial insurance, whether that's fleet insurance for our trucking industry. They have chosen time and time again not to support any motions that the official opposition has brought forward to help make insurance cheaper and more affordable for people in this province, and in the city of Brampton in particular. We pay some of the highest auto insurance premiums in the province, Speaker—rates that most drivers in Brampton have actually seen increase rather than decrease, despite the fact that many of them have been parked.

Last week, I met with owners in the trucking industry. I want to thank Kamal Singh from Sun Transportation, who highlighted how fleet insurance is crushing the trucking industry and making it harder and harder for their businesses to stay afloat. As well as folks in the taxi industry—Yadwinder Dhillon, for example, shared with me that his business did not even get any support from this government through the Ontario small business grant, and they are struggling. These are taxi drivers who put their lives at risk throughout this pandemic to help keep people moving.

The list goes on and on of small businesses that I've heard from and I'm sure others are hearing from.

I want to highlight one last thing here, Speaker, in my last few moments. We talk about the rising cost of living,

but often we forget about people who are on fixed incomes, like people with disabilities, who have not seen an increase to their ODSP rates, despite the rising cost of rent, despite the increasing cost of food and all of the other expenses they need to incur.

1350

People in this province deserve better. This government has the power to make life more affordable for Ontarians across the board. I urge them to help people in this province get through this pandemic, but also to think about how to make life easier and more affordable for everyone.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): Further debate?

M^{me} Lucille Collard: We know, based on ample evidence, that life is becoming increasingly unaffordable for Ontarians. Family budgets are being squeezed from all sides. People are having a hard time making ends meet. Child care and housing costs are now huge expenses, and families must sacrifice other living expenses to ensure that they can keep a roof over their head and bring food to the table. This is not a sign of prosperity; it's a sign of poverty that looms for many.

Ontario has one of the hottest housing markets in the country, and this has resulted in more people and families having to make very difficult choices, the kinds of choices that none of us here who have the privilege to serve in this House has to make—choices like choosing between medication and rent, or clothes and groceries; or choosing between buying auto insurance and signing up a child for a hockey team.

Many women are deciding to abandon their careers because the cost of child care is prohibitive. This has led to a she-cession in Ontario, with women returning to work in lower numbers than men. Fortunately, the federal government has a plan to reduce child care costs to \$10 a day. Unfortunately, this government has not been able to conclude a deal as a first step in making life more affordable for families. Ontario has now become the last province without a plan to help families struggling with child care costs.

Having a roof over your head is a very basic, primary need to ensure you have the ability and the motivation to contribute to the collective prosperity.

To allow every Ontarian to be working together towards a better Ontario—an Ontario open for business, an inclusive Ontario—we need to take care of everyone. This means supporting our students with adequate assistance so that everyone can create a future of their own. This means being there for people with disabilities so that they, too, can live with dignity and contribute to society. This means allowing immigrant workers to be part of our economic recovery by allowing them to work in their field of expertise by recognizing foreign credentials and expanding bridging programs. This means ensuring that our province offers quality health services and education in French to guarantee equal opportunities.

Taking care of everyone also means helping our small businesses survive COVID-19 so that they can continue to bring us local excellence in goods and services.

And let's not forget our parents and grandparents, who need high-quality care and the ability to stay in the comfort of their home as long as possible.

We need to look upstream to identify the gaps in our system to better support all layers of society, so that we can ensure a dignified and rewarding lifestyle for everyone. Giving everyone an equitable chance to succeed is how we can level the playing field; not by deciding who gets what depending on how much they are willing to give to support a party.

Understanding what's happening to our environment based on evidence and acting responsibly to counter the negative impacts of our previous actions can go a long way to addressing a number of affordability issues. Our mental health, and especially the mental health of our youth, is directly connected with the environment.

We need to understand that our kids don't have much confidence in a bright future if the planet they will be living on is not safe. Our children think that not having kids is better, given the poor future they may face in dealing with a decimated planet. The only way to give them hope is to stop spending hundreds of millions of dollars on projects that have a further negative impact on our environment and to start investing significantly in green energy projects that could secure a clean, thriving and affordable future for Ontario.

I'm calling on the government to give everyone a fair chance to be proud to be Ontarians. Give people the means to live with dignity and the motivation to do their best for all Ontarians. I hope that the Premier takes this as an impetus to take action to ease the budgetary challenges of working families by signing the child care agreement, reforming the housing market, and investing in green communities.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): Further debate?

Ms. Judith Monteith-Farrell: It's my great honour to stand on behalf of the people of Thunder Bay—Atikokan and speak to this important motion about affordability in Ontario because, like many of my colleagues have already said, it is something that comes up when I am going door to door with my constituents. It comes up very often with seniors. This is a group that is living on a fixed income, in most cases, or a very minimal—really, inadequate—pension system in our country, and they say, "I don't know how I'm going to do it anymore." Many of them have been forced to go to food banks.

The food bank usage in our community is exploding. There are many service organizations and an excellent regional food distribution network, but that isn't the answer. Even the food distribution network is saying, "We need a better solution to poverty in our society." One of those things is fair wages.

Some employers are telling us that they're looking for labourers and they can't find people to work in their industries in northern Ontario. And when I ask people why they think that is, workers have told me, "I can't afford to go to work."

The cost of gas—as the leader said—in Thunder Bay today is \$1.559, and in Atikokan it's \$1.59. Across the

north, the prices range around that, and that's for regular fuel. Unlike southern Ontario, we don't have transit, or there's very limited transit, and we don't have trains or light rail or any other way to get to work.

The other factor for many women is child care. They can't afford to work a minimum wage job and pay for child care, and the spaces for geared-to-income are very limited, if any. So those people who would want to participate in the workforce can't because of this low access to child care.

But I think the crisis that really looms around affordability is housing. Housing has become a crisis. People can't afford a decent place to live. When we don't have housing, it causes a lot of issues.

The issue around the opioid crisis is heightened because there is no supportive housing to ensure that people with addictions are able to support themselves and to support their inner souls and get better.

Again, those are people who could be working in those industries.

So when the government talks about getting prosperity as the way that we're going to have our province move forward, we have to remember that we need to support the labour force and the people who are in our province who will support those industries.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): Further debate?

Mr. Joel Harden: "God bless the Westons." That was what Premier Ford said on February 26, 2017, when he was debating my friend Avi Lewis about where Canada was going. Avi had just said that there are two billionaire families in Canada that have as much wealth as 11 million Canadians. Premier Ford's assertion at the time was that those folks—particularly the Weston family, he went on to say—were entrepreneurs and that they were part of the Canadian success story. I think that says a lot, Speaker, insofar as where this government is prepared to weigh its influence in this moment, when working families in this province need a break—"God bless the Westons."

Let's talk about the Westons. Let's talk about the kind of low-wage province they want to create and the government that has allowed them to do it. Let's talk about a company that brought in a \$2-an-hour pandemic pay increase when so many of our neighbours were rushing to the grocery store, stocking up on essential supplies, and I guess the management felt a little guilty for the profits they were raking in. So they brought in a \$2-an-hour pandemic pay increase. They announced it on March 21, 2020, and they ended it on June 13, 2020. The pandemic didn't end, Speaker, but the profits kept rolling in for Loblaws. Profits this year, the first quarter in 2021, are up 12%. That is \$392 million. Galen Weston and his family's net worth in this pandemic, during this moment, has increased by \$4.5 billion—up from \$8.8 billion to \$13.4 billion by April 7, 2021. God bless the Westons.

1400

I have a better word on behalf of working people in this province trying to feed their kids, trying to look after seniors, trying to make a good life. The Weston family are

exactly what's wrong with this province, and politicians who offer handouts to them and let them abuse their workforce are part of the problem. They are creating a low-wage future at precisely the time when we need to create opportunities for people.

As the leader said and as so many of my colleagues have said, we need affordable child care, and we need affordable housing. Housing is up 13.5% in Ottawa—highest, proportionally, of any place in this province.

I talk to people like Jacques, a great veterans volunteer I just hung out with on Remembrance Day in Ottawa. He sells poppies, gives out poppies to people who come to the national cenotaph. Jacques told me that a unit in his building that was \$800 recently is now \$1,500 because the landlord pushed a tenant out, and in comes somebody, and \$1,500 is what that landlord wants to make. That is the Galen Weston vision, the Premier Ford vision for this province.

You need an NDP government that will stand up for you, for your families; not for the billionaires. We need it now.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): Further debate?

Ms. Marit Stiles: Good afternoon, Speaker. It is great to be able to join the debate today on this motion from the leader of the official opposition.

As COVID-19 restrictions have been relaxing, it has been great to be out back on the doorsteps, talking directly with constituents and hearing about the issues that they're facing. Let me tell you, in Davenport, in my community, people are hurting. The increasing cost of living is having a real effect on them.

At house after house, I find moms and dads who are just frazzled, asking me why Ontario still has not signed the federal child care deal. These families pay more than \$1,500 a month in fees, and that's after many of them have faced years on waiting lists, years to even to get a spot for their child—if they're lucky enough to get a spot, and those are increasingly difficult to come by. They cannot understand why this government wouldn't be jumping at the opportunity to deliver a \$10-a-day plan.

In the Junction Triangle neighbourhood and across the city, I have heard from renters who are seeing their rents hiked up over and over again. They don't say anything because they cannot afford to lose their homes. They feel that the odds are stacked against them.

This neighbourhood and neighbourhoods across my riding are seeing massive new towers going up, but people are telling you right now that they know they'll never be able to afford to live in them. Years and years of Liberal and Conservative governments that favour the interests of big developers have allowed those developers to rake in the profits on those condo projects without providing enough sufficiently, deeply affordable units. They are looking to us, as their representatives, to finally intervene so that people can stay in the communities that they love.

More and more people are facing the threat of eviction and renoeviction, and they're ending up in the public parks in my community—the last resort. As weather gets colder, let me tell you, a lot more of those people are at risk.

For constituents in the Old Weston Road area in the northern part of Davenport, where I was just this Saturday, affordability is a top issue. Families there, who literally built this city, look around now and they know that they will never be able to afford to continue to live in those communities and their children will never be able to afford the rent, let alone to buy a home in the communities they grew up in.

I want to just end by mentioning all of those people who are barely scraping by on Ontario's ODSP rates. They barely had enough to live on before, and now their grocery bills are doubling, Madam Speaker. Something has to give.

We need immediate action. We need this government, all the members in this room to support the call today to make life more affordable—real action on unaffordable rent, \$10-a-day child care, lower the cost of hydro and auto insurance, and end those low-wage policies that help keep working people down.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): Further debate?

Mr. Mike Schreiner: It's an honour to rise today to talk about the affordability crisis facing the people of Ontario and the solutions we need to address it. And let me be clear, Speaker: Old ideas, old ways of thinking are not going to deliver the solutions that the people of Ontario need.

The number one crisis I hear about at the door is housing affordability. The average home in my riding of Guelph is almost \$1 million now, up an astounding 34% in the last year alone. In Toronto, it's even worse—my gosh, it's about \$1.2 million, \$1.3 million. The average minimum wage worker has to work almost 80 hours a week just to be able to afford a one-bedroom apartment.

So when I opened the fall economic statement, I thought, "Surely, there has to be something about addressing the housing affordability crisis in the fall economic statement." I didn't find anything in the budget. I looked at the spreadsheet numbers and couldn't find anything there. So I thought, "Surely, somewhere"—so I did a word search, and there was something about "studying" the housing crisis. My gosh, we had a housing affordability crisis prior to COVID-19, and it has gotten worse during COVID-19, and the government is going to study the issue.

Well, let me tell you, go to the Ontario Greens housing affordability plan. Some have called it a "master class" plan in addressing the housing affordability crisis. So let me tell you how the government can study this. Since the 1990s, when the provincial and federal governments got out of the housing business, the crisis has gotten worse each and every year. That's exactly why we need to start public sector investment in housing once again.

Instead of subsidizing electricity rates for the uber-wealthy in our province, let's redirect that money to building 100,000 affordable housing spaces over the next decade.

On top of that, let's build 60,000 permanent supportive housing spaces with wraparound mental health and addiction supports to help address chronic homelessness.

Let's bring in a mandate where 20% of development has to include affordable housing spaces, so we can get the private sector involved as well.

Instead of selling off public land to the highest bidder who wants to maximize profit, why don't we work with co-ops and non-profit housing providers? If we can help them acquire land at affordable rates, they will build affordable spaces for people to call home.

Instead of allowing speculators to turn housing into a commodity and leave homes vacant, let's put a tax on speculation. Let's put a tax on vacant homes to discourage such a destructive practice, and then let's invest the money we raise in affordable housing.

Let's change zoning rules to make it doable for people and the private sector developments to build duplexes, triplexes, quadplexes, laneway housing, secondary suites, tiny homes—all kinds of solutions to build connected, livable, affordable communities. We have solutions to the housing crisis.

When it comes to the affordability crisis at the pumps, if the Premier was serious—he talks tough on this, but if he was serious about it, he would help people buy electric vehicles. And I can tell you, as somebody who owns a Chevy electric vehicle, rebates don't go to millionaires. We need to make electric vehicles affordable for the average person.

Do you know that the average person can save \$10,000 using an electric vehicle versus an internal combustion engine vehicle? It costs the average person \$300 a year to fill their electric vehicle up with electricity. I know tons of people who spend over \$300 a month putting gasoline in their car. You can save, on average—and this was prior to gas prices going through the roof—60% lower cost to run an electric vehicle versus an internal combustion engine vehicle, and the maintenance costs are half, saving one tenth the cost to operate it. So why don't we address the climate crisis and the affordability crisis, and say no to Big Oil, period? Let's have made-in-Ontario electricity, keeping money in Ontario, creating jobs in Ontario and helping lower people's costs at the pumps.

1410

The fact that nine provinces and territories have now signed a \$10-a-day child care deal with the federal government and Ontario hasn't is a slap in the face to families struggling to find an affordable place to care for their children. Most families spend as much on their mortgage as they do on their child care payments, and it's unbelievable that the government is leaving literally billions of dollars on the table that could start helping Ontario parents right now, today.

Speaker, the average debt for a small business in Ontario right now is \$190,000. If we're going to get through this pandemic, if we're going to have the kind of economic recovery we need to address the fiscal challenges the province is facing, we need to ensure that our small businesses survive, the jobs they create survive, and the downtowns that they are so vital to supporting survive. That's exactly why small businesses need a third round of funding from the Ontario Small Business Support Grant,

to get them through the third and now fourth waves of the pandemic, and we need to expand the eligibility criteria, so those businesses that are falling through the cracks get the support they need and deserve.

Finally, Speaker, if we're going to address the rising cost of electricity in this province, we need to help homeowners and businesses retrofit their buildings, saving money by saving energy, creating hundreds of thousands of jobs in the process.

We have the solutions. Let's get to work.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): Further debate?

Mr. Will Bouma: This government knows that the cost of living has gone up for Ontario families, but there's only one party in this House that has a plan. Our plan is built on growth, not tax increases or spending cuts. It's a plan to protect the progress that we have made. It's a plan to build for the future. And it's a plan to work for the workers who make it all happen.

In our fall economic statement, Build Ontario, we made it clear that we recognize the incredible debt of gratitude we owe to Ontario workers. Build Ontario is focused on making this province into the best place in the world to do business, to work and to raise a family.

Mr. Speaker, I will remind the opposition that less than two weeks ago, the Premier stood shoulder to shoulder with union leaders and announced our government's proposal to raise Ontario's minimum wage. When workers told us that take-home pay is not keeping up with the rising cost of living, we listened. That's why we have proposed a \$15-per-hour minimum wage, a 4.5% increase over the current minimum wage of \$14.35 an hour. This means that in 2022, a full-time minimum wage worker will have an extra \$1,350 in their pocket for bills, for groceries, for what matters most. In fact, the national president of Unifor, Jerry Dias, stood with the Premier, Minister Bethlenfalvy and Minister McNaughton when we made that announcement.

Smokey Thomas, the president of OPSEU, said, "For the first time in dealing with three governments, we actually have a government that is listening and actually doing some very positive things for working people." The president of the Ontario Public Service Employees Union thanked the Premier and said that day was "a monumental day" for the people of Ontario, and especially for people who make minimum wage.

And we didn't stop there. We have proposed eliminating the special minimum wage for liquor servers, bringing these workers, who have been hard hit by the pandemic, up to \$15 per hour as well. With this change, a full-time server at one of Ontario's many world-class restaurants will see an extra \$5,100 in 2022, and our government will continue to raise the minimum wage based on the Ontario consumer price index as of October 1 of next year.

Our government also understands that the pandemic has had a huge impact on the way people work. People need an opportunity to pursue steady, well-paying jobs, and Ontario needs workers in these jobs too. The skilled trades provide good jobs that can support families, but too few young people see the trades as a career opportunity.

Madam Speaker, if you are prepared to put in the work, time and effort to learn a new skill to support your family, our government is prepared to put in the money and give you every opportunity to see it through. That is why, in the 2021 budget, our government introduced the Ontario Jobs Training Tax Credit to help workers pay for the training they need. With this credit, people in Ontario who need to brush up on their skills or certifications can get up to \$2,000 back on their taxes for 50% of eligible training expenses. We want to extend this credit into 2022, which means people trying to transition back into the labour force will be eligible for up to \$4,000 back. The 2022 credit is expected to provide an estimated \$275 million in support for about 240,000 hard-working people.

We also invested an additional \$5 million into the Second Career program. The program was originally designed to help laid-off, unemployed workers get trained for in-demand jobs and connect them with local employers, and pay for expenses like training costs, tuition, books, transportation and even basic living expenses and child care up to \$28,000. We want to expand this program to support more people, like gig workers, immigrants and people with disabilities.

Madam Speaker, this government is determined to get workers who are struggling into in-demand careers, so they can support their families and be part of Ontario's economic growth.

Speaking of families and what families in Ontario need, our government implemented the Ontario Childcare Access and Relief from Expenses tax credit in 2019, or CARE, one of the most flexible child care initiatives ever introduced in Ontario. It put more money into the pockets of families and provided parents the flexibility to choose the child care options that worked best for them. Eligible families are able to claim up to 75% of their eligible child care expenses, including services provided by child care centres, homes and camps. As we announced in the 2021 budget, the government is providing an automatic top-up of 20% of the credit for the 2021 tax year.

I will also remind the opposition that we are the government that introduced the Low-Income Individuals and Families Tax Credit, or LIFT, back in 2018, one of the most generous tax cuts for low-income workers in a generation. Low-income and minimum wage workers are saving up to \$850 in personal income tax relief, and low-income couples are saving up to \$1,700. That means more money for rent, more money for transportation, and more money for school supplies.

Madam Speaker, I will point out that our government is always looking for ways to reduce electricity costs for households across the province. A recent Financial Accountability Office report estimates that the province's electricity rate mitigation programs reduced the cost of electricity for the average Ontario household by \$609 for 2019. Two years ago, the government introduced the Ontario Electricity Rebate, which continues to provide a reduction directly on electricity bills for eligible residential customers. Targeted support programs are also available to help eligible rural and remote customers, Indigenous communities and low-income residents.

We are also providing choice to most electricity customers, allowing them to choose between tiered and time-of-use electricity rate plans to fit their lifestyle and save on energy costs.

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Madam Speaker, for too long the workers of our province have been taken for granted. Under previous governments, 300,000 well-paying jobs—manufacturing jobs—left our province in droves. We want Ontario workers in a race to the top, not a race to the bottom. By increasing take-home pay, providing the opportunity to pursue new careers, and creating the right work environment for job creation, our government is working for workers. It is clear that on this side of the House, we are committed to helping the hard-working people of Ontario.

The previous government was driven by the ideology of “no.” They said no to doing the work that would keep jobs here. They said no to investing in our economy.

We are not going to repeat those same mistakes. In this government, we are prepared to say yes—yes to listening to wage earners who are falling behind; yes to creating thousands of well-paying jobs for Ontario workers in the industries of the future; yes to supporting those who just need the right training to change their lives; yes to building; yes to investing; and yes to growing.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): Stop the clock, please.

Just before we continue debate, I want to point out—and I appreciate the member from Brantford—Brant did catch it a few times during his speech. I’m going to offer a suggestion to this House, because it happens frequently when there is a woman Speaker in the chair. I realize that, oftentimes, “Mr. Speaker” is worked into written speeches. If everyone would just use “Speaker,” there’s no risk of misgendering someone who is in the chair. Thank you.

Further debate?

M. Guy Bourgouin: Il me fait toujours plaisir de me lever et de représenter les intérêts de mon comté.

Today I stand here to address affordability in Ontario, but more precisely in my riding of Mushkegowuk—James Bay. As you know, Madam Speaker, the north is the best place to live. But, unfortunately, we hear from too many constituents about the high cost of gas, the high price of electricity, higher price of groceries, insurance, and the list goes on. Obviously, this government’s inaction on the housing crisis, affordable child care, paid sick days and meaningful support for struggling small businesses has caused more and more everyday Ontarians to fall behind.

Parlons du prix du gaz. Le plus au nord qu’on voyage sur la route 11, le plus cher le prix de l’essence. On demande depuis trop longtemps à ce gouvernement d’agir sur leur promesse électorale de régulariser le prix de l’essence, mais on le sait bien, il continue de traîner les pieds. C’est un problème quand une famille doit choisir entre mettre de l’essence pour se rendre à un rendez-vous médical, par exemple, ou mettre du manger sur la table. Inacceptable.

If we look at insurance costs for the vehicles we need to get to work or to travel to get to essential services, it’s unacceptable to have a constituent—Mr. Bardoe, who came to our office—who has seen his insurance rates go up so high he can no longer afford insurance. Yes, you heard me right. It used to cost him about \$350 per month, and now they want to charge him \$1,079. For obvious reasons, he cannot afford this. He’s a senior—fixed income.

Parlons du prix de la nourriture. Comment pouvons-nous demander à des gens de bien manger quand le prix pour un petit casseau de framboises coûte 6 \$? C’est simplement affreux, madame la Présidente.

Let’s talk about daycare: There’s nothing in this budget to help with child care. Whether it’s providing relief for families or supporting municipalities to allow for proper daycare, there’s nothing to help.

Trop de familles souffrent, madame la Présidente. Trop de familles ont besoin du « daycare ». Le gouvernement doit agir maintenant et signer l’entente à 10 \$.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): Further debate?

Mr. Michael Parsa: It’s always a privilege to be able to stand on behalf of the good people of Aurora—Oak Ridges—Richmond Hill and contribute to a debate.

I certainly agree with my colleague from Brantford—Brant: Our government recognizes that the people of Ontario have faced a once-in-a-lifetime crisis that placed an incredible burden on our health care system, our economy, our families and our communities. But in the face of these unprecedented and unpredictable challenges, the people of Ontario have shown true compassion and resolve. They showed true Ontario spirit. Now that there’s light at the end of the tunnel, there’s only one party that wants to get shovels in the ground for highways, for hospitals, housing and high-speed Internet.

In the recent fall economic statement, we proposed a housing affordability task force which would give recommendations on how we can make housing more affordable for Ontario families. One piece is already crystal clear: We have a dire lack of housing supply. We need more homes built, and we need them built fast. In June 2019, we passed the More Homes, More Choice Act, which the opposition voted against, and which was central to the government’s housing supply action plan. Initiatives under this plan are already working to streamline and speed up the development of new housing.

For example, to build more homes that meet the needs of the people of Ontario, \$25.6 billion was invested in new housing in 2020, and that’s \$4.5 billion more than in 2019. More homes started construction in 2020 than in any year of the past decade.

Rental construction has also seen a surge. Rental housing starts in 2020 were the highest since 1992. Rental starts to date in 2021 are currently 14% higher than at the same time in 2020.

And that’s not all. We’re also improving the land use planning system, allowing municipalities to delegate minor changes to their zoning bylaws to their staff.

We have said time and time again that we'll work with all levels of government to help ensure that everyone in Ontario has a place to call home. This is the difference between a government that wants to get things done for everyday people versus an opposition that wants to block things from getting done, on behalf of activists and special interests.

When we first formed government, Premier Ford made it one of our top priorities to reduce the price of gas, and we made moves to cut the cost by 4.3 cents a litre. Just last week, Premier Ford reiterated our commitment to lower gas prices by another 5.7 cents, and even further if the federal government steps up to lower the gas price as well.

It's clear that there's only one party on the side of Ontario drivers, on the side of commuters who are stuck spending hours trapped in gridlock. These are the people the opposition say no to; not us—we're saying yes. We're saying yes to the highways that will get Ontario drivers out of gridlock, including a resounding yes to finally building Highway 413 and reducing commute times for over 300,000 drivers in York, Peel and Halton regions by 30 minutes each day. The construction alone of the 413 will create 3,500 jobs and contribute \$350 million to our economy. The evidence is clear: It's time to get the 413 built.

We're also saying yes to building the Bradford Bypass and cutting drive times in Simcoe and York region for commuters and truckers by over 60%.

Here's just some of the feedback we've been getting from leaders across Ontario on our new highway projects. Joseph Mancinelli, LIUNA's international vice-president and regional manager of central and eastern Canada, said the following: "We commend the continued commitment of the Ford government to building critical transit infrastructure across the province of Ontario.... The leadership of Minister of Transportation Caroline Mulroney continues to advance higher-order transportation across the province, focused on building resilient and sustainable transit infrastructure that will foster tremendous growth for Ontario."

Virginia Hackson, the mayor of the town of East Gwillimbury, said this: "The Bradford Bypass is greatly needed to service the growing population of our community, provide a more efficient east-west connection, attract more businesses and reduce congestion on our local roads. Ultimately, this new highway will contribute to a safer community and a stronger local economy, and for that we are grateful to our provincial and municipal partners."

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Rob Keffer, mayor of Bradford West Gwillimbury, had this to say: "The presence of the Bradford Bypass will unlock hundreds of acres of employment lands in our urban area alongside its corridor. Existing employers will benefit greatly, and new businesses will be drawn to our community because of this addition to the provincial transportation network."

Speaker, I'll state for the record: Our plans for road, bridge or highway projects do not include tolls.

We're also saying yes to continuing our progress on the largest subway expansion in Ontario history and yes to delivering on our commitment to two-way, all-day GO Transit so parents can get home to their families faster.

On this side of the House, we recognize that tomorrow's prosperity depends on getting shovels in the ground today.

We've also seen how rising costs have impacted the pocketbooks of our seniors, so we have proposed extending the Seniors' Home Safety Tax Credit into 2022 to provide an estimated \$35 million to support about 32,000 people. This credit helps seniors pay for expenses that will let them stay in their homes comfortably for longer and improve accessibility, like grab bars, wheelchair ramps, stair and wheelchair lifts, walk-in bathtubs and so much more.

The bottom line is, our government has been looking out for families, for people in search of a home, for seniors on a budget, and for working commuters who are sick of gridlock. Speaker, we are the ones who are saying yes. We are saying yes to the better, brighter, more affordable future that the people of Ontario deserve.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): Further debate?

Ms. Jennifer K. French: It's getting harder to afford the life that we're working so hard for while child care, auto insurance, hydro bills, gas, groceries and everything else are rising and paycheques aren't. It's getting harder to get the health care we need. It's getting harder to get our kids the education that they deserve.

Instead of focusing on the Premier's buddies, let's focus on actual people and what they need to build the best life they can, and today let's focus on affordability.

ODSP and OW rates have remained flat while the costs of housing, transit and groceries have gone up. Folks who need specialized diets like gluten-free or diabetic do get a bit extra for their food allowance, but it's still not enough for the nutritional food that they need to stay healthy. Housing subsidies and allowances don't cover the cost of a month's rent, let alone the other basics, like food; the basics that folks need to survive. The rates need to be increased.

Pharmicare and assistive devices: Let's consider the costs. They're not going down, and with an aging population, plus who knows what sort of long-term impacts COVID-19 will have, more folks are going to be relying on these things.

I want to share an email from Amy, who is advocating for a lower cost of living:

"Groceries, clothing, toiletries and rent are too expensive. Fruits and vegetables, clothing, soap and sanitary napkins and shelter are not luxury items...."

"Also, the amount of people accessing services such as food banks has increased. Many people stand out front of food bank services crowding the street. The number continues to increase. Many people are sleeping on the streets...."

"I've attached my grocery receipts. I went to two stores with my buggy, because I don't have a car, walked 15

minutes to the closest stores, bought fruits, nuts, vegetables and other healthy items, walked 15 minutes home to my basement apartment with my heavy buggy and it cost \$75. I have an administrative—pink-collar—job, I live in a bad area, I am a single female and I am just making ends meet....

“This is unreasonable.”

Speaker, the NDP is here to fight for middle-class, working-class and lower-income folks.

I got an email from a board member from a local non-profit, and this was on the child care conversation. She wrote:

“We’ve had staff leave and new hires not accept positions because they didn’t have access to affordable or reliable child care. It was cheaper for them to stay home with their child instead of paying ridiculous fees. Also, with the pandemic, more of our workers have been calling in sick because they have to stay home with a sick child. This is just one example, but I suspect that part of the narrative of the labour shortage is the fact that child care costs are so high it’s almost a disincentive to work. Also, our workforce is almost exclusively female, so access to child care would mean more economic opportunities for women.”

Speaker, we’re calling on this government today to support today’s call to join the NDP—join Ontarians, frankly—and make life more affordable for the people we all represent. We have that chance today—we have that chance every day—and I would invite the government to join us.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): Further debate?

Ms. Suze Morrison: In the aisles of every local FreshCo, No Frills, Loblaws, Metro, Rabba and every small grocery store you’ll find in downtown Toronto, my constituents face the reality of what Statistics Canada has confirmed: Food prices are increasing at the fastest rate we’ve seen in decades.

Speaker, I suspect that many members of this House have never been in the position of having \$20 left to your name and trying to buy enough groceries to get you through the week; I have. It was a regular reality for my family when I was growing up downtown. Two decades later, I can’t tell you that things have changed. In fact, they’ve only gotten worse, particularly for those who are living on social assistance.

I recently heard from Sergiy, a constituent who wrote to me about how food prices are impacting him. He said, “I live on ODSP and thankfully don’t require a special diet. But I find myself only able to afford the cheapest pasta and canned soups.”

Cally, a 59-year-old constituent also living on ODSP, wrote me and said, “I am seriously tired of the food banks and what people are forced to take! There is almost no nutritional value to what I get. How can people ... live on this all winter and not get sick! Please help!”

Another constituent, Taylor, shared a story of having to go into debt just to eat. Taylor wrote and said, “I was

running a deficit every month. I had to dip into two different credit cards to put food on the table.”

While we might be lucky enough to have amazing food programs throughout our communities, run by organizations like FoodShare, Council Fire, Muslim Welfare Canada, Fred Victor, my fear is that this government relies far too heavily on the social services sector to fill the gaps in our social safety nets, because they refuse to raise the rates for ODSP, OW—and a livable wage.

For years, it has been getting harder and harder to afford the bare necessities. Prices for everything are up, and the Premier’s refusal to increase social assistance rates and his low-wage policy have been holding everyone’s income back. People deserve so much better.

Things have only gone from bad to worse, though, Speaker. The last Liberal government didn’t do anything to help when they had the chance. They did almost nothing to improve the minimum wage from 2014 to 2017. They sold off Hydro One, driving people’s utility bills through the roof. They had child care costs that were the highest in the entire country. And they never restored the callous cuts to social assistance rates from the previous Mike Harris government.

Speaker, the solutions are not rocket science, but they require political will. We need the political will to increase social assistance rates, to give workers a fair minimum wage, to bring back rent control, and to bring in affordable child care for families. These are the tangible solutions that we need to make our communities more affordable.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): Further debate?

Ms. Sandy Shaw: To the people in my riding, people living in Westdale, Dundas, Ancaster or the West Mountain: If you feel like life is getting harder to afford and the cost of everything keeps going up, you’re not wrong. Living costs in Ontario continue to skyrocket. Everything is going up—rent, housing, food, insurance, taxes, gas, hydro bills. Inflation is now at an 18-year high. As we’re hearing today, the struggle is real. Unfortunately, we don’t seem to have a government that cares or that seems to understand this reality, because, perhaps, it’s not their reality.

This is a government that ran on a lot of promises. They promised that they would put money back into the pockets of the little guy. They promised to reduce the cost of auto insurance. They promised to reduce the cost of gasoline. Just like buck-a-beer, these promises amounted to nothing.

Premier Ford also promised to lower your hydro bills by 12%; instead, those bills just keep going up. We know that the Liberals sold off Hydro One, which drove up our bills. Despite their promise, this government has not only kept the Liberal hydro plan, but they’re doubling down by using your tax dollars to subsidize hydro to the tune of \$5.6 billion. That’s at a time when Hydro One continues to post year-over-year profits.

It’s obvious that wages are not keeping pace, but low wages are the policy of this government. They scrapped an increase to the minimum wage and they held it frozen for three years, which has amounted to a loss of \$5,300 in

wages—wages that this government held back—for each minimum wage worker in Ontario.

You may be like me, watching your young adult children work full-time, full year, but not earning enough to get ahead of the bills, to pay for hockey for the grandkids, never mind saving for the future or saving enough for a home that they can afford. This government has just not kept their promises to regular Ontarians.

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But promises made behind closed doors? That's a whole different story. This government has made a lot about Highway 413. It needs to be understood that this billion-plus highway is being bankrolled by taxpayers' dollars. And it's a highway that nobody wants—nobody but PC donors and developers.

And in an insulting slap in the face to front-line workers like our nurses, who have had their wages capped by Premier Ford, the Premier recently rewarded one of his own MPPs with a \$27,000 raise. That's almost a full year's salary for anyone who's struggling to survive on minimum wage.

Unfortunately, under this government's watch, we're seeing a province that is becoming a province of haves and have-nots. If we had a Premier who actually cared, who actually wanted to help people, he could start by restoring the wages of those people who were affected by his freeze. He could end his low-wage policy. He could instantly raise social assistance rates that have been frozen in time and support our call to tackle Ontario's cost-of-living crisis.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): Further debate?

Mr. Tom Rakocvic: Life is becoming more and more unaffordable. You feel it at the grocery store, when you pay rent or a utility bill, when you pay your auto insurance or fill up at the pump. If you have children here in Toronto, where daycare costs are the highest in the country, you're spending most of your salary to have someone take care of your children while you work. The list goes on and on.

While the cost of just about everything has gone up, wages are not keeping pace, not even by a stretch, meaning that most Ontarians have to get by on less. But that isn't the case for everyone—not for Amazon, not for Walmart, not for big insurance companies, because they're making record profits and the government has their backs. While small mom-and-pop shops were closed, Walmart was open front to back. If you're a small mom-and-pop shop, you were told to close and given little to no support. If you were a big company, you had a direct line to the minister of your choice in this government.

As a small business owner with your shop closed, I'll bet your commercial insurance rates are up through the roof—maybe even two or three times higher. But is this government really doing anything for you? No.

Imagine: At the height of the first lockdown, when the streets were so empty you could play street hockey on the 401 during rush hour, and your car was parked, gathering dust, your insurance rates were not dropping. Accidents were down over 70% in Toronto, and your rates were not dropping. Where was the finance minister? He was doing

PR for the insurance companies. And then, almost a year later, we found out that insurance rates were going up. In fact, insurance rates went up by \$198 million in 2020, and while drivers got gouged, insurance companies made more than \$3.6 billion of profits in auto insurance alone. Where is the leadership from the government on this? They are silent.

And that's not it. Remember back in 2018, when this government promised to lower your hydro bill by 12%? Well, in the three years since then, your hydro bills have gone up. The list goes on and on.

Let's face it: If you're not a wealthy friend of this government, things are only getting worse.

We must commit to a real plan to not just help Ontarians get by, but to make sure they thrive; to ensure that everyone has a home they can afford; to not just talk about it, but to actually put a plan in place for \$10-a-day child care. We must give our small businesses the assistance they need to get back on their feet and help move our economy forward. The list goes on and on.

It's time this government put that big corporate executive donor on hold and answer when it's a worker, when it's a small business owner or a parent struggling to raise their children and pay the bills. The affordability crisis is real and getting worse, and we must do everything we can to stop it. The people are counting on us. Let's get it done.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): Further debate?

I recognize the leader of the official opposition for her right of reply.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: I'm really happy to get up and thank the members of the opposition. It's very clear that the members of the opposition, those of us on this side of the House, actually have an understanding of what families are going through. We actually have solutions to help people afford a decent life in this province, to help people to be able to buy their own home or to have a rental that they can afford, to keep a roof over their head. We have plans that would make sure that people can actually achieve their dreams in this province.

It was very difficult listening to the government, which has the opportunity to make change for these folks, which has the opportunity to help everyday families to address the rising cost of everything—because let's face it, as we have all talked about, everything is going up: the cost of housing; the cost of renting a house; the cost of our hydro bills, our food, our auto insurance. Pretty much the price of everything is going through the roof, but this government, instead of being on the side of everyday working folks, of middle-class families, of working families, they're not. In fact, their priorities are to take \$10 billion and move it from other infrastructure projects that had been committed to around the province to two roads—a highway and a bypass—that really just help the developers who are buddies of the various actors on the government side of the fence.

This is extremely problematic, Speaker—a government that is so out of touch they haven't cut a deal for \$10-a-day child care yet. We're one of the last provinces, but this

laggard government has decided that working families don't need child care. I guess nobody actually let this government know that in fact an affordable child care plan is something that not only helps everyday families, but it also helps the economy. It's shocking that this government is not aware of that. Maybe it doesn't help their buddies, though. Maybe that's the problem: \$10-a-day child care isn't going to help their buddies, who are lining up to make billions of dollars with these highway projects.

The bottom line is, for years it has been getting harder and harder to afford a decent life here in this province. People are working harder and earning less. This government has low-wage policies that reverberate throughout Ontario, that hurt everybody—whether that's the minimum wage that they froze for those number of years that they should have been increasing it, then to increase it only to \$15 an hour starting in January, after people have lost over \$5,300 in the interim, and when we know the wage needs to be at least \$17 an hour.

There are lots of things that could be done to give people a fighting chance at building a good life here. It's too bad the government only cares about their big developer buddies who will line their pockets, and not about everyday families.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): Ms. Horwath has moved opposition day number 4. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? I heard a no.

All those in favour of the motion will please say "aye."

All those opposed to the motion will please say "nay."

In my opinion, the nays have it.

A recorded vote being required, the bells will ring for 30 minutes, during which time members may cast their votes. Prepare the lobbies, please.

The division bells rang from 1450 to 1520.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): The vote was held on opposition day number 4.

The Clerk of the Assembly (Mr. Todd Decker): The ayes are 24; the nays are 46.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): I declare the motion lost.

Motion negatived.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

BUILD ONTARIO ACT (BUDGET MEASURES), 2021

LOI DE 2021 VISANT À PROTÉGER NOS PROGRÈS ET À BÂTIR L'ONTARIO (MESURES BUDGÉTAIRES)

Mr. Bethlenfalvy moved second reading of the following bill:

Bill 43, An Act to implement Budget measures and to enact and amend various statutes / Projet de loi 43, Loi visant à mettre en oeuvre les mesures budgétaires et à édicter et à modifier diverses lois.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): Further debate?

Hon. Peter Bethlenfalvy: I want to make sure that the House is aware that I'm sharing my time with the member from Aurora–Oak Ridges–Richmond Hill and the member from Brantford–Brant.

Madam Speaker, I'm honoured to rise and speak about our government's plan to protect our progress against the COVID-19 pandemic and build for a better future. We will outline how Bill 43, the Build Ontario Act (Budget Measures), 2021, provides legislative support for that plan. As outlined in the 2021 Ontario Economic Outlook and Fiscal Review, this proposed legislation is a key component of our government's plan to emerge from the pandemic stronger, more self-reliant and ready to face the challenges of a dynamically changing world.

Over the last two years, the people of Ontario have faced a once-in-a-lifetime challenge, and against this challenge the people of this province have stood tall. They have shown the true Ontario spirit. They have made sacrifices in their day-to-day life to keep each other safe and help safeguard our health care system from being overwhelmed. They came together to support the most vulnerable among us. They not only got vaccinated themselves but volunteered others to help get them vaccinated as well. The people of this great province have banded together.

Madam Speaker, I believe I speak for everyone in this hall today when I say how grateful we are for the efforts of everyone who stepped up in the fight against the pandemic—from our heroes on the front lines of our health care system to the essential workers who kept our supply chain strong and our store shelves stocked. As they always have, it was the people of Ontario who led the way. It is their leadership that will see our province through to a better future, a brighter future, to building a province that not only leads Canada in economic growth but North America as well.

It is my honour and my privilege to lay out our plan to build Ontario. Our government has put forward a plan for protecting the hard-fought gains we have made against COVID-19 and growing an economy that works for everybody. It is a plan that builds on our record of strong pandemic management and looks ahead to the kind of Ontario that we all want to build. As I've said many times before, you cannot have a healthy economy without healthy people. This is our plan for jobs, our plan for opportunities and our plan to build Ontario. It's a plan that dreams big but then lays out a clear path to take us there. This is our plan for building a better and brighter future for the people of our province.

Madame la Présidente, c'est notre plan pour créer des emplois, notre plan pour créer des possibilités, notre plan pour bâtir l'Ontario. C'est un plan ambitieux mais qui montre clairement la voie à suivre. C'est notre plan pour bâtir un avenir meilleur et plus radieux pour la population de l'Ontario.

The pandemic has reminded us that our health care system is connected. Whether it's public health measures

or intensive care unit capacity or mental health or surgical wait times, every pillar of our health care system is connected, and they all impact one another. That is why our government has taken an approach to building our capacity that looks at the complete picture. We have to build our capacity in all of these areas together in order to strengthen the system as a whole.

Our economy is linked in very much the same way. Strong government investment and prudent economic management can attract investment, encourage entrepreneurship and growth, which, in turn, will result in greater production, technological innovation and more well-paying jobs for Ontario workers.

Madam Speaker, our government refuses to settle for anything less than restoring our leadership in critical sectors such as manufacturing and natural resource extraction, as well as positioning Ontario as a global leader in advanced manufacturing technologies, electric vehicle and battery development and steel—fuelled in part by unlocking the awe-inspiring resource potential of Ontario's north. But in order to attract investment, we need the skilled workers who make those industries thrive, which is why we are investing in training and encouraging more young people to pursue skills and a rewarding, challenging and lucrative environment for the rest of their careers.

In turn, attracting and keeping these skilled workers in Ontario means investing in the communities where those workers will live, where they will work and where they will raise their families. That means investments in better health care, stronger local infrastructure and reliable supply chains to keep food, PPE and other essential goods moving. It means building and improving roads, transit systems and highways that make it easier and faster to move between home and work—and anywhere in between.

It's all linked. Our economy is a machine, and if one part is not working to its full potential, it holds us all back from getting to where we want, and need, to go. But if everything is working properly, there's nowhere else in the world you'd rather be than here in Ontario. A dynamic economy creates a virtuous circle that will help our province strengthen its position as the economic engine of Canada and become a leading jurisdiction in economic growth, cutting-edge innovation, quality of life and opportunity.

This is our plan to build bigger, faster and better than before. It is a plan for recovery through growth, not painful tax hikes nor spending cuts—because we know that the economy grows when the talent, drive and grit of businesses and workers are unleashed and Ontario's full potential is achieved.

Madam Speaker, in times of crisis, the people of Ontario deserve nothing less than full transparency from their government. That is why we were the first province in Canada to provide a fiscal update. And throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, our government has brought the people of this province timely and transparent updates about the state of Ontario's finances. We responded quickly and decisively to this growing threat.

In March of last year, Ontario was the first jurisdiction in Canada to release a fiscal update that reflected the potential impacts of the virus. Eight short months later, we published the 2020 Ontario budget, which built on our initial response with strategic and targeted investments to protect people and jobs. We followed that with our 2021 budget, Ontario's Action Plan: Protecting People's Health and Our Economy. In that document, the government enhanced its response to COVID-19, bringing our commitment to help guide the people and businesses of Ontario through the pandemic to \$51 billion. Included in that number is \$1 billion for a province-wide vaccination campaign that has seen Ontario achieve one of the highest vaccination rates in the world. It also includes \$5.1 billion earmarked to support hospitals, creating more than 3,100 additional hospital beds, and nearly \$3 billion in urgent and unprecedented support to over 110,000 small businesses across the province. This degree of support is truly unprecedented.

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And our government's 2021 Ontario Economic Outlook and Fiscal Review: Build Ontario continues to make \$51 billion in supports available to fight the COVID-19 pandemic and promote economic recovery. This milestone document is the seventh financial update since the pandemic began, highlighting the government's commitment to providing regular updates on Ontario's finances, even during this uncertain economic period.

Our government has made every resource available over the course of the pandemic to protect people and to protect jobs. While our government recognizes that this level of spending is not sustainable in the long run, protecting people's health has been the government's number one priority since the pandemic began. This is not just necessary to fight COVID-19 and save lives; it is also the most sensible economic and fiscal policy.

This is why our government responded with historic support for individuals, families and businesses, and we are already seeing evidence that our approach to protecting our progress against COVID-19 and building for tomorrow is working. Ontario's economy is recovering from the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic and is poised to continue to grow. For 2021-22, the government is projecting a deficit of \$21.5 billion, which is \$11.6 billion lower than the outlook published in the 2021 budget. A stronger economic growth outlook is a key factor in this improvement as well as more recent information about the impact of COVID-19 on the province's finances. Ontario's real gross domestic product—GDP—is projected to rise by 4.3% in 2021, exceeding the 4% projected in the 2021 budget. Real GDP is projected to grow at a pace of 4.5% in 2022, 2.6% in 2023 and 2% in 2024. For the purposes of prudent fiscal planning, these projections were set slightly below the average of private sector forecasts.

Revenues in 2021-22 are projected to be \$168.6 billion, which is also an improvement over the 2021 budget forecast. In fact, it is \$14.6 billion higher than projected in the 2021 budget and \$11.7 billion higher than projected in the 2021-22 first quarter finances.

There are clear reasons for optimism that Ontario is turning the corner based on these important indicators. However, there is still a great degree of uncertainty in the global economy.

From rising costs to supply chain shortages, the pandemic still poses a risk to our economy. That is why our government's plan is prudent and responsible. Our government will not raise taxes on Ontario businesses and families despite calls to do so from the opposition. Our plan will be fuelled by growth, by the dedication, ingenuity and hard work of the businesses and workers of our province.

The 2021 Ontario Economic Outlook and Fiscal Review demonstrates how strong economic growth can positively impact the province's fiscal situation, and it opens up opportunities for government to set the stage for future growth.

However, as we know, the pandemic is not over, and people's health must remain our top priority. That is why the government continues to maintain fiscal flexibility given the continued uncertainty over the virus.

Ontario allocated an additional \$500 million to the Time-Limited COVID-19 Fund in 2021-22. As vaccination rates increase and the province fully reopens, the funding will allow the province to deploy resources where they are needed the most, and, after accounting for the top-up and drawdowns from this fund since the 2021-22 first quarter finances, the net position of the Time-Limited COVID-19 Fund remains at \$2.2 billion in 2021-22. This remains the prudent and responsible approach as Ontario moves cautiously towards fiscal recovery.

As with previous financial updates, the government has again developed faster-growth and slower-growth scenarios in the 2021 Ontario Economic Outlook and Fiscal Review. These scenarios help us more fully anticipate the paths that the economy could take over the next several years and provide people with more transparency about how alternative economic scenarios could impact the province's finances, because in these uncertain times, our government must be prepared for anything.

In conclusion, our government's plan is prudent and responsible. It's a plan to protect the progress we have made and build for the future and work for the workers who make it all happen.

Madame la Présidente, le plan de notre gouvernement est prudent et responsable. C'est un plan pour protéger les progrès que nous avons accomplis, bâtir pour l'avenir, et soutenir les travailleuses et travailleurs qui sont derrière tout cela.

Our government applauds the incredible efforts of the hard-working people of Ontario to look after each other, to make hard sacrifices when needed and to follow public health guidelines when asked to. Our government knows it hasn't been easy, and we know Ontarians deserve a bright future after what they have been through. Under the leadership of Premier Ford, our entire government will continue to have their backs and do whatever it takes to finish the job.

The opposition would say no to our plan to build Ontario—no to building more highways, more hospitals,

more housing and more high-speed Internet, no to our plan to stand up for Ontario workers. But, Madam Speaker, we cannot go back to the politics of "no."

Our government is saying yes—yes to investing, yes to growing, yes to building a better and brighter future for people in every corner of our province. They deserve no less.

Bill 43 supports our government's plan to continue supporting Ontario in the fight against COVID-19 and helps prepare the people of this great province for what comes next.

To speak more about our government's plan and the details contained in this legislation, I'm asking my parliamentary assistants to take the floor. But, first, I want to express my thanks for their efforts, which played a key role in the development of the 2021 Ontario Economic Outlook and Fiscal Review.

Michael Parsa, MPP for Aurora–Oak Ridges–Richmond Hill, will discuss how our plan protects our hard-earned progress in the fight against COVID-19 and supports the workers of Ontario, who have done so much to help our province prevail against such an immense challenge.

Will Bouma, MPP for Brantford–Brant, will provide more details about our plan to build Ontario and position our province to face the challenges and seize the opportunities that the future brings.

Now I'll ask MPP Parsa to take the floor.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): The member for Aurora–Oak Ridges–Richmond Hill.

Mr. Michael Parsa: I want to thank the Minister of Finance, Peter Bethlenfalvy, for the introduction and all the great work that he has put into the ministry and certainly for the people of Ontario and in his riding.

I'm honoured, Madam Speaker, to speak about our government's ambitious plan outlined in the 2021 Ontario Economic Outlook and Fiscal Review, Bill 43, the Build Ontario Act, 2021. These initiatives support our government's efforts to protect the progress we've made and the milestones we've reached in our fight against COVID-19. We've incorporated measures into this bill that support the workers who have sacrificed so much for us during these trying times. We recognize that they're the ones holding the key to Ontario's future prosperity.

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Our plan starts with protecting our progress. Thanks to the selflessness, perseverance and dedication of the people of Ontario, we are finally turning the corner toward a better future. And while we've come so far, there continue to be real threats to our progress. But with the majority of people in communities across Ontario having rolled up their sleeves to get the vaccine, we know that taking our foot off the gas is simply not an option. Our government recognizes that we must safeguard the progress we've made in response to the virus, and our commitment to winning the fight against COVID-19 has never been stronger. Under Ontario's COVID-19 vaccination plan, more than 22 million doses have been administered, resulting in one of the highest vaccination rates in the

world. We encourage those who have not yet received their first or second dose to get the vaccine and protect themselves and their loved ones from the virus.

We know that the pandemic has tested the capacity of our health care system in ways we never knew possible. And although we did our very best to take care of our people and overcome the challenges of COVID-19, there are steps we need to take to better position ourselves for future emergencies, which is why our government is providing hospitals with over \$1.8 billion in 2021-22 to support 3,100 new and additional beds. This funding will reduce surgical and diagnostic imaging backlogs and help hospitals keep pace with patient needs, while also increasing access to high-quality care.

We are committed to supporting the seniors who have dedicated their lives to running businesses, strengthening communities, raising families and sharing their wisdom with the younger generation in every corner of our province.

Speaker, our plan includes funding to build more spaces for seniors. Specifically, we're providing the tools to build 30,000 net new long-term-care beds while also redeveloping another 28,000. But our plan is not just about building more beds; it's about building better beds. We're making a promise to our seniors that they can live in the comfort, dignity and safety that they rightly deserve. And to make this promise a reality, we're going to raise the bar for what constitutes acceptable care in our long-term-care homes. Our government has already committed \$4.9 billion to meet an average of four hours of direct care each day for every resident in long-term care by 2025. Now we are implementing a plan that will bring higher standards and more accountability to seniors' care. The days of unacceptable shortcuts and cutting corners are over. To ensure the safety of our long-term-care residents, our government is providing an additional \$72.3 million over three years to increase enforcement capacity. This funding will allow us to double the number of inspectors across the province by 2022-23, which in turn will make Ontario's inspector-to-long-term-care-home ratio the highest in Canada.

We're also investing \$57.6 million, beginning in 2022-23, to hire 225 new nurse practitioners in the long-term-care sector.

And across the health care system, we're recruiting more than 5,000 registered nurses and registered practical nurses, in addition to training 8,000 more PSWs.

We're also making new investments to improve home care, thereby keeping patients out of hospital. To help hospitalized patients continue their recovery and rehabilitation at home, where they are most comfortable, the province is investing an additional \$548.5 million over three years to expand home and community care. Speaker, this funding would support up to 28,000 post-acute surgical patients and 21,000 patients with complex health conditions every year—because we know that the best care a person can get is the kind you can receive in the comfort of your own home.

Our government wants to help seniors, in particular, stay in their homes for longer, but without compromising

their safety, which is why Bill 43 proposes to extend the Seniors' Home Safety Tax Credit. Remember, we introduced this refundable tax credit for the 2021 taxation year to help seniors, or those living with senior relatives, make renovations in their home to make them safer or more accessible for seniors. This credit is worth 25% of up to \$10,000 in eligible expenses. The 2022 credit extension would provide an estimated \$35 million in support to about 32,000 people. That's \$1,100 on average, up to a maximum benefit of \$2,500. Speaker, the credit helps seniors in communities across our province afford the renovations they need to be able to get around more easily, more safely, in their own homes. This helps seniors improve their mobility and retain their independence. Should this legislation pass, the credit would be extended, making it available for the 2022 taxation year.

We have seen many students return to in-person learning this September, and our government is working hard to make sure our schools remain safe. To ensure students have a safe and successful school year in 2021-22, the government is providing more than \$1.6 billion in resources to protect schools against COVID-19. Ontario has allocated over \$600 million to improve ventilation and filtration in schools, including over 70,000 stand-alone high-efficiency particulate air, or HEPA, filters and other ventilation devices in place.

We're also investing \$8.9 million to continue keeping staff and residents safe in congregate care settings. These include residences for adults with developmental disabilities, residences for children in care with special needs, youth justice facilities and emergency shelters for women and families fleeing domestic violence. This funding addresses immediate needs by providing essential resources such as personal protective equipment and rapid antigen testing, enhanced infection prevention and control measures and HEPA filters to improve ventilation to protect Ontario's most vulnerable.

Speaker, Ontario is well positioned for a strong recovery. But that recovery will only be made a reality by the hard work and ingenuity of Ontario's workers.

Throughout this pandemic, workers have had our backs, and our government, under the leadership of Premier Ford, will always have their backs. We want Ontario workers in a race to the top, not a race to the bottom. That's why our government is working for workers.

It's clear that Ontario's workers and families are struggling. Take-home pay hasn't kept up with the rising cost of basic necessities like groceries, and families simply can't do without.

That's why Bill 43 proposes amendments to the Employment Standards Act, the ESA, which would increase the general minimum wage to \$15 an hour effective January 1, 2022. This represents a 4.5% increase over the current minimum wage of \$14.35 per hour. If passed, it would also remove the lower special minimum wage rate for liquor servers, which means that they would earn the same general minimum wage as everyone else. The minimum wage rates for students, home workers, hunting and fishing guides and wilderness guides would be increased

proportionately to the increase in the general minimum wage. The consumer price index would then resume October 1, 2022. Should the legislation pass, this measure will help many employees boost their take-home pay. Many of the people impacted by this challenge worked in essential workplaces during the COVID-19 pandemic, and our government is profoundly grateful to them and to their dedication and willingness to go the extra mile in a time of such great need.

This government is also committed to protecting Ontario workers from exploitation and labour trafficking. We are investing \$1.1 million in 2021-22 to support a dedicated team of officers to undertake focused inspections of temporary help agencies and recruiters of migrant workers. The pilot will help protect some of Ontario's most vulnerable and marginalized workers.

As Minister Bethlenfalvy stated, Ontario's skilled workforce is critical to our province's future success. To provide more training opportunities for workers, Bill 43 proposes to extend the Ontario Jobs Training Tax Credit to 2022. This credit, introduced in the 2021 budget, provides up to \$2,000 in relief per recipient for 50% of a person's eligible training expenses. The credit is estimated to provide \$260 million in support to about 230,000 people this year alone. The 2022 tax extension would provide an estimated \$275 million in support to about 240,000 people. On average, that's about \$1,150 per person.

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To help workers get good jobs, Ontario is continuing to move forward with its skilled trades strategy. The province is investing an additional \$90.3 million over three years, starting in 2021-22, into that strategy. Some new initiatives we're creating include a skilled trades career fair and enhancing the Ontario Youth Apprenticeship Program and Pre-Apprenticeship Training Program. On top of these key initiatives, we are investing an additional \$5 million in 2021-22 to expand the Second Career program.

Speaker, working for workers also means working for economic growth, and our government is providing significant support and investment to help Ontario's economy recover from the pandemic. This provides skilled workers more opportunity to contribute to and benefit from that growth.

To strengthen Ontario's position as one of North America's premier jurisdictions for responsibly sourced critical minerals, the province has announced plans to develop its first-ever Critical Minerals Strategy. Ontario is blessed with an abundance of these minerals, such as lithium, manganese and graphite, which are crucial components of low-emission vehicle batteries, not to mention zinc, titanium and rare-earth elements, which are used in medical equipment and technologies such as cardiac implants, MRI machines and fibres for prosthetics.

These resources hold the power to fuel an advanced manufacturing renaissance in our province, to build a resilient and strong supply chain for electric vehicles and battery manufacturing right here at home in our province, to help secure investments in the cutting-edge technologies of today and tomorrow, and to open up new avenues of opportunity for Ontario's skilled workforce. To

make this happen, Ontario is moving forward with a strategy to unlock the economic potential of the Ring of Fire, which my colleague MPP Bouma will address in further detail.

Speaker, Ontario's automotive sector is a vital part of our economy, and to protect and create jobs in this sector, our government has secured investment commitments of \$5.6 billion from major auto manufacturers for electric vehicle supply chain capacity.

As part of the Regional Development Program, and to address growing competition for investments and supply chain challenges, we're creating a new province-wide, two-year, \$40-million advanced manufacturing and innovation competitiveness stream. To support businesses and the workers they employ, Ontario has enabled an estimated \$10.1 billion in cost savings and support in 2021, with more than 60%, or \$6.3 billion, going to small businesses in the province.

Now, Speaker, our government recognizes that the tourism, hospitality and culture sectors have been hit particularly hard by the pandemic. To support the tourism, culture, sports and recreational sector, Ontario has invested more than \$800 million since the pandemic began, and we will continue to stand with them in these difficult times.

To help the tourism and hospitality sector recover and encourage Ontario families to explore the province, Bill 43 proposes a new temporary Ontario Staycation Tax Credit for 2022. This new personal income tax credit will provide Ontario residents with 20% of support on eligible 2022 accommodation expenses in Ontario of up to \$1,000 for an individual and \$2,000 for a family, for a maximum credit of \$200 or \$400 respectively. The credit would provide an estimated \$270 million to support over 1.5 million families to further discover Ontario in 2022.

Finally, to strengthen Ontario's agri-food supply chain, we're investing up to \$25 million over three years, starting in 2021-22, in a new Strategic Agri-Food Processing Fund to support projects that will enhance processing capacity and food security.

Speaker, last week I was in the beautiful town of Aurora for the launch of the Accelerate Business Recovery virtual hub to highlight our government's investment in this innovative project. It was encouraging to see at the community level just how far we've come in these unprecedented times. People are getting vaccinated. Businesses are opening their doors to workers and customers again, and families are signing up for recreational activities in community spaces. It's vital that we protect the gains that we've made against the virus, and it's equally important to support Ontario's workers and enable them to succeed in a post-pandemic economy.

Speaker, that's exactly what our government's plan is going to do. We are protecting our progress, and we are working for workers. I encourage my colleagues in this House to support this legislation because it includes key measures that will move this plan forward.

Now I would like to turn to my colleague PA Bouma to present more details about our government's plan to put shovels into the ground and to build our province's future.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): The member for Brantford–Brant

Mr. Will Bouma: Thank you, Speaker. I will endeavour to refer to you appropriately. I have been through the speech with an X with my pen. I apologize for previously.

Thank you to the members of team finance, Minister Bethlenfalvy and PA Parsa for the rewarding partnership we have in delivering our government's plan for building Ontario. I am honoured to address that plan, as showcased in the 2021 Ontario Economic Outlook and Fiscal Review and in the measures contained in Bill 43, the Build Ontario Act (Budget Measures), 2021.

The government has a plan to build Ontario's future. This means having shovels in the ground for highways, for hospitals, for housing and for high-speed Internet. We are making these improvements to improve our health care capacity so that the system we rely on so much can be ready for whatever challenges emerge in the future; to unlock the vast economic potential of Ontario's north, including the Ring of Fire, by providing better access to critical mineral resources needed by leading-edge industries; and to cut down on the time commuters spend in gridlock so they can spend more time with the people who matter most to them.

Speaker, for too long our roads, our highways, our transit systems have not kept pace with our growing population. Gridlock is already costing the greater Toronto area \$11 billion per year in lost productivity. Too many precious hours are wasted stuck in traffic instead of spent with friends and family. To build, expand and repair Ontario's highways and bridges, create jobs and spur the economic growth that we need, the government has invested approximately \$2.6 billion in funding for 2021-22 in support of the Ontario highways program. This program features more than 580 expansion and rehabilitation projects across the province of Ontario.

As part of the highways program, the government has committed funding to build and advance the Bradford Bypass and Highway 413. These two critical projects will have significant impacts on our growing economy and will help make life easier and create more opportunity for people across the greater Golden Horseshoe.

The Bradford Bypass is a new four-lane freeway that will connect Highway 400 and Highway 404 in Simcoe county and York region. Both regions are expected to experience rapid growth over the next 10 to 20 years, and investing in this new corridor is required to ease congestion on Highway 400 and existing east-west local roads. This project is expected to support 700 jobs per year on average during construction and generate more than \$70 million in annual real gross domestic product.

Motorists and trucks are anticipated to see more than a 60% savings in travel time and reduce their commute time by up to 35 minutes. Highway 413 will be a new 400-series highway and transit corridor across Halton, Peel and York regions. The highway will bring relief to the most congested corridor in North America and play a vital role in the province's plan for economic recovery, growth and job creation.

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During construction, Highway 413 is expected to support up to 3,500 jobs per year and generate up to \$350 million in annual real gross domestic product. The highway will save drivers up to 30 minutes each way on their commute. That's one hour per day, five hours per week, freed up in people's schedules for what's really important to them.

Speaker, our government is also looking out for people who don't use the highway to get where they need to go. To deliver the largest subway expansion in Canadian history, Ontario is making progress in its \$28.5-billion plan with the all-new Ontario Line, the three-stop Scarborough subway extension, the Yonge North subway extension connecting to York region, and the Eglinton Crosstown West extension.

We are also investing \$1.7 billion towards a total of \$3.4 billion to support the Hamilton light rail transit project. This shovel-ready project will create thousands of jobs and will make it easier to get around for the people of Hamilton and surrounding areas. And we are delivering on our commitment to building two-way, all-day GO Transit, as well as building the Kitchener GO rail expansion and expanding GO train service to London. Our government is also working in partnership with northern and First Nations communities to create jobs, unlock critical minerals and bring economic prosperity to Ontario's north.

My colleague PA Parsa just spoke about our government's critical mineral strategy, and the Ring of Fire is a critical and vital component of that. The Ring of Fire is an astounding untapped resource, one of the most important mineral deposits in all of Canada. It is a vital source of potential economic development for communities across the north and especially for First Nations communities, and it is time to get the road to the Ring of Fire built. The province has committed close to \$1 billion to support the planning and construction of an all-season road network and other projects that will provide the corridor to prosperity for the remote nations living in the Far North. Bill 43 would, if passed, make changes to the Far North Act to facilitate economic development in the Far North, including the Ring of Fire.

These changes would also enhance and encourage collaboration between the province and Far North First Nations on land use planning. These changes are the result of extensive, collaborative work between the province and the NAN peoples, or the Nishnawbe Aski Nation, to review the act and recommend changes and also direct engagement with Far North First Nations throughout the review. Our government is committed to unleashing the potential of this mineral deposit. In fact, we are prepared to invest close to \$1 billion to get the job done.

First Nations are doing their part, and we are working closely with Marten Falls and the Webequie First Nations, but we need the government of Canada to step up, do its part and match Ontario's commitment to this critical project. Unlocking the critical minerals found in the Ring of Fire will play a key role in the economic vitality not only of the north but also for the rest of Ontario, and indeed for the rest of Canada.

We are also getting shovels in the ground for building and expanding our hospitals to support the growing demands of the health care system, Ontario is investing \$30.2 billion over the next 10 years to build, expand and enhance our hospitals. This is a historic commitment to ensure people can get the care that they need closer to their home. These projects include a new hospital and a lodge in Moosonee, as well as a new ambulatory care centre on Moose Factory Island; a new in-patient care tower in Etobicoke; and a complete rebuild of the Mississauga Hospital, in partnership with Trillium Health Partners.

This also includes funding to support the planning for the new Windsor-Essex acute care regional hospital; redeveloping the Oak Valley Health Uxbridge hospital; expansion of in-patient beds and ambulatory care at London Health Sciences Centre and doubling the capacity of its stem cell transplant unit; and transformation of the existing site and urgent care centre into a new in-patient care hospital at the William Osler Health System.

Our government also realizes that this foundation must be laid in every corner of the province, which is why our government is doubling the Ontario Community Infrastructure Fund over five years with an additional investment of \$1 billion, bringing the total to nearly \$2 billion.

This funding will help 424 small, rural and northern communities build, repair and modernize bridges, water and waste water infrastructure. This includes critical projects like road repairs in Sarnia, Georgina, and Haldimand county, as well as upgrades to water treatment plants in Tay township, Blind River and West Nipissing.

This additional funding will help provide reliable and sustainable services and directly support public safety, job creation and economic growth. Not only will these projects support about 1,500 jobs per year over the next five years, they will help keep our communities safe and support the recovery of main streets across the province.

Moving on, building schools and child care spaces: Speaker, seeing our kids go back to in-person learning has been a very welcome sight. Our government recognizes that these young minds are our future—our future leaders—and we are determined to help them succeed over the long run. To help support their success, the government is investing about \$14 billion in capital grants over 10 years to build more schools, such as new schools in the growing communities of Oshawa and Pickering.

The funding is also being used to improve existing facilities and support education-related projects. This includes providing \$1.4 billion for the 2021-22 school year to support the repair and the renewal of schools—for example, upgrading ventilation systems. Over 70,000 stand-alone HEPA air filters and other ventilation devices have also been deployed in our schools.

The government is also investing up to \$1 billion over five years to create up to 30,000 licensed child care spaces for families and communities across the province, and we have been working closely with our federal partners to support working families with their child care.

Recently, Ontario and the federal government made progress in this area with the renewal of the Canada-

Ontario Early Learning and Child Care Agreement, which includes enhanced funding from the government of Canada through 2024-25. Ontario has also secured one-time funding from the federal government to support the province's ongoing recruitment and retention efforts for a high-quality child care and early years workforce. We look forward to building on the progress we've made with our federal partners to meet the needs of working families all across the province of Ontario.

Our government fully recognizes that access to reliable licensed child care is crucial for improving options for parents and supporting inclusive economic growth. These investments build on our existing support of working parents through the Childcare Access and Relief from Expenses, or CARE, tax credit, which helps Ontario families with child care expenses while letting them choose the care that is the best for their children.

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Moving on: building high-speed Internet access for everyone. If the pandemic has taught us one thing, it's shown us that high-speed Internet access is not a luxury in a modern world; it's a necessity. High-speed Internet is critical for access to vital services like health care, education and employment, access to economic opportunity, promoting entrepreneurial opportunities and helping people stay connected with friends, family and their community. But it is estimated that as many as 700,000 households and businesses in Ontario lack access to high-speed Internet or have no Internet connection at all. Speaker, that's about 1.4 million people in the province of Ontario, and that is unacceptable.

In the 2021 budget, the province committed a historic \$2.8 billion to make high-speed Internet accessible in all regions of the province by the end of 2025, increasing Ontario's overall investment in broadband to nearly \$4 billion over six years, beginning in 2019-20. This is the largest single investment in high-speed Internet in any province, by any government, in Canadian history. It sets the foundation for Ontario to be competitive for decades to come. It also positions the province of Ontario as a leader in the transformational shift to a digital economy, where broadband connectivity is central to Ontario's future economic growth and development.

Ontario is also diversifying the province's broadband infrastructure by investing more than \$109 million in Telesat's next-generation low-earth orbit satellite network. Telesat is an Ontario-based company, and this investment will help secure future access to dedicated high-speed bandwidth for local communities.

Speaker, our government is laser-focused on putting shovels in the ground across our great province. This ambitious plan to build Ontario is as bold as it is necessary. Building the critical infrastructure our province needs will help safeguard the progress we've made against the pandemic that has impacted all of our lives so profoundly. It also helps put Ontario on to a future path of prosperity by keeping pace with our growing population and enabling workers, students, businesses and communities to better take part in our growing economy.

I stand with my colleagues in the Ministry of Finance, Minister Bethlenfalvy and MPP Parsa, in asking the members of this Legislature to give our plan their full support. And I'll also ask them to vote in favour of the measures contained in Bill 43.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): Before I move on to questions and answers, I just want to remind the members—it's happened a few times this afternoon—that you are to refer to other members either by their ministerial title or by their riding only, not including their names.

Question?

Mr. Guy Bourgouin: I was listening attentively and there's something I didn't hear in the budget. They talk about being laser-focused. They talk about how important the resources are in the ground that they need to develop. But you heard my colleague from Kiiwetinoong and myself, from Mushkegowuk–James Bay, speak a lot about the water crisis. And yet, in this budget, we hear zero about being laser-focused on fixing the water crisis in our northern communities.

What I would like to hear from this government is, why are resources in the ground more important than the basic human right to have potable water in First Nations communities?

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): Response? The member for Brantford–Brant.

Mr. Will Bouma: Thank you, Speaker. Through you: I completely agree with the member from Mushkegowuk–James Bay that it is time that we resolve these issues. That's why the federal government should be stepping up to the plate in order to do that.

I will also say that in order to build economic prosperity in the north, we are laying all the foundational pieces in order to make that happen. That's why I am so pleased by the work that we are doing in this fall economic statement.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): Question?

Ms. Natalia Kusendova: I was listening intently to both of my colleagues today on our fall economic statement, and I'm so proud of the work that we have done as a government to build more capacity within our hospitals and within our long-term-care sector. You know, 3,100 new acute care beds and a commitment of building 30,000 more long-term-care beds is quite phenomenal, but we need more health care staff to staff both acute care facilities and long-term care. I'm very proud of the work that we've done to train more PSWs and more nurses into both of these sectors, especially our work with our francophone institutions such as collège La Cité or Collège Boréal to infuse more French-speaking PSWs and nurses into these sectors.

My question is to either of my colleagues. Can you expand a little bit more on what our government is doing to hire more nurses into hospitals and more PSWs into our long-term-care sector?

Mr. Will Bouma: I have to say, I think my colleague from Aurora–Oak Ridges–Richmond Hill is probably more eloquent than I am, but I will take a stab at the answer to that question.

The member is absolutely right: We are making the investments necessary to have the workforce that we need in our health care system. That includes \$342 million, beginning in 2021, into the health and long-term-care workforce, providing 5,000 new and upskilled registered nurses and registered practical nurses as well as an additional 8,000 personal support workers.

We've had enough of the opposition saying no to the province of Ontario. It's time to start saying yes to health care and to our health care workers.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): Question?

Ms. Judith Monteith-Farrell: I listened intently to the presentations, and I was also disappointed to see that, in a bill that we're looking at moving forward, we are not addressing the mental health and addictions crisis that is so, so prevalent across our province but especially in northern Ontario. Without that, without lifting up people and without ensuring their safety, for many people, they don't see the meaning of their lives. They need help.

My question is, why, in this looking-forward document, are addictions services not meeting the need of the people of Ontario?

Mr. Will Bouma: Speaker, through you, I appreciate the opportunity to showcase some of the incredible things our government has done in the mental health space. As we all know, the government of Ontario, since we have taken office, has committed and is putting \$3.8 billion into mental health supports across the province of Ontario. We are making absolute action on that progress, which, again, is the single biggest investment of any province at any time in the whole entire country's history.

I also need to mention that we are putting another \$12.4 million just in this document, just in this bill, to aid Ontario nurses and doctors who are suffering and need mental health and addictions supports, especially through COVID, so that they can have the support that they need because we have relied so heavily on them.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): Question?

Mr. Sam Oosterhoff: My thanks to the member for Brantford–Brant for his passionate speech, also the Minister of Finance and, of course, our colleague the PA to the Minister of Finance as well.

My question to the member for Brantford–Brant is about the staycation tax credit—very important for the Niagara region, of course, where we see that a major economic driver is tourism. I know for other communities in this province as well, that's the case, especially in northern Ontario and in rural communities across this province where we see a great influx of visitors in normal times. Unfortunately, due to COVID, that was not the case, which had a devastating impact on so many of our communities.

I'm wondering if we could hear a little bit more about the staycation tax credit and what that's going to mean to so many small businesses in hospitality and tourism across this province.

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Mr. Will Bouma: To my colleague from Niagara: I completely agree. Our cultural industries have been so

dramatically affected through COVID and that runs right into tourism and everything else.

To see this level of support—we've already put \$800 million into support for the tourism, culture, sport and recreation sectors, and this includes this new Ontario Staycation Tax Credit. When you travel across the province of Ontario, when you stay home, you can get a 20% tax credit for the eligible expenses that go through that. It's such an exciting move so that we can help rebuild tourism in the province of Ontario post-COVID.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): Question?

Ms. Sandy Shaw: Reading from the fiscal statement, under this government, their debt has ballooned to \$402 billion. That's up 19% just from 2019 under this government's watch. That's \$108,000 worth of debt for every family in the province of Ontario.

What we have now is a government that's going to spend \$10.9 billion, taxpayer dollars, on a highway, Highway 413, the Bradford Bypass that nobody wants. Nobody except developers and speculators will profit from this. So when this government has slashed the planned increase to minimum wage, when they've frozen the wages of our health care workers like nurses, why do you think it's appropriate for you to say yes to using taxpayers' dollars, bankrolling a highway with taxpayer dollars, to the tune of \$11 billion?

Mr. Will Bouma: I really appreciate that question. It kind of exemplifies something that we've been hearing in the House for the last 20 months. All we hear from that side is no: no to supporting Ontario businesses, no to supporting Ontario families. And now that we're slowly getting ahead of COVID, they're saying no to the things that we need to do so that we can unlock the economic potential of the province of Ontario. They're saying no to commuters. They're saying no to getting people home to their families from work. That's just how it continues.

I really appreciate that question, because the government on this side of the House is saying yes to the people of Ontario.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): Question?

Mr. Norman Miller: Thank you to the Minister of Finance and the members from Aurora–Oak Ridges–Richmond Hill and Brantford–Brant for their comments on the Build Ontario Act, Bill 43.

The fall economic statement is just the latest in a regular pattern of fiscal transparency. Of course, that's pretty challenging in COVID times, but can you speak to what the Ministry of Finance is doing to ensure ongoing transparency and accountability to the people of Ontario about the government's finances, please?

Mr. Will Bouma: The member is absolutely right. In times of the crisis that we are coming through right now, never before have the people of Ontario needed transparency from their government, and we have delivered on that.

Ontario was the first jurisdiction in Canada to release a fiscal plan that reflected the potential impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. And throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, our government has brought the people of this

province timely and transparent updates about the state of Ontario's finances. Indeed, this is our seventh financial update since the pandemic began, and this Ontario Economic Outlook and Fiscal Review outlines how our government plans to protect Ontario's progress in the fight of COVID-19, build Ontario into the future and work for our workers.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): Further debate?

Ms. Catherine Fife: As the critic for finance and for Treasury Board, of course it is my pleasure to stand in my place in this House and address the fall economic statement and legislation Bill 43.

Now, before I start, I just have to comment that the disconnect that this government has between what is actually happening in the province of Ontario—that gap is getting wider and wider, and this fall economic statement proves that on several fronts.

When I did respond to the delivery of the FES, when the minister stood in his place, I said very clearly, “The fall economic statement is a key opportunity to communicate with Ontarians, and it should clearly articulate: What does this government stand for? Who are” you “working for? Have you been listening to people? And are you prepared to demonstrate some courage and act on those issues?”

And given the last 19 months, 20 months, that we have had in this province, the fact that this fall economic statement, this mini budget, misses the mark so profoundly is bizarre. You have to actively have been spending your entire summer up at the cottage, not listening to radio, not on social media, not talking to neighbours, to be so completely disconnected from the true struggles and challenges that Ontarians face on a day-to-day basis.

On education, on health care, on child care, and climate change—yes, “climate change,” two words that this document fails to address in any way, shape or form. Instead, it showed Ontarians that this Premier doesn't want to spend the money on health care and education that they deserve, because on this side of the House, we have given full credit to the resiliency that Ontarians have demonstrated through this pandemic. They stood up, they went out and fought for their rights, be they on the front line in health care or the front line in education. Teachers and education workers fought for their students.

So what we have here is an absence of leadership. Quite honestly, it's almost a level of ignorance that I've never seen from any government, given what we now know about how all of our futures, our health, our well-being, our economy are connected to building Ontario up, which this document pretends to do.

There are four areas that I'm going to focus on, because what is very telling about this document is what is missing in this document on education and child care. If you had told me that Jason Kenney would have gotten a child care deal—\$10 a day—before the province of Ontario, I literally would have put money on that bet. I would have gambled on that, because it is embarrassing; it is a shameful state of affairs that this province does not have a

child care deal with a government that has put \$10 billion on the table, given the fact that women have paid the highest price during this pandemic.

I mean, what is going on? We have a Minister of Education who thinks that full-day kindergarten is early learning and care. You can't negotiate a contract retroactively for a program that has already been in place in Ontario. There are words for that; they are very unparliamentary, I would say.

On the education front, as well, to see a government actively pull out almost half a billion dollars, \$467 million, from base funding, from education—this tells me, Speaker, that this education minister, that these members across the aisle have no direct connection to education, and you and I both came from education.

The learning interruption piece that our educators are facing right now is profound. I was speaking to an early childhood educator over the weekend. There's a new term in early learning and care. It's called "COVID toddlers," because they have not grown up watching facial expressions, so their language acquisition is delayed. They haven't been able to make that kind of contact and that social interaction and that play-based learning. And what is this government doing? Playing chicken with Justin Trudeau on an early learning and care strategy. Time is of the essence. There is urgency at play in this place. It's almost like there's some machismo: Who can get the most amount of money? It is amateur hour here in Ontario. The fact that we do not have a child care strategy and a child care deal with the federal government is a complete failure of leadership on this file.

The other issue that we're facing—and I feel strongly about this, because there's going to be a cost to not intervening. This is what we know about early learning and care—that you resource early, you intervene early. When I look at all the stakeholders who weighed in on the fall economic statement, Carolyn Ferns from the Ontario Coalition for Better Child Care—this is a direct quote from her:

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"It's called the Build Ontario plan, but you don't just build Ontario with roads and highways. Child care builds Ontario, early childhood educators build Ontario. They are going to be essential to our economic recovery."

What is really interesting and a little bit boring at this stage in the game is who this government actually listens to—because they don't listen to women who are on the front lines of these sectors, and they've been consistently absent on that front.

The other key piece about this fall economic statement is on health care. Why this government, at this stage in the game, with 200 days left before the election, doesn't understand that you cannot build a long-term bed without a nurse—and so we are still fighting this government, shoulder to shoulder with front-line health care workers across Ontario, to repeal Bill 124. Why do you think that a nurse should work for less money during a health care crisis, given the mental health and the emotional and the physical challenges that they have faced all through this

pandemic? You call them heroes, but you offer them less than pennies. How can you even walk around your neighbourhood and look a nurse in the eye when they have been facing hellish circumstances in our hospitals and in our congregate settings and in long-term care? How can you look them in the eye after all of this time and say to them, "We value you, but you are worth pennies"? This is an insult. I've rarely seen this kind of disrespect for the very people who build Ontario up.

You cannot build Ontario up without investing in people. We know that for sure on this side of the aisle.

The other issue is, this was an opportunity—and it's too bad the member from Brantford–Brant didn't mention this. You would have had our full support if you had negotiated a deal for eye care in Ontario. That should have been here. We believe that eye care is health care. In fact, we all have anecdotal circumstances in our ridings, but I will tell you that my son's good friend—his optometrist caught his brain tumor. Think of the opportunities that we are missing on this front.

The optometrists have been fairly clear, as was the member Mrs. Martow last week. She came out and she issued a statement last week calling on her party—that would be you—to abandon the hard line it has taken with the Ontario Association of Optometrists. She's an optometrist herself, as the member for Brantford–Brant is as well, and she argued that her professional colleagues are in the right. She broke ranks—although there have been a lot of people who have been sort of exited out of the party. But this is an intentional breaking of the ranks and an exposure of the hardline tactics that this government has been making with optometrists. She says her colleagues are in the right, and she poked holes in the province's justification for not yielding to the association's demand that it commit to covering the cost of OHIP eye services as a precondition to resuming negotiations. She called the government's current offer "unsustainable" and criticized the province for their "heavy-handed tactics." So there's a whole new discourse on this drawn-out tension between optometrists and the Minister of Health.

I've been getting two, three, sometimes five calls a week from parents who are concerned about their children who cannot access eye care and cannot see the board or the whiteboard in their classroom. At least we can acknowledge, we can find some common ground that this is an issue. It's an issue for seniors who can't drive. They can't get their licences renewed. They want their independence. Seniors—just in case you don't know this—vote, and they are mad. In fact, I have never seen so many activist seniors in Ontario. These are very different, of course, from the downtown activists who are fighting Highway 413, who apparently live in the Minister of Transportation's riding, and they're very upset that they've been called downtown activists—

Interjection: And millionaires.

Ms. Catherine Fife:—and millionaires. Yes, you can't forget the millionaires in the Minister of Transportation's riding.

So this long, drawn-out thing with optometrists is really—what is the game plan here? We want to know.

The people of Ontario want to know. How are you going to extricate yourself from this now 239 days—and this is from the Ontario Association of Optometrists' site. They're just putting this out there:

"We would like to provide you with an update on our discussions with the Ontario government. Unfortunately, since September 1, millions of Ontarians have lost access to primary eye care services because the Ontario government continues to neglect optometry services." And here is the update—"The number of days optometrists did not hear from the Ministry of Health. The Ministry of Health did not communicate with optometrists from December 5, 2020 until August 5, 2021.

"An independent, third-party accounting firm (BDO) determined that the average operating cost (rent, staff and equipment) to provide an eye exam in Ontario in 2019 (without doctor compensation) was \$75.51." What does the government come back with? \$48.43.

The Minister of Health—interesting, because these things come back to bite you—with the pharmacists back in 2010 said, "Why should the pharmacists have to pay to do the work that should be funded by government?" I send the same question back to the Minister of Health on this: Why should optometrists be heavily subsidizing the OHIP-funded patients, seniors and child care—unless you've made a political decision that you no longer want to value eye care at all and don't see that it is a prevention piece on the health care file.

So that level of frustration is off the charts.

For some of us who were here when the Liberals were here—they always used to describe themselves as overachievers. Well, on this file, you are overachieving on an incompetence level that we haven't seen for quite some time.

So get back to the table. Seniors, children and vulnerable Ontarians need their eye exams. We need them to get access to that care.

Also, remember, a lot of optometrists never received any support from this government during the pandemic.

I don't know what the game plan is; maybe you don't either. But it's going to become a huge political football. I know you care about your political fortunes because this document proves that. It proves that you are more concerned about your political fortunes than the very people we serve.

On health care, I'm including the repealing of Bill 124. Why it has taken so long I have no idea, nor do the nurses. The optometrists are completely frustrated. You must be inundated. One of your own has broken ranks and revealed that there's really no strategy here, except that you want to play hardball. I hope that the optometrists who sit on that side of the House can actually try to sway this Minister of Health to get eye care back in the health care realm. It's well overdue.

On the issue of vaccines: I brought forward a motion to the floor of this Legislature for mandatory vaccines for health care and education. We are seeing the numbers creep up. This should be concerning to all of us. When the Premier announced that we're not going to need passports

in January, those people who were vaccine-resistant had a little party for themselves and decided, "We're just going to wait it out." That said, their health and well-being is directly connected to our health and well-being, which is why a mandatory vaccine policy for the province of Ontario should have passed a long time ago. Emboldening anti-vaxxers is bad public health policy. I can't say it any more clearly than that, Madam Speaker, and I'm not the only one who feels that way. The nurses across Ontario have said, quite honestly, that they are very disappointed by the lack of courage of this Premier to bring in a provincial strategy.

"We're all in this together"—what happened to that mantra? Now it's "Every hospital, you have to survive on your own. Every school, you're on your own."

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And yet, last week, when the municipalities said, "We're going to try to negotiate with the federal government. We're going to try to get our own child care deal. Forget this government. We can't wait any longer"—they're under pressure, because obviously they understand the economic impact of investing in early-learning care. What did the Premier say? "Don't go out on your own. It never works well. Let's all stick together on this child care thing." And yet, he has served everybody up on not bringing in a mandatory vaccine.

This Premier is a walking contradiction. It reminds me of a Kris Kristofferson song—and that is going way back, almost as far back as when Highway 413 was a good idea. The inconsistencies that the people in this province receive from this government undermine our democracy, and they undermine our health and well-being, and at the end of the day—if you do not realize this at this stage in the game—it undermines our economy.

I have already started to hear from businesses that were just starting to feel a little bit of relief, even the ones that didn't qualify for the small business grant. They started to feel a little bit hopeful, but now the numbers are going up, and the Ontario Hospital Association and the science table have said very clearly that those who are not vaccinated have now created some space for new variants of COVID-19. That is how this works.

Because the Premier does not have the courage or the spine or the backbone to bring in mandatory vaccines for education and health care workers and, as my motion laid out, congregate work locations—the most vulnerable, disabled people, who have nobody advocating for them—because he has not demonstrated that kind of leadership, we all pay the price for that lack of leadership. Why you should have to explain that after 20 months of being in this pandemic, I don't understand.

So those are the education pieces, the child care piece and the health care piece, as well.

Then we have a very clear political strategy by this government, that they are fully invested in Highway 413 and the Bradford Bypass. Well, you have to go way back, because it's a 1950s idea, where induced demand is not a concept that we understand—that the more highways you build, the more cars go on those highways, the more

congestion you generate. That is exactly what is going to happen, and we actually have research and evidence to prove it. But I'm going to start with the money. There is no dollar figure for these two major infrastructure projects in the fall economic statement. There's no figure you can attach to it. There's some speculation; the Minister of Transportation has said she thinks the Bradford Bypass will cost about \$800 million; the Toronto Region Board of Trade says \$1.5 billion, minimum. So there are a lot of numbers floating around, but there are no numbers attached to these major infrastructure projects, and that should be a red flag for everybody who pays attention to this.

Just on the money piece: We do have an independent auditor—not an auditor; an audit. He is an independent auditor, but he's not the Provincial Auditor. I'm getting to that in a second. His name is Charles Smedmor, and he did an analysis of the fall economic statement. As my colleague has already pointed out, the debt load per family of four is now at \$108,000, or \$27,000 per Ontarian. I raise this because we need to be very cognizant of how we're investing, how we're generating revenue, where we are hoping to create good jobs for the future—which our Green New Democratic Deal highlights very clearly. Those ideas are there for you.

Charles has said that for the fiscal year, Ontario's net debt will now be \$402 billion. Ontario's population now exceeds 14.8 million; as I said, each person's debt exceeds \$27,000.

But not disclosed in the fall economic statement is the \$10.9 billion, the cost for Highway 413 and the Bradford Bypass and the Morriston bypass in Guelph. They've been promised that for many years. There was a full-on election junket last week, where the Premier said the same thing over and over and over again about the Bradford bypass and Highway 413—but Ontarians were shocked to learn that they're going to carry the full weight of this. Why is this important, Madam Speaker? Because the \$10.9 billion—so almost \$11 billion, and that's not even building in inflationary costs—is half of the entire highway project projections for Ontario. Somewhere along the line, this Premier and this Minister of Transportation made a decision that other highway projects are not going to happen, because they're not budgeted for. You've decided to prioritize a poorly planned, poorly thought out, damaging highway at the expense of other communities.

I'm thinking of Highway 69, for instance. Those in northern Ontario have no other options. The member from Sudbury and the member from Nickel Belt raised this very clearly when they were speaking about what their commute is like to this place and how dangerous it is, Madam Speaker.

However, this auditor goes on to say, with regard to the fall economic statement, "Ontario's taxpayers are in the dark on costs. The situation is the same for the Guelph-area Morriston bypass. If the minister can tease taxpayers about Highway 413's \$350 million per year construction contribution to the provincial GDP, he should disclose the financial commitment for these projects." Do you think

that's fair? I think it's fair for the Minister of Finance and the Minister of Transportation to be transparent with the people we serve. I don't think that's asking too much.

Mr. Michael Mantha: A few details would be nice.

Ms. Catherine Fife: A few details, yes. It's a lot of money. This could be in the gas plant scandal category; we don't know yet. We haven't seen the numbers, and we haven't seen the research that proves that the road is worthy of our consideration. We haven't seen the price tag. When I say price tag, I also mean, what are the other infrastructure projects that are not going to happen because the Premier fast-tracked Highway 413 and the Bradford Bypass? Where did they have these conversations? Was it at the associate minister's father's golf course? Were they shooting nine holes and saying, "I think that we should save holes 2, 3 and 11, and not put this Bradford Bypass through this golf course"?

Ms. Sandy Shaw: Done.

Ms. Catherine Fife: Yes—is that how we're doing business now in Ontario? Do you have to have a golf membership to figure out where the transportation strategy is?

"Given the minister's silence, preliminary 2021 cost calculations are needed. For these three projects" this auditor came out with "\$10.9 billion, being \$8.2 billion for Highway 413, \$2.2 billion for the Bradford Bypass and \$530 million for the Morriston bypass. The calculations"—admittedly—"are based on previous estimates, costs per kilometre of highway and 5% annual construction inflation."

It is well within our rights to question these numbers, and because inflation is a major factor now in today's world—and he actually speculates, "On tolls, the update labels the two bypasses as 'freeways'; Highway 413 is a '400-series highway' suggesting tolls."

So even though the Premier has said, "Don't worry. There are not going to be any tolls"—listen, we've heard this before. It was called the 407, right? We bought, we paid for, we toiled for Highway 407, which will run parallel to Highway 413.

This leads me to a really interesting conversation, and it's an interesting conversation because I wrote a letter last week to the auditor and asked her—this government says, "Oh, we're so transparent. We put all our cards on the table." We can't even see the table, Madam Speaker. So I wrote to Bonnie Lysyk, our Auditor General of Ontario, on November 10. I reference the point because the media, to their credit, pushed the Premier for some answers on how much these projects were going to cost. I said, "This week the Premier announced that the people of Ontario would be on the hook for two highway projects, Highway 413 and the Bradford Bypass, but refused to release total cost estimates or budgets for either. However, an independent forensic accountant recently suggested that the ... cost ... would be \$10 billion...."

"Since" the Premier "has not allocated additional dollars to the highways budget, he must be sacrificing multiple highway construction and upgrade projects.... To date," they have "not publicly stated which projects have been sacrificed."

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So before any decisions are made with regard to these two projects—even though I could argue quite successfully that they are not needed and they will not solve the congestion problem—the government needs to tell us and probably some of their own members which projects in your ridings are going to get cancelled because of this politically motivated Highway 413.

Equally important, I said to the Auditor General in this letter, which is also public, “These two highways are not expected to substantially reduce commute times or congestion, yet they are expected to have a massive financial benefit to people who have donated to” the PC Party. And this is well documented. I have the investigation report, “Developers with Ties to Ford Government Stand to Cash In on Hwy. 413.” It’s an exposé of who owns land along the 413, who will financially benefit from this decision. I put this question, quite honestly, to the members on that side of the House: What is the return on the investment for the people who paid for it? The report that the Liberals, who scrapped this idea—not only because of political pressure from communities and not only because they were already scandal-ridden, but also because a panel evaluated Highway 413 and deemed that it would save only 30 seconds, and that the risk to the environment was consequential to the decision as to whether to move forward with this infrastructure project.

I said to the Auditor General, “Spending that amount of public money when priorities for reducing congestion through massive transit investment is needed is unwise and needs full accounting, especially because, as a total share of highways infrastructure spending, these two projects would consume nearly half of the total 10-year budget for construction.”

I went on to say, “I believe Ontarians deserve to know exactly how these projects have been proposed,” who is driving these projects, “and prioritized over so many important infrastructure investments this province desperately needs.”

This letter to the auditor really is the only avenue that I have as an MPP and as the finance critic for Her Majesty’s official opposition because, Madam Speaker, I was actually denied a briefing. This is the first time this has happened in this House—and I’ve been the finance critic for a very, very long time—that I’ve been denied. I want to look at the numbers. I like to follow the money. When you follow the money, you follow the real priorities of a government. Budgets, in my view, are, in very blank terms, moral documents. They tell the story of what a government is willing to do to serve the people.

Right now, I see a small group of people benefiting from moving and accelerating Highway 413. I see that very clearly. The public has grown to see it. The Bradford Bypass—I’m going to get to that in a second, because it’s more complex in some ways. But I started to go down this discussion about where the money is going and why we are spending in certain places and not.

The same day that I wrote a letter to the Auditor General, my colleague from Orléans wrote the Auditor

General as well. He wrote—this is also a public letter—“I am writing today following media reports that Minister Mulroney met with Highway 407 management on April 19, 2021 to discuss the forgiveness of penalties for failing to meet contractual obligations. On behalf of ... Ontarians, I am formally requesting an investigation...”

Why is he asking for an investigation? He went on to say that this government “claims to be using every tool at its disposal to address gridlock, yet reports have exposed that the minister didn’t even request the lowering of tolls in exchange for the nearly \$1 billion in forgiveness from penalties”—\$1 billion. Are we really a province that can afford to forgive a large conglomerate that owns the 407, which was wrongfully sold away from the people of this province by the former Harris government? Are we really in a financial position to forgive \$1 billion in contractual penalties to the 407 international conglomerate?

He went on to say, “It is clear that the ... government has made no effort to negotiate on behalf of the people of Ontario and the consequence is more gridlock, and nearly a billion dollars in immediate costs...”

“Experts have highlighted that Highway 407 lowering or eliminating its tolls would provide the same relief from gridlock as Highway 413 might when it is completed.”

So you have clear evidence that the Minister of Transportation met with a multi-billion dollar organization that failed to meet their contractual obligations to the people of Ontario, and all of a sudden, we’re okay with forgiving \$1 billion in penalties.

When you follow the money and you examine the priorities of this government, you can see very clearly that they are not in the corner of the people of Ontario. This is very concerning because we need to recover, and it needs to be a shared economic recovery. You’ve put all your apples in one basket, on highways. The only reason that you would do that is because there are people along that highway who will have already made \$813,000 in contributions to the party—they’ve made contributions across the spectrum, but nowhere near almost a billion dollars.

So here we are: a fall economic statement that missed the opportunity to invest in the very people who kept us safe, like nurses; a cut to public education when we have well-documented learning interruption. This would be the time and the place to actually invest in education, and to their credit, the elementary teachers of Ontario made this point to the government—that this was a complete missed opportunity to demonstrate and try to re-evaluate, if not rejig, the relationship that you have with the education community, because it’s not a good relationship. They don’t trust you. You refuse to listen to them and consult with them. You’re heavy-handed with your policies, and then at the end of the day, after 20 months, after the longest closure of schools across the country—Ontario students suffered the most, Madam Speaker—what did you do? You removed half a billion dollars in base funding. I don’t understand how somebody on that side of the aisle at the cabinet table would not have said, “Minister of Finance, is this really a good idea for the future of the province of Ontario—to cut half a billion dollars from education?” I hope that somebody on that side raised it.

We're going to fight it, of course. That is who we are. There are so many questions on what is driving this government now, with 200 days left before the election. Is it all political opportunism, or is there any hope to reverse course on some of these cuts, including housing?

The 413, though, is gaining momentum. You won't hear the Premier say this in one of his stand-ups behind a dump truck, but municipalities have weighed in, as have some Conservatives. So it's not just a New Democrat thing—that we have raised legitimate concerns about the validity of this highway. You can't question this, because the evidence and the research are actually on our side.

The Independent and Free Press—this was from February 18, 2021. I never thought I would ever do this, but I would like to introduce you to the op-ed written by PC member Michael Chong. He wrote about Highway 413.

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He said, "The government of Ontario is planning a new 400-series highway ... north of Vaughan to the 407-401...."

"This 50-kilometre highway would not only chew up thousands of acres of prime farmland, it would also cost a staggering \$6 billion—at minimum.

"The highway, also known as Hwy. 413, would not reduce congestion. An expert panel estimated it would reduce commute times by 30 seconds. That's right: \$6 billion in taxpayer money to save 30 seconds in the daily commute.

"Many studies have shown that building highways does not reduce congestion. If building highways was the solution ... Los Angeles" would be traffic-free.

"The solution is to expand rapid transit"—I agree with Michael Chong, also something I never thought I would say—"and optimize the existing road network." Also, I agree.

"The highway also flies in the face of Canada's commitment to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 30% by 2030—only nine years from now."

Michael Chong, PC member, went on to say, "Building new highways that increase miles driven is one of the reasons why tailpipe emissions from cars and trucks account for 25% of Canada's emissions."

He went on to say, "I work closely with MPP Ted Arnott and Mayor Rick Bonnette, alongside Halton Hills council and staff. In 2011, we all worked together to successfully oppose another highway planned for Halton Hills, the 'Alternative 4-3.'

"Many constituents have expressed concerns about the highway." These are not downtown activists; these are people who live in his riding. "I share these concerns. I have formally expressed my opposition in writing to the Ontario Transportation Minister Caroline Mulroney. MPP Arnott has also spoken" to the minister "to express concerns.

"The benefits of this new highway are far outweighed by the adverse impact it will have on our climate, our environment and our community."

He ended his op-ed by saying, "The GTA West highway should not be built."

He can be reached at michael.chong.a3@parl.gc.ca. I think I'm going to send him a note, Speaker, and thank him for his leadership as a PC member in fighting Highway 413.

An editorial last week on Highway 413—and this is another thing I thought I would never, ever say, but this editorial was called, "Politics, Not Logic, Is Behind Doug Ford's New Drive to Build Highway 413." So politics, not logic, is behind this highway. He goes on to say that anyone who isn't on board—this is the Premier, saying that anybody who doesn't agree with him is a greater Toronto area "downtown activist." This is the new rhetoric. We hear it all the time. It's like buck-a-beer. It's right up there with buck-a-beer. He went on to say, "Hop on your bicycle or get behind a horse and buggy."

This editorial from the Toronto Star went on to say, "It's true the kind of people Ford thinks of as downtown activists"—they do oppose poorly thought out infrastructure projects like Highway 413 "just in time for June's provincial election. But boy, do they ever have a lot of allies in the very areas the Premier says will benefit most from his big build."

The municipal councils that now are against Highway 413—and it's a growing number—are Mississauga, Vaughan council, Halton Hills council and Halton regional council. They are all on record now as opposing Highway 413. Councils in Brampton, Caledon and Peel "have called for a federal environmental assessment of the project before it gets the green light."

Asking for an updated environmental assessment is a reasonable and rational thing to do. I'll tell you why: The current EA is 25 years old. A lot has changed in Ontario; a lot has changed about our own knowledge. You just can't pick up an environmentally sensitive wetland and replace it and build it someplace else—which has already happened with three MZO's in and around the Caledon Hills. The reason I say that is that we fought this regressive development because this is the "pay to slay." There's not enough money to replace a 1,000-year-old wetland. You can't just pick it up and move it someplace else, and we know that right now.

This is where the downtown activists get a little bit interesting—because in this editorial from the Toronto Star, they went on to say, "Listen, for example, to that noted 'downtown activist' Bonnie Crombie, the mayor of Mississauga." She would not be happy, I'm fairly certain, but I'm very happy right now to be able to get this on the record.

This is a quote from the mayor of Mississauga, Hazel McCallion's successor: "The proposed GTA West highway will have a disastrous impact on the environment, encourage residential sprawl and increase our dependence on cars," she said back in February."

It went on to say—Rick Bonnette, the mayor of Halton Hills: "This will lead to more urban sprawl, as developers will be building houses along the new route. Adding a highway is like Homer Simpson loosening his belt buckle at a buffet, thinking he is not gaining weight."

People are trying to get their concerns on the record. They're trying to get the ear of this government. The question remains, though: Who is this government listening to? Because it isn't the residents of Mississauga and Halton Hills and Peel.

"The government said any decision about going ahead with this massive project, which was shelved by the Liberals "would depend on more consultation and study." However, they streamlined the study, and they've streamlined the consultation process, and they promised a new watered down—no pun intended—environmental assessment that's not going to take as long. This project, since 2018, has moved ahead and leap-frogged very important infrastructure projects across the province.

We value infrastructure projects. We know that they can create job creation. We know that they can be good for the economy. Finishing the rest of Highway 69, putting that out to tender and accelerating that—we would be 100% in support of that, because there are health and safety and economic considerations with that project. That project is not like Highway 413, which is promising to correct a problem like congestion by creating more congestion. This is not the solution.

It went on to say that one of the reasons that the Liberal government cancelled this is because it just created "more old-fashioned sprawl, in other words, locking in the problem for decades...."

This project also—the way that the Premier talks about it is like he thinks that people are going to automatically not be sitting in their cars. This project won't be done until 2030 at a minimum, Madam Speaker. Some of us won't be here. Some of us won't be here in 200 days, one can hope. So the fact of the matter is that this promise of fast-tracking this highway is being driven by only political interests, and those interests lie squarely in the Premier's office. And that, after going through a challenging, devastating pandemic, really is unconscionable—having seen how this government operates.

The concerns continue to mount based on how things are proceeding and based on a fall economic statement that didn't have any numbers attached to it—these major infrastructure projects.

I will say the other project that is very uncomfortable is the Bradford Bypass. I want to be straight up about this: The fact that the Minister of Transportation visited the Associate Minister of Transportation's father's golf and country club, which was directly in the path of the Bradford Bypass, put him—and, I think, the whole government—in a really untenable position, because if it is a huge stretch, one of those Liberal stretch goals, to imagine that in March at the Silver Lakes golf course, the Minister of Transportation and the future Associate Minister of Transportation wouldn't mention, "Hey, there's going to be a bypass going through here"—that asking the suspension of belief of the people we serve is really quite insulting. And this is all well documented. It was a public Facebook post from March 23 that reveals that the previous week, the golf course hosted the Minister of Transportation, as well as the Associate Minister of Transportation, whose father is the co-owner of the course.

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Now, it's totally great that somebody is a co-owner of a golf course. I have no issues with that. But if there is a proposed major infrastructure project that was supposed to go through that, and then, four weeks after that visit, that bypass is no longer cutting through the golf course, with no rationale, no documentation, no transparency about why that happened—listen. If you are honest with yourselves and this happened on our side—I want to say, honestly, I don't know anybody who co-owns a golf course—but if that happened, you would be calling us out, without a doubt—

Ms. Sandy Shaw: Rightfully so.

Ms. Catherine Fife: —and rightfully so. For the love of humanity, you just don't visit a golf course and then the infrastructure project that had been planned to go through that very golf course for years all of a sudden gets picked up and moved over and displaces more families, more Ontarians, more greenbelt, more environmentally sensitive land. There's no clear reason or rationale as to why the minister and associate minister would be at the golf course at the same time in March. There just isn't.

So when I asked this question, I have to say, the response I got from the Minister of Transportation—to be fair to her, she was really back on her heels, because the optics of this stink. The whole thing about how the Bradford Bypass is now accelerated, the course is changed, there's no transparency, there's no economic evaluation, there's no explanation about the return on investment—and now this Premier saved a golf course.

Do you know where the Premier needs to focus his attention? It's down on University Avenue, where the nurses and the front-line health care workers are completely at their wits' end and you offer them pennies by way of an increase. That's where we should be focused. We should be focused on our educators. We should be focused on our nurses. We should be focused on the PSWs, our early childhood educators who are dealing with a new group of young minds who have gone through a pandemic. That is where we should be investing our time and our energy, to ensure that everybody can recover. But what is this Premier talking about? He has saved a golf course. Well, there you go.

Ontarians now know that the main beneficiaries of this \$1.5-billion, four-to-six-lane bypass, I believe it could be—well, the independent auditor said \$2.2 billion, and there could be inflationary costs built into that as well. But the question remains, why did the Bradford Bypass get fast-tracked? Who is driving those decisions? And why—because we're still in the fourth wave of a pandemic—why is this your priority? Honestly.

Invest in transit. You made an announcement about a GO train from London. Who is going to get on a three and a half hour GO train from London? Who's going to do that? Make it faster. Make it efficient. Make it work for commuters. Get more cars off the road. Invest in public transit. This is where the return on the investment is. People don't want to be stuck on the 401. They would rather have an accelerated train from London to Toronto.

I would rather take a GO train, but two hours and 20 minutes is still a long time from KW. I think it's actually four hours from London, which is really prohibitive.

So here we are, Madam Speaker. We have a growing number of municipalities who are weighing in against Highway 413. We have a government who's doubling down and digging in and pretending that this highway is going to be the salvation for commuters. The disconnect, the dissonance, is astounding, because this is not the answer. Surely, the fiscal Conservatives over there—there may be a few hawks—you must have some concerns about a price tag of almost \$10.9 billion that is not costed out and is not part of the overall transportation strategy. I mean, somebody on that side says, "You know what? Can we just see the numbers?" We'd like to see the numbers. I'd like a briefing from the ministry, and I'd like to see the numbers. I'd also like to see the research and the report that the Premier refuses to come forward with, which says hours and hours—he says—that this highway will save people. Well, I could successfully argue and challenge that assertion.

So here we are. We have the nurses in Ontario—and I believe this is from North Bay news—nurses are looking for some leadership and some courage from the Premier around vaccines so that we don't end up in another lockdown in Ontario. The nurses' association, from Bay Today, are displeased with Ford's lack of courage on the vaccine mandate. It goes on to say that the Ontario registered nurses' association is "deeply disappointed" that Premier Ford is backing off on COVID-19 vaccine requirements for all professional health care workers—and they're not alone. This makes no sense, unless you're pandering to a certain group of people, and that is downright irresponsible, Madam Speaker.

Individual hospitals are on their own. I know you're well acquainted with what's happened in Windsor, Madam Speaker. They took a leadership position very early in it. This is from the same article and it's dated two weeks ago. It says, "The RNAO accused" Premier "Ford of being afraid to do what is right for the province." You don't want to mess with the nurses. I don't understand why I have to say this in the House, but they have "accused Ford of being afraid to do what is right for the province."

This is a direct quote. "This decision by Premier Ford is a disgrace and shows a lack of courage to do what's right for Ontario's patients and workers. To not implement a province-wide vaccination policy for all health care workers puts the burden unfairly on employers and imposes a risk of infection on Ontarians receiving health services..." That is Doris Grinspun.

She goes on to say, "The majority of hospital CEOs have already weighed in and provided their support for mandatory vaccination for health care workers. To not act immediately and go against the evidence is irresponsible..."

I want to say publicly that we, as a caucus, share that view, which is why we have continued to bring forward motions to the table, which is why I brought forward a private member's motion to the floor of this Legislature,

and even during that time, government members said, "We'll wait for the hospital association to weigh in; we'll wait for the science," and yet when the science table and when the hospitals recommended a mandatory vaccine, you still did not listen.

So it goes back to my original comments—who are you listening to? Because it does appear, by looking at how the fall economic statement is crafted—why you don't have a strategic investment in staff retention for PSWs, for hospital workers, for nurses? Who is driving the agenda over there? This is how we feel in this House. When we go back to our ridings, we talk to the restaurants and the small businesses, many of whom did not qualify for even the small business grant, and then you see the contrast where the Minister of Transportation meets with the 407 conglomerate and says, "You know, \$1 billion in forgiveness penalties? We can handle that," but you're charging small businesses 7% on their loans after they carried us through the pandemic.

Where are your priorities? Where is your loyalty? Is it only along this Highway 413 and this Bradford Bypass, and why are you hitching your whole election campaign to an infrastructure project that will not solve the problem of congestion? It will not generate the result you claim you want.

At the end of the day, the fact that we have such a transactional Premier is clearly at odds with our goals and the oath that we take as legislators when we come into this place. We say we are going to put the people we serve first and foremost. I can tell you the optometrists of Ontario don't think that's happening. I can tell you that early childhood educators in the province don't think that's happening, or PSWs or nurses. And so, it is really time for a reset.

1720

One only has to review the investigation into the developers. This was done by Emma McIntosh, Steve Buist and Noor Javed. This actually came out last April, and I can tell you, it reads a little bit like an episode of Succession. We have enough of a pattern of behaviour here by this government that is very concerning for how planning infrastructure projects actually happens.

This is dated April 3, 2021, and it reads, "The province has a way for developers to skip the wait." So you've created a way for developers to have a fast track right through this place. "They're called minister's zoning orders, or MZO's, and the Ford government has used more of them since 2018 than the previous government did in 15 years.

"The orders—made by" the municipal affairs minister "and in the face of mounting criticism—are unappealable." We have seen a steady decline in protecting the rights of the citizens, therefore undermining our democracy under this government.

It goes on to say that the "Ford government MZO's cleared the way for projects near" Highway "413."

"One issued in Vaughan in April 2020 approved developers' plans to demolish three protected wetlands where development is normally forbidden, and replace

them with a massive Walmart distribution centre. The land sits near the point where the 413 would join Highway 400.”

When people read this—I mean, they’re already cynical enough about governments, about what drives governments. What drives us as politicians? How do you make a decision to run, then come to this place and on climate change, on progressive planning principles with regard to our environment, decide, “Do you know what? That part is expendable. I can let that part go”?

Matt Elliott is a contributing columnist, and he put this out last week. This piece is called, “Doug Ford Plans to Spend Billions on Building Highways. Here Are Three Reasons That Is Absurd.” The first one, of course, is that all of this was taking place while the COP26 conference in Glasgow was happening, and it was a bit embarrassing. He says, “The first absurdity: The same week Ford’s government was releasing this highway heavy plan, international leaders were gathered in Glasgow for the COP26 conference to talk about climate change.” That’s embarrassing.

He goes on, and this is a very valid point. He says, “It seems darn near certain that the mobility of the mid-2030s—when Highway 413 would realistically open—will be different than today.” Yes, that’s absolutely for sure. This plan is an old, recycled plan that does not meet the needs of Ontarians for 2021. It is fiscally irresponsible, it is environmentally irresponsible and it is driven by outside interests that do not serve the people of this province.

And then, finally, he goes on to say—and I’ll leave you with this, Madam Speaker, because the hour went fast and I didn’t get through a lot of the stuff I wanted to. But he goes on to say, “With all this change coming, betting big on highways in 2021 feels like betting big on the fax machine in the mid-1990s as the communication technology of the future.” We agree. This is a wrong-headed infrastructure project to invest in. I think you have underestimated the people of this province. They are going to fight it, and the federal government should do an environmental assessment which puts this back at the back of the filing cabinet, well past 2030, if ever.

Thank you very much, Madam Speaker, for your time.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): Questions?

Mr. Michael Parsa: I thank my colleague across for her presentation. I’ve had an opportunity to work with her on committee for a couple of years at least, and I have a lot of respect for her.

But, Madam Speaker and colleagues, this is the NDP for you. This is the opposition. And it’s clear, the member and—I’ve heard many of my colleagues talk about transit, Madam Speaker. When we introduced the transit—a \$28.5-billion transit, which is the very best in the province—what did the opposition do? They voted against the transit. Then when we introduced the bill to build transit faster, what did they do? They voted against transit.

You talked about highway support. Well, colleagues, I’m from that region. If you travel in that area right now, you will see traffic and congestion. We talked about support for our environment. What do you think happens when those cars sit idle on highways?

We need to advocate—and you talked about members and all of us in public office doing things so that we can have a legacy to go back to Ontarians. Do the right thing and support these highways.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): Thank you.

Ms. Catherine Fife: There was no real question there, but I’m so happy that you sound like you’re getting frustrated. You should be frustrated. This project is accelerating without any common sense or rationale or economic analysis. Quite honestly, Ontario’s Peel region pulled its support for the Ford government’s plan to build a highway through the greenbelt on Thursday, joining a flurry of councils turning their backs on the project. This isn’t the NDP saying no to just this one project. We support progressive infrastructure investment. This is not that, and the municipalities have proven that they are on our side on this issue.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): Question?

Mr. Michael Mantha: I really enjoy having the member join us and our cohort this week. I missed having her. I enjoy listening to her passion.

Her theme today was really how this government is disconnected with the realities of what’s going on out there; how this government is really disconnected from how people are being impacted.

I want to go back to one of her points that she raised in regard to the penalties on the 407, where the government is meeting with them in order to potentially forgive their \$1-billion penalties. We shouldn’t be surprised with that because the same government is forgiving penalties and refusing to collect them from long-term-care homes and is actually looking at granting them with exclusive further contracts, extending their licences for the for-profit model.

This is not something that we should be surprised. It goes back to one of the themes she raised: Where are the priorities of this government? Where should they be going? What are the negative impacts of these decisions this government is doing on the province?

Ms. Catherine Fife: Thank you very much to my friend from Algoma–Manitoulin for pulling us back into the long-term-care debacle.

The issue of profit falling ahead of the people who were in long-term care, which led to almost 4,000 seniors passing away in long-term care, one only has to see and bear witness to the fact that this Premier, instead of choosing to protect those seniors, chose to protect those corporations. In fact, he made them financially whole.

So this this is about priorities. We see it very clearly. Instead of investing in those homes, you made the for-profit homes and their boards whole, and that speaks to the character and the moral views of that government.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): Question?

Ms. Natalia Kusendova: I was listening intently to the member. I wanted to address one very important issue and that’s the issue of vaccine mandates.

As the member knows, our government has given flexibility for hospital CEOs to invoke their own vaccine mandates, including my own hospital of Etobicoke General. We do have a vaccine mandate. The vast majority

of CEOs did bring forward their own vaccine mandates. But our party and our leader don't pretend to know the staffing needs of all hundreds of hospitals, including hospitals in rural areas in Ontario.

I'm actually studying the topic of vaccine hesitancy as part of my master's degree, and what I can tell the member opposite is that there are historic and systemic reasons why a small percentage of the population may decide not to get vaccinated. These would include members of the eastern European diaspora from the post-Soviet bloc or Black, Indigenous, people of colour—or BIPOC—population.

So my question to the member is: When will she and her party stop vilifying those educators and those hospital workers who may have very legitimate reasons, stemming from historical and systemic—

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): Thank you. Response?

Ms. Catherine Fife: I know the member serves as a nurse, so she will have seen first-hand the devastating impact of those who are not vaccinated. I mean, Anthony Dale just came out today saying that we are at 130 ICU cases. We're 20 ICU cases away from being in a very a similar position to where we were last spring.

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And she should actually listen to what the Premier says. He ramps up the rhetoric on the anti-vaxxers in Ontario. He's very selective about which audience he has when he does so, but vaccine hesitancy and anti-vaxxers—there's a big difference for people who have legitimate excuses and reasons to not get a vaccine.

But at the end of the day, we are talking about a progressive public health policy, and that should overrule any of this rhetoric that we hear from this Premier.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): Questions?

Ms. Judith Monteith-Farrell: Thank you to the member from Waterloo for her presentation. I really appreciated the shout-out for highways in northern Ontario, because many people in northern Ontario feel that this government really leaves them behind.

Recently, I met with the chamber of commerce in a round table. It was mostly small businesses and a few others, and they were very vocal about their disappointment with the small business grants and how they couldn't even get answers and voice their opposition. They also talked about the opioid and homelessness crisis and how that's affecting the hospitality industry and the businesses that are having to act as social workers to provide washrooms, to provide places for people to be warm.

My question to the member is, how can small business be better served? What would she like to have seen in this bill?

Ms. Catherine Fife: Thank you very much for the question; it's truly important. The bill does not address labour shortages or a retention strategy to keep those front-line health care workers employed and feeling respected. That is one of the reasons we hear that nurses, PSWs, ECEs are leaving these professions. Because you have a piece of legislation, Bill 124, on the docket, which demonstrates how little respect you have for those workers.

From a small business perspective, though, this government could have brought in a third round of grants to help those businesses reboot, pivot and adapt to this changing new world that is the fourth wave of the pandemic to survive—and not only to survive, but to thrive. They missed the mark on that. This would have been the place to invest in those supports for small businesses.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): Questions?

Mr. Stephen Crawford: Speaker, my question is just related to the highways. I know the member from Waterloo was certainly talking a lot about that. And to my colleague's point here, a few points I wanted to bring up on that and just get your take on it. Because I just want to get a sense as to what you're going to tell parents, for example in my riding, or a lot of the ridings in the 905, that are taking their kids to soccer practice or hockey and they're stuck in traffic.

What are you going to tell the workers who are coming home late, can't join their family for dinner, because they're stuck in traffic? Why? Because we have North America's most clogged highway system, period. Building bicycle lanes is not going to help them. What do you tell emergency first responders who are stuck in traffic and want to get to their emergency quicker but can't, as many have reported? And what do you tell businesses that are delayed in getting their products to market, in the just-in-time inventory world that we live in today, that can't get them near quick enough? Certainly, the trucker's association has been 100% supportive—

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): Thank you. The member from Waterloo.

Ms. Catherine Fife: Thank you for the question. I would tell them the truth: I would tell them that Highway 413 is not going to solve their congestion issues. I would explain to them about induced demand. And if they actually look out the window, they can actually see the effect of very poor planning strategies.

I would tell them the findings of the Observer and TorStar investigation raised questions about why the 413 highway was resurrected by this government shortly after it was axed, and that it's going to go through environmentally sensitive land, and that he's going to break another promise, this Premier—break another promise—to invade and entrench themselves in the greenbelt.

That's what I would tell them. I would tell them the truth, because the truth will set you free—even from congestion.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): I beg to inform the House that pursuant to standing order 101(c), changes have been made to the order of precedence on the ballot list for private members' public business such that Mr. Coe assumes ballot item number 20 and Mr. Miller, Parry Sound–Muskoka, assumes ballot item number 21.

Further debate?

Mr. Deepak Anand: Good afternoon, everyone. As I start, I would like to congratulate the Minister of Finance on our government's fall economic statement and the introduction of the Build Ontario Act.

As we all know, Ontario has faced a once-in-a-lifetime crisis, a crisis that placed an incredible burden on our health care system, our economy, our families and our communities.

Before I talk about the FES, I want to talk about the Ontario spirit. I want to talk about thanks to wonderful Ontarians for stepping up, Ontarians like Dr. Terry Papneja, for leading a not-for-profit organization, Aim for Seva, guided by the principles of seva, a Sanskrit word for “selfless service,” to empower children and youth who lack basic access to education. Thanks to the passionate, laborious work done by the volunteers, board members and sponsors like Pankaj and Sangeeta Bajaj and Arun and Menakshi Garg, who donated to build a hostel so that vulnerable children can go to school within the rural communities in India and discover the world within the classroom.

Madam Speaker, another great example is Ovais Iqbal, the goodwill ambassador of Deaf Reach North America, from Mississauga–Malton, and the founder, Richard Geary, for bringing communities in Ontario together to raise over \$200,000 to support the education of deaf children.

I want to say thank you to the residents of Mississauga–Malton for continuing to serve the community. That is Ontario spirit.

Back to FES: The minister is blessed to have two wonderful PAs and a team of very dedicated and committed staff. Thank you to team finance for laying a clear plan for protecting our progress against the pandemic; a plan that looks to the future; a plan to build Ontario; a plan, I’m glad to note, including funding for long-term care, including training for thousands of personal support workers and the hiring of nurses, nurse practitioners and PSWs—nurses like my colleague from Mississauga Centre, who has done an incredible job.

That builds on our government’s commitment, spear-headed by the Minister of Long-Term Care, to increase direct care up to four hours per day per resident. And I can tell you, Madam Speaker, a resident, Balraj Grewal, is thankful to the government for providing the direct home care to his mother when they needed it most.

As parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Labour, Training and Skills Development, I’m particularly pleased to see the commitment in this plan to ensure that we are working for workers. We have a government that believes in prosperity, supporting people and attracting investments. People want to live in Ontario. They want to invest and build businesses here. I’m thankful to the government for making sure we’re making the arrangement and the environment so that they can raise a family and thrive.

To start, I want to highlight the proposed changes to the minimum wages. If passed, the Building Ontario Act would raise the general minimum wage from \$14.35 to \$15 per hour, effective January 1, 2022. The special minimum wage rate for liquor service would be eliminated. They would be entitled to the general minimum wage. Students under 18, home workers and hunting, fishing and wilderness guides would also see an increase in special minimum wages.

I was pleased to join the Premier and minister, along with some of Ontario’s top labour leaders, to make this announcement earlier this month. Both Jerry Dias, Unifor’s national president, and Smokey Thomas, president of the Ontario Public Service Employees Union, showed their support for this action for workers.

To quote the Premier, “Ontario’s workers have been the unsung heroes of this pandemic, as they’ve stocked shelves, kept our supply chain moving and helped so many of us enjoy a meal among family and friends at a local restaurant. When we asked labour leaders what their priorities were, increasing the minimum wage was at the top of the list. As the cost of living continues to go up, our government is proud to be working for workers, putting more money into their pockets by increasing the minimum wage.” I couldn’t have agreed more.

1740

Liquor servers have previously received below the general minimum wage, based on the belief customer tipping can make up the difference. However, as we know, many of these workers have increasingly seen their tips pooled and redistributed among many staff, making it harder for them to make ends meet. That simply is not fair. That’s why we want to make things right. There are special minimum wage rates for students under the age of 18 who work 28 hours a week or less when school is in session or who work during a school break of summer holidays. They’re actually going to see an increase from \$13.50 to \$14.10 an hour. These new proposed rates would make sure that the hunting and fishing guides would get \$75 for working less than five hours in a day, and \$150.05 for working five or more hours in a day.

Speaker, let me give you some examples of the real impact of these proposed changes. Greg is working full-time at a general minimum wage. With the minimum wage increase, Greg’s earnings will increase by \$1,350 in 2022. Angela works full-time at the liquor store at a minimum wage of \$12.55. With the elimination she would be making more than \$5,100 more in 2022.

Ontario workers should not be in a race to be at the bottom; they should be in a race to be at the top. I’m proud of our government for taking action and making sure that our workers are respected.

Speaker, I’m proud to have worked with the Minister of Labour, Training and Skills Development—I call him a champion for the workers—to introduce another bill recently, to provide more supports for our workers. Through our Working for Workers Act, we’re ready to act swiftly and decisively to put workers in the driver’s seat and begin rebalancing the scales.

If passed, the legislation would require employers with 24 or more employees to have a written policy about employees disconnecting from their jobs at the end of the workday, to help employees spend more time with their families; ban the use of non-compete agreements; and help remove barriers such as Canadian work experience requirements for internationally trained individuals so that they can get licensed in a regulated profession and get access to jobs that match their qualifications and skills. We

have many examples we have seen where when you have a regulated licence your income goes substantially up. By doing this, we are actually going to make sure that we're going to be adding another \$12 billion to \$20 billion in GDP in the next five years.

Speaker, along with that, we will be taking care of the temporary help agencies to have a licence to operate in the province, to help protect our vulnerable employees from being exploited.

We heard time and again from our front-line workers, like delivery workers, about using company washrooms. Now if they're delivering or picking up items, this supports the delivery drivers, couriers and truck drivers who have kept our essential supplies and economy going through the pandemic. It would require business owners to allow delivery workers to use the company's washroom.

Enabling the Workplace Safety and Insurance Board to work with entities like Canada Revenue Agency to streamline remittances for businesses enables a way to give them an efficient, one-stop shop for submitting premiums and payroll deductions.

Through the dedicated, committed and passionate team at MLTSD, we are improving workers' protection, creating opportunities for better jobs. And through skill development and training, we are creating bigger paycheques.

Speaker, as the Minister of Labour said, this landmark bill will show Ontario is ready to lead the way into the workplaces of tomorrow and create the conditions that will make talented, innovative people want to work in our great province of Ontario.

But don't just take my word for it. I would like to share some of the support that we have received from key leaders across the province. On reducing barriers to internationally trained workers, Elise Herzig, the executive director of Jewish Immigrant Aid Services Toronto, said, "We applaud this bold, impactful, and meaningful initiative that will contribute to the Ontario economy and remove barriers that hinder newcomers' abilities to maximize their talents and potential."

On our actions to protect temporary help agencies, Christopher Bloore, president and CEO of the Tourism Industry Association of Ontario, said, "Workers are the heart of the tourism industry, they are the reason our hotels, restaurants, and attractions in Ontario are some of the most sought after destinations in the world. Many are international workers who come to Ontario to work, and we are proud to see Minister McNaughton taking the lead to ensure that every worker in our province is protected against unscrupulous recruitment practices, and labour trafficking."

Finally, on eliminating non-compete clauses and requiring right-to-disconnect policies, Chris Albinson, president and CEO for Communitech, said that they are "pleased to see Ontario level the playing field for workers, including tech workers, compared to other jurisdictions like California. Canadian founders are in a global competition for talent, so we are grateful to see Ontario setting conditions to help innovators...."

Mr. Speaker, these are just some of the examples. I'm confident that this proposed legislation, if passed, would help Ontario be the top choice for people around the world to live, work, raise a family and thrive.

Mr. Speaker, as you know, skilled trades workers are vital for the health of Ontario's economy. The trades provide good jobs that support families and the community. That is why we are investing an additional \$90 million over three years in our skilled trades strategy. The investment will enhance our strategy, so we can provide more information, further promote the value of trades, establish clear pathways and encourage diversity and inclusion.

As I always think, Mr. Speaker, one is the intent and the other is the impact. This bill clearly shows that we have the intent to make sure that our province thrives, but are making sure, by adding and taking action with investments of \$90 million, we are making an impact as well. It allows us to strengthen linkages between government, school boards and industry. These actions will make it easier than ever to learn a trade in the province of Ontario.

Let's look at the Second Career program. It has traditionally helped laid-off, unemployed workers across industries assess the training that they need to become qualified for in-demand, well-paying jobs. This program also connects local employers with the high-skilled workers that they need. To help more Ontarians, we are investing an additional \$5 million in 2021-22 to expand the program to extend support to more people, including newcomers, gig workers and people with disabilities.

Another great initiative led by our ministry and highlighted in the fall economic statement is the Skills Development Fund, and I'll say thank you to the Ministry of Finance. This fund supports projects that remove pandemic-induced barriers to hiring, training and retaining workers. With almost 150 projects so far, the first round of the Skills Development Fund is helping more than 260,000 workers and job seekers across the province. Mr. Speaker, these are not just workers; these are 260,000 families that we are supporting. We are committing more than \$200 million to the Skills Development Fund and accepting proposals for the second round of funding. In addition, we are expanding the fund's eligibility, to allow an even wider range of organizations to apply, including Indigenous skills and employment training centres and hospitals.

Let me give you just two examples of the true impact of the Skills Development Fund. We have invested over \$600,000 to help 390 young people from under-represented backgrounds train for and secure apprenticeships in the construction sector. The funding has opened the doors to lifelong careers in the plumbing, steam fitting, electrical, elevator mechanic and refrigeration trades through programs delivered by Hammer Heads.

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We have invested over \$1 million in two projects that provide free training in construction to 645 people in northern Ontario, prioritizing those from remote First Nations and Indigenous communities. As the Premier

says, if you have a job in trades, you have a job for life. These projects prepare participants for in-demand jobs in the construction sector, including heavy equipment operator and the electrical trades, addressing a skilled trades shortage in the local workforce. There are more than 100 funded projects like this.

We are also looking beyond our borders to find skilled workers and investors to help build our province. Many new immigrants are looking for business opportunities, while small communities are looking for the vital workforce and investments. To help create more jobs in small communities, Ontario is investing \$6 million over three years for a pilot program to expand opportunities for foreign investors. These programs will establish new opportunities and expand existing businesses in Ontario outside of the GTA. The pilot is expected to result in an additional 100 Entrepreneur Stream applications through the Ontario Immigrant Nominee Program, which in turn will become a job creator. This will help generate employment in the regions that need the most help to recover from the impact of COVID-19.

Speaker, the fall economic statement also demonstrated that we are taking action to protect our workers, particularly ones who are most vulnerable. No one in Ontario should go to work in fear. That is why our government is protecting workers and cracking down on exploitation and labour trafficking. Ontario is investing over \$1 million to implement a team of officers to undertake inspections of temporary help agencies and recruiters suspected of work exploitation and labour trafficking. This team will help protect some of our most vulnerable and marginalized workers in Ontario, including Indigenous workers, newcomers, young workers, migrant workers and women. This initiative will ensure all workers, no matter their status, will have the full protection of Ontario's labour laws.

In closing, I would like to express my support for Bill 43. I truly believe this bill is paving a clear path to economic growth and prosperity. We have seen in the last many years that we have created even more jobs than we had before COVID-19. We have, to date, over 291,000 jobs which are unfilled, so that's why we need to work hard. We want to make sure that we are putting workers at the centre of these efforts.

I urge everyone in the House: Let's work together and build a stronger Ontario.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): Questions?

Ms. Sandy Shaw: This government is fast-tracking Highway 413; they're fast-tracking the Bradford Bypass, which is a six-lane highway through the Holland Marsh and through the greenbelt. No one seems to support this. There's opposition from all kinds of people, and it only seems to be supported by the PC donors and developers who stand to benefit a huge windfall from this. We know it's an environmental disaster, but it's also an economic disaster. Under this government's time, their debt has ballooned to \$400 billion—that's \$108,000 for every family in the province of Ontario. Yet somehow this government thinks it's okay with the people of Ontario to

dip into the cookie jar and use taxpayer dollars to bankroll these highways to the tune of about \$10.9 billion or \$11 billion.

So I ask, do you think this is a priority for the people of Ontario—that this government is spending their hard-earned tax dollars on an unneeded highway that will only benefit developers and will cost them both environmentally and financially?

Mr. Deepak Anand: Through you, Madam Speaker, to the member opposite: Thank you for that question.

Our government is taking another step towards relieving the gridlock. I know it is difficult when you're on the highway, especially if you're living in the GTA. It takes forever to reach home. By putting together the Bradford Bypass, we are advancing and making sure we're relieving the gridlock. This new four-lane freeway connecting Highways 400 and 404, and Simcoe county and York region, will be necessary to ease congestion, as these regions are expecting rapid growth for the next 10 to 20 years.

As the Premier said, delivering on this and other important infrastructure jobs will create good jobs, help stimulate the economy and reduce highway congestion.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): Question?

Mr. Stephen Crawford: Thank you to the great member from Mississauga–Malton.

I know that the tourist industry has been affected dramatically by the pandemic, and in particular, hospitality and accommodation companies, hotels, have been dramatically impacted.

The government has put out a lot of support programs to help travel and tourism.

I'm wondering if you can explain a little bit more about the proposed staycation tax credit. How is that going to benefit these companies, these hotels, these bed and breakfasts in small communities; and also, how is it going to benefit consumers? Do you think it's going to have the impact to get this industry back on track?

Mr. Deepak Anand: Madam Speaker, through you: Thank you to the member from Oakville for that great question.

I just want to talk about the incredible work the member from Oakville is doing, saving Glen Abbey from development, decreasing the long-term-care wait-list—a long list of things you have accomplished. I want to acknowledge that here.

As we all know, in the province of Ontario, tourism has been hard hit. This new temporary Ontario Staycation Tax Credit would help the tourism, hospitality and cultural sectors recover from the pandemic and encourage our Ontario families to discover the best the province has to offer. The personal tax credit would provide Ontario residents with the support of 20% of eligible 2022 accommodation expenses of up to \$1,000 for an individual and/or \$2,000 for a family—

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): Thank you. Question?

Ms. Peggy Sattler: I wonder if the member for Mississauga–Malton is aware that calls for a \$15

minimum wage have been made in this province for at least six years, and when his government decided to cancel the \$15 minimum wage in 2018, that resulted in a loss of at least \$5,300 in earnings for minimum wage workers since January 2019.

In light of the fact that we are seeing inflation go through the roof and nowhere in this province will a \$15 minimum wage job keep a worker out of poverty, how can he defend this government's decision to, at this point, introduce a \$15 minimum wage, when we know it has to be at least \$17 to actually help workers?

Mr. Deepak Anand: Through you, Madam Speaker: First of all, I want to say thanks to the member opposite for that question.

As the member from Oakville talked about, the tourism sector has been hit hard.

I want to recognize that for far too long, workers have been falling behind and wages have not kept up with the cost of living. That is why, if this legislation is passed—and I want to talk about the liquor servers who have been serving our community. Going to a restaurant is not just having food; it is building that connection, building those milestones—whether it is my daughter's 16th birthday or celebrating a wedding anniversary. Those workers have been left behind. If this legislation is passed, liquor servers would be treated more fairly and will get a 19.5% increase, from \$12.55 to a harmonized \$15 an hour.

Madam Speaker, our government is proud to be working for workers and putting more money into their pockets by increasing the minimum wage. We have been helping them, and we'll—

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): Thank you. Question?

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Mr. Rudy Cuzzetto: Today I had the Minister of Long-Term Care come to our riding to look at the accelerating build of our long-term-care facility in Mississauga–Lakeshore, with 632 beds. The total beds that we are getting in Mississauga–Lakeshore is 1,152, and Mississauga is getting a total of 1,600 long-term beds.

From 2011 to 2018, do you know how many beds Mississauga got?

Interjection: Zero.

Mr. Rudy Cuzzetto: Zero. So I want to thank, first of all, the minister and the former Minister of Long-Term Care for all the work they've done for long-term care.

I would like to ask the member from Mississauga–Malton what we're doing for PSWs and how we're hiring them, moving forward.

Mr. Deepak Anand: Thank you to the member from Mississauga–Lakeshore for the incredible job he's doing, especially giving back to the community.

Talking about PSWs, I have to say this: Malton has 61% of residents who are immigrants, and many of those have come from the Middle East, have come from India, and have been working in the medical field, in the care sector. There are so many PSWs in my riding, and I want to say thank you to each one of those PSWs from Mississauga–Malton for the contributions made by you in hospitals, long-term-care clinics and doctors' offices. It has been critical in the fight against COVID-19.

And yet, the pandemic has taken a toll and highlighted the need for more staff on the health care front lines. That's why our government is making sure that we are adding 8,000 PSWs to the critical areas of health care through a variety of programs—

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): Thank you. Question?

Mr. Guy Bourgouin: I want to thank the member from Mississauga–Milton.

There were a lot of disappointed Ontarians when we were listening to the budget for help with child care. Whether it's providing relief to families or supporting municipalities to allow for proper daycare—there was no help announced.

I was speaking to a young woman, one of my constituents from Hearst, and she said that there are a lot of young mothers who will have to quit their jobs because there's not enough daycare to be able to put their child in.

I'd like to hear from the member what he's going to say to this young woman, or other young mothers in my riding who will have to quit their jobs because there is no daycare and there was none in the budget for relief.

Mr. Deepak Anand: Through you, Madam Speaker: Thank you to the member opposite for that question.

I just want to make a small correction. I am the member from Mississauga–Malton. We do have a wonderful minister from Milton, who is doing an incredible job, so I just want to share that—and I love Malton.

Absolutely, you're 100% right: We need more child care spaces. That is why our government, when we got elected, made child care our number one priority. That's why in my riding itself, we are building a lot more child care in the schools that we're building.

I will say to the member opposite as well: Let's all work together. Let's talk to the federal government, to give us a fair share, so that residents like you have and residents in my riding can have fair child care.

Report continues in volume B.

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| Walker, Bill (PC) | Bruce—Grey—Owen Sound | Deputy Speaker / Vice-président |

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|--|---|--|
| West, Jamie (NDP) | Sudbury | |
| Wilson, Jim (IND) | Simcoe—Grey | |
| Wynne, Kathleen O. (LIB) | Don Valley West / Don Valley-Ouest | |
| Yakabuski, John (PC) | Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke | |
| Yarde, Kevin (NDP) | Brampton North / Brampton-Nord | |
| Yurek, Jeff (PC) | Elgin—Middlesex—London | |
| Vacant | Don Valley East / Don Valley-Est | |

**STANDING AND SELECT COMMITTEES OF THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
COMITÉS PERMANENTS ET SPÉCIAUX DE L'ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE**

Standing Committee on Estimates / Comité permanent des budgets des dépenses

Chair / Président: Peter Tabuns
Vice-Chair / Vice-président: Randy Pettapiece
Teresa J. Armstrong, Toby Barrett
Lorne Coe, Rudy Cuzzetto
Goldie Ghamari, Randy Hillier
Christina Maria Mitas, Judith Monteith-Farrell
Michael Parsa, Randy Pettapiece
Peter Tabuns
Committee Clerk / Greffière: Thushitha Kobikrishna

**Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs /
Comité permanent des finances et des affaires économiques**

Chair / Président: Ernie Hardeman
Vice-Chair / Vice-président: Ian Arthur
Ian Arthur, Will Bouma
Stephen Crawford, Catherine Fife
Ernie Hardeman, Mitzie Hunter
Logan Kanapathi, Sol Mamakwa
Jeremy Roberts, Dave Smith
Vijay Thanigasalam
Committee Clerk / Greffier: Michael Bushara

**Standing Committee on General Government / Comité
permanent des affaires gouvernementales**

Chair / Président: Logan Kanapathi
Vice-Chair / Vice-président: Mike Schreiner
Jill Andrew, Robert Bailey
Will Bouma, Guy Bourgouin
Chris Glover, Mike Harris
Logan Kanapathi, Sheref Sabawy
Amarjot Sandhu, Mike Schreiner
Daisy Wai
Committee Clerk / Greffier: Isaiah Thorning

**Standing Committee on Government Agencies / Comité
permanent des organismes gouvernementaux**

Chair / Président: Gilles Bisson
Vice-Chair / Vice-président: Aris Babikian
Deepak Anand, Aris Babikian
Gilles Bisson, Lorne Coe
Wayne Gates, Robin Martin
Norman Miller, Billy Pang
Amanda Simard, Marit Stiles
John Yakabuski
Committee Clerk / Greffière: Tanzima Khan

**Standing Committee on Justice Policy / Comité permanent de
la justice**

Chair / Président: Daryl Kramp
Vice-Chair / Vice-présidente: Lucille Collard
Lucille Collard, Christine Hogarth
Daryl Kramp, Natalia Kusendova
Jim McDonell, Suze Morrison
Randy Pettapiece, Gurratan Singh
Donna Skelly, Effie J. Triantafilopoulos
Kevin Yarde
Committee Clerk / Greffière: Thushitha Kobikrishna

**Standing Committee on the Legislative Assembly / Comité
permanent de l'Assemblée législative**

Chair / Présidente: Laurie Scott
Vice-Chair / Vice-présidente: France Gélinas
Rima Berns-McGown, France Gélinas
Goldie Ghamari, Faisal Hassan
Jim McDonell, Sam Oosterhoff
Laurie Scott, Vijay Thanigasalam
Jeff Yurek
Committee Clerk / Greffière: Valerie Quioc Lim

**Standing Committee on Public Accounts / Comité permanent
des comptes publics**

Chair / Président: Taras Natyshak
Vice-Chair / Vice-présidente: Christine Hogarth
Deepak Anand, Toby Barrett
Jessica Bell, Stephen Blais
Stephen Crawford, Rudy Cuzzetto
Christine Hogarth, Michael Mantha
Taras Natyshak, Michael Parsa
Amarjot Sandhu
Committee Clerk / Greffier: Christopher Tyrell

**Standing Committee on Regulations and Private Bills / Comité
permanent des règlements et des projets de loi d'intérêt privé**

Chair / Président: Aris Babikian
Vice-Chair / Vice-président: John Fraser
Aris Babikian, Lorne Coe
John Fraser, Vincent Ke
Laura Mae Lindo, Paul Miller
Billy Pang, Jeremy Roberts
Dave Smith, Daisy Wai
Jamie West
Committee Clerk / Greffier: Isaiah Thorning

**Standing Committee on Social Policy / Comité permanent de
la politique sociale**

Chair / Présidente: Natalia Kusendova
Vice-Chair / Vice-présidente: Bhutila Karpoche
Aris Babikian, Jeff Burch
Amy Fee, Michael Gravelle
Joel Harden, Mike Harris
Bhutila Karpoche, Natalia Kusendova
Robin Martin, Effie J. Triantafilopoulos
Jeff Yurek
Committee Clerk / Greffière: Tanzima Khan

**Select Committee on Emergency Management Oversight /
Comité spécial de la surveillance de la gestion des situations
d'urgence**

Chair / Président: Daryl Kramp
Vice-Chair / Vice-président: Tom Rakocevic
Robert Bailey, Gilles Bisson
John Fraser, Christine Hogarth
Daryl Kramp, Robin Martin
Sam Oosterhoff, Tom Rakocevic
Donna Skelly, Sara Singh
Effie J. Triantafilopoulos
Committee Clerk / Greffier: Christopher Tyrell