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ORDERS OF THE DAY / ORDRE DU JOUR**Build Ontario Act (Budget Measures), 2021, Bill 43, Mr. Bethlenfalvy / Loi de 2021 visant à protéger nos progrès et à bâtir l'Ontario (mesures budgétaires), projet de loi 43, M. Bethlenfalvy**

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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
OF ONTARIO

Tuesday 16 November 2021

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE
DE L'ONTARIO

Mardi 16 novembre 2021

The House met at 0900.

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

Prayers.

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)

Resuming the debate adjourned on November 15, 2021, on the motion for 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 Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Further debate?

Ms. Jessica Bell: I'm pleased to be here today to speak to Bill 43, the bill accompanying the fall economic statement. It is a big omnibus bill; I'm not going to cover it all today, but I do want to raise some of the issues that I see that particularly affect the residents of University-Rosedale.

The big issue that I see is that base funding to education is being cut by \$467 million. It's going down from \$31.3 billion to \$30.8 billion. This is very concerning, because funding education and health care is fundamental to who we are as Canadians and Ontarians. It is very concerning to see an additional cut to education funding because it will affect the 33 schools in my riding and the thousands of parents and kids who rely on schools to get kids ready, teach them what they need to know, help them get the support they need and help them thrive.

It is very clear that the pandemic has had a huge impact on children in a negative way and it's also had a huge impact on parents, especially women. We see the statistics. The participation in the workforce has dropped, especially for women. It has dropped down to 1980s levels. We have seen a 40-year reversal in the gains that we have made to address equity in the workplace—taken away in a short 18 months.

We know that there are things that we can do to help parents, especially women, get back into the workforce. One way we can do that is by making sure we have high-quality, well-funded schools that are as safe as possible so that they can remain open. That requires a fair amount of

funding so that the school boards across the province can do what they need to do to provide schooling to the million-plus kids who need it. That, unfortunately, is not what's happening.

I want to summarize some of the issues that parents, parent councils and my trustee, Chris Moise, have raised with me over the last two months since schools have returned in September.

We are getting reports of class sizes that are very large—32, 33 children, even in the smaller classes, the JK, the SK classes where kids really need that extra support so that they can be socialized, so that they learn how to read and write.

There's no additional funding for online learning. So what that means is that teachers that have taught in in-person classes are being pulled out to teach online. As a result, schools are being forced to do last-minute shuffling, often merging classes together, in order to accommodate the loss of that teacher. That's happening in many schools across my riding.

When it comes to COVID safety, there have been some improvements. I have seen the HEPA filters; principals have communicated with me about the arrival of HEPA filters across schools in my riding. But what we're not seeing is a comprehensive rollout of rapid tests. We see them piecemeal here and there but we're not seeing the comprehensive rollout of rapid tests, even though other countries have moved forward with a comprehensive rapid testing program and it's been very effective in curbing the spread of COVID, especially in schools, which is where we know the spread of COVID is happening. It should have been here in September. We are now in November and we are not seeing it rolled out in the way that we need.

I am not seeing the public health nurses that I've heard the Minister of Education speak about again and again and again. I don't know where they are, but I'm not getting calls from principals telling me that they've arrived.

We're not seeing the mental health supports that are really critical, including reliable access to social workers.

We're seeing kids in special-needs classes being forced into hybrid models of learning. In the mainstream classrooms, by and large, it's been in person or online. You get a separate teacher for each. But when you go into developmentally delayed classes, classes where there are kids on the spectrum, we are seeing that there has been a move that the TDSB has made, because of a lack of funding, to move forward with a hybrid model. So a teacher is required to teach in person and online at the same time, and I'm getting calls from parents who are really concerned about that because they've had enough. They need help.

The testing for air quality in schools is still not being done, even though we know that's critical. It's being done elsewhere. It's been working effectively in New York City. It is a measure that we are calling for here. This government has chosen not to move forward with it.

The facility condition index: After years of advocacy, the Ontario government started tracking how poorly maintained schools were across Ontario and what amount of funding is needed to get them up to a state of good repair. The facility condition index is getting worse. Schools, in order to be maintained to a state of good repair—so the heating is working, the cooling is working, there are no bricks falling on kids, which happened in my riding—is short \$16.3 billion. And Jesse Ketchum, which is a school in my riding, is one of the worst—no funding in this fall economic statement for that. What I find so concerning is that the poor maintenance of our schools, the facility condition index, actually doesn't include a whole lot of things that are needed to keep schools well-maintained. So the number is actually larger than \$16.3 billion.

The example I like to give is that the water quality in schools is not included in the facility condition index. Many schools in my riding are very old. There's lead in the pipes, so kids cannot drink water from the drinking fountains. They have to fill up a bottle at home and take it to school with their own water, just like we do here in Queen's Park because there's lead in the pipes here. But with schools it's a bit different. And we don't even have a plan for that.

So it was very disappointing to see a cut of \$500 million to schools in the fall economic statement. What it tells me is that this government is continuing on its agenda of wanting to cut funding to schools in order to move forward with a privatization model, in order to drive parents away from the public education system and move them into private schools and charter schools, all with the goal of reducing taxes and giving big contracts to big business to provide education when it should be the public sector to do it. It is an ideological approach, and it's our kids that are suffering as a result. I urge you to change that approach.

The second concern I have with the fall economic statement concerns the issue of housing. It is the number one issue in my riding when I go door to door and I ask constituents, "What is top of mind for you? What do you want me to raise with the Ontario government?" Housing is the number one issue that comes up at the door, and that makes sense. In University-Rosedale we have some of the highest rents in the country. The average rent for all properties is getting close to \$2,400 a month, which is astronomical. Over a third of Ontarians now pay unaffordable rent, and many of those people are in my riding of University-Rosedale.

0910

Owning a home is also completely out of the picture. A new national Bank of Canada report shows that in Toronto, a household needs to make \$205,000 a year—we're talking top 2%, 3% of income earners here—to afford an average home and must save for 28 years for a

down payment, which is five times more than the historical average. It's deeply concerning. Many people have given up.

You would think that this government—because this government knows full well that housing affordability is an issue in their constituencies too. You know that. You're getting these calls just like me. You would think that the Ontario government would put measures in their fall economic statement to address the housing affordability crisis, but when I looked through the fall economic statement, I didn't see much. I'm going to summarize what I saw.

One is that the government decided to create a task force to study the problem, which is really very disappointing because the whole purpose of a task force is to identify whether you've got a problem or not—hey, we've got a problem; we already know we have a problem—and the task force is to identify solutions to that problem. There are already solutions that other provinces and countries and municipalities have tried and successfully implemented in order to stabilize housing prices and make rent more affordable for the nearly 50% of Ontarians who now rent. The measures already exist. We know what needs to be done. Proposing to study an issue is the oldest trick in the book. It's to pretend that you're working on a problem when really you're doing very little at all.

The second measure that I see—well, there are two others, actually, that I noticed in the fall economic statement that address housing. The other one is this government is looking at moving forward—a small step forward—in bringing about real estate transparency within the housing sector in Ontario. I support this move. I think it's a good measure.

The challenge is that there are loopholes in the fall economic statement's measure to truly address real estate transparency. I'll just explain it for a minute. Many experts have said time and time again for many years now that Ontario, like BC, has issues with money laundering and tax fraud. Investors come here and take advantage of some of the loopholes we have in our laws which allow them to use trusts, numbered corporations and partnerships to buy properties anonymously. They hide their human individual identity behind a number and they buy and sell properties in order to make profit.

By and large, many of these transactions are legitimate, but there is a small section of people that use them in order to engage in money laundering and to engage in tax fraud. It is deeply concerning, because many experts and academics have made it very clear that this habit and activity is contributing to the massive increase in speculation that we are seeing in the housing market and a run up in housing prices. It's also just not fair, because, if there are some companies that are not paying their taxes, it means other people, the rest of us, have to pay more in order for us to get the services that we need to run our province.

So this government has decided to bring in a measure that would require businesses that are registered in Ontario to track who their true beneficial owners are: the actual human individuals who own that business and stand to

benefit if that business sells or makes profit. Now, that's a good thing, but here are the loopholes, and I'm asking this government to introduce amendments to improve these loopholes. The loophole that it creates is that if they are businesses that are incorporated elsewhere, in another province, in another country, they are not required to disclose the identity of the individuals who own that property. That's a very big loophole.

The second thing is that the information around these individuals is not public. It's a secret registry. It's available to financial authorities and the police, if they need it, but it's not a public registry. We think it should be a public registry.

This issue doesn't apply to individuals like you or me. We are already required to track our identity, and it's public within the MPAC tracking system. This would apply only to numbered corporations, trusts and partnerships. So that's a large loophole.

Finally, partnerships are exempt. If you're a money launderer and you see this new law, you're like, "Okay, I just won't register in Ontario and I'll turn my company from a numbered corporation into a partnership," and then you can just avoid this whole process overall.

My request to you is that you address these loopholes in order to clamp down on money laundering and tax fraud in the real estate sector. The measures already exist; they have been tried elsewhere. I urge you to move forward on those measures.

The final thing that I see in the fall economic statement, when it comes to housing, is the amount of funding that is going to municipal and housing sectors. It's a cut. A cut is being made from \$512 million—that's what it was in the 2020-21 budget—down to \$481 million in the 2021-22 budget. That is really a travesty.

I fail to understand why this government would choose to cut funding to municipal services and housing at a time when we have a homelessness crisis. We have a mental health crisis. We have an utter need for the construction and the purchasing of supportive housing so that we can help people who are sleeping in our parks right now.

If you travel across Toronto and visit the parks, you will see people who are in very desperate circumstances sleeping outdoors: Dufferin Grove; the park in Kensington, formally Alexandra Park; and parks near the lake in the MPP for Spadina-Fort York's riding. It is an absolute crisis.

What is very clear is that the municipality of Toronto needs financial help to work with social service providers to provide permanent housing to people so that we can address our homelessness problem. In fact, the city of Toronto last week passed a motion calling for an additional \$45 million from the provincial government in order to assist in dealing with the homelessness crisis that Toronto has right now—the worst homelessness crisis I have ever seen and that Toronto has experienced in decades. It would be a positive move for this government to increase the amount of funding that goes to municipalities and housing so that the city of Toronto and all municipalities across Ontario have the additional support they need to get people off the streets and housed.

An example I like to use on how effective this could be is the building 877 Yonge; 877 Yonge is right near the Toronto Reference Library. It used to be a retirement home; we did a lot of work with the seniors who lived there. Now, it is a supportive housing building. So people who are in really difficult circumstances are being moved into—not a hotel, not a short-term, temporary hotel, but a permanent home, with social workers and supports living on-site to provide people with the care they need. That building is part of the Housing Now program, and it was funded by money that came from the federal government and the city. They just bought it outright. We don't need to spend five or 10 years getting the approvals to build a new building; they just bought it outright. It's 200 new homes that are available right now to move people in.

But you know who wasn't at the table? The Ontario government wasn't at the table. I think that's a real travesty, because those kinds of initiatives should get the Ontario government's support, so that we can really tackle the housing affordability crisis and the homelessness crisis that we have today.

I want to conclude by talking a little bit about the lack of support for child care. The reason why this is such a big issue—what I expected to see in the fall economic statement was a commitment to roll out \$10-a-day child care, which provinces all across Canada are moving forward with in partnership with the federal government. I was hoping to see that kind of statement here, but I didn't.

The reason why it is so important is because in my riding of University-Rosedale, it costs about \$1,500 a month, on average, for a parent to find and pay for a child care spot for that child. That works out to about \$36,000 a year if a parent has two young children. That's a lot of money. That's more than a lot of people make in the city of Toronto. And this government—I'll give them a tiny amount of credit—introduced a tax credit in the fall economic statement of \$1,500. Let me tell you, there's a big difference between \$36,000 a year and \$1,500. There's a massive amount of money that still needs to be paid forth by the parent: \$34,500 a year.

0920

Also, this government, instead of investing in high-quality, non-profit and public child care, has watered down standards by increasing allowable staffing ratios within private child care facilities. Now, I don't think that that is a good way to address the child care crisis, because those rules are there for a reason. They were developed in response to tragedies of children getting injured and dying, and government doing the wise thing and responding with fair and sensible regulation. Keeping those regulations is a good idea.

What also needs to be done is the Ontario government needs to step up and work with the federal government and make a deal to bring in affordable, high-quality, \$10-a-day child care that is provided by non-profit and public providers. That is what parents in my riding need. That is what this government needs to do.

So that's a summary of what I see in the fall economic statement that really affects the residents of University-

Rosedale. There needs to be more funding for housing. There need to be more measures to make housing affordable on all levels. There needs to be a greater commitment to invest in public education, because it is fundamental to who we are as Ontarians and Canadians. And there needs to be a real commitment to move forward on affordable, \$10-a-day, high-quality, non-profit and public child care.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): We have time for questions and answers.

Mr. Michael Parsa: I want to thank my honourable colleague for her presentation.

Speaker, one of the areas in the fall economic statement that was very important to me and I think to all of us here was the support that's being provided in the long-term-care sector. We saw many years of neglect by the previous government, whether it was just lack of beds—the fall economic statement, you notice, highlights that more beds will be added, more inspectors will be added, more nurses, more PSWs. I'm just wondering if my honourable colleague can point to why she won't be supporting it after such contrast, when the previous government let down our most vulnerable. On the other hand, we are changing it and making sure that they are supported. I'm wondering why my honourable colleague is not supporting it.

Ms. Jessica Bell: Thank you so much to the member for Aurora–Oak Ridges–Richmond Hill. I am happy to see that there are movements in the right direction to provide additional support—financial support—to the long-term-care sector in order to increase the amount of hours that each resident receives from a personal support worker to get the care they deserve. And it is a move in the right direction to increase inspections in order to ensure that the regulations that are designed to protect residents are properly enforced.

Here's what I'm concerned about: There is a long-term-care home in my riding, St. George. It's run by Sienna. Every quarter, Sienna posts profits that it gives to its shareholders. But when you walk into St. George—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): Thank you. The next question.

Mr. Jeff Burch: Thank you to my colleague from University–Rosedale for all the great work she does for our caucus on housing and other issues. She started out her speech talking about women's issues, and with the recovery, that's going to be really important. She ended talking about \$10-a-day child care, and how this government couldn't seem to get over its ideological issues, to do what other provinces are doing. What's she hearing from women in University–Rosedale about the importance of \$10-a-day child care for them, as we go into a recovery?

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): The member for University–Rosedale has one minute to respond.

Ms. Jessica Bell: Thank you very much. I'll give two examples. One is that I hear from child care educators, who make between \$35,000 and \$45,000 a year, that they can't afford child care. That needs to change, and that comes from affordable child care. I'm also hearing from parents who have quit their job—it's almost always

women—because they can't make it work because they can't afford child care either.

It's critical to increasing women's participation in the workforce and bringing about equality.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): The next question?

Mr. Will Bouma: I have two quick questions, because I don't know if I'll get a chance to ask both.

I always appreciate the member from University–Rosedale because she has a point of view from downtown Toronto that I sure don't get in Brantford–Brant.

On the child care issue: I think our minister has been quite clear that we would like to make a deal with the federal government, but they are shortchanging the people of Ontario with the offer that they have before us, both in the amount that they would give us in order to do child care but also in the longevity of the agreement, which would leave us hanging high and dry in just a few years and with no commitment to future funding. I was wondering if she would think that it's appropriate for us to fight for Ontario to get its fair share from the federal government in child care—number one.

Number two: I was wondering if she could speak about inclusionary zoning. I was watching Steve Paikin—Toronto has just done this—and a couple of the commentators were saying that this would dramatically increase costs of regular housing from the affordable—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): Finish your question, please.

Thank you.

The member for University–Rosedale to respond.

Ms. Jessica Bell: Thank you very much to the member from Brantford–Brant for those two questions. I'm just going to focus on the first one because I'm going to focus on the fall economic statement.

My assessment of the situation is that there are two issues that the Ontario government is having difficulty dealing with when it comes to the negotiation about high-quality and affordable \$10-a-day child care that is delivered by the public or the non-profit sector. One is that they want big corporate chains to be included in the agreement. I have a lot of concerns with having big child care chains coming in from the US, providing discount child care, undercutting child care workers' wages, and then receiving a government subsidy to do that. I think that's deeply concerning, and I'm asking this government to take that sticking point, that negotiating point, off the table.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): The next question?

Ms. Sara Singh: Thank you to the member from University–Rosedale for your coverage of the fall economic statement. You highlighted a number of different concerns as our housing critic, as well.

I want you to elaborate a little bit on the importance of diversity in housing. We spoke of folks in long-term care and, obviously, the need there, but can you talk about the importance of investing in community-based assisted living arrangements for vulnerable seniors and people with disabilities as well?

Ms. Jessica Bell: Thank you very much for raising that question.

I get a lot of calls from—it's often parents with adult children who are in really critical need, and they are finding that they're putting their adult children in places that are not safe. They are not being maintained to an adequate standard. There is inadequate food. There is inadequate staffing to make sure that these people are not harmed by others or don't harm themselves. There is no appropriate education for these folks or appropriate entertainment. It's actually deeply concerning, what I'm hearing from constituents.

There is a need, and our party is proposing this: that there is funding to provide community-based care not only for older residents but for younger residents and people with disabilities as well.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): The next question?

Mr. Sam Oosterhoff: My thanks to the member opposite for her words this morning.

Obviously, in smaller communities in this province, and larger as well, it's important that we see infrastructure investments being made in improving the lives of all of our constituents.

I know in my community, my local mayors and councils were very excited to see the doubling of the Ontario Community Infrastructure Fund. I'm wondering if you could speak a little bit about the doubling of that fund and what that would mean for communities across Ontario.

Ms. Jessica Bell: Thank you very much to the member for Niagara West.

What I can say is, when I look at the fall economic statement, I see a cut in the amount of funding that's going to municipalities. I'm sure that there are many municipalities out there, including the city of Toronto, that don't want to see a cut from the Ontario government; they want to see an investment.

0930

When I also look at infrastructure, I often think of transit and transportation because that is what I used to spend a lot of time on. What I see when I look at the FAO reports is that investment into infrastructure like transit is actually dropping under this government. So I have concerns. I don't share the same kind of hope that you might.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): The next question.

Ms. Sandy Shaw: Thank you for your speech this morning. Child care is a huge issue in Hamilton as well. We have organizations that have been struggling to make sure that there is accessible, affordable child care: Today's Family, Umbrella, to name just a few.

It's distressing to hear that Jason Kenney managed to get a deal with the province, but we here just seem to be dragging our heels. It's also distressing to hear the idea that part of the problem is that there is an interest in making sure that there is privatization in child care. It's already expensive and it's already difficult to access.

My understanding—there are reports that this government, despite all their bluster, is not co-operating with the

federal government. In fact, there are reports that the federal government, the minister responsible, hasn't even heard yet from this government.

So while families are waiting, while kids are losing the opportunity to get back into child care after suffering so much during COVID, what can we say to this government to get them moving on a child care deal that works for families in the province?

Ms. Jessica Bell: Affordable child care is a very important issue. It's an issue that doesn't just affect the parents and kids in my riding; it affects the parents and kids in ridings all across Ontario, including many held by Conservative MPPs.

I can say this: It is extremely important that the Ontario government come up with a plan quickly. If nearly all other provinces can do it, so can we. It is time to stop stalling and it is time to start acting, because parents and children across Ontario are waiting for you to do it.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): Further debate?

M^{me} Lucille Collard: We've got a whole 12 minutes here, and I'll be sharing my time with the member for Ottawa South.

Donc, merci monsieur le Président. C'est un honneur de me lever en Chambre aujourd'hui pour apporter la perspective des gens d'Ottawa-Vanier, les gens que je représente depuis un peu plus d'un an et demi.

Les Ontariens se tournent vers le gouvernement pour trouver des solutions aux problèmes économiques comme le coût de la vie, les changements climatiques et l'équité. C'est juste normal. Cet énoncé économique de l'automne était l'occasion pour le gouvernement d'améliorer son bilan et d'améliorer la vie des gens. Au lieu de cela, le gouvernement a choisi de ne pas poursuivre les programmes qui pourraient rendre la vie plus abordable.

On sait que c'est un problème important : les budgets des familles sont comprimés de toutes parts; les gens ont du mal à joindre les deux bouts. Les frais de garde d'enfants et de logement sont maintenant des dépenses énormes, et les familles doivent sacrifier d'autres frais de subsistance pour s'assurer qu'elles peuvent garder un toit au-dessus de leur tête et apporter de la nourriture sur table. Ce n'est pas un signe de prospérité, monsieur le Président; c'est un signe de pauvreté qui se profile pour plusieurs Ontariens.

L'Ontarien vit présentement une des plus grandes crises du logement au pays, ce qui oblige davantage de personnes et de familles à faire des choix difficiles; des choix qu'aucun de nous ici qui a le privilège de servir dans cette Chambre n'a à faire; des choix comme choisir entre les médicaments et le loyer, ou les vêtements et l'épicerie, ou choisir entre prendre une assurance d'auto ou inscrire un enfant dans une équipe de hockey.

De nombreuses femmes décident d'abandonner leur carrière, car le coût de la garde des enfants est prohibitif. Cela conduit à une récession pour les femmes en Ontario, car les femmes retournent au travail en moins grand nombre que les hommes.

Heureusement, le gouvernement fédéral a un plan pour réduire les frais de garde d'enfants à 10 \$ par jour. Malheureusement, ce gouvernement n'a pas encore été en mesure de conclure une entente comme première étape pour rendre la vie plus abordable pour les familles.

Avoir un toit au-dessus de sa tête est un besoin primaire très de base pour vous assurer d'avoir la capacité et la motivation de contribuer à la prospérité collective. Pour permettre à chaque Ontarien de travailler ensemble vers un meilleur avenir pour l'Ontario, un Ontario ouvert aux affaires, un Ontario inclusif, nous devons prendre soin de tout le monde.

Cela veut dire d'appuyer nos étudiants avec une aide financière adéquate afin que chacun puisse se créer un avenir. Cela veut dire être là pour les personnes handicapées afin qu'elles puissent, aussi, vivre dans la dignité et contribuer à la société. Cela veut dire permettre aux travailleurs immigrants de faire partie de notre reprise économique en leur permettant de travailler dans leur domaine d'expertise en reconnaissant leurs diplômes acquis à l'étranger et en élargissant les programmes de transition. Cela veut dire aussi de s'assurer que notre province offre des services de santé et une éducation en français de qualité pour garantir l'égalité des chances.

Prendre soin de tout le monde, monsieur le Président, c'est aussi aider nos petites entreprises à survivre à la COVID afin qu'elles puissent continuer à nous apporter l'excellence locale en biens et services. Et n'oublions pas nos parents et nos grands-parents qui ont besoin de soins de haute qualité et la possibilité de rester dans le confort de leur foyer le plus longtemps possible. La santé mentale est devenue le principal obstacle à ce que chaque Ontarien ait la capacité de faire de l'Ontario le meilleur endroit où vivre.

Nous devons regarder en amont pour identifier les lacunes de notre système afin de mieux soutenir toutes les couches de la société afin d'assurer un mode de vie digne et valorisant pour tous. Donner à chacun une chance équitable de réussir est la meilleure façon d'uniformiser les règles du jeu, pas en décidant qui obtient quoi selon combien ils sont prêts à contribuer à un parti.

Comprendre ce qui arrive à notre environnement sur la base des preuves abondantes à notre disposition et agir de manière responsable pour contrer les impacts négatifs de nos actions précédentes a le réel potentiel de contribuer à résoudre un certain nombre de problèmes liés aux enjeux économiques.

Notre santé mentale, et surtout la santé mentale de nos jeunes, est directement liée à l'environnement. Nous devons comprendre que nos enfants n'ont pas beaucoup confiance en un avenir radieux si la planète sur laquelle ils vivront n'est pas sûre. Nos enfants pensent que de ne pas avoir d'enfants est un meilleur choix compte tenu de l'avenir incertain auquel ils peuvent être confrontés face à une planète en déclin. La seule façon de leur donner de l'espoir est d'arrêter de dépenser des centaines de millions de dollars sur des projets qui ont un impact négatif supplémentaire sur notre environnement et de commencer à investir, et de manière significative, dans des projets

d'énergie verte qui pourraient assurer un avenir propre, prospère et abordable en Ontario.

J'incite le gouvernement à donner à chacun et chacune une chance équitable d'être fier d'être Ontarien. Donnons aux gens les moyens de vivre dans la dignité et la motivation de faire de leur mieux pour tous les Ontariens. J'espère que le premier ministre décidera de faire plus pour aider les familles de travailleurs que ce qui a été indiqué dans cet énoncé économique. Le gouvernement doit prendre des mesures pour alléger les défis budgétaires des familles de travailleurs en signant une entente avec le fédéral pour les services de garde d'enfants, en réformant le marché du logement et en investissant dans l'énergie verte.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): Continuing the debate, the member for Ottawa South.

Mr. John Fraser: I love coming here first thing in the morning, because it's so quiet. It's almost like church. Maybe I can help us get going this morning.

Highway 413: Why does the government want to build a highway? It's not 1950. They want to build a highway that no one wants, that's going to save 30 seconds. Why do they want to do that? That's the question. Why don't they want to invest in education? They've cut a half a billion from education. Why are we spending money on this highway? Why are we spending money on this highway, when we just gave back to the people who own the Highway 407 a billion dollars? We just forgave it to them. Why did we do that? Where are this government's priorities? It's not the 1950s. It's not the ministry of roads.

We need to invest in those things that are going to help our children in the future: education, child care. How do we not actually have an agreement with the federal government? For God's sake, Jason Kenney got an agreement. That's incredible. I mean, at the rate Jason Kenney is going, he's going to be ahead of this government on climate change. If you look at the fall economic statement, there's a nice paragraph that says, "We recognize climate change is a challenge." Well, welcome to the parade, honestly.

I don't understand the focus on highways. Why do we have to build a highway that nobody wants? And then a lot of people are asking questions about the Bradford Bypass: Why the change. Why the change?

Ms. Sandy Shaw: A golf course.

0940

Mr. John Fraser: Was it done to save time, or to save the back nine?

Speaker, this government's priorities are out of whack: half a billion from education; spending money on a highway that's going to save 30 seconds, that's going to pave over farmland and that people don't want. What people want is they want a future for their children, they want education, they want better schools and they want \$10-a-day child care. How come it's not there?

Hon. Lisa M. Thompson: You know it's not \$10.

Mr. John Fraser: Well, it's not going to be \$10 at the rate your government is going, which is nowhere.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): No cross-aisle chatter, please. Speak through the Chair.

Mr. John Fraser: Your Minister of Education, if you want to talk about this, says, “Well, we want to get a billion-dollar deal, and we gave them some data points”—no plan, but some data points. I’m not sure if I was on the other end of a billion-dollar deal and trying to make it with someone—and they gave me data points and talking points whether they would sign on the dotted line.

Here’s the other thing: Milton two-way GO. I heard yesterday the other side crowing about, “We’ve successfully done this, just like we built the Vaughan hospital in three years. We cut the ribbon; we built the hospital.” It takes 10 years, folks, to build a hospital, minimum. Have a bit of humility, that’s all.

Talk about Milton two-way GO—how do you figure you got to where you’re at with CN in negotiations? Because you guys started it three years ago? No. We all know that there’s work done in the governments before us. You can take as much credit as you like, but have a shred of humility more than what we hear on a day-to-day basis. I don’t care; cut the ribbon, take the credit, but don’t tell other people—don’t tell us—that we did nothing, because that’s just a load and it’s a lack of humility.

You raised the minimum wage. I’m happy for those workers who will be getting it now. I would have been a lot happier if I hadn’t watched three years ago every single person on the other side standing up and cheering the Premier as he cut the raise to the minimum wage, took away equal pay for equal work, took away paid sick days. Then we had to spend 400 days—not just us, but just literally everybody in this province had to drag the government screaming and kicking to get back paid sick days.

I remember in 2018 when you guys thought that was the greatest thing—every day, six, seven, eight standing ovations. Well, the Premier stuck it to the little guy, the minimum wage workers and their families. I remember that. Maybe you don’t remember that. I remember that. Maybe you want to forget it. You don’t see a lot of those standing ovations anymore—certainly had a heck of a lot of them in 2018 and 2019.

Hon. Todd Smith: Those were the days.

Mr. John Fraser: Yes, you’re right. There we go: Those were the days, looking back fondly on 2018. You hear that? The minister says, “Those were the days.” Those were the days. Yes, those were the days when we stuck it to the little guy. I don’t know. It’s not something I would be very proud of.

I don’t know if the Premier is in Etobicoke taking delivery of that vehicle that we ordered in 2018, but I’ll be interested to see whether or not that’s the case.

Thank you very much, Speaker, and I’m looking forward to questions—oh, not everybody at once.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): We do have time for questions. The first one goes to the government House leader.

Hon. Paul Calandra: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I love listening to Liberal members talk. Colleagues, if they had just got that fifth term, then they would have been able to get these things accomplished. It wasn’t the four terms they had; it was just that fifth term. They

were so close to building a hospital, they were so close to Milton, they were so close to getting all these things done. They built no long-term-care homes. They were close. They just needed that fifth term—if they had only got 16, 17, 18 years.

Why are we building roads? Well, because there are a million people coming to Ontario. Why? Because this government is encouraging people to come back and the economy is growing. It’s unacceptable that I should be in traffic for an hour. It’s good for the Liberals.

Why did we delay certain enhancements to the minimum wage? Because they were driving away jobs by the thousands, and people are now coming back.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): Ten seconds to pose your question.

Hon. Paul Calandra: On every count, that government was a failure, and it wasn’t us saying that, it was the people—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): Thank you.

I’ll leave it up to you to decide what the question was in there, but I turn to the member for Ottawa South to respond.

Mr. John Fraser: I will remind the member, who I have a lot of respect for—and it’s always entertaining going back and forth with him—that this province led the G7 in jobs and growth for five years before you took office. We were one of the top three places for five years for foreign direct investment.

And by the way, the hospital? It takes 10 to 12 years minimum. It used to take 17 years to build a hospital. There will be things that you do that you won’t be around for, unfortunately, I think, after June this year. And I’m looking forward to actually talking to you about that, hopefully with humility, which I think is really important.

Just don’t say that somebody did nothing, all right? Just don’t acknowledge that they did something, as opposed to saying, “You did nothing,” because you know it’s not true.

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): Order, please. Order.

The member for Manitoulin: You have a question, sir?

M. Michael Mantha: Merci, monsieur le Président. C’est tout le temps le fun quand on entend des gros coups de vent passer à travers de l’Assemblée ce matin.

Ma question est pour le membre d’Ottawa–Vanier sur le discours qu’elle a donné sur l’énoncé économique de l’automne. Moi, un francophone du nord de l’Ontario, j’étais—avec passion—en train de regarder l’énoncé économique pour voir quels sont les services qui vont venir pour améliorer les vies des personnes francophones. Je n’ai vu aucun énoncé en dedans de l’énoncé économique—je n’ai même pas vu un mot.

Fait que, pour les gens du nord de l’Ontario, ça nous éloigne de ce gouvernement. Ça ne nous rapproche pas. Ça ne nous rend pas un message qu’on veut améliorer les services.

La députée pour Ottawa–Vanier, est-ce que tu étais aussi surprise que moi qu’il n’y avait aucun mot français dans l’énoncé économique de l’automne?

M^{me} Lucille Collard: Merci au membre pour la question en français aussi. C’est toujours un plaisir de pouvoir parler dans sa langue maternelle, comme c’est toujours un plaisir et une nécessité de se faire servir dans sa langue francophone également.

Le discours du trône n’avait pas de mots en français, l’énoncé économique non plus. Donc, est-ce que j’étais surprise? Non. Est-ce que j’avais espéré qu’il y aurait eu une amélioration entre ces deux étapes-là? Oui. Malheureusement, on nous a déçus encore une fois.

On sait très bien que l’offre active est quelque chose d’important, alors je veux reconnaître—parce que le membre d’Ottawa–Sud a bien expliqué que c’est bien de reconnaître aussi ce que les autres font, puis je sais que la ministre des Affaires francophones a apporté certaines améliorations. Par contre, on n’est pas où on devrait être. On a besoin des services en français partout. Il faut se donner les moyens. Alors ce ne sont pas juste des énoncés qu’il faut avoir; il faut investir pour se donner les moyens d’accomplir ces objectifs-là.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): The next question.

M. Jeremy Roberts: Je veux remercier mes collègues du Parti libéral pour les discours ce matin. Je pense que tout le monde dans la Chambre législative ici comprend l’importance des infirmières et des PSSP durant la pandémie. C’est pour cette raison que notre gouvernement a soutenu la formation de plus de 5 000 nouvelles infirmières et 8 000 PSSP dans notre budget cette année.

Donc, je veux demander aux membres de l’opposition : est-ce qu’ils vont soutenir cet investissement de 342 millions de dollars qui va soutenir la formation de ces membres importants de notre système de santé?

M^{me} Lucille Collard: Encore une fois, merci aussi à mon collègue d’Ottawa de poser la question en français. Je me sens vraiment à la maison ce matin.

Alors, évidemment, l’investissement pour les infirmières et pour les préposés aux bénéficiaires est un investissement non seulement important mais nécessaire. Mais il faut que cet investissement-là soit permanent. On offre des augmentations de salaire temporaires en espérant que ça va attirer plus de gens dans la profession. Moi, je ne vois pas comment on va accomplir cet objectif-là si on sait qu’après la fin de mars, on va vous couper votre salaire.

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Je parlais plus tôt de se donner les moyens d’accomplir nos objectifs. Il ne faut pas que ça soit juste des énoncés. Il faut améliorer les conditions de travail de ces gens-là si on veut les attirer dans la profession, et c’est ce qui manque, cruellement, dans le plan du gouvernement.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): The member for Hamilton West–Ancaster–Dundas has a question.

M^{me} Sandy Shaw: C’est mon tour maintenant d’essayer de poser ma question en français. Merci pour votre discours ce matin. Vous avez dit que le gouvernement doit

prendre soin de tous, et je suis complètement d’accord avec vous.

Nous avons discuté de nos enfants, qu’ils s’inquiètent pour leur avenir. Dans ma circonscription, les gens sont vraiment déçus par ce gouvernement, surtout à propos du changement climatique. Est-ce que vous pouvez nous dire pourquoi vous pensez que ce gouvernement a décidé de bâtir plus d’autoroutes au lieu d’avoir un plan de changement climatique qui est crédible devant tout le monde? Est-ce que vous pouvez nous donner des mots rassurants qu’il y aura un avenir pour nos enfants?

M^{me} Lucille Collard: Merci beaucoup. Merci pour l’effort. J’ai très bien compris la question, donc c’était très bien formulé.

Bien évidemment, on sait que le gouvernement présentement n’a pas mis une grosse priorité sur l’environnement, et ce n’est pas rassurant pour nos enfants. Il n’y a pas de priorité pour l’environnement parce que le ministre de l’Environnement est allé à Glasgow les mains vides. On n’a pas entendu parler de ce qu’il est allé faire là-bas. Est-ce que c’étaient des vacances? On ne le sait pas. Mais il n’y a eu aucun résultat qui est sorti de cette présence-là.

On sait que nos enfants sont inquiets de leur avenir. Ils voient très bien que ce n’est pas ce gouvernement-là qui va les rassurer. On va avoir besoin d’un changement de gouvernement qui donne la priorité sur l’avenir de nos enfants, parce que présentement ils ont perdu confiance. Ils préfèrent même de ne plus avoir d’enfants, parce qu’ils sont incertains de l’avenir qu’il va y avoir sur la planète. On a juste à regarder ce qui se passe en Colombie-Britannique présentement, encore une fois, pour réaliser que notre environnement, il est en danger.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): Speaking of the environment, the Minister of the Environment, Conservation and Parks has a question.

Hon. David Piccini: To the member’s point: I remember always getting an awkward moment when I first got elected, making an announcement I had nothing to do with—always acknowledged my predecessor.

But in just three years, we have, through legislation, regulated a direct minimum hours of care of four and a half hours. We fixed the hospital funding formula. We’ve launched community paramedicine. We’ve invested in subways after years of neglect. We’ve launched two-way GO, servicing folks in my community. We’ve created a climate where we’ve seen over \$6 billion invested in electric vehicles and we’re the only province—you mention the Minister of the Environment—that’s on track to meet our goals by 2030 from Paris.

My question to the member opposite is: Just as I gave some credit to my predecessor, would he give credit to our government for getting all of that done in just three years?

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): The member for Ottawa South to respond in 30 seconds.

Mr. John Fraser: He made my point. He said that they got something done in three years that takes 10 years, like a hospital. Look, I’ll give you credit. I don’t have a problem giving credit. But don’t tear out the charging

stations, cancel the subsidies and then say all of a sudden that you're the champions of electric vehicles. It doesn't work that way. It's like, "We're the champions of minimum wage, but we cut it three years ago. And do you know what? When we did it, we celebrated. We all stood up and clapped."

Can you believe that, really? Honestly. Thank you.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): Further debate?

Mr. Bill Walker: A pleasure to stand in this House and speak to Bill 43, the Build Ontario Act (Budget Measures), 2021.

I want to congratulate the member from Pickering–Uxbridge, who is the Minister of Finance. When I was sitting in your chair, Speaker, I referenced him as the President of the Treasury Board. But he did a fabulous job of that, and I just want it acknowledged that he did a job with both. And I want to pay acknowledgement to the PA, the member from Aurora–Oak Ridges–Richmond Hill, who has done a fabulous job in his role, and the former PA from Willowdale.

Mr. Speaker, it's truly a pleasure to stand here. I want to again start this off by that speech—the cornerstone was paying credit to the people of Ontario; the people of Ontario who through COVID-19 have shown the Ontario spirit. They've shown strength, determination, compassion, generosity and grit, Mr. Speaker. To all of the people who have stepped up and done the right thing to get us through this once-in-a-lifetime pandemic, I applaud you. Know that our government is behind you, as it has been through the pandemic and will continue to be.

Mr. Speaker, through you—and I see the member, I believe, from Ottawa South wanted to engage and get this House heated up a little bit, so I want to just offer a couple of comments because I didn't get a chance during the question-and-response. He talked about humility and he talked about data points. I just want to remind the people watching at home and listening, and for Hansard's record, of some of those data points of when the Liberals were in for their 15 years; that 300,000 manufacturing jobs left our province. They tripled the debt in 15 years of the history of our province, which left us in a horrible state. The deficit was about \$12 billion a year. Every single one of those—to the member from Ottawa South—was a dollar that wasn't going to programs and services and all of the things that people in need, need. They built 611 beds in 15 years, and I think the House leader was going to get on to that and say that if they had had that fifth mandate they might have built the 612th bed over the next term.

He said, "Those were the days," and he might have been paraphrasing someone across the aisle who was saying that, but those were not the days we want to go back to. With this budget statement and this fall economic statement, I want to assure the people of Ontario that we are here for them, as we have been throughout the pandemic, and we'll continue to be.

I'm going to cover a couple of things, just from my great riding of Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound, and then I'll come back to some of the more generic stuff. We have

approved, just in the riding of Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound—and I want to reference those 611 beds over 15 years built by the Liberals. We're going to have an additional 91 beds in Owen Sound, an additional 51 beds in Meaford, an additional 62 beds in Grey Gables, an additional 28 beds in Rockwood in Durham and an additional 26 beds in Hanover, Mr. Speaker. Just in my riding alone, we'll have 640 beds. We're one of the highest percentages of seniors in the province. We needed those beds 15 years ago, but we are building them today. We have committed a total of 30,000 beds, and we're going to recondition another 28,000 beds over the next 10 years.

Mental health: I want to congratulate the member from Vaughan–Woodbridge and the Associate Minister of Mental Health; \$12.4 million in this document for rapid access to mental health, which we all know is direly needed across our province in all sectors.

Minister Dunlop, colleges and universities, the member from Simcoe North, was just in Owen Sound a week ago announcing that we are actually bringing our nursing programs back to rural Ontario—in our case, Georgian College in Owen Sound—so people don't have to leave to get that last certification. They move to an urban area and many times do not come home, so that's going to bring care closer to home. I just couldn't thank, again, the member from Simcoe North and the Minister of Colleges and Universities enough.

Two daycares have been approved in my riding, in Holstein and Durham; drastically needed in our riding for many, many years. Multiple roads and bridges—and I want to again congratulate the member from Etobicoke Centre and the Minister of Infrastructure: over \$2 billion for small, rural and northern; \$30.2 billion over 10 years, which is going to drastically improve the lives of people across this great province.

Mr. Speaker, I'd be remiss—and you might have heard me say this once or twice in your years here: that the Markdale Hospital is actually, finally, going to be built. In fact, it's coming out of the ground as we speak. The Liberals announced it three times and never did a darn thing, but today I drove by and I can tell you that that hospital is coming out of the ground, and that is fabulous.

Broadband: \$4 billion—again, the Minister of Infrastructure. This is going to be game-changing across our province, and people are ecstatic about the ability. They're flocking, actually, from those urban areas, to beautiful places like the Bruce Peninsula and Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound, and maybe a couple to Manitoulin, even, across the way.

Mr. Speaker, I'm excited about the isotopes. I did a motion here a couple of weeks ago to make sure that this is a fundamental strategic approach of our government that every government, frankly, of all stripes, endorsed, and should, going forward, because that is life-saving. It's new technology. It's new ways to create jobs. But most importantly, it's going to help improve the lives of people across our great province.

We've talked about SMRs in the nuclear field. We know we can't get to the net 2030 without nuclear, and the

SMRs are, again, going to be game-changers. Hopefully we will have the wisdom to make sure that they are SMRs, just like the Candu, Ontario-made. Ninety per cent can be made here, and it will revolutionize, particularly, if they wish, the small, rural, Indigenous communities in our extreme Far North—which will give them a reliable, clean source of power.

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It's going to create jobs, Mr. Speaker, and a supply chain that already in our nuclear system is second to none. This gives them hope and vibrancy. The investment community is saying, "You show us that you're committed to this." I can tell you, for both Bruce Power and OPG, one of the key fundamentals that they believe has helped them to be able to go through with their life extension is knowing that this government stands behind them 100%, saying it will be here in the future, because it is the technology that is the baseload, that is there and providing good-paying jobs and clean, affordable energy.

We're building roads, as has been spoken about in here. I think some of the people like to try to make this—Mr. Speaker, as the government House leader, the member from Markham–Stouffville, said, with one million more people in Ontario, we have to increase the roads. It would be like not increasing some of the Hiram Walker estate down in Windsor when you had all that ability, with more people wanting to enjoy those products.

There's \$40 million over two years for advanced manufacturing, \$90.3 million for skilled trades, \$5 million for Second Career, and \$270 million for Discover Ontario. Folks out there listening, I hope you take it to heart to re-discover Ontario, as our Minister of Heritage, Sport, Tourism and Culture Industries has said. It's incredible. That industry was hit so hard. Again, the beautiful Bruce Peninsula and all of Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound is a great place for all of those people to come and visit. I hope people will take this to heart and truly do it, and maximize some of those opportunities that are in front of them.

Mr. Speaker, I want to focus a little bit, in the early going of my speech, on the long-term-care sector. As I said, the former Liberal government, for 15 years—abysmal. No one had to be a rocket scientist to look at the demographics of the baby boom generation and know we were going to need more beds. The member from Ottawa South talked about 10 years; well, he had 15, and they built a total of 611 beds when we all knew that the seniors demographic was increasing exponentially.

So, Mr. Speaker, I am proud to say that our government is investing \$2.68 billion to build 30,000 new and modern long-term-care beds in a decade, as thousands more are upgraded to the 21st century. We found out the hard way during COVID, sadly, because of that lack of effort and getting the job done by the former Liberal government, supported, by the way—just so some of my friends across the aisle in the NDP know, they actually kept that government in for at least the two terms that I was here during votes.

At the end of the day, I want to ensure that the people of Ontario know that we have committed significantly: 20,000 new and 15,000 upgraded beds in development,

representing more than 60% of the province's goal. That's fundamentally a game-changer, Mr. Speaker. You're going to hear that—"game-changer"—because we are making big change across many sectors for the betterment of the people of Ontario. We're investing over \$5 billion over four years to hire more than 27,000 long-term-care staff, including nurses and personal support workers.

Mr. Speaker, I was the critic of long-term care. I saw what the Liberals did not do, what they did not accomplish, and we are all paying the price of it now. We've said that we will commit, that we will turn this around, and by April 2022 we're hoping to make significant progress by adding 16,200 more personal support workers. I have lots of friends and I have family who are personal support workers. They truly are the front-line heroes. They are the people out there every day. We do need them, we do value them and we want to make sure that there are more of them to be able to do that.

We've increased and committed to four hours of care per day. I tried to get the Liberals to do that in my critic role when I was in that role, and they wouldn't do it. And yet, the member from Ottawa South likes to have a bit of revisionist history. He wants to talk about what you needed to get done and what you didn't. The Liberals didn't get a lot of things done in long-term care, and people have suffered because of that. We're turning that around.

While I'm on that topic, Mr. Speaker, I want to talk a little bit about the Canada Health Transfer. At this point, it's only 22% of the total provincial health care costs. We know that as people get older, as we all get older, there are more challenges and more complications. The cost of providing care is significantly more. At this point we are lobbying the federal government, saying, "You have to revisit that. You have to make sure that you are actually thinking of the long-term future." All of us have the ability to be able to influence that. We're suggesting that they need to get to at least 35%, so that we actually can take care of those people in a very appropriate manner.

COVID-19, as we all know, was something that none of us thought about, that none of us could see coming. We did not have any idea. This is a once-in-a-lifetime—hopefully—pandemic for all of us to have lived through, that hopefully we will never experience again, and our fundamental, I can tell you from being at the cabinet table, from the Premier and our cabinet and whole-of-government, was we wanted to ensure that the services and the programs are there for people.

I've had some people suggest, "You spent a lot of money. The federal government spent a lot of money." That's an absolutely true statement, Mr. Speaker. But at the end of the day, in their time of need, that is when your government should be there. You should be there to take care—and we'll figure out over time how to bring that balance sheet back.

But \$51 billion was expended to ensure that the people in that time of need—in something that none of us had an idea of how to deal with, that we've never had experienced. You couldn't turn to a textbook. You couldn't turn to anyone in our world to say, "How do you do this? How do you react?" We did what we thought was best. We put

programs and services in place to help people through. That included \$1 billion for a province-wide vaccination campaign that has seen Ontario achieve one of the highest vaccination rates in the world, Mr. Speaker.

I'm glad to say there are a lot of things in our lives that are starting to return to normal, or at least a resemblance of normal, because that vaccination has worked. It has been the case in Ontario where we've been able to convince the bulk of people to be vaccinated, and not do it for themselves only, but do it for their fellow men, women and people in our communities, Mr. Speaker.

We've included \$5.1 billion earmarked to support hospitals, creating more than 3,100 additional beds, Mr. Speaker. Again, in that time of need, we had to flex. We had to flex for ICU beds. It was one of the biggest concerns we had: How do you deal with people in that time of need?

Some \$3 billion in urgent and unprecedented support to over 110,000 small businesses across the province—we know that businesses suffered. It was a challenge, certainly, everyone knows that, but we tried to do our best. We wanted to protect people. We wanted to protect jobs. And our number one priority, which I'm going to continue to say and stand proudly behind, was protecting people's health—our number one priority. We'll continue to do that until it's totally behind us.

Mr. Speaker, I've had some people call my office with concerns about the deficit: "Yes, you did some things" and "Yes, you had to do those things." But they are concerned about the deficit because, as we know, and what I've shared before about the Liberals, every single cent that is spent on deficit financing is a cent not going to mental health, affordable housing or to people in need. So we are actually trying, and we will balance over time. We'll put programs in place that are prudent, that are fiscally responsible.

It's good to hear that this year, for 2021-22, the finance minister is projecting a deficit of \$21.5 billion, which is \$11.6 billion lower than the outlook published earlier. Again, by being prudent, by making sure we continually review, we can bring those numbers down and make sure more dollars are going out the front door.

Mr. Speaker, we're going to have, again, projected revenues of \$168.6 billion, which is also an improvement over 2020-21, because as we know, Mr. Speaker, you need to continue to increase those revenues to stay in touch with time. It's \$14.6 billion higher than projected in the 2020-21 budget and \$11.7 billion higher than projected in the 2021-22 fiscal quarter finances.

Mr. Speaker, it's incredible. You think you have 20 minutes and you can cover a lot of stuff. I'm not even getting to most of my high points, and even at the rate I speak, it's challenging to get it all out.

But I want to make sure that we again cover very quickly that we have \$51 billion that we have invested on behalf of the people because we made their health and their care a priority. Mr. Speaker: \$300 million for surgical recovery in hospital reform, and making sure that—we had to delay and defer so that we had that capacity in our hospitals if people, and the wave came as strong as it could have come—to make sure that we had those resources

there. It's more than \$580 million since the start of the pandemic. This is going to allow supporting up to 67,000 surgeries and procedures, as well as up to more than 135,000 diagnostic imaging hours. There was a Surgical Innovation Fund to support 104 projects. I think that is moving us in the right direction.

Nursing is absolutely critical. I just want to say, on behalf of every single person in this House, the nurses are the heart blood of our health care system and they always will be. So, to you, thank you so much for all that you have done and continue to do. Mr. Speaker, to strengthen the nursing and personal support workforce, we're planning to invest \$342 million beginning in 2021-22, adding 5,000 new and upskilled registered nurses and registered practical nurses, as well as an additional 8,000 personal support workers. That includes 500 registered nurses with specialized acute care training, 420 registered nurses through the existing Community Commitment Program for Nurses, 900 registered nurses, 700 registered practical nurses through the WeRPN bridging program, 8,000 PSWs to critical areas of the health care system through a variety of programs, and an additional \$57.6 million beginning in 2022-23 to hire 225 nurse practitioners. Again, a huge shout-out to them for the great job that they do on our care.

1010

I alluded earlier to the Associate Minister of Mental Health—\$12.4 million over two years to expand mental health and addiction supports for health and long-term-care workers across this province. Again, not only are we caring for the people most of our professionals care for, but we also know this is an added burden to them, so we're putting in programs and services to help them through this.

I'm going to repeat it again, because it's such a critical component that has come to light: 8,000 PSWs to critical care areas; an additional \$922 million to extend the temporary wage increase for personal support workers.

Mr. Speaker, we are going to put in an investment of \$72.3 million over three years to increase enforcement capacity and double the number of inspections by 2022-23 in our long-term care. That was something, again, that we heard loud and clear. We've made changes. We are taking action and steps to be able to improve that.

I'm going to reiterate: 30,000 new beds and upgrades to 28,000 existing beds, a \$3.7-billion commitment to long-term care, which—had the Liberals done that in their term, maybe we would have had different results.

I want to talk a little bit about home care, Mr. Speaker, because it's always the case, I think, that if you surveyed the bulk of people and said, "Where do you want to spend your remaining days," it would be in their own home. They don't want to go to other facilities. Obviously, there is a need in certain cases where you have to, but the bulk of people want to do that. One of the ways to do that is to actually have a home safety tax credit for those seniors to make improvements to their home and have a tax benefit to be able to do that so they can participate, they can be there, helping themselves as well. That's a great thing, I think, Mr. Speaker—up to \$1,000 for an individual or \$2,000 for a family.

And the tourism recovery grant and the travel small business grant—again, the staycation in Ontario that I mentioned earlier, Mr. Speaker: I think it’s fabulous that we’re actually thinking back to say, “How do we help these small businesses in need? How do we encourage the community to step forward? How do we allow individuals to be part of the recovery from this devastating COVID-19 pandemic?” Well, that is to be able to encourage people to get out, to be able to get out of their house now that most of the lockdowns are over and to travel and to reconnect with family, to travel our great province, which we should all be proud of.

Again, Mr. Speaker, I want to push the federal government to take a look at that Canada Health Transfer. We are projected to spend \$69.9 billion on base health care and a further \$5.2 billion on dedicated COVID-19—that’s 40% of the provincial budget. The Canada Health Transfer is projected to meet 22% of these costs. We want it to be up there at a much higher level of 35%, and I hope people will push their federal members of Parliament to give that a concern.

A couple of last touching points, Mr. Speaker: The Ring of Fire is an absolute gem of an asset that is in our own backyard. It will allow us to move forward with the electronic vehicle, which will revolutionize our world. I talked about the SMRs, the small modular reactors—again, a new evolution. Here in Ontario, we have the ability, we have the capacity, and I couldn’t be more happy to stand here and suggest that we are the government that is going to continue to move that forward.

Mr. Speaker, I started my speech a little bit earlier with a few notes about what the persistency was and how we can be there. We are a province, and we are a people, and I’m proud of it—and this budget moving forward and this fiscal economic statement is moving us forward. The people of Ontario showed, through the worst pandemic of our lifetime, that they have the strength, the determination, the compassion, the generosity and the grit. I want them to know that their government stands lockstep with them. Our government is there for you in your time of need. We’ll continue to be there in your time of need. It’s the people of Ontario that we all stand here for and have the humble honour of representing. I’m honoured to do that, and we are with you. Ontario spirit.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): I thank the member from Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound for his 20-minute presentation. I know he’s anxious to respond to questions; however, that will have to take place later, because we’re at that point on our agenda where we go for members’ statements.

Second reading debate deemed adjourned.

MEMBERS’ STATEMENTS

ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION

Ms. Jessica Bell: Ontario and Canada’s lakes are fundamental to our life, our health and the health of the

environment. Yet every day, we pump pollutants into our Great Lakes system: mercury, hard metals, toxins and plastic, including microplastic.

The most common type of microplastic are microfibrils that are shed from our clothes in the washing machine and then released in our waterways and Great Lakes system. These plastics end up in fish, birds, oysters, and then they move up the food chain to us. We need to take action to protect our health and safety and our waterways.

That is why I introduced a bill, Bill 279, with my friend the MPP for Kingston and the Islands to require all new washing machines to be equipped with a cheap filter that captures up to 87% of microfibrils and stops them from entering our waste water system and then our lakes. These microfilters work. We know this because of the pilot that was conducted in households in Parry Sound by Georgian Bay Forever. I want to thank the leadership and the staff and the volunteers of Georgian Bay Forever. I also want to thank Lisa Erdle, a researcher at the University of Toronto. And I want to thank the townships that are right now passing resolutions in support of this bill, including Archipelago and Seguin. I also want to thank Jen Petursson from Fashion Takes Action.

This movement is growing, and I urge you to join. If we truly want to protect Canada and Ontario’s lakes from harmful microplastics pollution, the Ontario government must pass our bill to install microfilters on washing machines. Let’s get it done.

WORLD VISION 2021 GLOBAL 6K

Mr. Billy Pang: For over 70 years, World Vision has worked with communities and partners to help kids and families across the world rise out of poverty.

I have been a World Vision volunteer for over 30 years and currently sponsor six kids. This organization has a special place in my heart.

Six kilometres is the average distance a woman or a child in the developing world walks for water. Too often, the water obtained is not clean to drink.

This year, the 2021 Global 6K aimed to fund clean water projects in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Haiti.

Speaker, I want to thank everyone who donated to Markham-Unionville’s Walk for Clean Water fundraising event. In combination with four teams—Billy Pang and friends, Grace Chinese Gospel Church of North York, Peoples Grace Church, and Marie and Wini Zumba Dance—we raised over \$45,000 to support this great initiative.

Let’s continue to support and change lives one day at a time.

AFFORDABLE HOUSING

Mr. Jeff Burch: Speaker, Christine and Dave Hunt have one simple goal: to find a safe, affordable place to live. After falling victim to a rental scam, they lost \$1,400, money they needed to secure a rental. Since then, they’ve

had to live with family in Welland after being refused at over 20 apartments in the Niagara region.

Christine and her family are far from alone. My office hears from countless families who are having a nearly impossible time finding a safe and affordable place to live. Seniors and those on fixed incomes are increasingly having a hard time with the rising cost of living and unsustainable rental increases.

Since this government was elected in 2018, the cost of a rental has increased dramatically. And statistics recently released from the Canadian Real Estate Association showed that the cost of buying a home in Niagara has increased 121% in the last five years.

Speaker, we know that Ontario's municipalities cannot solve the affordable housing crisis alone. This Legislature has the opportunity to take action and tackle this crucial issue in our communities by investing in social housing, investing in affordable housing stock, and by expanding the ability of municipalities to use inclusionary zoning.

Housing is a human right, and people in Ontario shouldn't have to sacrifice an arm and a leg to put a roof over their heads.

SANT TEJA SINGH JI

Mr. Amarjot Sandhu: This is a subject that is very personal to me and many Canadians of South Asian origin. I want to talk about an individual who was the first turban-wearing student to graduate from Harvard University, an individual who dedicated his life to fighting for a just society, and an individual who is known as one of the first ambassadors of Sikhism to the Western world. Speaker, his name is Sant Teja Singh Ji. He was an educator by profession who preached hard work and honest living.

1020

In the early 20th century, Sant Teja Singh Ji played a vital role in helping South Asian migrants in Canada achieve permanent residency. Without his valiant efforts, there would not be such a strong and vibrant South Asian presence in Canada today. As a result of his esteemed efforts, the province of British Columbia has declared July 1 as Sant Teja Singh Day.

Through you, Speaker, I would like to take the chance to appreciate his many achievements. As a Canadian with South Asian origins myself, I am well aware that I would not be in the position I am today without the selfless efforts of Sant Teja Singh Ji. He was truly a man ahead of his time, who served humanity without any distinction of caste, creed, race or colour. His life was his message to the world.

ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION

Ms. Jennifer K. French: I was recently joined on a beautiful fall day by the leader of the official opposition, the MPP for Hamilton West–Ancaster–Dundas, councilors 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 Ontario NDP form government in 2022.

Before the change in government, however, I wish it were possible to convince this current anti-environment PC government to protect these headwaters. I'm not optimistic, however, after the war we had over Duffins Creek. This Premier has paved over wetlands and farmlands, giving his buddies what they want, come hell or high water—and there will be high water. This Premier has slashed flood prevention programs by 50% and has hobbled conservation authorities.

Even though the now MPP for Ajax publicly committed to bringing the Carruthers Creek headwaters under the protection of the greenbelt when he was campaigning in 2018, just like other local PC Party campaign promises, they don't hold water—unlike wetlands, Speaker.

People and businesses in the area should be saved the heartache and cost of flooding. Building on the Carruthers Creek headwaters will increase downstream flooding in Ajax an average of 77%, as high as 113% in one region, according to the Toronto and Region Conservation Authority watershed study. The Carruthers Creek headwaters are comprised of prime agricultural lands containing sensitive hydrological features, and are completely surrounded by the greenbelt. The watershed is vulnerable and invaluable. We must protect it, so, government, please—please—add the Carruthers Creek headwaters to the greenbelt.

HOSPITAL FUNDING

Ms. Mitzie Hunter: Today, on behalf of my constituents in Scarborough–Guildwood, I stress the urgent need for a new hospital in Scarborough. A year ago, I asked the Minister of Health to advance funding to support our new hospital, and we are still waiting. Most of our hospital buildings were built between the 1950s and the 1980s. Today our hospitals rank at the very bottom in facilities conditions. We need an urgent response to move forward with Scarborough Health Network's renewal plans.

Just last week, I visited Scarborough's oldest senior, 110-year-old Ms. Dora Skeen, who was at the Scarborough General site. While on the seventh floor of the tower, I couldn't help but notice the narrow space that was crammed in with patients, nurses, PSWs and other staff. They were doing their best to make use of every inch.

I met a dedicated PSW and nurse, Natalie, who specializes in treating the feet of diabetes patients to save their limbs. It is my hope that we provide conditions that better support her work.

Thank you to the Scarborough Health Network and all the front-line workers for their perseverance in fighting this pandemic amidst facilities challenges. We owe so much to these front-line workers for saving lives and keeping us safe. Their team has vaccinated almost 600,000

individuals, conducted over 400,000 tests and admitted over 3,000 patients to treat COVID.

The SHN has created the 2030 Future Facilities plan, which specifies a vision for a new and expanded hospital facility. I urge the government to accept their proposal and not leave Scarborough behind.

STEVE MINNEMA

DAVID WICKHAM

Mr. Dave Smith: On a number of occasions during the three and a half years that I have represented Peterborough–Kawartha, I’ve had the distinct privilege to rise in this House to thank some extraordinary individuals for things that they have done. Today, I would like to talk about two individuals from the Peterborough Police Service: PC Steve Minnema, and PC Dave Wickham.

At approximately 4:30 in the afternoon on August 4 of this year, PC Minnema and PC Wickham arrived at PRHC on a completely unrelated matter, when they saw a man fully engulfed in flames trying to get to the hospital emergency department. PC Minnema and PC Wickham were able to intercept the man and extinguish the flames before he entered the hospital. This allowed hospital staff to assist him without the potential for additional injuries had he been able to get into the emergency room before the flames were extinguished. The actions of these two officers not only saved the life of this man, but they also prevented injuries to others who were in the ER department waiting room.

Speaker, most of us would have turned and ran when we saw someone running at us engulfed in flames, but not PC Minnema and PC Wickham. They quickly recognized what needed to be done and immediately jumped into action. They ran towards the flames, extinguished the fire and saved the man’s life without concern for their own.

From the bottom of my heart, PC Minnema and PC Wickham, thank you. Your actions were truly heroic.

FOOD BANKS

Ms. Sara Singh: Good morning, Speaker. It’s an honour to rise here on behalf of the people of Brampton Centre. I would like to take a moment to thank all of those who work in our food banks in our local community. I would like to acknowledge Angie Rehal, the acting executive director at Seva Food Bank; Gord Warren, the chairman at St. Andrew’s food bank in Brampton; as well as Annie Bynoe at the Knights Table, for the tremendous work that they have done to help serve our vulnerable community.

Speaker, as you know, food bank usage has increased across our province and across the country. Food Banks Canada, through their HungerCount 2021, estimates that there was a 20% increase in food bank usage across the nation, with one in four locations experiencing a 50% increase in demand.

We know that the pandemic has been difficult on individuals in our communities. The rising cost of food,

stagnant wages and business closures have made it harder and harder for people to get by. I’d like to take this opportunity to encourage all members here to donate and to encourage others in your community to donate to our local food banks—but more importantly, that we continue to fight against low-wage policies that push people into poverty, and that we help them with the wages that they need and the supports that they need to get through this pandemic and thrive in our local communities.

EVENTS IN BARRIE–INNISFIL

Ms. Andrea Khanjin: I am very proud and humbled to represent the riding of Barrie–Innisfil. It’s a great riding because we have so many local businesses and so many local charities that are really thriving this time of year, and really providing hope and giving a little in our community. I wanted to take this opportunity to remind people to give a little, choose local, and think of charities that have just started ramping up, like the Innisfil Rotary Club through their Innisfil Christmas for Kids campaign, where they’re getting help from Johnny Burger—so thank you, Johnny Burger, for all your efforts—and of course looking forward to their Santa Claus drive-through parade.

We also have Christmas Cheer in Barrie that has been operating for about 47 years. It’s incredible the work they do with local charities as well. And, of course, Youth Haven’s Boxes of Hope, where they provide hope for so many youth across Simcoe county.

But it’s not just our youth, young people and families; it’s also our seniors. I would be remiss if I didn’t mention the Senior Wish Association that is gathering boxes for seniors in our community, to lift up spirits and get back into that great holiday spirit.

We also have, of course, the second annual Light It Up Innisfil campaign by Jennifer Richardson and her family, as we try to always keep up with the Richardsons. It’s difficult sometimes, Speaker, because they’re doing a lot. But they are doing their Light It Up Innisfil event this year where proceeds will be going to, of course, the Innisfil Food Bank and Christmas for Kids. Last year, they had about 139 houses participate in the campaign of lighting up the ornaments and Christmas decorations outside their homes, and they raised over \$2,500. This year, we’re looking for even more.

So support local and your charities.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): That concludes our members’ statements for this morning.

1030

LEGISLATIVE PAGES

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): I am going to ask that our pages assemble.

It is my honour and pleasure to introduce this group of legislative pages:

From the riding of Don Valley West, Claire An; from the riding of Etobicoke North, Rishi Bhargava; from the

riding of Brantford–Brant, Eleanore Bouma; from the riding of Parkdale–High Park, Elinor Carter; from the riding of Whitby, Nathaniel Gardner; from the riding of University–Rosedale, Joel Kronis; from the riding of York–Simcoe, Hayden Lai; from the riding of Aurora–Oak Ridges–Richmond Hill, Serena Noronha; from the riding of Brampton North, Felicia Pagulayan; from the riding of Markham–Unionville, Athisha Surees; from Beaches–East York, Isabella Surman; and from the riding of Davenport, Alfie Tabachnick.

On behalf of all the members, I wish you our welcome and best wishes and our thanks for all the help that you're going to give us in the coming weeks.

Applause.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Now, back to work.

VISITORS

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): I'm also very pleased to inform the House that page Isabella Surman from the riding of Beaches–East York is today's page captain, and we have with us today at Queen's Park her mother, Sarah Cahill, and her father, Matthew Surman. Welcome to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

HUGH EDIGHOFFER

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): I recognize the government House leader on a point of order.

Hon. Paul Calandra: Mr. Speaker, if you seek it, you will find unanimous consent to allow members to make statements in remembrance for the late Mr. Hugh Edighoffer, with five minutes allotted to Her Majesty's government, five minutes allotted to Her Majesty's loyal opposition, and five minutes allotted to the independent members as a group.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Mr. Calandra is seeking the unanimous consent of the House to allow members to make statements in remembrance of the late Mr. Hugh Edighoffer, with five minutes allotted to Her Majesty's government, five minutes allotted to Her Majesty's loyal opposition, and five minutes allotted to the independent members as a group. Agreed? Agreed.

I recognize the member for Perth-Wellington.

Mr. Randy Pettapiece: It's truly an honour to pay tribute today to Hugh Edighoffer, someone who exemplified the very best of public service as MPP, as Speaker, and throughout his life.

Who was Hugh Edighoffer? When he passed away in July 2019, we read a simple statement in Hugh's obituary that was characteristic of the man's decency and humility: "Hugh was a small businessman, mayor, town councillor, member of provincial Parliament and Speaker of the Ontario Legislature." He was, indeed, those things. But to his family, friends, constituents and colleagues in public service, and all those who knew him, he was much more.

Hugh was a community builder. After graduating from college, Hugh returned to his hometown of Mitchell to work in the family business, a retail clothing store his

grandfather founded in 1924. With an early sense of public service, Hugh got involved in local service clubs, including the Lions Club and the chamber of commerce. In the 1950s and early 1960s, Hugh's dedication to community led him to local politics. He held various municipal offices, including councillor and mayor of Mitchell. With this experience, it's probably not surprising that as an MPP, he supported community-building projects. He knew their value.

That was my first experience with Hugh. I met him in the late 1980s, when I was on the building committee for the Monkton arena, now called the Elma-Logan Recreation Complex. We needed money to build it. These were the days before constituency offices, so we went to see Hugh at his home in Mitchell. He welcomed us, he heard us and he acted. He delivered an astonishing \$600,000 in funding. When the project was complete, he added to the grand opening ceremony, bringing along another distinguished community builder, Lincoln Alexander, then the Lieutenant Governor of Ontario.

Just an aside on that: On the day of the opening, Speaker, we lost Mr. Alexander. We couldn't find him. We had a secure room for him, and he wasn't there. So just before the ceremony was to start, his security guard started running around, looking for him. I was on my way to the men's washroom. I went into the washroom, and guess who was in there? Lincoln Alexander. And I said, "Sir, everybody is worried about your security and your safety, and people are looking for you right now." He looked at me, and he said, "I don't think anybody is going to shoot me in Monkton." And nobody did. So we continued on with the ceremony.

Years later, after I was first elected, I enjoyed sitting down to dinner with Hugh—and that's dinner at noon—at the Mitchell Legion on Fridays. He was always supportive and encouraging. And Hugh was determined. Hugh's determination is well known and well respected, but his election results over the years make it unmistakable. He first ran for a seat in the provincial Legislature in 1963. Despite receiving nearly 40% of the votes, he was not successful. Four years later, he tried again. His second attempt was a squeaker. He won the seat by only 184 votes. I know how that feels, Mr. Speaker.

Having won an election, Hugh didn't rest. He worked hard for his constituents. Throughout the 1970s, he won every election by a greater margin than the one before. By the election of 1977, Hugh won almost 70% of the votes in the riding of Perth, a plurality larger than any other in the province. Hugh easily won re-election again in 1981, 1985 and 1987.

His Progressive Conservative opponent in 1977 was Vivian Jarvis, who serves today in my constituency office. Before that election, Vivian visited Hugh and Nancy on their front porch. She recalls telling Hugh, "I'm not running against you; I'm running because we don't have a candidate."

Hugh was a statesman. It has been said, correctly, that Hugh elevated his constituents and public service over partisan politics or personal ambition. But he was always

a proud Liberal and even served as chairman of the Liberal caucus. By 1985, Hugh had accumulated considerable knowledge about the workings of the Legislature, having already served as Deputy Speaker in a minority Parliament. That and a well-earned reputation for impartiality made him the obvious choice to serve as the new Speaker.

In his book *Whose Servant I Am*, Clare Dale writes, “The man who many people felt was ‘one of the most non-partisan politicians at Queen’s Park’ became the second Speaker of the Legislative Assembly to be elected from the ranks of the opposition.”

Two weeks later, Frank Miller’s government fell, and David Peterson became Premier.

Dale goes on to write, “Impartiality became the watchword for Edighoffer’s initial term as Speaker.”

His well-earned reputation for impartiality was tested, as Dale also notes, in a series of tough decisions as Speaker. He passed those tests, however, and in 1987 went on to become only the third person since the 19th century to have served more than one term as Speaker.

Hugh was a constituency person. Though he may be remembered in the halls of Queen’s Park as a statesman and a Speaker, to those of us in Perth county, his greatest legacy is one of his service to his constituents. They were the reason he ran. He was a humble, good-humoured people person who cared about his community, and voters rewarded him for it. To this day, it’s a story worth remembering and it’s an example worth emulating.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): I recognize the member for London West.

Ms. Peggy Sattler: It is a pleasure to rise on behalf of the official opposition to pay tribute to one of the deans of the Ontario Legislature and one of the finest Speakers ever to preside in this chamber, Hugh Edighoffer.

Hugh Edighoffer served as the Liberal member of Parliament for the riding of Perth for 23 years, from 1967 to 1990, and before that as councillor and mayor. When he passed away in July 2019, the flags were lowered to half-mast at the municipal office in Mitchell, the community where Hugh grew up and where he dedicated most of his life to public service.

1040

Former Premier David Peterson first met Edighoffer in 1975 and describes him as one of the sweetest men on earth: quiet, modest, decent and kind. He was admired for his non-partisanship, well-liked by everyone who knew him and respected by voters across party lines for his strong work ethic and as a champion of rural issues.

When Hugh was first elected, MPPs did not have budgets to run constituency offices or to hire staff. Hugh had inherited the Edighoffer family clothing business and held constituency hours at the back of the store. Peterson told me that Hugh was a smart guy and realized it didn’t hurt that constituents could buy a pair of gloves on the way in or out.

A decade later, in 1985, Stratford Mayor Dan Mathieson met Edighoffer when he signed up as a 14-year-old campaign volunteer. Dan remembers Hugh picking him up to go out canvassing or to put up signs. When Dan

started volunteering on his own, Hugh always took the time to talk to Dan afterwards and ask how the canvass went. For Hugh, everything was a teachable moment. He not only asked Dan what people were saying at the door, but also what Dan had learned from the experience.

Hugh returned to Queen’s Park that year, becoming the second Speaker in Ontario’s history to be elected from the ranks of the opposition during the short-lived Frank Miller government. He became one of a handful of Speakers to serve more than one term when he was elected again in 1987 under Liberal Premier David Peterson. And although he did not run in the 1990 election, he served briefly as Speaker under NDP Premier Bob Rae until a new Speaker could be elected, making Hugh Edighoffer the only Ontario Speaker ever to serve under Conservative, Liberal and NDP governments.

Former NDP MPP David Warner succeeded Edighoffer as Speaker in 1990. Although there is no formal expectation that the outgoing Speaker will attend the election of the new Speaker, Hugh was there when David assumed the role in 1990 and was one of the first to offer his congratulations. David and Hugh would continue to see each other in the years that David served, and like every Speaker after him, including yourself, David considered Hugh a great friend. For David, Hugh exemplified the proud tradition of Speakers: always even-handed, always fair, always balanced and always respectful. He had a nice sense of humour too and was famous for his calm and patient “I’ll wait” when things got out of hand.

Thirteen years after Hugh stepped down, John Wilkinson was elected as Perth–Wellington MPP and regarded Hugh as a treasured mentor and role model. John said that there was only one person in the riding who actually watched the legislative channel, and that was Hugh—when he was not out golfing at the Mitchell Golf and Country Club. John and Hugh shared similar paths: both Liberals, both with young families when they entered political life, and both unsuccessful in their first run for office. John recalls Hugh telling him after that initial defeat, “Don’t give up. I did it and you can do it, too.”

When John won in 2003, he asked Hugh for his most important piece of advice. Hugh said, “If your wife ever calls you and asks you to go home, go home. Always put your family first, because they will be there long after politics is over.”

Hugh lived by those same words. For him, family was everything. He was devoted to his late wife, Nancy, and was a loving and joyful father, grandfather and great-grandfather.

To his family, we say a profound thank you for sharing such a kind, gracious and loyal public servant with the people of Perth and the province of Ontario.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Next, I’ll recognize the member for Guelph.

Mr. Mike Schreiner: I’m honoured to rise today to pay tribute to Hugh Edighoffer. Hugh’s accomplishments are very impressive. He was a small business owner, a mayor, a town councillor, MPP and Speaker of the Legislature, but most of all, he was a decent, respectful and respected person.

When he was appointed Speaker of the Legislature in 1985 from the opposition benches, he was nominated and seconded by the three party leaders serving in the Legislature at the time, and I think that says so much about Hugh's character. Former Premier David Peterson described him as a model to everybody, consensus-oriented. He made friends across party lines. Hugh was a model MPP, and for those of us who currently serve in the Legislature, someone who we can learn from. I'm inspired by his commitment to working across party lines.

I just want to say to Mr. Edighoffer's family: You must be so proud of his accomplishments and the fact that so many MPPs from so many different parties so respect Hugh's character and his public service. Thank you for sharing him with us.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Next, I'll recognize the member for Ottawa South.

Mr. John Fraser: It's an honour to say a few words of tribute to Hugh Alden Edighoffer: small businessman, mayor, town councillor, member of provincial Parliament for Perth and Speaker of the Ontario Legislature. He served this assembly on behalf of the people of Perth for 23 years. He was known for his impartiality and was one of the most non-partisan members of this House, qualities that served him well in this chamber.

I spoke to Gerry Phillips, a former member who most of us know, who served with him from 1987 to 1990. This is what he had to say about Hugh: "He was really a role model for Speaker. He commanded respect for himself and, by extension, for this assembly."

He presided over this Legislature in changing times. There was the accord of 1985, the televising of debates and other technological changes, the transfer of responsibility to the Speaker for the legislative precinct. He was the only Speaker to serve under Conservative, Liberal and New Democratic administrations in Ontario's history. But he left much more than that behind.

I was talking to John Wilkinson, MPP for Perth. He said that when he got here more than a decade after Hugh had left, staff at the assembly would routinely ask him, "How is Mr. Speaker?"—in reference to Hugh. He obviously left a very lasting impression on many people. It strikes me that what made him unique is that he listened and that he took a genuine interest in the people who were speaking to him and what they were talking to him about. Fairness, impartiality, taking a genuine interest: All those things, all those qualities set him apart.

All of us who sit here and all those who have gone before us, especially those who have to travel distances, know how much time we give up from our families. It is a big sacrifice. Hugh Edighoffer did that for 23 years to make his community, our province and this assembly a better place. Being separated from our families—well, that's something we all accept as part of the job. But when you become Speaker, something else happens: You become separated from your other family, your caucus colleagues. Hugh served as Liberal caucus chair for a long time. These were people who you're on a journey with. They're like a family. By virtue of the office, you need to

back away. You don't spend as much time together. That's a big sacrifice.

Speaker, I think the people who make the greatest sacrifice are actually our families. They give up a lot to allow us to be here and try to build better communities and a better province for everybody. So to Hugh's family—his late wife Nancy; his children Susan, Katie, Bob, and Jan; his grandchildren and his great-grandchildren; his sisters Maxine, Mary and Lloy and their families—we can't thank you enough for allowing Hugh to be here, to support him, to do the kinds of things that he did here to make Ontario a better place, to make his community a better place, and to make this assembly a better place for all of us here.

Applause.

1050

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): I want to thank the members for their tributes. I know that all members join me in giving thanks to the family of Hugh Edighoffer and offering thanks for his life in public service. Thank you very much.

ORDER OF BUSINESS

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Point of order, government House leader.

Hon. Paul Calandra: Mr. Speaker, if you seek it, you will find unanimous consent to move a motion without notice respecting the arrangement of House business to accommodate the Indigenous art unveiling ceremony this Thursday.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The government House leader is seeking the unanimous consent of the House to move a motion without notice respecting the arrangement of House business to accommodate the Indigenous art unveiling ceremony this Thursday. Agreed? Agreed.

Government House leader.

Hon. Paul Calandra: Thank you, Speaker.

That, immediately following the afternoon routine on Thursday, November 18, 2021, the House shall adjourn to allow for an unveiling ceremony to take place in the chamber; and

That the ceremony be broadcast on the ONT.PARL network and a full Hansard transcript of the ceremony be prepared; and

Notwithstanding standing order 101(a), that ballot item numbers 12 and 13 be considered consecutively on Tuesday, November 23, 2021, during the time for private members' public business.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The government House leader has moved that, immediately following the afternoon routine on Thursday, November 18, 2021, the House shall adjourn to allow for an unveiling ceremony to take place in the chamber; and

That the ceremony be broadcast on the ONT.PARL network and a full Hansard transcript of the ceremony be prepared; and

Notwithstanding standing order 101(a), that ballot item numbers 12 and 13 be considered consecutively on Tuesday, November 23, 2021, during the time for private members' public business.

Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry?
Carried.

Motion agreed to.

QUESTION PERIOD

CHILD CARE

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

Yesterday, Alberta signed the deal for \$10-a-day child care with the federal government, and families here in Ontario are asking about what's happening here in this province. Does the government not get the urgency here, that families actually need a break—and \$10-a-day child care would be a great break.

The costs of everything are going up. I think everybody acknowledges that. Child care expenses are one of the biggest that families have, sometimes costing more than the mortgage.

Yesterday the federal minister said this: "We are still waiting on that action plan and while I very much welcome the letter from Minister Lecce, we're still waiting for more details from the province of Ontario."

Why has Ontario still not done its homework, leaving families to wait even longer? Why do we not have that child care deal right now?

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): To respond, the Minister of Education.

Hon. Stephen Lecce: Thank you to the member opposite for the question.

Indeed, Ontario wants to get a good deal, a fair deal for the families we serve.

Mr. Speaker, the offer by the federal government would not get us to \$10 a day—not in year 1, not in year 5, not at any point in the duration of that agreement.

I would hope that every member of this Legislature is resolved to stand up for families who want a deal that gets us to \$10, a fair share that reflects the interests of families and the fact that this province has one of the most comprehensive child care systems in the world—in this country, no doubt, and we're proud of that, including the \$3.6 billion we expend for 260,000 four- and five-year-olds. We want that recognized by the federal government. We want an investment that does not penalize Ontario because we happen to have the most progressive, comprehensive system in the nation. We want a better deal that is sustainable, that is flexible and that truly achieves the objective of the federal mandate, which is \$10 a day for all families in this province.

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

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Speaker, yesterday the government was spinning something like \$21 or \$22 an hour, and they're so out of touch that they don't realize that would immediately reduce costs by about 50% for families right here in this city and around the province. It would reduce them significantly.

We know that child care is not just about children and families. It's also about the economy, especially on the heels of this pandemic, when many, many women still have not returned to work. The Centre for Future Work says that a child care deal could create literally thousands of jobs and increase the GDP significantly. More importantly, it helps young children to succeed. That is the evidence-based reality about what child care offers, Speaker.

Why does this government not understand that helping young families afford a quality life here in an increasingly unaffordable Ontario should be a priority? Why is the Premier still refusing to bring a \$10-a-day affordable child care plan to this province?

Hon. Stephen Lecce: The Premier is very committed to affordable child care. It's why in the first budget we unveiled the Ontario Child Care Tax Credit, which provides roughly \$1,500 per child in savings, a measure that was opposed each and every year by the New Democrats and Liberals in this House.

But with that said, Speaker, we know there is more that can be done. The federal government contributes roughly 2.5% of Ontario's contribution of child care. They should be doing much, much more.

Now, we agree that childcare is expensive. It is an inherited legacy of the former Liberals—roughly 40% higher than the national average here in Ontario. That is absolutely unacceptable. We agree. It's why we're at the table with the feds. It's why we've made the case that we're being shortchanged. And I thought the New Democrats at least would want to stand up to the Justin Trudeau Liberals to say, "Look, Ontarians are being shortchanged billions of dollars that will not lead us to \$10 a day." That's the commitment the federal government made. That's what we expect of them: to invest in a program that delivers a sustainable, flexible, long-term, affordable program that all families can enjoy and, more importantly, all families can benefit from.

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

Ms. Andrea Horwath: With all due respect, who New Democrats stand up for is the families who desperately need affordable child care in this province. That's who we stand up for, Speaker.

I don't disagree with the minister that, in fact, the child care system was broken under the Liberals after 15 years. They did nothing to fix it. But what we need is a fix that makes it affordable for families. What we need is a fix that increases accessibility, making sure we have more spaces for families to be able to put children into child care. We need high-quality care with decently paid workers to make sure that care stays high quality. These are the fixes that this province needs.

The question is, why won't this government actually get its act together and bring \$10-a-day child care to families in Ontario who continue to struggle with the rising cost of everything? When will the government prioritize child care?

Hon. Stephen Lecce: We're putting the priority on Ontario families that expect their MPPs in this House to stand up for the best deal possible. It's an abdication of leadership for the members opposite to want us to sign any deal—the first deal that comes to the province—that would have ensured a shortchange of billions of dollars. That just seems inconceivable when we were sent here to stand up for the provincial interest.

I didn't expect the leader of the NDP to be the champion for the federal Liberals. I expected her and every member of this House to say to the federal government we want a better deal, one that actually invests in the children of this province, a comprehensive system that is more sustainable and more flexible, and a program that actually gets to \$10 a day, not \$21 or \$43 a day; that's not what they committed to. We want a commitment that is long term, not a five-year program that creates short-term savings, no doubt, but long-term challenges for families. We want the feds to be at the table and stand with the province through a program that is sustainable, that is flexible and that truly delivers on their commitment of affordable child care for all families in Ontario.

AFFORDABLE HOUSING

Ms. Andrea Horwath: My next question is also for the Premier. Yesterday afternoon, this government voted against making life more affordable for Ontarians, so it's not surprising that they don't care about getting that child care deal to take the burden off of families. Not only are they totally out of touch with how hard it is for everyday folks to build the life that they're working towards, but this government is making it absolutely worse. Low-wage policies, high housing costs, the price of everything going through the roof: auto insurance, hydro, food. Now they are polling on how to politically take advantage of a housing crisis that's been unfolding in this province for years now. The Liberals ignored it. The PCs are making it worse.

Will this Premier stop polling on housing and actually help people to be able to afford a roof over their head in this province?

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

Hon. Peter Bethlenfalvy: Thank you to the member opposite for the question. Of course, I would submit that 760,000 Ontarians who received a minimum wage increase to \$15 is something that makes their lives more affordable. That's over \$1,300 for those at the minimum wage. That's over \$5,000 for a liquor server. I think if you talk to the three quarters of a million workers in this province who face, every single day, prices going up—there's no question about that, and it's something that we're always very concerned about. But this government is very focused on helping the workers in this province and helping those who help us build this province into a more prosperous province for all families and for all Ontarians.

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

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Well, Speaker, in fact this government's low-wage policies make it harder and harder for people to afford to put a roof over their head. But instead of trying to fix the problem, this government continues to poll on what it is that needs to be done with the housing crisis.

The Premier shouldn't need to poll to understand that we are in an extremely problematic housing price crisis everywhere in the entire province. In Mississauga, a single-family home is now \$1.4 million. In Hamilton, the average condo price is \$577,000. You can't even get a house in this city, in Toronto, for less than a million bucks.

Why won't the Premier stop worrying about himself and his political advantage—or future, for that matter—and actually focus on making life more affordable in Ontario for people who are trying to pay the mortgage or even just have a roof over their head?

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

Hon. Steve Clark: Driven by a severe shortage of housing supply, rental housing and affordable housing has become unattainable for many Ontarians. Despite all the efforts by the government as part of our housing supply action plan, despite all of the improvements we have seen in terms of housing starts, construction starts and rental housing starts, we know as a government that there is much, much more we can do.

As the finance minister said in his fall economic statement, we will be appointing in the near future a housing affordability task force to give us further suggestions to build upon the success that our housing supply action plan moves forward. I will have more details in the near future, Speaker. Thank you for the question.

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

Ms. Andrea Horwath: I invite the minister to look at our housing policy, which we put out over a year ago now, because we knew that Ontarians needed some hope in terms of the rising housing costs in this province.

But look, those costs are going through the roof, and the Premier continues to keep wages low in the meantime. The Canadian Real Estate Association forecasts that Ontario's average house will skyrocket to \$942,000 in 2022, and that's almost a quarter of a million higher than in 2020—a quarter of a million dollars more in a matter of two years.

Everyday Ontarians can't even afford to get into a home. They're struggling to make their mortgage payments. Some 37,000 people left this province, the greatest number in 30 years. They abandoned an unaffordable Ontario. Instead of fixing this crisis, the Premier is busy polling on what might be popular for him politically.

How can the Premier stick to this wrong-headed, low-wage policy when everything—especially the cost of the fundamental need that everyone has, the price of housing—is getting out of control and going through the roof?

Hon. Steve Clark: Despite COVID-19, housing starts are still up significantly since the pandemic. In fact, the housing sector invested over \$25.6 billion in new housing in 2020, which is about \$4.5 billion more than the previous year. Right in the Leader of the Opposition's city of Hamilton, housing starts in 2020 were up 7% over 2019, and year-to-date in 2021 shows that they're currently 38% higher.

I acknowledged in the previous answer that there is much more to do. Our government, again, is going to be building upon the success of our housing supply action plan. We're not done yet, Speaker.

OPTOMETRY SERVICES

Mr. Chris Glover: My question is for the Minister of Health.

November is Diabetes Awareness Month, and we know that the Minister of Health knows about it because she tweeted about it. But does she also know that diabetes is the leading cause of blindness in Canada? That's why it's so important that people with type 1 diabetes, like Thomas Young and Jacob, who are Spadina–Fort York constituents, can get an eye exam. But they haven't been able to get an eye exam because of this government's unwillingness to negotiate a fair deal with Ontario's optometrists.

Ontario's children and seniors are also not able to get the eye care that they need, including the seven-year-old daughter of Jagbir, who needs her first prescription glasses so that she can read the chalk board at school; and seniors including Gita Schwartz, Rob Whelan, Myrna Copeland, Candi Gill and her husband, who are experiencing vision loss. In fact, it has been 77 days since anyone has been able to receive OHIP-covered eye exams.

Will the government stop spinning excuses, truly value our residents' health and eyesight and enter into good-faith bargaining to achieve a fair deal with Ontario's optometrists?

Hon. Christine Elliott: Well, I can certainly agree with the member's question. It is very concerning that many young people are not receiving the treatment they need, and many seniors aren't as well. But that is not because the government is not paying for these OHIP-covered services. We continue to pay for them. The fact of the matter is that the Ontario Association of Optometrists has decided not to provide these services. They are demanding certain outcomes before we even start into negotiations.

They broke off the negotiations with the mediator of their choice. They asked for \$39 million in back payments because their previous agreement ran out in 2011 under the previous government. We want to make things right with them. We paid that \$39 million into their account. They've asked for an increase going forward on the same basis that physicians would receive. We are offering that at 8.48%, retroactive to April 1 of this year, and we want to go into negotiations with them to discuss their overhead costs.

These are all things that they've asked for. These are all things that we're willing to discuss. We ask them to come back—

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

Mr. Chris Glover: The government continues to give excuses, like the 8.48% that they just mentioned, which would increase funding to \$48 per exam. But an independent audit says that they need at least \$75 per exam just to cover their costs, without optometrists actually being paid. The government says that they are open to negotiations, but they refuse to even offer cost recovery funding to restart those negotiations.

My leader, the leader of the official opposition NDP, and the president of the Ontario Association of Optometrists both wrote to the minister last week, asking for a fair deal. Even a member of the government's own caucus publicly admitted the government uses "heavy-handed tactics" and "opted to ignore this important file."

When will the government stop spinning excuses and negotiate a fair deal so that Spadina–Fort York optometrists like Dr. Deepak Malkani, Dr. Shannon Fernandez, Dr. Melissa Yuen, Dr. Mario Santos and Dr. Abraham Yuen can get back to doing what they want to do, what they were trained to do, which is to assist people with their eye care?

Hon. Christine Elliott: The fact of the matter is our government is very anxious for optometrists to continue providing these services to people under 18, to people over 65 and everyone else in between. We have offered to go back to the table. The mediator has set out some terms that he wants to see abided by in order for the arbitration to continue. We've agreed to do that. We have agreed with all of those conditions, but the optometrists have not.

We want to make sure that we can cover as many of their costs as possible, but we need to see what their overhead costs are to do our proper due diligence as custodians of public funds. We want to reach a deal that's going to be fair to the taxpayers of Ontario and fair to the optometrists.

We want to put a group together to work with the optometrists to look into these issues. All we need at this point—because we are ready, willing and able to pursue those negotiations—we need the optometrists to come back to the table. So if you're speaking with those optometrists, would you please ask their association to come back to the table so we can complete a deal and make sure everyone receives the eye care they need in the province of Ontario?

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

The next question.

RESEARCH AND INNOVATION

Mr. Vijay Thanigasalam: My question is for the Minister of Colleges and Universities.

Speaker, as you are well aware, the COVID-19 pandemic has emphasized the importance of research. Conducting research here at home would allow Ontario to discover, commercialize and advance technologies and remain competitive. Additionally, research leads to the creation of new knowledge and insight, which can bring high-quality change to society.

Speaker, through you to the minister: What is this minister and the government doing to keep Ontario competitive in research and innovation?

Hon. Jill Dunlop: Thank you to the member from Scarborough–Rouge Park for that important question. Our government is committed to investing in research and innovation in order to compete and thrive in the global economy. The Ontario government, in the fall economic statement, is investing an additional \$48 million over two years to support groundbreaking research initiatives across the province, from London to Kingston to Sudbury and beyond.

Funding will go to support the work being done at the Perimeter Institute, SNOLAB and advanced research computing facilities. These initiatives will put Ontario at the forefront of innovation and ensure that research and research infrastructure continue to be competitive, to attract the best and brightest researchers to this province. Ontario is committed to supporting research to advance new discoveries and innovation, foster a skilled labour force and promote new business opportunities across the province.

1110

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

Mr. Vijay Thanigasalam: Thank you to the minister for the answer. It is great to hear that our government is investing in the future of research here at home in Ontario. When we think about research, we think about knowledge, data and information. It is essential for Ontario's research institutes and post-secondary institutions to discover, commercialize and adopt advanced technologies to remain competitive.

Speaker, through you, can the minister tell us how this funding will benefit Ontario's research institutes and post-secondary institutions and our province as a whole?

Hon. Jill Dunlop: Thank you to the member for your interest in this exciting initiative. It is essential for Ontario's research institutes and post-secondary institutions to discover, commercialize and adopt advanced technologies to remain competitive. Advanced technologies have the potential to increase productivity and create new revenue opportunities to deliver high-quality products and services. This, in turn, helps create highly skilled jobs and enhances the global competitiveness of Ontario's companies.

Our government is saying yes to investing in research to solve complex problems. This research will lead us to addressing climate change, improving cyber security or finding cures for cancer right here in Ontario. Our government is thrilled to see this \$48-million investment to support research excellence to support key research initiatives.

I'd like to thank the Perimeter Institute for hosting me last week, Ranil Sonnadara from Compute Ontario, and Dr. Virtue from SNOLAB, who drove five hours from Sudbury to join us.

INDIGENOUS AFFAIRS

Mr. Peter Tabuns: To the minister of Indigenous relations: Yesterday, Grassy Narrows First Nation announced

they're pursuing legal action against Ontario for issuing mining exploration permits which authorize companies to drill for gold on their territory. In a statement, Chief Randy Fobister said, very clearly, "The government isn't working with us, they are working against us. They need to stop logging and mining so the land can heal. Good land will heal our people from all the damage the government has been pushing on us," like mercury and industry.

Will the government listen to the leadership of Grassy Narrows and rescind those permits?

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The parliamentary assistant, the member for Peterborough–Kawartha, to respond.

Mr. Dave Smith: What has been issued have been exploration permits, and I can arrange a briefing for the member if he'd like to have a better understanding of what the difference is between the types of permits. The crown has a duty to consult with Aboriginal communities in relation to approval for mining exploration. Our government takes the challenges faced by the people of Grassy Narrows very, very seriously, and we are engaging in conversation with them. But because this matter has now come before the courts, I'm afraid that I'm not able to discuss anything further about it.

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

Mr. Peter Tabuns: The government did not consult or even notify the people of Grassy Narrows before issuing these permits—not consult, not even notify. But now that the people of Grassy Narrows know what's going on, they are being perfectly clear.

Chief Fobister went on to say, "Since Premier Ford came into power there has been a huge expansion of mining claims and permits on our territory, and now the government is starting to plan for more industrial logging on part of our territory again. How many times must our people fight off these attacks on our health and our way of life?"

The community is being very clear about their needs. Why won't the government listen?

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Again to respond, the—

Interjections.

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

Member for Peterborough–Kawartha.

Mr. Dave Smith: The ministry continues to work with Grassy Narrows to establish a positive relationship and promote reconciliation, and to ensure that the community is appropriately consulted regarding proposals to resource development in the area. We actually have a meeting scheduled with them for Thursday of this week.

But because the matter is before the courts, it would be inappropriate for me to comment any further.

COVID-19 IMMUNIZATION

Mr. Roman Baber: My question is to the Minister of Health.

For more than a year, the government was telling Ontarians that vaccination is the way out of the pandemic. Ontarians endured measures, lockdowns and mandates. They're now subjected to segregation and passports. But alas, the goalpost is moving again.

Over the last week, we've heard from Dr. Isaac Bogoch, who advised the government on its vaccine rollout. Bogoch confirmed yesterday that efficacy of the vaccine is reduced after six months, which is why Ontario is rolling out boosters. And last week, Bogoch tweeted that the vaccine is just a helpful tool providing incremental benefit.

My question to the Minister of Health: As almost 90% of Ontarians are fully vaccinated, does she still believe that the vaccine is the way out, and if so, why aren't we out?

Hon. Christine Elliott: This is a pandemic. I hope the member realizes that. We're not in the endemic stage of it yet.

We do have over 88.6% of our adults aged 12 and over who have received the first dose—85.6%. We're well on our way to reaching the 90% strategy that we've been aiming for. We're working on our last-mile strategy right now.

In the meantime, compared to many countries in the world—you will have noticed that over five million people have died from this pandemic around the world right now.

With this rollout of vaccination, we are saving lives. And for people who are doubly vaccinated, who also can still contract COVID-19, it's going to save their life because it will mean that they will not have nearly as toxic a case. They will largely be out of hospitals.

As you can see by the numbers, even though we have gone up in numbers, as we expected with the colder weather coming—this was not unanticipated—we currently have only 137 people in our intensive care units right now, which includes 11 people from Saskatchewan.

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

Mr. Roman Baber: Speaker, the government moved the goalpost again. Maybe the Minister of Health was just kidding when, for the last 12 months, she was telling us that the vaccines are the way out. Public health is making it up as it goes along.

Speaker, it's a new virus and it's a new vaccine, which is why we need to start having frank conversations instead of censorship by the COVID-19 mob.

From two weeks to flatten the curve to—

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): I'm going to ask the member to withdraw.

Mr. Roman Baber: Withdrawn.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): I'll ask the member to conclude his question.

Mr. Roman Baber: From two weeks to flatten the curve to slow the spread, from slow the spread to stop the spread, from stop the spread to 70% vaccinated, then 85% vaccinated—now we're at 90% vaccinated, but on Sunday, on CTV, the head of the science table, Dr. Jüni, said that we need two weeks to flatten the curve. Did Jüni mean to be funny?

My question to the Minister of Health: 90% of us are vaccinated. If the vaccine is effective and is the way out,

then why do we need another two weeks to flatten the curve?

Hon. Christine Elliott: It's hard to know where to start with this one, but let's just start with this: I don't know who the member has been speaking with as to the medical evidence here, but the vaccine has been recommended by the World Health Organization, by the Food and Drug Administration in the US, by Health Canada, by the National Advisory Committee on Immunization. It has been proven to be effective in saving people's lives. It's not the only factor. There are many other things that we need to do, such as wearing masks, which is what we're doing here today, such as maintaining physical distancing, frequent handwashing, adequate ventilation. All of these things are important. It's not just one single thing.

But out of all of these issues, vaccination is the most important issue. That's why it is fundamentally important for us to get to a 90% vaccination rate in Ontario, so that we can then start to see this as an endemic rather than a pandemic.

We are not out of this yet. I urge everyone who has not received a vaccination yet, please do so. It will save your life.

COVID-19 RESPONSE

Ms. Laurie Scott: My question is to the Minister of Community, Children and Social Services.

Our province has come a long way in the fight against COVID-19 thanks to our front-line workers, nurses and health care providers across the province. Although the end of COVID-19 is in sight, we cannot yet take it for granted. Some of Ontario's most vulnerable populations live in congregate care settings, including homes for adults with developmental disabilities, shelters, children's residential settings, youth justice facilities and Indigenous residential programs. These populations are disproportionately affected by COVID-19 and require more support than you or I.

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My question is, how is this government continuing to support front-line workers and some of this government's most important vulnerable citizens?

Hon. Merrilee Fullerton: Thank you, to the member from Haliburton-Kawartha Lakes-Brock, for your good work on behalf of your constituents.

Since the onset of the pandemic, our government took immediate steps, immediate action to protect our province's most vulnerable people and the front-line staff who care for them in residential settings. This government understands that the fight against COVID is not over, and that's why, as announced in the fall economic statement, we are continuing to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic. We are taking further action to protect Ontario's most vulnerable populations and ensure the safety of those in congregate care settings, including homes for adults with developmental disabilities, shelters, children's residential settings, youth justice facilities and Indigenous residential programs, with an additional investment of \$8.9 million in

2021-22. Thank you, Speaker. And thank you for the question.

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

Ms. Laurie Scott: Thank you to the Minister of Children, Community and Social Services for her answer and dedication to this file and for explaining the government's action in supporting our vulnerable populations.

My question is back to the minister: I appreciate that the government has adapted with the evolving science to meet the situation throughout the pandemic and followed the advice and guidance of the Chief Medical Officer of Health. This additional investment is necessary to ensure the health and safety of those in congregate care, both for residents and their care providers. In these extraordinary times, it has become clear that COVID-19 must be stopped at the doors of congregate settings through measures like enhanced screening and use of PPE.

My question is, can the minister tell us what the additional investment will mean to residents and caregivers in congregate care?

Hon. Merrilee Fullerton: Thank you again to our good member from Haliburton–Kawartha Lakes–Brock. Our government is building on the previous investments of \$131 million with an additional investment of \$8.9 million in 2021-22 for COVID-19 supports in congregate care settings to ensure the province's most vulnerable and those who care for them are safe. This funding will help to provide support, such as personal protective equipment, infection prevention and control measures and HEPA filters to improve ventilation, which is increasing in importance. These supports will help reduce transmission of the virus and allow residents and staff to be better protected against COVID-19.

Our government recognizes that we have come a long way in combatting COVID-19, and we are committed to continuing all of our efforts until COVID-19 is curbed.

DRIVER EXAMINATION CENTRES

Mr. Michael Mantha: My question is for the Premier. My office received a letter from the CAO of Central Manitoulin explaining that they are facing a shortage of volunteer firefighters who have a valid D licence. Their issue isn't the lack of willing volunteers; they have people ready to go. The issue is that they aren't able to schedule a road test until April 2022 due to testing backlogs. People in my riding can't wait five months to have a fully staffed fire department. They need to know that when there is an emergency, there will be someone ready to respond right away.

The DriveTest backlog has gone on long enough, and the government needs to take action now. One extra examiner isn't going to make a dent in the demands we are facing in the north. Will the Premier commit now to open new DriveTest locations in the north and allocate the resources necessary to end the backlog across this province?

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

Hon. Caroline Mulroney: I thank the member opposite for the question. I understand the frustration of Ontarians across the province in accessing DriveTests in every part of the province—in the north, in the south. That's why, in June, I introduced an aggressive plan with a committed investment of over \$16 million to tackle the backlog of in-vehicle passenger road tests and to ensure that everyone who needs a test can book one. As part of this plan, we've opened over nine temporary road test facilities and we're hiring an additional 251 examiners who are offering road tests with extended hours on weekends and weekdays. Just recently, we opened three additional temporary road test facilities, and we are looking at adding one additional DriveTest examiner in every location in the north.

Mr. Speaker, we know how important this is to all Ontarians. We have a province-wide plan to deal with the DriveTest backlog, but we ask for Ontarians' patience.

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

Mr. Michael Mantha: Again, my question to the Premier—Ruth, let me try again. This is question period, not answer period, and I do apologize.

This town CAO writes, "Our volunteer firefighters are having great difficulty. When a call comes in, there are not enough qualified drivers for the fire trucks.

"We have some qualified drivers, but since it's a volunteer force they are not always available or in the area to respond to every call. This situation can't go on."

Speaker, this is a vital emergency service that the town cannot go without. This is not unique to Algoma–Manitoulin municipalities. People's health and welfare is at stake because the Premier continues to ignore rural and northern communities.

Will the Premier recognize that he is failing people in rural communities and urgently address the growing DriveTest backlog with additional testing locations in the north?

Hon. Caroline Mulroney: Look, the problem in the north didn't happen overnight. Our government is tackling the road test backlog that COVID-19 created, but the north has historically faced capacity challenges that predate the pandemic and that certainly predate this government. These issues were the result of neglect by the previous Liberals, who had 15 years to increase testing capacity in the north but couldn't get it done.

Mr. Speaker, we have an aggressive plan in place, and we are by no means leaving northerners behind when it comes to our aggressive strategy to tackle the backlog. I am aware of the specific issues in the Algoma DriveTest centre, and we are looking at specific responses to it. I can commit to the member opposite that we can be in touch and talk about what our approach will be.

CLIMATE CHANGE

M^{me} Lucille Collard: My question is to the Minister of the Environment, Conservation and Parks. Earlier this month, international activists and political leaders met at

COP26 in Glasgow to talk about commitment to reducing emissions. Ontarians were excited. They thought, “Well, maybe this is it. Maybe we will finally know how this government will join the rest of the country in fighting climate change.” Ontarians paid to send our Minister of the Environment to COP26, but the Premier sent him empty-handed. We know that, Mr. Speaker, because we’ve heard nothing from the minister about the conference or the work he did over there. Climate change conferences are not paid vacations. These conferences are essential work sessions to coordinate efforts against this existential threat.

My question is, what is the minister’s justification for going to COP26, and what work did he do to advance climate action?

Hon. David Piccini: The member is indeed incorrect. I was honoured to be a part of the Canadian delegation at the COP conference, where I spoke at length and with a number of different stakeholders about the important work Ontario is doing to tackle climate change. The member opposite would know, in fact, that Ontario leads Canada in greenhouse gas reductions, thanks, in part, to investments that this government has made into transportation: record investments into subways; record investments into expanding GO Transit; fuel additives that are going to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, equivalent to taking approximately 300,000 cars off the road. We met with a number of delegations about our hydrogen strategy that Ontario is launching, our climate change impact assessment—the first of its kind in Canada to build resiliency to fight climate change. We spoke at length with a number of other provinces keen to learn about Ontario’s experiences.

I will follow up a little more with detailed meetings in the supplementary, but I was honoured to be a part of Canada’s delegation to fight climate change.

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

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M^{me} Lucille Collard: But nothing of that was shared during the conference, and we’re still wondering what happened there.

Mr. Speaker, this government has demonstrated their lack of commitment to climate action by spending Ontarians’ tax dollars on efforts to make polluting free. One of the first things the government did was cancel the cap-and-trade program, after companies had already bought in to it—I was expecting applause for that. The direct impact of this backtracking by this government is that millions of tonnes of additional carbon have been emitted since 2018.

The government spent \$30 million fighting the federal carbon tax in court, and \$4 million in advertising campaigns to convince Ontarians that climate change is not important. Now the government is selling off the greenbelt to wealthy developers and using MZOs to strip away the role of conservation authorities and bypass environmental laws.

My question is, does this government think it should be free to pollute in Ontario?

Hon. David Piccini: I think it’s important to understand the facts. That member is a part of a party who, when in government, could have expanded the use of clean fuels; they didn’t. That government could have learned from the COP conference in Paris and launched a climate change impact assessment to build adaptation and resiliency; they didn’t. They could have built subways and encouraged Ontarians to take active transportation through subways, through expanding GO trains; they didn’t. They could have expanded green space, they could have added more parks, they could have expanded more wetlands; they didn’t. They could have invested in green bonds—over \$7.7 billion that this government has invested in green bonds—they didn’t.

When I was at COP, I spoke to Tamar Zandberg about the important work in waste water that Shafdan is doing in Israel, to inform the important legislation I introduced for York, an ever-growing community.

They say no to highways. They say no to improving waste water management in the province of Ontario, Mr. Speaker. We met with an important round table on electric vehicles. Again, that government could have built manufacturing and—

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

The next question

AGRI-FOOD INDUSTRY

Mr. Stephen Crawford: My question is to the Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs.

Throughout COVID, agri-food businesses experienced unexpected costs to protect the health and safety of employees. Other agri-food businesses have experienced labour challenges that have disrupted their operations and our food processing and supply chains. Food Processing Skills Canada projects a shortfall in full-time food processing jobs that will reach 65,000 across Canada by 2025, and according to the Canadian Agricultural Human Resource Council, Canada will face a shortage of 123,000 workers by 2029, with the majority of that shortfall here in Ontario.

Mr. Speaker, to the Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs: What is our government doing to address these shortfalls and help grow this valuable sector of our economy?

Hon. Lisa M. Thompson: I appreciate the question from the hard-working member for Oakville, because the incredible jobs that exist in the agri-food sector are right here in the GTHA and across small-town and rural Ontario. Our government, with Premier Ford at the lead, is working so hard to make sure that we are taking the right steps and growing investments to make sure people understand the incredible opportunities that exist within this sector.

Just last month, our government announced, through the Canadian Agricultural Partnership, that Canada, together with Ontario, is investing \$1.5 million to address some of our province’s agri-food sector labour challenges.

This investment will build a strong labour force that will support projects that identify and address labour challenges that we are currently facing.

And I can tell you, Speaker, with absolute certainty, that we have a sector that wants to work with our government, because they trust and believe in what we're doing when it comes to great jobs growing in the agri-food sector in Ontario.

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

Mr. Stephen Crawford: It's great to hear that this government is taking concrete steps to respond to the agri-food industry's labour shortage. However, while an aging workforce is part of the issue, we also know that the reason for the shortage is a result of the specific challenges in attracting entry-level and experienced skilled workers to jobs and careers in that particular sector.

Mr. Speaker, to the Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs: What is the government doing to address the skills gap in Ontario's agri-food industry?

Hon. Lisa M. Thompson: Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, the agri-food sector in Ontario had over 720,000 workers. We hear day in and day out now, on a regular basis, that people are looking for people to fill the job shortages that we have in this industry.

We're working so hard to attract young people and adults with transferable skills to this particular sector. We are looking at opportunities that will provide well-paying careers. That includes innovation, technology, STEM, automation, robotics. The Minister of Colleges and Universities is working very hard with the Minister of Labour with regard to increasing awareness of the amazing trades that are available through this sector, but there are professional positions as well.

The chair of AgScape—AgScape is agriculture in the classroom, promoting good-quality jobs—was speaking to the Premier, and I can tell you that commodity organizations, industries like Food and Beverage Ontario and our government will—

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

GOVERNMENT ACCOUNTABILITY

Mr. Joel Harden: My question is for the Premier.

After being out of service for almost two months due to a sixth train derailment, the Ottawa LRT resumed partial service last Friday. But public confidence in our LRT that has been plagued with issues from the start remains at an all-time low.

For over a year, I have been insisting with this government that they take action and address the mess. I have heard, "It's the city of Ottawa's problem," until very recently.

Late last week, the Minister of Transportation—good morning, Minister—said that the government is considering options to promote accountability, including a judicial inquiry and an Ontario Auditor General investigation, which I've been requesting.

Speaker, residents in Ottawa are fed up. They want answers, and they deserve accountability.

My question to the Premier: Will he mandate a provincial judicial inquiry under the Municipal Act and join us here in the official opposition by asking the Auditor General of Ontario to conduct an investigation into this mess?

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): To reply, the Minister of Transportation.

Hon. Caroline Mulroney: As members of this House know well, getting transit built in Ontario is a priority for our government. We must build with respect for transit riders and for taxpayers.

I am frustrated with the challenges that have plagued stage 1 of the Ottawa LRT. We've become increasingly concerned with the city's ability to successfully carry out future phases of this work. Ontario is a funding partner, and it's important that we have confidence in the city to deliver, especially given the size and the scope of stage 2. We've also heard from industry stakeholders and city councillors who have expressed concern about the execution of phase 1. So we are looking at options that will increase the province's oversight of the project to ensure the best value for taxpayer dollars moving forward. All options are on the table. This may include a judicial review, a review by Ontario's Auditor General and further measures that may require—

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Response?

Hon. Caroline Mulroney:—legislation.

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

Mr. Joel Harden: It's encouraging to hear that this morning, Speaker, but I can honestly tell you, and I'll tell the minister through you, that there are some people in Ottawa who do not want a judicial review.

Lobbyists and insiders are worried, like Mr. Brian Guest, a major LRT consultant who told former Ottawa mayor Bob Chiarelli in an email that a judicial inquiry would—and these are his words—"screw" him. Those were his words, released to the media by Mr. Chiarelli. But that's not the worst of it. It actually gets worse. Mr. Guest's company is still involved in the planning and procurement of major Metrolinx P3 projects, including the Ontario Line.

So despite the government's rhetoric around accountability today, which is welcome to hear, there actually, at this point, is no difference between Premier Ford and Mr. Del Duca when it comes to promoting P3s in public transit. This Premier has talked about stopping the gravy train, but like Mr. Del Duca, he appears to be just as devoted to the P3 gravy train that helps insiders like Mr. Guest.

So again, my question to the minister, to the Premier: Will a judicial inquiry mandated by Ontario be called? Will the Auditor General of Ontario investigate this mess to get to the bottom of this and get out—

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

Hon. Caroline Mulroney: As I said, improving public transit is a priority for our government, which is why we

committed \$600 million for stage 1 of the Ottawa LRT and up to \$1.2 billion for stage 2. To ensure accountability of the project, Ontario is already holding back 10% of the committed phase 1 funding as safety investigations remain ongoing, and as our government is committed to standing up for taxpayers.

This is about having full confidence that the city will be able to carry out future phases of work on this project and deliver for the people of Ottawa. As I said, Mr. Speaker, all options are on the table. Our government is reviewing those, and we'll have more to say in the future.

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COVID-19 IMMUNIZATION

Mr. Roman Baber: To the Minister of Labour: Over the last two months, tens of thousands of Ontarians have lost or been suspended from their jobs. More companies are forcing workers to do something against their will.

The minister claims that he didn't vote against my jobs and jobs bill, but every I time I ask him about tens of thousands of Ontarians losing their jobs, he refuses to even acknowledge the issue. But now we have a pivot, an admission by the experts that the vaccine doesn't prevent transmission and that its efficacy is reduced to six to eight months.

My question to the Minister of Labour: Is it appropriate to fire employees who choose not to vaccinate, given that the vaccine doesn't prevent transmission and its efficacy wanes after six to eight months?

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): To reply? The government House leader.

Hon. Paul Calandra: As the Minister of Health has already highlighted, it is important that Ontarians get vaccinated. That is the way that we will eventually remove ourselves from this pandemic. It is also appropriate that employers protect their workplaces and their employees. We will always protect those workplaces and those employees and support them in doing so.

The good news, of course, is that across Ontario, the economy is booming, and that has required us to aggressively look at other ways that we can fill these job vacancies across the province. We are seeing the economy roar back to life, and that is good news for all Ontarians.

I hope that the member opposite will do like he used to do when supporting us in all of those measures that we brought in in the pandemic to keep Ontario safe. He was a wonderful supporter of all of those measures, and I hope he will be a great supporter in helping to bring back the Ontario economy as we go forward.

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

Mr. Roman Baber: Speaker, this government is pretending that the catastrophe experienced by hundreds of thousands of Ontario workers isn't happening. They claim to stand up for workers, but thousands of Ontario families don't know if they can keep a roof over their heads. It's not because they aren't working; it's because they aren't allowed to work—because in this government's Ontario,

employers can terminate you for cause if you refuse to take medication that doesn't prevent transmission and wanes after six months.

My question to the Minister of Labour: Given what we now understand about the limitations of the vaccine, will he show leadership? Will he show compassion? Will the government House leader show compassion and defend Ontario employees who are being fired for not wanting to do something against their will?

Hon. Paul Calandra: Mr. Speaker, this is a member who voted in support of every single measure that this government brought forward in order to fight the pandemic. He got up in his place and voted yes to every single one of those measures at a time when we did not have a vaccine and when our numbers were increasing.

Now, at a time when almost 90% of the people of Ontario who are eligible have gotten vaccines, when, as the Minister of Health has talked about, numbers in our ICUs have decreased dramatically, our hospitals are back on the road to recovery, people are getting their surgeries and our economy is booming, this member has decided that he's got a different approach—a unique approach, one that doesn't work anywhere.

The results are clear. Do you want to support workers? Do you want to keep people working? Then get vaccinated, because that is the best way for us to continue to grow the economy and for us to move forward in the province of Ontario.

TENANT PROTECTION

Ms. Peggy Sattler: My question is to the Premier. Bryan Russell relies on ODSP and lives in a 125-unit townhouse complex on Belmont Drive in London West. Last month, tenants were told that the units will soon be sold and they will be forced out. Bryan fears he won't find another place he can afford and worries he will become homeless.

Another tenant, Amy Baker, says, "We have all just barely survived coming out of COVID, mentally and financially, and now this." She told me, "The scare tactics that they have set upon our community is disgusting, especially with winter approaching and not being able to find affordable housing."

Speaker, when is this government going to finally crack down on bad-faith landlords who illegally pressure or coerce tenants to move out?

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

Hon. Steve Clark: Thanks for the question. I know that the Attorney General has worked hard with the Landlord and Tenant Board, ensuring that staffing levels are up. As the member opposite knows, our government, through Bill 184, Protecting Tenants and Strengthening Community Housing Act, put a number of measures in place to further protect tenants. As the member knows, we also were one of the only jurisdictions in Canada that provided a rent freeze in 2021. But we know that there is much more

work that we can do for tenants as we encourage tenants and landlords to continue to work together.

I want—Speaker, through you to the member—you to know that if those tenants in your riding are concerned about the law being broken, I would encourage them to reach out to my ministry, to the rental housing enforcement unit so that an investigation could take place.

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

Ms. Peggy Sattler: Yesterday, my office learned of another London West building where the same thing is happening. Catherine Peebles is a cancer survivor living on a disability pension at 425 McKenzie. The building was recently sold and the new property manager has approached the residents to get them to vacate their units. A few of these residents were told that if they didn't leave, it could become "very uncomfortable" for them.

London's 2021 Vital Signs reported that almost 6,000 individuals in London are currently on the wait-list for social housing, an increase of 1,000 since last year, and more than 1,300 Londoners are experiencing homelessness. When will this government get serious about preventing illegal evictions, protecting tenants and investing in the affordable housing that Londoners need?

Hon. Steve Clark: Again, in terms of investing in affordable housing, this government, through the safe restart plan, has put a record investment into our community housing system: over \$1 billion to our municipal partners, much of that not cost-shared by the federal government. I was the first minister in Canada, after the federal cabinet was sworn in, to go to Ottawa to meet with my federal colleague. I made it crystal clear to my federal colleague that Ontario, who is renegotiating our National Housing Strategy deal with them this year, is short-changed; \$490 million from the federal government, based on our core housing need in this province. That \$490 million could go a long way to help community housing systems right across this province, including in the city of London.

We will continue to stand up for tenants. We will continue to stand up to get our fair share. What we need is other members, like your party, who consistently vote against our measures, to support us.

TRANSPORTATION INFRASTRUCTURE

Mr. Stephen Blais: My question is for the Premier. Commuters need relief today. But instead, it's reported that the government is choosing to give nearly \$1 billion away to the owners of Highway 407 without anything in return for commuters. Experts suggest that the reduction of tolls on the 407 could provide congestion relief, and yet the Premier and his government—a government that likes to say "yes"—seems to have said "no." They have said no to commuters by keeping 407 tolls amongst the highest in North America.

Mr. Speaker, the government is choosing the destruction of thousands of acres of green space, forests and farmland, and they're choosing to spend \$10 billion on a

highway that won't be built for nearly a generation. That's more gridlock, more damage to the environment and, of course, it's \$1 billion lost to corporate giveaways. Why is the government more committed to billion-dollar corporate bailouts than they are to Ontario commuters?

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

Hon. Caroline Mulroney: Since our government took office, we have been focused on making life more affordable for all Ontarians, and in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, we took specific action to address affordability for commuters and for drivers. We suspended the collection of interest on unpaid toll fees from Highways 407 east, 412 and 418. We froze the scheduled increases to driver and carrier products, like drivers' licences and validation tags. We extended the validity of all government driver, vehicle and carrier fees, and we froze the scheduled CPI increase to toll rates on Highways 407 east, 412 and 418 that was scheduled to come into effect on June 1.

In this case, our government was bound by a contractual agreement with the 407 ETR corporation. It included a clause in the event that it could not meet traffic volume targets because of a pandemic. Our government had to comply with the law and had no choice but to grant force majeure.

Our government is committed to getting Ontarians moving and making sure that life is affordable as we do so.

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

Mr. Stephen Blais: Lower tolls on the 407 would almost certainly divert traffic from other congested corridors and help families save time. It has been reported, and it sounds like the minister just confirmed, that they've recently granted the owners of the 407 nearly a billion dollars in relief—owners like SNC-Lavalin, as an example. Now, a billion dollars might not be a lot of money to a government that has no plan to ever balance their budget, but it is a lot of money to Ontarians.

The government claims to be using every tool at their disposal to address gridlock, but instead of negotiating lower tolls on the 407, they're giving away a billion dollars to corporate interests. Why?

Hon. Caroline Mulroney: It is truly ironic to hear the member from Orléans calling for lower tolls when it was the Del Duca Liberals who had imposed tolls on highways that they built, making life harder and more expensive for drivers in Ontario.

Highway 407 is a privately operated company and, as a result, has full control over its toll rates. This has been the case since the contract was established in 1999. The Liberals had 15 years to renegotiate the contract; Steven Del Duca had four years as Minister of Transportation, and he did nothing. These were unprecedented circumstances, and the member for Orléans is offside here. The Liberals had 15 years to remove tolls on provincial highways to address gridlock but, instead, they did nothing.

Affordability for Ontarians clearly was not a priority for the Liberals, but it is for us. We are constantly reviewing

opportunities to lower the cost of living for hard-working families, and that includes the many costly policies that were enacted by the Del Duca Liberals.

CHILD CARE

Ms. Jessica Bell: My question is to the Minister of Education. It has been months since the federal government unveiled its \$10-a-day child care plan. Since then, every province has been negotiating or has signed a deal to bring in \$10-a-day child care except Ontario, and it's parents who are paying the price—people like Natalia. She's a nurse in my riding and she has told me the cost of child care makes everyday living extremely difficult for her and her family. With rent, school, debt and the rising cost of living, she cannot afford it.

Every day your government delays in striking a deal with the federal government costs families. When will this government stop stalling and get us an agreement for affordable, high-quality, public or non-profit \$10-a-day child care?

Hon. Stephen Lecce: I know Natalia and all families in Ontario want to see \$10-a-day child care. The Liberal and New Democratic position is that we should take the first offer made by the Trudeau government, and I would simply argue that for Natalia and for all families and moms and dads in Ontario, the deal on the table will not bring us anywhere near \$10-a-day. It is up to us as legislators to say to the federal government, advancing the provincial interest, that the deal offered falls short, does not get us to \$10, is not sustainable and, more importantly, would lead to hikes in year 5, 6 and beyond.

We are working hard to get a good deal and get our fair share from the federal government. We want a deal. We've been working the federal government, of course, interrupted by the federal election. Nonetheless, we're there now making clear our objectives of affordability, flexibility and a sustainable program that lower costs for all families right across Ontario.

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

This House stands in recess until 3 p.m.

The House recessed from 1154 to 1500.

REPORTS BY COMMITTEES

STANDING COMMITTEE ON GOVERNMENT AGENCIES

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): I beg to inform the House that today the Clerk received the report on intended appointments dated November 16, 2021, of the Standing Committee on Government Agencies. Pursuant to standing order 111(f)(9), the report is deemed to be adopted by the House.

Report deemed adopted.

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

ANTI-MONEY LAUNDERING IN HOUSING ACT, 2021

LOI DE 2021 SUR LA LUTTE CONTRE LE BLANCHIMENT D'ARGENT DANS LE SECTEUR DU LOGEMENT

Ms. Bell moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 49, An Act to enact the Anti-Money Laundering in Housing Act, 2021 / Projet de loi 49, Loi édictant la Loi de 2021 sur la lutte contre le blanchiment d'argent dans le secteur du logement.

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

First reading agreed to.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Would the member for University–Rosedale care to explain her bill, briefly?

Ms. Jessica Bell: Yes. Thank you, Speaker. This bill enacts the Anti-Money Laundering in Housing Act, 2021. The act requires the minister to develop and implement a landowner transparency plan, which is a plan to establish a public registry of beneficial property owners. The purpose of this bill is to clamp down on money laundering and tax fraud in the housing sector.

PETITIONS

OPTOMETRY SERVICES

Ms. Jennifer K. French: I have a whole whack of petitions that I'd like to share today 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.”

Of course, I support this. I will affix my signature and send it to the table with page Joel.

LONG-TERM CARE

Ms. Jessica Bell: This petition comes from family members of residents in the Mon Sheong Home for the Aged, which is a long-term-care home in my riding that serves the Chinese Canadian community.

“We, the staff and family members of the residents in Mon Sheong Home for the Aged and community members, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to increase Ministry of Health funding for hiring more PSWs in Mon Sheong Home for the Aged.

“Specifically, we request the Ministry of Health to hire more PSWs.

“We request that there is an increase in the hourly rate of PSWs in Mon Sheong Home for the Aged to the same hourly rate earned by PSWs in nursing homes managed by the city of Toronto;

“To increase the hourly rate of RPNs to a level at least higher than the PSWs in the nursing homes managed by the city of Toronto;

“To immediately implement an average of four hours of daily direct care per resident per day; and

“To raise the issue of the high PSW-to-resident ratio and the shortage of MOH funding and nursing staff in this home.”

The reason why they brought in this petition is that Mon Sheong Home for the Aged had up to a third of the residents die of COVID during the pandemic, and they want action. I fully support this petition. I'll be giving it to page Athisha and signing my name to it.

OPTOMETRY SERVICES

Mr. Paul Miller: This petition is from the good people of Wellington–Halton Hills.

“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 agree with this and will sign this petition.

AFFORDABLE HOUSING

Ms. Jennifer K. French: I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly about affordable housing.

“Whereas for families throughout much of Ontario, owning a home they can afford remains a dream, while renting is painfully expensive;

“Whereas consecutive Conservative and Liberal governments have sat idle, while housing costs spiralled out of control, speculators made fortunes, and too many families had to put their hopes on hold;

“Whereas every Ontarian should have access to safe, affordable housing. Whether a family wants to rent or own, live in a house, an apartment, a condominium or a co-op, they should have affordable options;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to immediately prioritize the repair of Ontario's social housing stock, commit to building new affordable homes, crack down on housing speculators, and make rentals more affordable through rent controls and updated legislation.”

Of course, I support this. I will affix my signature and send it to the table with page Joel.

OPTOMETRY SERVICES

Ms. Jennifer K. French: Again, unsurprisingly, 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 covers an average of 55% of the cost of an OHIP-insured visit, the lowest rate in Canada; and

“Whereas optometrists must absorb the other 45% for the over four million services delivered annually 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.”

Once again, I support this petition. I will affix my signature and will send it with Athisha.

OPTOMETRY SERVICES

Ms. Jessica Bell: This is 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
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“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, will be affixing my signature to it and giving it to page Claire.

AFFORDABLE HOUSING

Mr. Michael Mantha: I have a petition entitled “Affordable Housing.”

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas for families throughout much of Ontario, owning a home they can afford remains a dream, while renting is painfully expensive;

“Whereas consecutive Conservative and Liberal governments have sat idle, while housing costs spiralled out of control, speculators made fortunes, and too many families had to put their hopes on hold;

“Whereas every Ontarian should have access to safe, affordable housing. Whether a family wants to rent or own, live in a house, an apartment, a condominium or a co-op, they should have affordable options;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to immediately prioritize the repair of Ontario’s social housing stock, commit to building new affordable homes, crack down on housing speculators, and make rentals more affordable through rent controls and updated legislation.”

I wholeheartedly agree with this petition, affix my signature and present it to page Ellie to bring it down to the Clerks’ table.

INJURED WORKERS

Ms. Jennifer K. French: It just so happens I have another petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario. This is “Workers’ Comp is a Right.”

“Whereas about 200,000 to 300,000 people in Ontario are injured on the job every year;

“Whereas over a century ago, workers in Ontario who were injured on the job gave up the right to sue their employers, in exchange for a system that would provide them with just compensation;

“Whereas decades of cost-cutting have pushed injured workers into poverty and onto publicly funded social

assistance programs, and have gradually curtailed the rights of injured workers;

“Whereas injured workers have the right to quality and timely medical care, compensation for lost wages and protection from discrimination;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to change the Workplace Safety and Insurance Act to accomplish the following for injured workers in Ontario:

“Eliminate the practice of ‘deeming’ or ‘determining,’ which bases compensation on phantom jobs that injured workers do not actually have;

“Ensure that the WSIB prioritizes and respects the medical opinions of the health care providers who treat the injured worker directly;

“Prevent compensation from being reduced or denied based on ‘pre-existing conditions’ that never affected the worker’s ability to function prior to the work injury.”

Of course, I support this. I will affix my signature and send it to the table with page Rishi.

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)

Resuming the debate adjourned on November 16, 2021, on the motion for 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 Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Further debate?

M. Guy Bourgouin: Il me fait toujours un plaisir de me lever en Chambre, de représenter mon comté de Mushkegowuk–Baie James, mais aussi de pouvoir parler sur le projet de loi 43 aujourd’hui. J’aimerais surtout me pencher sur l’annexe 13 de ce projet de loi.

Monsieur le Président, ce gouvernement nous a fait croire depuis les dernières élections qu’il moderniserait la Loi sur les services en français. Depuis des mois, les organismes et la communauté francophone attendent après celle-ci et suscitent beaucoup d’espoir. C’est pourquoi plusieurs étaient ravis de voir l’énoncé de la ministre des Affaires francophones qui disait avoir modernisé la Loi sur les services en français. Le problème, monsieur le Président, est que « l’excitement » et l’espoir se sont éteints assez rapidement. Considérant toutes les coupures que ce gouvernement avait faites dans ce dossier, on s’attendait à bien plus. Disons que c’est décevant.

L’annexe 13 du projet de loi ignore beaucoup de sujets importants que la ministre a choisi d’ignorer et de ne pas incorporer dans la proposition de la modernisation de la Loi sur les services en français. En effet, l’annexe 13

démontre que ce gouvernement n'écoute pas les recommandations. Ce gouvernement aime faire à sa manière et oublie les intérêts des francophones et francophiles de partout en Ontario.

J'aimerais d'ailleurs me pencher sur les sujets manquants de cette annexe. Si on veut parler de modernisation, on doit parler d'une des premières grosses demandes de la communauté francophone : de rétablir notre commissariat aux langues officielles indépendant. On s'est battu pour avoir notre commissaire indépendant sur les services en français. Une des premières choses que ce gouvernement-là, une fois rendu au pouvoir, a faites—on se souvient du jeudi noir avec l'Université de l'Ontario français; mais aussi le commissaire aux services en français, notre chien de garde, a été éliminé. Puis aussi on se souvient très clairement que ce gouvernement disait que c'était pour des raisons financières. On a demandé à maintes reprises de nous démontrer ces fameuses dépenses financières—où, ce montant économisé sur le dos des francophones? On n'a jamais eu de réponse. La communauté demande toujours leur commissaire indépendant. Cette issue ne s'en va pas. Cette issue va continuer d'exister. Notre chien de garde, on le veut, et on en a droit. En étant un peuple fondateur, on a le droit à notre commissaire, puis il faut le rétablir.

Un autre, c'était de modifier et voir une meilleure définition de la communauté franco-ontarienne. Quand j'ai déposé mon projet de loi, la modernisation de la Loi sur les services en français, une des demandes que la francophonie demandait—non seulement moi; il y avait l'AFO qui la demandait : une meilleure définition.

Je vais vous donner un exemple, monsieur le Président. J'avais un assistant, moi, ici à Queen's Park. Sa femme était québécoise. Ses enfants allaient à l'école française. Lui, il était argentin. Sa première langue était l'espagnol. Puis il s'identifiait comme francophone, parce que moi, je sais, dans mon bureau, on parlait seulement français. À la maison, ils parlaient seulement français. Il fonctionnait toujours en français. Mais quand ça venait pour être recensé, mon assistant, dans le temps, n'était pas considéré comme francophone. Il n'était pas recensé comme un francophone—une grosse différence. Il y en a beaucoup qui sont dans la même situation que lui.

C'est pour ça que c'est important qu'on modifie la définition d'un francophone. Pourquoi? Le plus qu'on identifie de francophones, le plus d'argent est disponible pour les services francophones. Mais ça, le gouvernement a jugé de ne pas le mettre, même avec la demande—parce qu'il ne faut pas oublier, là, que tu sois à l'opposition officielle ou au gouvernement ou un autre parti, on consulte les mêmes personnes ou les mêmes groupes ou les mêmes entités francophones, puis ces entités francophones-là nous demandaient la modernisation de la Loi sur les services en français, nous demandaient de faire une meilleure définition. Pourquoi? Parce que la communauté francophone, elle, a évolué. À cause de l'immigration, la communauté franco-ontarienne, elle a évolué. Les francophones pure laine, il y en a, mais il y a beaucoup d'immigrants qui font partie de cette communauté-là, puis il faut les reconnaître.

Ça fait que, dans une situation comme celle de mon assistant, où lui, il venait de l'Argentine—mais il y en a d'autres, des francophiles, qui s'identifient, en passant, comme francophones, mais qui ne sont pas recensés comme francophones, ce qui est très important pour la loi qu'on devrait moderniser. C'est pour ça que ça faisait partie des demandes. Mais, dans sa sagesse, le gouvernement a décidé de ne pas la mettre dans la modernisation.

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Il ne faut pas oublier, là, que la loi est plus vieille qu'une trentaine d'années. C'est quoi, 32 ou 35 ans? On a une chance de la moderniser pour refléter la communauté francophone d'aujourd'hui. Mais on juge de ne pas l'insérer dans la loi, dans la modernisation de la Loi sur les services en français. C'est quand l'opportunité de pouvoir la remodifier? Ça peut être encore belle lurette. Mais il reste que c'était une demande qui ne venait pas juste de l'opposition officielle, de moi quand j'ai déposé un projet de loi, mais de la communauté franco-ontarienne.

Une autre grosse demande qu'on demandait, c'était un comité consultatif, et le gouvernement a mis dans le projet de loi qu'il y était pour avoir un comité consultatif. Mais la différence entre leur projet de loi et le mien? Moi, je demandais que, avant que tout changement soit fait qui va affecter la communauté franco-ontarienne, il faut qu'il y ait une consultation—avant que le projet ne soit mis en place, pas de consulter après qu'on ait fait des projets de loi; une grosse différence, monsieur le Président, une énorme différence, parce qu'on sait qu'ils peuvent passer des projets de loi, et, après ça, on dit qu'on va aller consulter.

Mais « la consultation » dans mon projet de loi était très bien définie. Le langage était très clair : que le gouvernement, avant qu'un projet de loi soit mis qui affecte la communauté francophone en Ontario, était pour avoir un processus de consultation pour voir ses effets sur la communauté et non juste de continuer à faire ce qu'on fait comme d'habitude. On avance d'avance, on continue d'avancer, on consulte après les faits—mais la communauté, ce n'est pas ça qu'elle demandait.

Ça, ça vient aussi de l'AFO. L'AFO demandait cette même chose, ce même projet de loi, le même comité consultatif, mais d'avoir plus de dents. Leur proposition manque de dents—du mordant, si je peux utiliser le terme—du mordant quand ça vient à la consultation, parce que la communauté demandait d'avoir plus de mordant dans cette protection-là, ou que les comités consultatifs puissent adresser les « concerns » avant que les amendements soient faits à la loi. Ça fait une grosse différence.

Un autre qu'on demandait : c'est sûr qu'on demandait la désignation à la grandeur de la province. On a vu que le gouvernement a jugé de ne pas le faire. Ils parlent dans leur projet de loi que, s'il est nécessaire, ils peuvent améliorer les services dans certaines régions. Ceci n'est pas assez, monsieur le Président. On a des communautés francophones à la grandeur de la province.

Si on est un peuple fondateur, on a droit aux services bilingues. On a droit à nos services francophones. C'est un

droit qui nous revient. C'est constitutionnel. Pourquoi continuer à nous garder avec 26 régions désignées? En plus, j'ai fait le tour de la province puis il y a bien des régions désignées qui n'ont pas de services. Même si elles sont désignées, elles n'ont pas les services. Ça, on va y revenir dès qu'on parle de l'offre active. Mais il y a des francophones à la grandeur de la province qui méritent les mêmes services et qui ont droit aux mêmes services.

On a la chance maintenant d'adresser la modernisation de la Loi sur les services en français. Pourquoi ne pas l'insérer dans la loi? Elle a plus de 30 ans, cette loi-là. On a évolué. Il y a beaucoup plus de francophones partout. Les 26 régions ne suffisent plus. On a besoin de mettre, à la grandeur de la province, des services en français dans les institutions gouvernementales, parce que les francophones méritent ces services-là.

Il y a assez qu'on a vu à travers cette pandémie que nos bureaux de santé publique ne sont pas assujettis à la loi. S'il y a de quoi qu'on aurait dû faire, s'il y a de quoi qu'on aurait dû apprendre à travers la pandémie qu'on vient de vivre, c'est de mettre des centres de santé assujettis à la Loi sur les services en français, parce que les francophones appelaient leur service de santé, mais parce qu'ils ne sont pas obligés de donner des services de santé, on n'avait pas ces services-là. Qu'est-ce qu'on fait pendant une pandémie? Où est-ce qu'on va chercher de l'information? Où est-ce que les francophones qui ne parlent pas anglais vont chercher des informations ou demander de l'aide ou demander : « Où est-ce que je peux aller me faire vacciner? Où est-ce que je vais chercher ces services-là? » Mais ils ne sont pas assujettis. Ils n'ont même pas les documents. Ils ne sont même pas obligés de donner des pamphlets francophones. Moi, je suis chanceux dans ma région, mais mon comté représente 60 % de francophones. C'est certain qu'il y a plus de services dans mon comté. Mais si tu sors de ma région, par exemple, et tout d'un coup, je peux te dire que tu plantes du nez assez raide quand tu viens aux services en français.

Monsieur le Président, on a l'opportunité de faire de quoi de bien pour la communauté francophone de l'Ontario, puis on omet ça? Écoute : on est sorti en grande pompe. On se souvient que c'était une promesse : « Oui, on va la moderniser. » Mais ça, ce n'est pas juste moi qui le dis. En passant, les choses dont je parle en Chambre aujourd'hui, je ne les invente pas; c'est en consultation avec les communautés francophones. Ce sont les mêmes communautés francophones, la même communauté francophone, les mêmes agences francophones que le gouvernement a consultées.

Monsieur le Président, on a vécu une pandémie où les francophones n'avaient pas de services. On a martelé pour avoir des services en français—de la traduction. On est obligé d'aller, en passant, sur YouTube pour aller chercher de l'information, puis on n'était pas capable d'avoir de la traduction simultanée. Mais ça a pris—on a été obligé de faire des plaintes à la commissaire. Je peux vous le dire, le commissariat, l'ombudsman, on eut multiples plaintes; c'était effrayant.

C'est pour ça que c'est important qu'on ait la chance de mettre ces choses-là dans notre projet de loi. On est là pour

moderniser la loi; prenons le temps de faire certain qu'on représente la communauté. La nouvelle communauté francophone, elle a évolué. Il faut faire les bonnes choses.

Écoute, on a parlé de la désignation, mais aussi, on sait qu'on a obligé les agences de paiement de transfert à respecter la loi et de garantir que les agences ayant été consolidées ou restructurées doivent offrir les services en français. Fait qu'on ferme des agences ou on restructure, mais le financement ne reste pas, ce qui est inacceptable pour la communauté. On en a besoin, de ces services-là. À cause qu'on restructure, les transferts financiers devraient se faire avec. C'est effrayant. On n'a déjà pas assez de services, et on ne fait pas de transfert financier.

Monsieur le Président, ce gouvernement est fier d'avoir inclus l'offre active dans leur projet de loi. Il ose dire que ce changement dans le projet de loi démontre qu'ils sont à l'écoute. De mon côté, je suis d'accord que le langage est là, mais est-ce que l'investissement sera là? Si on regarde les tendances de ce gouvernement durant les trois dernières années, les belles paroles sont là; l'action ne l'est pas. Ce ne sont que des paroles vides.

En effet, on peut le justifier avec le dépôt de ce dernier projet de loi. En plus de ça, pour mettre la cerise sur le sundae, le ministre des Finances parle très bien français. Il se débrouille très bien en français. Je peux vous dire que dans la communauté, ça n'a pas passé inaperçu : aucune ligne dans ce budget-là ne mentionne le français—qu'il n'a pas parlé en français de leur projet de loi. Si ça ce n'est pas un manque de respect envers la communauté francophone, je ne sais pas ce que c'est. Il me semble qu'il aurait pu y avoir un paragraphe en français, au moins pour dire à la communauté francophone : « On est là. On veut travailler avec vous. » Même pas un mot. Mais on parle de l'annexe 13, par exemple, où on parle de modernisation des services en français, puis aucun mot en français dans l'allocation. Il faut le faire. Il y a un gros oubli, là, mais il faut le faire. Mais on dit : « Non, non, on est à l'écoute de la communauté francophone. »

Par exemple, je peux vous dire aussi, quand je parle du financement, qu'on n'a rien qu'à penser au côté juridique : comment, dans le côté juridique, on est obligé d'attendre deux à trois fois plus longtemps. Pourtant, la loi est très claire quand ça vient aux services en français dans le juridique. On dit qu'on a droit à l'équivalence. Mais c'est drôle : on attend de deux à trois fois plus. Même quand on demande de l'aide pour aller dans les cours juridiques, que ce soit criminel ou familial, on se fait dire : « Tu es sûr que tu veux y aller en français? Il y a plus long d'attente. » Inacceptable.

C'est pour ça que je dis : le financement va-t-il être là? Ça reste à voir. C'est bien beau qu'ils vont avoir des annonces qui vont dire que c'est leur obligation de faire certain que les 26 régions désignées vont avoir à démontrer que le service est là, mais si on n'a pas le personnel—si les bottines ne suivent pas les babines, comme on dit souvent, ça veut dire qu'on va être dans le même bateau où on est là, ou qu'on va avoir les mêmes services qu'on a là. Même si toutes les affiches sont là : « Mais excusez, monsieur—sorry, sir, but the francophone

person is not here today. » Ça, on l'entend souvent, puis ceux qui ne sont pas bilingues, par exemple, sont obligés de revenir une autre journée ou de faire un appointment avec le francophone qui vient. Ou il faut donner les services, puis on se fait dire « Bien, on n'a pas trouvé de francophone, ce qui fait qu'on met un anglophone. » Ça, je peux vous dire, je l'ai entendu souvent.

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Ce gouvernement dit avoir consulté, mais clairement, il n'écoute pas. Ils prennent ce qu'ils veulent et ce qui leur convient. Il reste à voir comment tout ceci va se dérouler.

Speaker, I would like to now turn my attention to another important issue that was not brought forth by this Ford government in this bill.

I see I'm going to run out of time, but I'm going to try to put in as much as possible.

Just like francophones, our First Nations have not been a priority under this government. I'm not surprised to see the lack of commitment towards our First Nations communities. In fact, looking at this government's track record again, it is clear they do not have their priorities in the right place.

Speaker, I do not understand why this bill does not address the water crisis, a basic human right to have potable water. Why do we still have this issue in our First Nations communities? The water crisis in our First Nations communities is not unheard of. Why is there nothing to address this urgent need when my colleague from Kiiwetinoong and myself, on behalf of Mushkegowuk–James Bay, have brought this to this government's attention on numerous occasions? Right, they consult, but they do not listen.

Families are suffering. Children are suffering. Some youth, adults have never drunk from a faucet, and when they leave their community, they're afraid to drink from faucets. Some First Nations communities have been without potable water for over 20 years. It's a disgrace. We are talking about basic human rights and needs.

I'm sure if any city in Ontario had no potable water for over 20 years, no water to drink, the Premier would react. I can guarantee you he would have reacted in the first week or in a few days. Why don't our First Nations communities deserve the same reaction? But again, like I said in French: "loin des yeux, loin du coeur."

Mr. Speaker, I'm running out of time.

It should not be this way. This government has to stop passing the buck and start putting action where their mouth is.

Yesterday, I asked a question to the associate minister of finance, the MPP from Brantford–Brant. His answer: He agreed with me. He agreed with me, but he blamed the federal. Ontario is a signatory to Treaty 9. We have a responsibility just as much as the feds, and yet we're passing the buck. Let's stop playing the political Ping-Pong between the feds and Ontario. Let's fix this problem. Let's fix the problem of potable water for the community. They deserve clean drinking water; it's a human right. There's no reason why we should be debating this again today.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): We have time for questions and responses.

Hon. David Piccini: Thank you to the member opposite for his remarks today. I note the member mentioned water, specifically in Indigenous communities. Just anecdotally, I don't know if you're aware, we've been doing some work with Walkerton Clean Water Centre. They do some phenomenal work, and they're expanding the work out of the reserves and the fiscal dollars that the province supports them with to expand the work that they're doing with Indigenous communities. It's been some really remarkable work. So, just anecdotally, if the member is interested, I would love to take that off-line, if you'd be interested in knowing some of the great work that the Walkerton Clean Water Centre is doing.

Furthermore, just in the economic update, I know that in it, we've put forward a number of measures to grow the economy, one of which, again on Indigenous communities, I know we're working with Indigenous Institutes, and we need to unlock the potential of skilled trades in the province of Ontario. I've had the opportunity to visit a number. Do you think—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): Thank you, Minister. You ran out of time before you posed your question, but I'll give you a chance, member from Mushkegowuk–James Bay, to respond to what you believe the question would have been.

Mr. Guy Bourgouin: He's talking about the fall economic statement. I've heard about the Ring of Fire, how important the road is and how much investment needs to happen. That's the question I asked yesterday to the member across: Is the water crisis or the basic human right to have potable water less important than the minerals in the ground? I say it's more important, that people in Ontario deserve clean drinking water. Once we fix that, maybe we should look at the resources, but let's fix that as a priority in this province, because I can tell you, there's a lot of First Nations that also—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): Thank you. The next question goes to member from Toronto Centre.

Ms. Suze Morrison: I want to thank the member for his comments, and I want to particularly thank you again for raising the issue of clean drinking water for First Nations in this House. I think there are few issues in this province that continue to be as neglected for as long as they have by both Liberal and Conservative governments. As you said, there are communities in your riding where there are children that have never known what it's like to have clean drinking water, and that's just devastating.

I wonder if you can speak a little bit more about what that's been like in the communities in your riding for those little ones that have been left behind by this Conservative government failing to prioritize their need, their human right for clean drinking water.

Mr. Guy Bourgouin: Thank you for the question. We have young adults who are 20 years old and up who have never drunk from a faucet. Where do you see this anywhere else in Ontario?

We had an issue in Marten Falls. We have to realize that there's also a huge housing crisis. I've spoken to this many times in the House, that two or three generations live in the same home. So when we want to help people with their water facilities and the person goes for holidays, there's nobody to take care of the water. They want to bring people in, but there's no housing to accommodate them. So people come, but they don't stay to help.

But for your answer, there are youth, there's kids, there's young adults who have never had potable water, and that is unacceptable in this province.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): The next question?

M^{me} Mitzie Hunter: Il est très important de consulter d'abord les Franco-Ontariens et Franco-Ontariennes pour ce projet de loi. Pourquoi?

M. Guy Bourgoin: Merci pour la question, à ma collègue. Je dirais, écoute, c'est très important, parce qu'on a vu dans ce projet de loi qu'il manque—comme on dit souvent dans les Satellipopettes, il manque des morceaux de robot. C'était une émission qu'on écoutait quand j'étais jeune. Mais il manque beaucoup de choses qu'on a demandées. La communauté a demandé de rétablir leur commissariat en français—je devrais vous faire parole, monsieur le Président; je m'excuse. On a demandé notre commissaire. On a demandé de désigner la province au complet. On a demandé—j'en ai parlé dans mon projet de loi—l'offre active, et le financement qui vient avec ça. On a demandé d'obliger les agences de paiement de transfert, mais aussi de refléter la vraie communauté, pour qu'on reconnaisse—comme j'ai parlé de mon assistant qui est argentin mais qui n'était pas reconnu comme francophone, qui n'était pas identifié comme francophone. Ça, pour nous, c'est important pour la communauté. Ça veut dire plus de financement pour les organismes francophones, plus d'argent dans notre communauté. Mais le gouvernement a décidé de ne pas les écouter. Ils ont refusé de mettre ces quatre, cinq points-là qui sont très importants puis ils sont seulement allés avec une recommandation.

1540

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): The next question.

Mr. Dave Smith: My colleague spent a great deal of time talking about what wasn't in the FES, but my question is about something that actually is in the fall economic statement. In northern Ontario, about 5,000 individuals are employed directly in the mining industry. As mining becomes more important for electric vehicles, there will have to be an expansion of it.

One of the things that's in the FES that I think is going to be very, very valuable is the investment in skilled trades, because you can't build roads, mines, hospitals, long-term-care facilities without having carpenters and plumbers and electricians. Would the member agree that spending more money, making it easier for our youth to get into the skilled trades, is something that's valuable, and will you support that portion of the FES?

M. Guy Bourgoin: Ce que je répondrais au collègue de l'autre côté c'est que, écoute, je ne pense pas qu'on est contre que les jeunes aillent dans les métiers. Mais ce que j'ai un problème avec, par exemple, c'est quand on parle de bâtir dans le Cercle de feu une route puis qu'on ne consulte pas avec toutes les Premières Nations; quand on a des communautés dans mon comté qui ont des moratoires dans leurs territoires ancestraux, puis qu'on ne les consulte même pas; qu'on fait du « claiming », qu'on fait toutes sortes d'activités sans consultation avec les communautés; qu'on dit qu'on consulte, mais quand on fait des recherches plus approfondies, c'est qu'on ne consulte pas avec les communautés qui sont affectées—pas toutes, je devrais dire; pas toutes les communautés affectées. Ça, c'est un manque, par exemple. Ça, c'est un manque. De dire qu'on va aller consulter—ça, c'est du « divide and conquer », comme ils disent en anglais. C'est du colonialisme au pur, au plus pur. C'est du « divide and conquer ». C'est l'approche que vous faites—c'est inacceptable pour les Premières Nations. C'est inacceptable pour eux autres et pour ce bord-ci, pour l'opposition. La consultation c'est de la consultation.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): The member for Hamilton East–Stoney Creek has a question.

Mr. Paul Miller: I would like to thank the member for his excellent submission. Two quick questions:

Number 1, the \$15-an-hour minimum wage in northern Ontario would obviously have no impact whatsoever, as far as improving people's lives, as far as I can see, because things cost more up there. Everything costs more up there.

And secondly, the nursing situation, as you know, is bad in southern Ontario. We have nurses leaving in droves, resigning. Doctors are having problems. At the best of times in northern Ontario, it's tough to get doctors and nurses to even stay, let alone come up there to practise. So, in your opinion, what effect do you think this situation will have on the nursing situation which they have ignored, practically, up in northern Ontario?

Mr. Guy Bourgoin: I'm trying to see if I'll say it in French or in English, but I can get more words out in French, so I'll go in French, just so I can answer these two questions.

Les 15 piastres, c'est une farce. Ils auraient pu le faire, comme ils sont au pouvoir. Ils l'ont enlevé puis là, aujourd'hui, ils ont décidé de le remettre. Puis ça, en réalité, c'est strictement prendre les travailleurs pour des pions politiques. Il faut le dire et c'est la réalité. Ils ont volé 5 300 piastres aux personnes, à ceux qui ont travaillé—puis on les considère des héros—dans une crise, quand on était dans une pandémie.

Pour revenir aux gardes et aux docteurs, le plus qu'on va au Nord, le plus que c'est une pénurie. On a une pénurie de médecins, on a une pénurie de [inaudible]. On a des hôpitaux qui ont 10 000 piastres à offrir pour des « nurses » et on n'est pas capable d'en avoir. On a un hôpital, comme Hearst, qui travaille pour avoir des docteurs. On a des patients orphelins qui n'ont pas de docteurs, et on a besoin de docteurs. Ils font des

applications pour des « nurse practitioners », mais il n'y a pas de programme financier.

Ils ont coupé sur le bord municipal. Ils ont coupé sur le bord des hôpitaux. Mais ils se virent de bord et, vous autre, il faut trouver et il faut piger dans—il faut faire du « creative financing » pour être capable d'y arriver. C'est inacceptable, monsieur le Président. On a besoin au Nord plus de gardes. Les 15 piastres ne l'adresseront pas. Leurs politiques n'adresseront pas le problème dans le Nord. Il faut les payer. Si tu veux attirer le monde—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): Thank you very much. Further debate?

Ms. Mitzie Hunter: It's always a pleasure to rise on behalf of my constituents in Scarborough–Guildwood. You know, Speaker, as the Ontario Liberal critic for finance and economic affairs, and treasury—

Interjection.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): Ms. Hunter, I'm sorry. I'm sorry, I've made a mistake. You will have the floor, but I failed to recognize a point of order from this side. I recognize the member for Barrie–Innisfil. We'll get back to you, and your time will be put back on the clock.

I recognize the member for Barrie–Innisfil.

Ms. Andrea Khanjin: Thank you, and my apologies to the member from Scarborough–Guildwood. I just want to have one point of order: to cancel tonight's night sitting, and then—

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): That's it?

Ms. Andrea Khanjin: I just have one more point of order, Speaker.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): The member for Barrie–Innisfil.

Ms. Andrea Khanjin: It's a very important matter of business, Mr. Speaker. If you seek it, you will find unanimous consent to move a motion without notice respecting private members' public business.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): The member is saying that if I seek unanimous consent—do I have it? Agreed? All right.

Ms. Andrea Khanjin: Thank you, Speaker. I move that, notwithstanding standing order 101(e), the notice requirements for ballot item 14, standing in the name of Mr. Glover, and ballot item 17, standing in the name of Mr. Burch, be waived.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): Ms. Khanjin has moved that, notwithstanding standing order 101(e), the notice requirements for ballot item 14, standing in the name of Mr. Glover, and ballot item number 17, standing in the name of Mr. Burch, be waived. Agreed? Agreed. Thank you—both valid points of order.

And now, with 15 minutes on the clock, I return to the member from Scarborough–Guildwood.

Ms. Mitzie Hunter: Thank you, Speaker, for those additional minutes.

It's really an honour, as always, to rise and to speak on behalf of my constituents in Scarborough–Guildwood, and Bill 43 is such an opportunity. As the Ontario Liberal

finance critic, I have an opportunity to review closely this government's budgets and its fall economic statements time and time again. When you think about where we are in the midst of this pandemic—we are still in the midst of a fourth wave, perhaps staring down the barrel of a fifth wave—this would have been an opportunity for the Premier to show Ontarians that this government is serious about delivering relief that so many people in this province need.

Prior to the fall economic statement, the government had put forward a budget with a \$22-billion fiscal outlook gap. It missed the mark by \$22 billion. And it really begs the question: Is this government really doing its homework? Is it really carefully examining what are the things that Ontarians need right now, in times of crisis? What I see from its presentation in this bill and in its fall economic statement is that it is not delivering on those things that Ontarians need, like lower class sizes, like more support for children with autism and their families, like delivering support to small businesses. This government has shifted the burden for a rise in minimum wage to small businesses, but what has it done to ensure that these small businesses on our main streets can survive and recover from this pandemic?

When I look at the complete missed opportunity—and I was so disappointed in reviewing this legislation, Bill 43, and of course the fall economic statement that was its companion, to see that the government has not delivered on \$10-a-day child care, despite the fact that the federal government has this offer on the table, despite the fact that almost all of the provinces in this country have signed on. What is the government waiting on? Why is it letting down children and families, when it has an opportunity to do better? Speaker, that is what I ask of this government at this time of global pandemic: that it must do better.

We have a government that likes platitudes. The Premier likes to say, "I am someone who will say yes," but that is not what is happening in terms of action and in actual fact, because you're not saying yes to mandatory vaccinations in our schools, in our hospitals and, yes, even in places like restaurants. I have to have double vaccinate if I want to dine in, but what about that server? Have they been mandated to have their vaccine? They have not. So at any time, we just don't know, and this virus is going to continue to spread.

I want to look at one of the most important areas in any provincial budget, and that is education. Speaker, that is the sole responsibility of a provincial government, despite the fact that across the last two years of the pandemic, we've seen the federal government step up to support provinces in shoring up education with more funding for ventilation and PPE. What I look for is what is happening with the base funding for our education system. Unfortunately, even during a global pandemic, we have not seen this government step up on behalf of students in this province.

1550

You haven't lowered class sizes. This was something that the Ontario Liberals asked you to do two summers

ago—I remember that—when we were getting ready for back-to-school, but that was not done.

And now, in a time when we can really invest and lean into our schools and support boards in the challenges that lay ahead—whether it's to close the learning gap, or whether it is to provide much-needed mental health support for students and for the children of this province—what we actually see is that this government has taken money out of the education budget. It has somehow managed to cut almost half a million dollars from the education budget, and if you expand that across the next decade, it amounts to a \$12.3-billion cut to Ontario's education system. This is a lost opportunity for us to invest in Ontario's education system at a time when we so desperately need that investment.

I would say, shame on this government for doubling down on things like billions of dollars on highways—Highway 413 and bypasses—instead of investing in the number one priority of this province, which is our future, the children of this province, through our education system.

Speaker, time and time again, I have called on this government to find solutions for the she-cession, and by that, I mean that when we look at the impact of the pandemic on women's employment and on women's economic opportunity, what we see is that there is an alarming number of women who are choosing to not return to the labour market. Women in core age groups are deciding that it's not worth it for them or for their families. This is an area that the government must pay attention to. There cannot be a full economic recovery without ensuring that Ontario's women are able to have a fair chance at gaining employment in fields that are growing and that are expanding. And so crucial to that is accepting the child care program that has been put on the table by the federal government. I saw a comment last week from Minister Karina Gould, who is doing the negotiations with other provinces, and they seem to be moving along. They have their proposals—but nothing yet from Ontario. Why is this government dragging its feet? Why is this government delaying? Why is this government making this opportunity pass us by? Shame on you. In my constituency, this is a key issue. I've convened numerous tables with families, with non-profit organizations, and even with schools, to talk about the lack of affordable child care access for families in my community. We need solutions. We need more capacity. We need more investments. We need more funding. And we need to lower the costs so that more of our children have an opportunity to access good-quality child care as well as before- and after-school programs.

Speaker, when I think about what is most important in my community, I think about the need for affordable housing. Just yesterday, the Daily Bread Food Bank presented Who's Hungry, their 2021 report, which told us that it has seen a 61% increase in clients who are relying on the food bank and 42% of clients are relying on social assistance. I've already asked this government why they are not increasing the OW and the ODSP rates that they cut back in 2018 from a 3% increase to a 1.5% increase.

Now that the government has acknowledged that there are cost-of-living issues elsewhere, why are they not recognizing those who are most vulnerable, who are on income supports?

We also know that people are paying high amounts of their income just to stay housed, so they don't have enough for food. This is a shame, that here we have Bill 43, which does not address this very pressing issue of housing affordability.

You would think that that would be the biggest missed opportunity, but it is not, because when you look at the government's focus on climate change and the emergency and the crisis that we face as a globe—and we see that, because we just had COP26, which looked at that issue in great detail. This government has fallen short. In fact, it has fallen completely silent. It sent a minister over to COP26, and we've heard nothing. There has been no report.

It really echoes the track record of this government. By cancelling programs like cap-and-trade, which took billions of dollars out of the opportunity to invest in a green and clean economy; spending \$30 million just to fight the federal government on its carbon tax in the Supreme Court, a case in which it lost; cancelling and ripping out, in fact, electric vehicle charging station infrastructure; ripping up windmills—that is what the government is spending its time doing rather than putting a plan together for the climate.

Hon. Lisa M. Thompson: We're not ripping out windmills.

Ms. Mitzie Hunter: You're ripping out windmills, yes. If you go through eastern Ontario, as I have done—and they have been appalled at this government's behaviour in ripping up windmills that were previously invested in.

Speaker, I could go on. But what I want to say to this government is that Ontarians are watching. Ontarians are watching your words. For instance, you say that you're investing in PSWs and that you're hiring 8,000 of them. Is that enough to actually meet the need and the demand in our hospitals and in our long-term care as well as in our home care? Why have you not made the \$3-an-hour increase in pandemic pay permanent for PSWs if you believe that they are the pandemic heroes?

We need to do better. We need to do better for our seniors. We need to do better for our children. We need to do better for the people of this province. I urge this government to use the opportunity that you have before you to make the lives of every Ontarian better. I know that that is what we are doing on this side of the House, Speaker, and I urge the government to do the same.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): Now we have time for questions.

Mr. Bill Walker: I want to start off by saying that this morning I inadvertently left out the member from Brantford—Brant in my speech, acknowledging him as a PA to the Minister of Finance, so I owe him a Billy Walker.

But I'll get back to the topic at hand. I want to ask the member from Scarborough—Guildwood—she referenced

education. She was in the government that cut 600 schools. In fact, she was the minister, so challenging us on education is very interesting.

As my colleague from Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke asked, they want to talk about all of the child care. At the end of the day, did they not think we should be actually defending the taxpayers of Ontario, making sure we get the absolute best deal that we can? Again, if their government hadn't tripled the debt in 15 years, we'd have more money to put into all of those things.

We're hiring 5,000 new nurses and 8,000 PSWs, and you're saying that's not enough? You built 600 beds in 15 years, and you're criticizing what we're doing? You cut more schools than you built long-term-care beds—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): Should you wish to pose a question, now would be a good time to do so.

Mr. Bill Walker: How can you not support more resources for long-term care and the nurses on the front line that we're proposing—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): Thank you.

Back to the member from Scarborough–Guildwood to respond.

Ms. Mitzie Hunter: Speaker, I do remind the member that when he's revising history, he needs to make sure it's complete. You know that we built 800 schools in this province. In fact, the schools that you are now announcing are the schools that I announced while I was education minister, because it takes time to build a new school.

1600

Similarly, when you look at long-term care, why are you not mentioning the thousands of beds that were renovated and improved and upgraded under our leadership? Why are you not talking about the fact that your government cancelled the annual inspection of each long-term-care home? You reversed policy on that. You, in fact, did not enact legislation that would import fines on those long-term-care—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): Thank you.

The next question goes to the member from Toronto Centre.

Ms. Suze Morrison: I'd like to ask the member opposite—who, if I recall correctly, was a cabinet minister in the former Liberal government: If your government cared so much about addressing affordability and a good living wage for people in our communities, why did your government wait until the dying days of your last term to raise the minimum wage to \$15 and push the implementation back like a carrot on a stick for an election you didn't win, putting it at risk of being cut by this Conservative government? Why did you wait until the eleventh hour, holding the minimum wage increase that people have been waiting years for as a result of the callous cuts of this Conservative government?

The people of Ontario are not election ploys for you. They deserve a higher minimum wage than you ever gave them.

Ms. Mitzie Hunter: I do want to thank the member for reminding the House of the Liberal record on minimum wage, because it was really under a Liberal government that the minimum wage increased, in fact, some nine times, and that was something that—I remember clearly, actually, when it was first done, because I was part of a team at Goodwill that was responsible for figuring out how we were going to afford the rise in minimum wage. We looked at our budget, and I remember the day when the minimum wage increased, it was not what it was doing to our budget, but, in fact, how our employees felt getting more money on their paycheque. In fact, even the customers that were coming through the Goodwill stores at the time were spending a little bit more.

I fully support a rise in minimum wage, and this government is three years too late.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): The member for Brampton West.

Mr. Amarjot Sandhu: Ontario's population is continuing to grow, and that is why we are saying yes to building highways, projects like the Bradford Bypass and Highway 413. People deserve a transportation system that benefits businesses, commuters, families and reduces traffic congestion. This is a much-needed highway that will not only reduce traffic congestion, but it will attract more jobs, more businesses.

My question to the member opposite is: Can the member opposite explain why they want to continue to hold up barriers for highways like 413 and the Bradford Bypass that will create jobs, relieve gridlock and get Ontarians home faster so they can spend more time with their family and not behind the wheel?

Ms. Mitzie Hunter: I can't believe the member opposite is asking me that question, because I believe that if you understand that there's climate change happening and you support a green environment, you would actually be investing in things like transit that will continue to move more people in our region and to do it in a way that is more efficient.

At the same time, when you look at Highway 413 and you look along that corridor, look at the farmlands that you're going to be destroying, look at the environmentally sensitive watersheds and green areas that you're going to be paving over—for what? To save 30 seconds? It's just not the vision that we have. It's not what this province needs. You should be investing in things like education instead of Highway 413.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): The next question.

Mr. Paul Miller: To the member from Scarborough–Guildwood: I have a good memory, and I do remember in 2016 when we brought the \$15-and-fairness legislation forward—I believe you were in power in 2016—and that kind of fell on deaf ears and ended up at a committee and it died at committee.

I also remember a social services research commission which I wanted to establish in 2016-17, and that would have helped people on social assistance throughout the

province and made it more uniform. That fell by the wayside on committee, too.

So a lot of the things you're criticizing the government for—your government, at the time, didn't even listen to us. And now, all of a sudden, they're the bad—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): Pose your question, please.

Mr. Paul Miller: The question is, how can you justify going after them for something that you didn't do as the Liberal Party?

Ms. Mitzie Hunter: Well, that's just not the case, Speaker. It was the former Liberal government that moved the minimum wage to \$15 and enhanced many aspects of the Employment Standards Act for workers.

One of the first things this government did when they came into power was, they cancelled that minimum wage that was set to go into effect on January 1, 2019, and they really have set back the lowest-wage earners in this province by tens of thousands of dollars, in fact.

When I look at the Second Career program, that is definitely something that was introduced under the former Liberal government, and that this government, in its Bill 43 and fall economic statement, is enhancing to make sure that we support those workers who are transitioning in their careers. We need to do more of that.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): The next question?

Mr. Dave Smith: During the last 10 years of the last Liberal government, we saw an addition of 611 long-term-care beds and the time for care was stagnant.

Now that we're proposing so many new investments, like 30,000 new long-term-care beds and increasing the time for care to four hours, and adding 8,000 PSWs and 5,000 nurses to the system, why is the member opposite objecting to these things that are going to improve the quality of life for so many people?

Ms. Mitzie Hunter: To answer your question in a direct way, it's too little, too late. We've just gone through the last 20 months of a pandemic, and we know that personal support workers need to have a permanent pay increase; instead, it's temporary. The \$3 an hour has not been made permanent.

The 8,000 new PSWs you're saying you will hire—why didn't you do that in month three, just like Quebec? They invested in orderlies for their long-term care, and they did it that very first summer. Here we are 20 months in, and you're saying, "Oh, we plan to do this." It is just too little, too late. This should have been done a long time ago because we know that we're facing a shortage of PSWs, of nurses. That investment should have been made.

By the way, Bill 124 is disadvantaging our nurses and our front-line health care workers, and you need to address that as well.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): Further debate?

Mr. John Yakabuski: It has been a while since I've been able to engage in one of these debates, with the cohort system and all.

Before I get too deeply involved, I want to make a point that today is the birthday of one of my granddaughters. Adelaide Helena Colucci is eight years old today. And just in case I don't get to speak on Thursday, another granddaughter, May Wiebke Marion Mundt, will be 14 on Thursday. So I get to go home this weekend to a happy house.

We have 12 grandchildren and—to the point of the member for Scarborough–Guildwood—I understand very much the importance of family and children.

I did want to make a couple of comments before I get into my own remarks.

It was interesting to hear the questions from the member for Hamilton East–Stoney Creek to the member from Mushkegowuk–James Bay on the minimum wage. He talked about how he felt the change in the minimum wage—by the way, we are the ones who actually made it. We'll get it there because we've changed the rules.

1610

Ms. Mitzie Hunter: You cancelled it. What are you talking about?

Mr. John Yakabuski: Shh, shh, my turn now.

They're saying that it meant nothing, it was terrible—I'm just paraphrasing. But only a few weeks before that, the members of the opposition were campaigning and lobbying and petitioning and motioning for us to bring in a \$15-an-hour minimum wage. So I just don't quite understand it. All of a sudden, we do what they're asking for, but then it was a bad idea—

Interjection.

Mr. John Yakabuski: But I'm sure the member from Hamilton East–Stoney Creek is going to explain that to me when he has his opportunity to make remarks. It's been bouncing back and forth over there and here. So I will be interested to hear their explanation. Did they not mean it when they were lobbying for a \$15-an-hour minimum wage? I can't use the words here, but you know what I mean.

Anyway, Speaker, it is a great opportunity to be speaking here on the response to our tremendous finance minister Bethlenfalvy's fall economic statement, one which I don't think it's possible to overemphasize the importance of at this time. We are coming through—thank God—one of the most difficult periods that humans have ever experienced. We are getting there, and getting there slowly but surely. Who would have thought, 20 months ago, that we would have gone through—or 21 months, I suppose, or two years—that we were going to be dealing with and living through the kind of times that we've lived through in the past 20 months or so?

How do you determine, then, whether your government has responded properly or not? You know, there are many measures that you can take. And you can look at what this government has done, versus other governments all across the world and other governments right here in Canada or in North America, and you will have to come to the conclusion—and I know we won't get agreement over there, because it doesn't seem to matter what we've done. If we've done something this way, "You've moved too

slow.” If we’ve done something, “You’re moving too fast.” “You need to open up the restaurants—oh, no, now we’ve got a problem. You need to lock it down.”

We heard every opposite piece of advice from the other side over there, no matter what we did. No matter what we did, the Leader of the Opposition stood up and took a counter-position to it. They must have been tying themselves in knots in their own caucus meetings to try to determine, “How can we continue to be critical of the government and still try to maintain some semblance of credibility ourselves?” Because that’s what I saw for the past 20 months, coming from the other side. It was a daily ritual of challenging and condemning the government for whatever they’ve done—and then they should ask themselves, where are we now?

Where are we now? Well, you know, I was watching Global News—which is no friend of ours—and they were showing the cases per 100,000 in population the other day. They did the map all across Canada, and it was stark. When they’re talking about—and, yes, as the Minister of Health indicated today, we understand that as the weather changes, as it gets cooler and people are confined to being indoors more, windows not open, ventilation is different, that we’re going to have some rise in cases, and we’ve seen that. But the question is, how are we faring against other jurisdictions? Well, I tell you, we’re doing a heck of lot better than your cousins on the west coast. We’re doing much better, because we have managed this pandemic in the most thoughtful, pragmatic way, while still protecting the health and well-being of Ontarians. That is critical. And I want to give full marks to the minister and all those involved, including every single front-line worker in this province who has done so much to protect our population.

We’ve maintained from day one that the way out of this pandemic is through vaccination, and we continue to do that, and we continue to promote and encourage it in all sectors. That is why we have reached such tremendous uptake and numbers, getting close to 90% for a first dose and over 85%—almost 86%, I think it is—for a second dose. So we’re getting there. It’s not been easy, but the population has accepted that that is the route to getting this pandemic behind us. It is not going to be without having had a tremendously challenging and negative effect on our society, on our economy and everything else, but we’ve been there, steadfast right through, making sure that the ship has been steered with a steady hand.

So what do you do now? Well, our Minister of Finance laid it out the other day: Now our plan has to be about recovery, bringing Ontario back to the economic engine that it once was—we lost it during the 15 years of the previous government—and making Ontario that economic engine once again.

Some of the things we’ve done—and I know we’re talking about long-term care. How could we not talk about long-term care in the wake of this pandemic? No sector, no part of our society, was affected more negatively and greatly. What have we done? We’ve maintained and solidified and confirmed our commitment to 30,000 net new beds in the sector. But we’ve also made other

changes, as my colleague from Peterborough–Kawartha was saying: 8,000 PSWs, and some of those PSWs have been trained in my riding, at Willis College in Arnprior. We have a rapid response, so that we can get more of these people trained more quickly, so that we can get them into the homes that need them so badly, because you can’t just build 30,000 beds if you haven’t got somebody to take care of the people who are going to occupy that bed. That’s so hugely important.

And, critically important, we’ve legislated—it’s no longer a discussion; it’s no longer a talking point, as it was for folks on the other side—a promise. We’re making it; it’s done. We’re doing it: four hours of care for each resident in those long-term-care homes. I’m so pleased that I can talk about that, because I recently had the honour of being part of the opening of a new Grove nursing home in Arnprior, back near the end of September. That’s 96 beds, replacing a 60-bed home, and all 60 residents have now been moved into the new home. I had the opportunity to tour it, and I’d been in the old Grove nursing home many times. In fact, when that home opened in 1981, the two provincial politicians that were there to open it were Health Minister Dennis Timbrell—we didn’t have a long-term-care minister at that time—and the other was none other than Paul Yakabuski, the MPP for Renfrew South at the time, my father. So it was a great honour for me to be there to open the new Grove nursing home in Arnprior. The old circle comes back, you know? It was a great day.

But when I had that opportunity, Speaker, to look at the old Grove and the new Grove, and how we have changed and evolved, and how the level of care that we’re giving and the level of attention and understanding of the aging process, and how it has changed over the years, and what the clientele is, and how we’re addressing that, the new home is just—I just know that those residents who were being transferred from the old Grove to the new Grove must have felt like they were going into a new world. It really was that they were moving into something that was heavenly—not that they weren’t being cared for well in the old one; you just didn’t have the facility and the capacity to do all of the things that you’re able to do in this new home.

1620

Those are the kinds of things that we’re committed to, whereas the previous government, as has been said—I tell you, I understand. I spent 15 years on the other side, and I understand what being in opposition is all about. But you really have to know when to hold ‘em and when to fold ‘em, as Kenny Rogers would say, because when the Liberals want to talk about long-term care, that is not a subject they should ever want to open up. They should never want to open up that subject, because their record on long-term care is not one they can defend.

In fact, they actually had a policy—and that’s one of the reasons they had 611 new beds from 2011 to 2018; they literally began a policy of not building any more new long-term-care beds. They had a different philosophy. Some deep thinker gave them a better idea and they went for it, and that was part of the reason that there was nothing

happening in that sector, and that's one of the reasons that we had such a challenge when the pandemic hit. Challenge happened everywhere, all around the world. We were certainly not immune from it, and part of that was because of the neglect in that system by the Liberals over all those years.

I also want to talk about highways. I'm hearing so much from the opposition about how we shouldn't be building highways, that we should be building more public transit. Well, this government is doing both. This isn't one or the other. You have to be able to look into the future and see what's going to be needed. Somehow they think that we're not going to need highways, because everybody is going to be on a bus. I don't know what we're going to be doing. Transporter beams, too?

The reality is, we have millions of people coming to the province here in Ontario over the next decade or so. The next couple of decades, over four million people are expected. They're going to have to live somewhere, which means we have to build homes for them or get homes built. The NDP doesn't want to build homes. They want us to build nothing. Yet somehow we have to be able to accommodate the increase in population, and highways are part of that.

You know, I've heard some things said in here about the Bradford Bypass. It really pains me when I hear some of the comments because, I'll tell you, John and Sandy Cho are two of the finest people you're ever going to meet. They came here as immigrants with absolutely nothing, but with the work ethic that they had, they became successful because they were never afraid to tackle what was ahead of them. I just hope that people here will understand what a wonderful couple of people they are, and make sure that they temper their criticism appropriately.

Mr. Bill Walker: And their son, too; a sitting MPP.

Mr. John Yakubuski: Well, we know that, for Stan. Everybody knows Stan; not everybody knows his parents.

Mr. Bill Walker: I'm just telling it like it is.

Mr. John Yakubuski: Yes, thank you. I appreciate that, Bill.

I want to talk about highways in my riding, too—Highway 417. I hear the opposition saying, “Oh, we're putting all of this money into a couple of big projects and it's taking away money from other highways.” Well, we've got the biggest commitment to a capital project from the provincial government in history—the expanding and four-laning of Highway 17 through my riding—that's ever happened. That's a commitment. The money has been locked in, set aside and work has begun. The interchange at Calabogie Road will be beginning next year. That's the first part of it.

We're going to continue to build highways all across the province, because highways are needed. If these people are talking about emissions, we understand that. We had our minister over at the big summit. We're building the most productive electric car assemblies, and the batteries and everything, here in Ontario. We expect that, if all is according to Hoyle, those highways will be

travelled by people driving a car that doesn't have emissions from fossil fuels. But nevertheless, we still have to be able to move people. We still have to be able to move people throughout this province so that they can get around. I think sometimes they take a position over there just to be opposite of what this government is doing. But the reality is that we're looking to what the needs of Ontario will be, not just today but in five years, 10 years, 15 years and so on. We're making sure that we do the kinds of things that will provide those services to Ontario.

In my riding, Highway 17 is a massively important project. What does it mean? For one thing, we're talking about a significant economic development in the township of McNab/Braeside, which is west of Arnprior. The reason that they're looking at that area is because they see that the highway is going to continue to move west. We're talking about 600 jobs in a township like McNab/Braeside. Several companies, all from Europe, are looking to establish light manufacturing here, because we've got a great workforce, a willing workforce, good, hard-working people in Renfrew county—as you know, Speaker. You've been there yourself. You used to work there. You know exactly what kind of people I'm talking about. They want to establish a significant development right in Renfrew county, and that will be aided by the expansion of the highway.

We've got work going on on Highway 17, as I said, 41, 132, 28 and 60, all in the last few years. Quite frankly, I don't think I'm exaggerating when I say the highways in my riding have never been in better shape, and that's what we are committed to as a government.

I know the member for Mushkegowuk—James Bay spoke earlier about French-language services etc., and I understand how he feels about that. It's an important issue, not just in his riding but for people in the north in general. I remember when I went to see our son the first time he was working at Halfway Lake Provincial Park. It was actually the first time I'd ever spent any time in Sudbury, and I was quite surprised at the level of francophone in that community. It's massive. So we understand.

That's why, for example, we're building a French-language school in Arnprior, in Renfrew county, brand new, because we recognize that everyone has a right to have that opportunity to have that French-language school in their community when numbers warrant. In fact, when the budget came in, and because of the pandemic and everything our costs came in \$1.5 million higher on the quotes to build it, what did we do? We talked to the Minister of Education and secured the additional money to make sure that that French-language school gets built in Arnprior.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): We have time for questions, and the first one goes to the member for Hamilton East—Stoney Creek.

Mr. Paul Miller: I'd love to address the member from Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke. When he mentioned my name and the \$15 and our position on that—if I remember correctly, and I don't think he was away that day, the Liberals promised to bring it to \$15 an hour, and they lost

the election and didn't bring it forward. The party that the member over there represents said, "We're cancelling that. We're not moving ahead with the \$15 an hour," and they didn't move ahead with it. Now, seven months before an election, they bring in \$15 an hour, which, if they hadn't cancelled that program back then, could be heading in the neighbourhood of \$17 or \$18 an hour for minimum wage, which is getting closer to a livable wage.

Why did we push for \$15 an hour? Because we felt it was a good starting point three years ago when we brought it forward. Now this member is trying to screen it—how would I put it? Make it look like they're doing us a big favour at \$15 an hour when they cancelled it. So—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): Thank you very much. I guess we'll turn it over to the member from Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke to reply to the question that wasn't quite put to you.

1630

Mr. John Yakabuski: I think I understand it, Speaker. I do thank the member for his—whether it's a question or a rebuttal to my points or whatever. Whatever it is, he's right about the \$15-an-hour minimum wage at the time of the 2018 election. We publicly campaigned saying that we would not proceed with it, and we were elected with a majority government across Ontario.

But we've also recognized that in those intervening years, I say to the member from Hamilton East–Stoney Creek, the world has changed a lot, and the pandemic has certainly accelerated so much of that change. That's what you have to be as a government—not only recognizing that what was the right decision three years ago may not be the right thing today, because you have to be nimble enough and willing to adapt enough to the changing needs of the people of the day. And that's what we've done.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): The next question?

Mr. Jeremy Roberts: I appreciate the remarks from the MPP for Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke, who always delivers such passionate remarks in this chamber.

One of the reasons I sought elected office was because I had seen, for years and years and years, the neglect of long-term care in Ontario. I know that this is something that this member has fought passionately for throughout his entire career in public service. It seems to me, Speaker, that for years we've struggled to see new beds built and adequate support for staff.

I'm wondering if the member could speak a little bit about what our government is doing to adequately address this challenge that has been going on for far too many years.

Mr. John Yakabuski: I thank the member for Ottawa West–Nepean for that question. Boy, he's sure right: This government has recognized the need to address that because it had not been addressed. There's no arguing about whether or not the Liberals addressed the shortage of beds and the need to increase the capacity in long-term care. So that was our number one thing: Increase the capacity—and it gave me an opportunity to cover a couple of things that I wasn't able to cover in my first part.

Even in my own riding—I talked about the Grove in Arnprior. We also have redevelopments approved and money set aside for redevelopment at Valley Manor in Barry's Bay, Marianhill in Pembroke, and a brand new home in Deep River. Those are just in my riding alone.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): Ten seconds.

Mr. John Yakabuski: Is that it?

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): I'm giving you a 10-second warning.

Mr. John Yakabuski: Oh.

So if you think of that much in my riding, extrapolate that across the whole province. That's what this government is doing.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): The next question?

Ms. Marit Stiles: I want to thank the member from Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke for his comments.

This past weekend, I was door to door in the community in my riding which we call the Junction Triangle. There are a lot of young families in that area who are really struggling. One of the major struggles—and I think this is true of young families across the province—is the struggle to find child care spaces and to be able to afford them. In my riding, the median price for child care is \$1,600 a month per child.

I wonder if the member opposite would care to comment on why there is really no mention of child care here and when this government is going to get to the table with the federal government and deliver \$10-a-day child care to the people of this province.

Mr. John Yakabuski: I thank the member from Davenport for her question. I do understand it because our youngest grandchild was born on July 1—so we've got lots of ones who are going to be in that situation. They live in Newmarket, so child care is definitely going to be an issue.

If you want to talk about being responsible, why would we not want to make sure that this province gets the best possible deal from the federal government when assessing child care? We have a unique situation in Ontario, which you know, and the Minister of Education has been absolutely forthwith and transparent in letting people understand why he is trying to get a better deal from the federal government. We have a unique situation with full-day, all-day kindergarten, and when the federal government gives us a proper deal, we'll—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): Thank you. The member for Peterborough–Kawartha has a question.

Mr. Dave Smith: In the member's speech, he talked about investment in highways and so on. There has been some criticism from the opposition that we're not investing in anything else and the smaller municipalities are going to lose out. There are more than 400 municipalities in Ontario, and in the FES, we've increased the OCIF funding by a billion dollars. Can you explain how that is going to be a massive benefit to those small rural municipalities that we have in Ontario?

Mr. John Yakabuski: Thank you to the member for Peterborough–Kawartha for that question. You’re touching on one of the most important parts of rural and small-town Ontario in our fall economic statement. That’s an additional billion dollars that is going to be put towards infrastructure projects in those communities.

We were talking about Royal Pines Road in North Algona Wilberforce in my riding. I’ve driven on that road many times. It’s going to be a big improvement on that road. That’s a municipal road. If you look over the last few years, the municipal roads have gotten better too, because we have been supporting those municipalities to help them upgrade their infrastructure. That’s going to continue. We recognize that rural Ontario is an important part of Ontario, and we’re going to continue to support it.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): The member for Ottawa Centre has a question.

Mr. Joel Harden: I always love to hear my neighbour up the Ottawa Valley speak in this place. I have a couple of questions—probably embedded in one question for him.

You mentioned the steady hand in 20 months. I wonder if you could you help me understand why the steady hand was steering in a particular direction. Before the pandemic hit, what we know is that comprehensive inspections of long-term-care homes were massively reduced. We had to fight the Liberal government over this. We embarrassed them enough that they backed off. The member was part of that effort. But now we know that before the pandemic hit in 2019, comprehensive inspections only happened in nine out of 626 homes, and that Canadian Armed Forces report is forever seared into the memory of this country, about how shameful it was that 4,000 of our elders died in that pandemic.

So my honest question to the member is: Were we going in the right direction? And are you worried that these beds that we’re talking about—many of them—are being built by the same for-profit operators linked to your party and to the Liberal Party that are enriching themselves at our elders’ expense? Is that troubling?

Mr. John Yakabuski: Thank you to the member for Ottawa Centre for his question. Our Premier and our minister have said, more than once, we all share, successive governments all share in where long-term care was in the province of Ontario. But it has been put on our shoulders to fix it. We’re the government and we’re going to do just that. In fact—

Interjections.

Mr. John Yakabuski: Yes, thank you very much. I love the sound of applause.

So the minister has indicated—I don’t have this in front of me—we’re going to double the number of inspectors for long-term-care homes in the province of Ontario, and we’re going to give them teeth. We recognize—everybody recognizes, nobody is denying, and I say this to the member: There was a problem, there is a problem and we’re going to fix it—we’re committed—so that that vulnerable portion of our population, those elderly people who deserve the very best from us, will get it.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): Further debate?

Mr. John Yakabuski: Oh, am I done?

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): You’re all done, buddy. You’re all done.

Member for Davenport.

Ms. Marit Stiles: It’s really a pleasure to rise on behalf of the great people of the riding of Davenport here in the debate of what is called the—it’s really the legislation arising from the fall economic statement, or the mini budget, for those watching.

Speaker, our economy is just starting to recover, and as many workers are returning to the job, we are in very fragile times. Families are trying to balance a return to the workforce while schools and child care centres remain under risk of outbreak, as we eagerly await an approval on a vaccine for children 5 to 11. The pandemic is not over, as has been made abundantly clear by increasing case numbers in public health units around the province, and the risk of another deadly wave is very real. If anxiety about that wasn’t enough, people are being hit simultaneously with the rising cost of, well, everything. People need their government to show some leadership, some foresight and some sense of urgency to take on these problems, but they are not getting that. This bill—again, implementing what was in the fall economic statement—isn’t going to deliver it for them either, I’m afraid to say.

1640

Speaker, today I want to talk a little bit about three major themes that I was thinking of when I read through this and listened to the fall economic statement—it’s pretty lightweight; I’ll put it that way—and this legislation: what Ontario needs and what Ontarians need, what they should be getting from their government, and why they simply aren’t getting that.

Yesterday I had the pleasure of rising to speak to the leader of the official opposition’s motion that the government deal with the affordability crisis in Ontario. I think that was very timely.

This is a great province. I am so proud to be an Ontarian. When I grew up in Newfoundland, we looked to Ontario and we said, “Wow. Look what they’ve got. We don’t have that.” You know, don’t you, Speaker? They had it all. In fact, I went to the Canada Winter Games three times when I was a young person. We’d go to the Canada Winter Games and we’d be wearing our very nice but simple uniforms, and the Ontario team was, like, amazing. There was the sense that that’s where people went to get by, and a lot of Newfoundlanders like me left for economic reasons.

But today in Ontario, things are very, very different, and I am acutely aware of that in the community which I represent. They have been different for a long time. Under respective Conservative and Liberal governments, we have seen life get harder and harder for people. Costs are going up, even for the most basic of human needs—rights, really—like a roof over your head, food in your belly and a warm place to sleep at night. The pandemic has made things even harder, it’s true, but to a great extent, it has

also just shone a light on the issues that many Ontarians have been experiencing for years.

According to this year's Who's Hungry report from the Daily Bread and North York Harvest food banks, released just yesterday, new clients outnumbered existing users at the city's food banks and community food programs. It was reported on CBC News that there were 1.45 million visits to Toronto food banks between April 2020 and March 2021, the highest use ever recorded. In my riding, community members have started their own network of community fridges stocked by volunteers—literally a donated refrigerator plugged in on the street. They are a low-barrier way of getting people the very basics of survival, but the fact that that is even necessary should alarm all of us here.

Meanwhile, over a third of Ontarians pay rent that is just plain unaffordable, and now that the eviction moratorium is over, the result is more and more people being forced from their homes and onto the streets, or forced to build makeshift shelters in city parks. Let me tell you, that is not a pretty sight, and it is a very divisive issue in my community.

And what about those trying to find a more affordable home? There are more than 185,000 families on the waitlist for affordable housing. Over 35% of them are seniors—one third. The dream of owning a home is simply that to many young people: a dream. In my community and across this province, they're watching towers go up all around them, knowing they can't even afford the down payment on a condo and that they won't be able to afford to rent any of those units—not even close.

In terms of child care—and I mentioned this in my question just a few moments ago to one of the members opposite—we have the highest fees in the country. The median cost in my riding—in the city of Toronto, really—is \$1,600 per month per child. This has absolutely effectively forced women, in particular, out of the workforce, long before the pandemic even started, and let me tell you, that's if you can find a child care space, which many of the families that I meet every day are not able to. They cannot find a space, and with the continued restrictions around COVID, there are fewer and fewer spaces. We have spaces that are closing. I have parents who are losing child care spaces that they got for like a year, and now they're losing them again. And retention of workers, when you look at how little our ECEs are paid, is, I think, one of the biggest issues on the horizon right now in terms of child care, just holding on to those workers.

We've all been talking a lot about eye care in this House, right? I wish we didn't have to, but it is mind-boggling. People in this province are going right now without needed medical care—and yes, it is medical care—because this government will not negotiate in good faith with optometrists.

We've learned this week now that two members, I think, of the Conservative caucus have raised these issues and their concerns with the caucus. Well, good for them. Good for them. Why isn't your caucus listening? We've been talking today about—are we going to have to find

more space on this side of the House again? I don't know, Mr. Speaker. Because I've got to tell you, I'm a little worried about anybody over there raising issues with their caucus.

It is day 77 of services being withheld, and children and seniors in this province are the ones paying the price. We know it was underfunded for decades under the previous Liberal government, but that is not a reason to continue that. You are in government now; fix this.

Now, on the topic of wages—and we're talking, still, about how unaffordable life has become in this province. For most of the Liberals' 15 years in power, the minimum wage was frozen. It took years and years of activism and a looming election to force them to finally increase it. We all know that. And then this Premier came in and rolled it back again, immediately upon coming into power. That decision cost the lowest-paid workers in Ontario dearly—at least \$5,300. Now, years later, they're deciding to reverse their decision, and they're looking for accolades? Are you kidding me? By the way, \$15 is not nearly enough in 2021 to pay for shelter, for food and for medicine. So while this government tries to rebrand its low-wage policies as somehow worker-friendly—please.

Bill 124 is a weight around the neck of every public sector worker in this province. It shows enormous disrespect for those workers, including the nurses that this government calls our health care heroes. Shameful. Nurses were here, actually, just this Sunday demanding the repeal of that legislation. The very people who put their lives on the line to save the lives of others during this pandemic, they should not have to beg to be paid fairly or to have their constitutional bargaining rights respected, for goodness' sake.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, let's turn to the number one issue for many Ontarians, which is their kids: youth, their grandkids, those young adults, our children. Students, from the littlest 3-year-olds to the 17- and 18-year-olds and also, by the way, our adult students, lost a minimum of 26 weeks of school during the pandemic. Schools in Ontario were closed longer than in any other jurisdiction. Why? Because this government refused to prioritize them. That's the only reason; that's the only explanation.

The opposition and education efforts put out proposal after proposal. Parents flooded the Premier's phone lines, and still the solutions, which were really clear—proactive rapid testing, smaller class sizes, mandatory vaccination, a comprehensive vaccination strategy—if they arrived, it was always too late, if it came at all. Too late to keep our kids healthy, too late to keep them in school, too late to ensure that our exhausted educators were supported.

Today, most of the largest boards in the province have teachers who are right now juggling terrible hybrid learning environments. It's just outrageous. Education workers are leaving the system because of stress and sickness and exhaustion and a lack of respect. The fact that they're doing that because of this government's failures—well, wait until you see what we're going to be dealing with in another couple of years: a shortage of nurses, shortage of PSWs, shortage of ECEs, shortage of education workers, and we'll know who to blame.

Our kids had their learning disrupted. Some of them—and it's really hard to quantify this, I will say, but we know that large numbers of students left the system forever and we simply cannot find them. They are gone. Ask folks like Irvin Studin about that.

What does this bill do to address those issues? Nothing. Absolutely nothing. Time and again, the Premier has made it clear the he is here to help his friends, not the people struggling to get by. He's let housing, auto insurance and hydro prices rise completely out of control. He stalled \$10-a-day child care, the plan that the federal government is trying to negotiate, that many of us have fought generations for. He's refused to invest in affordable and supportive housing. This government has actually punished workers with low-wage policies that hurt people and hurt our economy. He has let ODSP stagnate at absolutely criminal levels while grocery prices double. At a time when people across this beautiful province are looking for a road map to a just, green and equitable path to economic recovery, these guys are giving away sweet deals that benefit the few at the expense of the many at a price that is going to—I'll be clear, Mr. Speaker—be paid by future generations.

1650

The YWCA Ontario Coalition said about this bill and this statement—and I want to quote: “We did not see any indication of the bold transformative action that is required to see women enter or re-enter the workforce in ways that will address this province's dire labour shortage and stimulate the economy.”

It's not rocket science, though, is it, Mr. Speaker? This is an enormous missed opportunity. Economists have been talking about this throughout the pandemic. This would be our greatest challenge; this is our greatest challenge. I've got to say that I think this is the challenge for all of us over the next few years, maybe the next decade or more, that economic recovery. We are just beginning to feel the impact of this pandemic, and it is such a missed opportunity, such a loss.

These pages we were presented with are just nothing. They might as well be blank. Imagine how people who were hearing that speech, realizing that there would be nothing there to address those issues—and I mean, not one mention of education. But not just that, deciding to drop \$11 billion on highways that no one wants or needs while cutting \$500 million—half a billion dollars—from our community schools. In this moment, when our kids are struggling the most, imagine a government that would prioritize that.

I was hoping we would see, in that bill and in that fall economic statement, a commitment by this government to repeal Bill 124—now, please. How can you look nurses in the eye and say, “We value you, but we're just going to pay you pennies and we're not going to let you negotiate any more”? What enormous disrespect is that?

It's also a missed opportunity to attract health care workers—and we saw that as well with ECEs and teachers again. These are missed opportunities that we will pay the price for down the road.

I was listening to a nurse named Jen Miller on Metro Morning on CBC this morning—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): I'm sorry to interrupt just for a moment.

Pursuant to standing order 50(c), I'm now required to interrupt the proceedings and announce that there have been six and a half hours of debate on the motion for second reading of this bill. This debate will therefore be deemed adjourned unless the government House leader directs the debate to continue.

The member for Barrie—Innisfil.

Ms. Andrea Khanjin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Please continue.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): We will continue the debate, and we go back to the member from Davenport.

Ms. Marit Stiles: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As I was saying, I was listening to a nurse named Jen Miller on CBC Radio this morning, and what she said was, “Ontario is a Titanic, and there aren't enough lifeboats.”

Interjections.

Ms. Marit Stiles: The members opposite don't like me saying that, but this was a nurse, one of your so-called health care heroes, who said very clearly, the disrespect they're showing for nurses is going to be a problem, we are facing more disasters and we're not going to be ready for it.

The last few weeks, this whole world has been watching discussions in Edinburgh, but was there any commitment from this government to fight climate change? Nothing. If we are going to make change in Canada, Ontario must be at the table, Mr. Speaker. Instead, nothing—and worse yet, what was on the table? What's on the table? Highways. It feels like 1960; it really does. It feels sometimes like 1960. John Doyle in the Globe talked about this government has this Archie Bunker mentality, and I think 1960s, 1970s—that's the kind of budget we're looking at.

No eye care deal; where is it? It should have been included. Nothing for people living on ODSP, no vaccine plan for five-to-11-year-olds, nothing to address racism and equity issues, nothing to address affordable housing.

Just last week, Mr. Speaker, Toronto city council passed a motion to formally request \$48 million in annual ongoing operating funding to create 2,000 new supportive housing opportunities for vulnerable and marginalized individuals, including people experiencing homelessness. It also reiterated its request for the federal and provincial governments to provide new, enhanced, accelerated investments and policy tools.

The answers are there. The government just needs to look and act, but instead, they're doing partisan polling on housing issues to see what's politically helpful to them. That's shameful. We know what needs to be done. What's missing is the political will and the courage to do it.

Why did the government make the choice to leave all of that out of their mini-budget and out of this legislation? I would say, Speaker, that the answer is very simple, and it's money—not more money in the pockets of regular people or seniors, or money invested in the things that

matter to Ontarians. No—more money in the pockets of the wealthiest few, the donors to the PC Party, the developers who have been making a mint on the backs of hard-working Ontarians.

This government made a choice not to invest in preventing climate change or in green energy. They're investing in highways. There are communities all over Ontario that need new or improved roads. Ford is shelving those to build these multi-billion dollar roads for the benefit of his developer friends—and it's so clear; you just have to look at the map. Where highways should be built, they should be built for safety, not politics, and not to make the rich richer. These roads are not going to save commuting time. If you want to do that, build more public transit, provide more options, trains. That's what changes things.

There is no question what this bill and this budget is about. It's about making this government's rich friends richer.

I would love to know what conversations happened over lunch at the minister's father's golf course. It must have been one hell of a tuna salad is all I can say. "Let's just move that over there, move it a little bit this way. We'll move a few more houses. Pass the ketchup." What was that conversation?

It reminds me of another transportation minister exercising undue influence over transit planning—Liberal leader Steven Del Duca and his decision, you'll recall, to relocate a GO station to his own riding against the advice of his own ministry.

I can tell you, Mr. Speaker, that people across this province are tired of politics taking precedence over good transit planning.

These questions that I've just raised demand some transparency from this government.

While this government is building highways to advance the interests of developers that donate to their party, those same developers are trampling on communities across this province, and mine is one of them. The failure of this government to truly address the need for deeply affordable housing and rent is more than apparent in the building of multiple towers in my riding where the pressure on schools and transit is already enormous—and there is not a penny for that. The government's own legislation allows developers to override community interests, even when communities come together—and these are not NIMBY concerns. People in my community are fine with condo towers. They would like some of the middle-sized housing too, but they're okay with that as long as there's something back, like deeply affordable rental units.

Speaker, I have three words for this government when it comes to this bill—not good enough. It's not good enough for families. It's not good enough for working people. It's not good enough for our kids, for their future. It's a lost opportunity, a complete failure. It's not the road map to economic recovery that people in this province so desperately need.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): We have time for questions. The first question goes to the member from Scarborough–Rouge Park.

Mr. Vijay Thanigasalam: I was listening to the speech from the member opposite.

This government is not just building highways. This government is also building public transit and also building GO Transit—two-way, all-day service—and also doing highway repairs, road repairs, and rehabilitation roadwork across Ontario.

1700

My question to the member opposite is, why does the member in the opposition keep not supporting the investment on highways, on public transit—the historic investment in public transit in the history of the GTA, the history of Ontario, \$28.5 billion in the four priority subways, and expanding GO services? And why is the member opposite not supporting—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): Thank you. The member for Davenport to respond.

Ms. Marit Stiles: Thank you to the member from Scarborough–Rouge Park for that question. I think I can answer it pretty easily: You've cancelled those projects. This government, the first thing they did when they came to power is they cancelled a whole bunch of projects and came up with these vanity projects, is all I can call them, for the Premier of this province.

Transit planning takes years. It takes an enormous commitment. And frankly, we need to take the politics out of it. I think this government has shown what can go very deeply wrong when politics and partisanship become part of the decision-making about transit and roads.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): The next question.

Ms. Jennifer K. French: I appreciate the member from Davenport's thoughtful comments. I want to delve a little bit into child care, because I already shared on the record some letters and ideas from my community. We see that it's harder for women who have child care costs, who are single mothers or who are trying to flee abuse. We see that it's a dangerous scenario for them if they don't have access to affordable child care. You had raised not enough spaces. All of these things work together to keep women out of the workforce. That's something that I have heard: that a not-for-profit has people who can't accept the job because they can't afford child care, and they're forced to literally choose to stay home instead of working at jobs that they want.

So could you tell me what it would mean to the people in my community to have affordable \$10-a-day child care, or even a worthwhile child care strategy that is accessible and affordable?

Ms. Marit Stiles: Thank you very much, to the member for Oshawa, for that really thoughtful question. She does such an amazing job representing her community and bringing these issues into the Legislature. I think it's very much appreciated.

Absolutely. What would it mean, \$10-a-day child care? I literally remember—and it's 20 years ago now—being heavily pregnant, bouncing around in a pregnancy aquafit class with women in my community, and we were talking about child care. Everybody had their kids already on a

list. Many didn't get in. This was 20 years ago. Nowadays, you're lucky—if your kid is two years old, you're lucky to get a spot.

But the funny thing is, I remember us talking, and I said, "You know, in Quebec they have \$7-a-day child care." It was \$7 at the time. And I swear, it's amazing that everybody didn't just go into labour right then, because it's unimaginable for us here. How transformative would that be for families in this province. It would be massive and it's achievable, and this government needs to get to the table.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): The next question.

Mr. Dave Smith: I understand that each of us advocates on behalf of the residents of our ridings. The member opposite's riding is 12 square kilometres, which is smaller than some of the family farms in my riding of 3,200 square kilometres. What would the member opposite have me say to my farm families when I say, "We're not going to make it easy for you to bring food to the GTA to feed the millions of people here, because you can put it on a bus or other public transit"?"

Ms. Marit Stiles: I'd like to thank the member from Peterborough—Kawartha for that question. My riding—you obviously have been doing some research. You might have also noticed that it is framed by train rails, by railroads. It is literally defined by rail, and there are constant projects happening in my community—overnight construction around rails. And people are quite accepting, generally. They don't want to be woken up at three in the morning, but they accept that this is really important. Why? Because it brings food into our communities, and the people in my community are very thankful for the food that is provided and created by farmers.

But I'll tell you one thing: What your government is proposing to do is to pave over that farmland. So we will absolutely oppose that, 100%, because we actually support farmers, and my people in my community value the work they do.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): The member for Ottawa Centre has a question.

Mr. Joel Harden: It's always great to hear my friend from Davenport hold forth in this place. I want to give her the opportunity to expand on an aspect of her remarks.

I recently met with parents from Louise Arbour school, which is one of the French public schools in our riding. There's a group of parents who were joking about the need for a rapid test liberation front, because one of the groups, sadly, that this government said no to were parents and community groups struggling to get rapid tests into schools because we still don't have a vaccination strategy for kids aged five to 11. But the government said no, and the biggest unvaccinated population in our province right now are kids aged five to 11.

I would love the member's help to understand why the government has allowed, from what I can tell, 11 million rapid tests to sit in warehouses in the province of Ontario instead of finding a way to get those rapid tests to schools so we can make sure our kids are safe in schools.

Ms. Marit Stiles: Thank you so much to the member from Ottawa Centre. I also want to say what a tremendous job he does, as well, advocating for the folks in his community. It's wonderful to see how he represents them here in this Legislature. Thank you so much.

That's interesting, and it is a question I've heard from people across Ontario, these missing tests. And where are they? This government's own plan, finally, in mid-November, to actually get tests out to communities—most of those public health units are saying, "We still don't got 'em. We don't have them. Boards don't have them. We don't know where they are."

Once again, we have a government that—and you have to hand it to parents. They got together; they tried their best. It wasn't the most equitable approach, but when a provincial government refuses to lift a hand to do anything, parents get active. They will become creative, and they will find solutions. This government shut them down.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): The next question.

Ms. Andrea Khanjin: My question to the member is, when she did review the fall economic statement to talk about what's in it for her constituents and members she talks about, did she read things like—let me see here—pages 133, 132, and did she read page 78 of the fall economic statement? I'd prefer if she could just say yes or no, and then I have a supplemental. Thank you.

Ms. Marit Stiles: I don't know if we have supplementals. Interesting.

I've read it, so I guess I read those pages. I don't know what the purpose of that member's statement was, but I thank the member for Barrie—Innisfil. Maybe she could be more specific.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): The next question.

Mr. Michael Mantha: I always try to come to the legislative floor here with a lens from a northern Ontario perspective. There was very little inside of this fall economic statement that would help a lot of northern Ontarians. There was an opportunity for us—those little white flies that you're seeing outside—to invest in winter road maintenance. I didn't see that in here. I didn't see anything on gas prices. I didn't see anything on the cost of housing. I didn't see anything on auto insurance. I didn't see anything inside the context of this fall economic statement in regard to how they're going to be bringing down hydro bills.

There's not a lot that I have seen. I would like the member to comment particularly on what's there that could possibly help northern Ontarians that I'm failing in not seeing right now.

Ms. Marit Stiles: Thank you to the member from Algoma—Manitoulin. One of the things I really appreciate about the member from Algoma—Manitoulin is how he continually brings the voice of his community, particularly northerners, into this place. I've had some experience working in the north and in northern communities, and I really appreciate that.

I would say, looking at this—and I try to look at legislation not just from the perspective of people in my community. I do try to look at it and see if there are things for people and communities beyond ours, because, obviously, you're looking out for the entire province here. I was really having a hard time—and I know we've discussed this in the past, but this government's failure to

prioritize northerners—and rural communities too, generally, I think—the fact that there's nothing there, for example, to support rural northern schools or busing or any of those things that are really on the mind and really affect the quality of life for people in northern communities—it's sorely lacking here.

Report continues in volume B.

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Harden, Joel (NDP)	Ottawa Centre / Ottawa-Centre	
Harris, Mike (PC)	Kitchener—Conestoga	
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Lindo, Laura Mae (NDP)	Kitchener Centre / Kitchener-Centre	
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Mantha, Michael (NDP)	Algoma—Manitoulin	
Martin, Robin (PC)	Eglinton—Lawrence	
Martow, Gila (PC)	Thornhill	
McDonell, Jim (PC)	Stormont—Dundas—South Glengarry	
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McNaughton, Hon. / L'hon. Monte (PC)	Lambton—Kent—Middlesex	Minister of Labour, Training and Skills Development / Ministre du Travail, de la Formation et du Développement des compétences
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Miller, Paul (NDP)	Hamilton East—Stoney Creek / Hamilton-Est—Stoney Creek	
Mitas, Christina Maria (PC)	Scarborough Centre / Scarborough- Centre	
Monteith-Farrell, Judith (NDP)	Thunder Bay—Atikokan	
Morrison, Suze (NDP)	Toronto Centre / Toronto-Centre	

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Parsa, Michael (PC)	Aurora—Oak Ridges—Richmond Hill	Deputy Government House Leader / Leader parlementaire adjoint du gouvernement
Pettapiece, Randy (PC)	Perth—Wellington	
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Piccini, Hon. / L'hon. David (PC)	Northumberland—Peterborough South / Northumberland—Peterborough-Sud	Minister of the Environment, Conservation and Parks / Ministre de l'Environnement, de la Protection de la nature et des Parcs
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Rasheed, Hon. / L'hon. Kaleed (PC)	Mississauga East—Cooksville / Mississauga-Est—Cooksville	Associate Minister of Digital Government / Ministre associé délégué de l'Action pour un gouvernement numérique
Rickford, Hon. / L'hon. Greg (PC)	Kenora—Rainy River	Minister of Indigenous Affairs / Ministre des Affaires autochtones Minister of Northern Development, Mines, Natural Resources and Forestry / Ministre du Développement du Nord, des Mines, des Richesses naturelles et des Forêts
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Romano, Hon. / L'hon. Ross (PC)	Sault Ste. Marie	Minister of Government and Consumer Services / Ministre des Services gouvernementaux et des Services aux consommateurs
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Sandhu, Amarjot (PC)	Brampton West / Brampton-Ouest	
Sarkaria, Hon. / L'hon. Prabmeet Singh (PC)	Brampton South / Brampton-Sud	President of the Treasury Board / Président du Conseil du Trésor
Sattler, Peggy (NDP)	London West / London-Ouest	Opposition House Leader / Leader parlementaire de l'opposition officielle
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Scott, Laurie (PC)	Haliburton—Kawartha Lakes—Brock	
Shaw, Sandy (NDP)	Hamilton West—Ancaster—Dundas / Hamilton-Ouest—Ancaster—Dundas	
Simard, Amanda (LIB)	Glengarry—Prescott—Russell	
Singh, Gurratan (NDP)	Brampton East / Brampton-Est	Deputy Opposition House Leader / Leader parlementaire adjoint de l'opposition officielle
Singh, Sara (NDP)	Brampton Centre / Brampton-Centre	Deputy Leader, Official Opposition / Chef adjointe de l'opposition officielle
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Smith, Hon. / L'hon. Todd (PC)	Bay of Quinte / Baie de Quinte	Minister of Energy / Ministre de l'Énergie
Stevens, Jennifer (Jennie) (NDP)	St. Catharines	
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Surma, Hon. / L'hon. Kinga (PC)	Etobicoke Centre / Etobicoke-Centre	Minister of Infrastructure / Ministre de l'Infrastructure
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