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Mardi
15 novembre 2022

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Clerk: Todd Decker

Président : L'honorable Ted Arnott
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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

Tuesday 15 November 2022

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

Mardi 15 novembre 2022

The House met at 0900.

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

Prayers.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

PROGRESS ON THE PLAN TO BUILD ACT (BUDGET MEASURES), 2022

LOI DE 2022 SUR LA PROGRESSION DU PLAN POUR BÂTIR (MESURES BUDGÉTAIRES)

Mr. Bethlenfalvy moved second reading of the following bill:

Bill 36, An Act to implement Budget measures and to enact and amend various statutes / Projet de loi 36, Loi visant à mettre en oeuvre les mesures budgétaires et à édicter et à modifier diverses lois.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Would the minister care to lead off the debate?

Hon. Peter Bethlenfalvy: Yes, thank you. Today I rise to speak to the second reading of the Progress on the Plan to Build Act (Budget Measures), 2022. I will be splitting my time with my two parliamentary assistants, the member for Oakville and the member for Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound. I'm glad to see them here in their seats.

Yesterday, I introduced the Ontario economic outlook and fiscal review and tabled our first ever Building Ontario Progress Report. The progress report and fall bill highlight how our flexible and responsible plan is positioning the province to be ready to manage uncertainty and risk as the world faces emerging economic challenges. It is my honour to continue to discuss the highlights in that report that showcase how we have progressed on our plan to build and to discuss the measures in the fall bill that are aimed at furthering the progress spelled out in our fall economic statement.

Monsieur le Président, le rapport d'étape et le projet de loi de l'automne montrent en quoi notre plan flexible et responsable met la province à même de gérer l'incertitude et le risque à un moment où le monde fait face à des difficultés économiques émergentes. C'est pour moi un honneur de continuer à discuter des points saillants de ce rapport qui mettent en évidence les progrès que nous avons réalisés au regard de notre plan pour bâtir et de discuter des mesures prises dans le projet de loi de l'automne pour faire suite aux progrès annoncés dans notre énoncé économique de l'automne.

I am pleased to say that we have made significant progress on our plan. I will first take a moment to list the key pieces of legislative business contained in the bill.

Related to the Ontario Guaranteed Annual Income Act, we are proposing to temporarily double the Ontario Guaranteed Annual Income System payment. This temporary measure would be for 12 months, starting in January 2023. This step is a way that our government can help keep costs down for low-income seniors.

Mr. Speaker, we are also proposing an extension of the gasoline and fuel tax rate reductions under the Gasoline Tax Act and the Fuel Tax Act. We are also working to keep costs down and put more money back in the pockets of the people of Ontario by including the cut to the gas tax and the fuel tax. Statistics Canada noted that the province's rate cut was a contributor to the decline in gas prices in Ontario for the month of July, helping to lower consumer price inflation.

This bill also proposes amendments to the Ontario Production Services Tax Credit under the tax act of 2007. The proposed amendments would expand eligible expenditures for the Ontario Production Services Tax Credit to include location fees to help attract domestic and foreign film and television production to the province, and incentivize more on-location filming in communities across Ontario.

De plus, nous proposons des modifications au crédit d'impôt de l'Ontario pour les services de production, prévues dans la Loi de 2007 sur les impôts. Les modifications proposées permettraient d'élargir les dépenses admissibles aux fins du crédit d'impôt de l'Ontario pour les services de production en y incluant les frais de lieux de tournage pour attirer la production télévisuelle et cinématographique canadienne et internationale dans la province, et encourager davantage les tournages dans des localités de l'Ontario.

We are also proposing to extend the current freeze on the salaries of members of provincial Parliament. We also have proposals related to the acts that provide the government with the usual spending authority it requires to carry on operations for the 2022-23 and the 2023-24 fiscal years.

In relation to the Securities Act, we are proposing to introduce rule-making authority to allow public companies to digitize access to certain financial documents. This proposal shows how Ontario is moving ahead with modernizing the way public companies communicate with investors and the market to reduce regulatory burden and support the digitization of the economy.

We are also proposing amendments to the Pension Benefits Act related to the framework to target benefit

pension plans. These amendments will allow the government to work with stakeholders to develop a clear and fair framework for their pension plans, specifically around funding, governance and communication.

Finally, Madam Speaker, we are proposing amendments to authorize the creation of a provincial clean energy credit registry. This proposed change would launch a voluntary clean energy credit registry in 2023 to help boost competitiveness, attract jobs and provide businesses with more choice in how they pursue their environmental and sustainability goals. These legislative changes and amendments are part of our government's plan to build Ontario. This province, its people and our government are focused on getting things done.

Our Building Ontario Progress Report shows how we are making progress in attracting investments and creating good jobs. It is our government that has, over the last two years, helped attract \$16 billion in transformative global auto investments of electric vehicles and electric vehicle batteries in Ontario. And it is our government that is investing \$2.5 billion to help make Ontario a world-leading producer of low-carbon steel. I'm sure the Minister of Economic Development, Job Creation and Trade would completely agree with me. We got a thumbs-up.

Hon. Graydon Smith: He does.

Hon. Peter Bethlenfalvy: He does.

It is our government that is building Ontario's workforce by making progress in training and educating students and workers to succeed today and tomorrow. And it is our government that has already added over 11,700 health care workers, including nurses and personal support workers, to our health care system.

0910

It is our government that is building infrastructure for Ontario by getting more shovels in the ground on critical projects all across the province. It is our government that is building to ensure this province is a leader in Canada and across the world because, Madam Speaker, this province has had decades of underinvestment. Because of this underinvestment, this province today needs many things. It needs highways and more transit. It needs more hospitals and more schools. Ontario needs more long-term-care homes and Ontario needs schools, subways and highways.

On that last point, I'm proud to report that today, preliminary fieldwork is under way for Highway 413. Early work construction is under way for the Bradford Bypass that will serve the rapidly growing communities of Simcoe county and York region and help ease traffic in the greater Toronto area.

Madam Speaker, our government is also making progress in ways that directly impact every person and family in Ontario, no matter where they live.

Madame la Présidente, notre gouvernement fait également des progrès qui ont une incidence directe sur chaque personne et chaque famille, partout en Ontario.

To help keep costs down, our government has eliminated licence plate renewal fees, as well as licence plate stickers, and refunded the past two years' fees for eligible vehicles. These actions have helped make life more affordable for nearly eight million vehicle owners in Ontario. To

further contribute to the savings every day for households in Ontario, we temporarily cut the gas tax and the fuel tax starting on July 1, 2022. These actions build on others that the government has taken to make life more affordable, such as child care support for eligible families through the Ontario Childcare Access and Relief from Expenses tax credit.

We know that, in order to make social and economic progress, we also need to address the current labour shortages. That is why our government is focused on supporting job creation and economic growth. Simply put, we want everyone who is able and wants to pursue a job to pursue and reach their goal. We want them to know they are not alone in their pursuit—that their government is in their corner. That is why one of our key investments is in skills training. We have supported groundbreaking programs that connect jobseekers through our Skills Development Fund. It is giving people the skills and training they need to pursue a new opportunity. And I announced when I introduced the 2022 Ontario Economic Outlook and Fiscal Review, we are investing an additional \$40 million for the latest round of this program. Madam Speaker, this brings total funding for the next round to \$145 million.

We know that the skilled trades present an opportunity for successful careers for thousands of people. High school students need to know that in Ontario today, they can have a great life in the skilled trades or working with children. That is why I am pleased to share that our government is expanding the Dual Credit Program. That is creating direct pathways for high school students and learners seeking a career in the trades or in early childhood education. Thanks to this program, students are getting the opportunity to complete credits towards both in Ontario's secondary school diploma and college credential, or a certificate of apprenticeship, giving them the opportunity to work and begin work earlier. Madam Speaker, there is a future for young people in the trades. There is a future in building in Ontario.

Our government continues to build Ontario's economy, to build Ontario's workforce, to build Ontario's infrastructure and keep costs down for families and businesses. Each and every day, in every corner of our province, we are getting it done. There can be no uncertainty about the immense geographic size of the province we call home.

But, Madam Speaker, there is uncertainty about the economic times we find ourselves in. Today, all across the globe, we see emerging fiscal challenges.

L'économie d'aujourd'hui est source d'incertitude. Partout dans le monde, des difficultés financières se manifestent.

In Ontario, we are not immune to these pressures. In 2022, Ontario's consumer price inflation reached highs not seen since the early 1980s, when I was a young man. We are seeing 40-year price spikes because of many things: the consequences of a worldwide pandemic and because of Russia's illegal war on the Ukraine, which has caused supply disruptions across various industries. While inflation eased slightly in September, the Bank of Canada increased interest rates another 50 basis points in October,

so the cost of groceries and everyday goods that all businesses and families rely on continue to remain stubbornly high.

The next couple of years are likely to be marked by ongoing economic turbulence, by uncertainty and by challenges. Understandably, Ontario seniors, families, workers and businesses are feeling financial pressure. The challenges of ongoing labour shortages and supply chain disruptions are being felt throughout our economy. Our government knows this reality is stressful for many. This is why our government has built a flexible and responsible fiscal plan, one that takes a targeted approach as we navigate these uncertain times together. It's the right plan, and no matter what lies ahead, I have confidence in the resilience of Ontario's economy, I have confidence in its workers, and I have confidence in its businesses and people. I have confidence in our plan.

C'est le bon plan. Quoi que l'avenir nous réserve, sachez-le : j'ai confiance en la résilience de l'économie ontarienne et dans les travailleurs, les entreprises et les populations de l'Ontario. J'ai confiance en notre plan.

Awareness of these challenges informed our work as we prepared the 2022 fall economic statement. It is why we have included in it new targeted measures to advance our plan and help families, workers, seniors and businesses. It is why we have included new plans and programs to support those families, seniors, businesses and workers.

Through these times of great economic instability and uncertainty, our government remains steadfast. We are resolved to our task. One of these areas we are determined to advance progress in is attracting investment and bringing good manufacturing jobs back to Ontario. Our government is using the strength of Ontario's supply chain to support globally competitive, homegrown manufacturing, and build things such as the next generation of hybrid and electric vehicles and batteries right here in Ontario, for sale right across North America.

We know that manufacturers are looking for ways to remove emissions from their supply chains, and that is why our government is proposing legislation to launch a voluntary clean energy credit registry. This registry would, if passed and approved, boost competitiveness for the province and give Ontario businesses another tool as they compete for global capital. Manufacturing is Ontario's legacy and it's Ontario's future.

This registry is among the outside-the-box initiatives we are exploring and undertaking as we pursue making the province the destination of choice for global investors. That is why we are refocusing our approach to cutting red tape to clear up supply chain delays as well as supporting Ontario's agri-food system so we can get goods and services to customers faster and help create more jobs.

We know that these are challenging financial times for many in our province. This government understands that the last thing the people of Ontario need right now is a tax increase at the pumps. That is why we are proposing to extend the gas and fuel tax for another 12 months, until December 31, 2023. Extending these cuts would mean

households of this province would save \$195, on average, between July 1, 2022, and December 2023.

Many of us will know and appreciate that seniors built this province and we owe them all a debt of gratitude, but for too many low-income seniors, covering day-to-day costs has become a source of anxiety. That is why our government is proposing to double the Guaranteed Annual Income Supplement, also known as GAINS, so seniors can receive a maximum increase of almost \$1,000 per person for low-income seniors for the year.

0920

These and other measures in the bill and the 2022 fall economic statement make the picture clear. Our government has a responsible, flexible plan, needed to help Ontario's businesses, workers, families and seniors, as the province navigates this period of uncertainty. Whatever the economic uncertainty may bring, our government has a plan.

Before I turn it over to my two able parliamentary assistants, I also want to acknowledge my previous parliamentary assistant. The member happens to be opposite today—right over there—the member from Brantford—Brant. I want to thank him for his great support and work when he was my parliamentary assistant. Gentlemen, you have a very high bar to match.

With that, I would now like to call on the member for Bruce—Grey—Owen Sound, who will also speak to the measures contained in this bill.

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): The member for Bruce—Grey—Owen Sound to continue.

Mr. Rick Byers: Good morning, colleagues. Today, I rise to speak in support of the second reading of the Progress on the Plan to Build Act (Budget Measures), 2022, in follow-up to the Minister of Finance introducing the 2022 Ontario economic outlook and fiscal review yesterday, and Minister Bethlenfalvy initiating second reading of the bill this morning.

These documents—our progress report and the bill—include new targeted measures that advance our plan on many fronts. They move forward our work to build the economy, address the province's labour shortages and help families and businesses keep costs down. The progress report and bill highlight how our responsible, targeted approach is positioning the province to be ready to manage uncertainty and risk as the world faces emerging economic challenges. It's my honour to discuss the specific measures in the bill that are aimed at furthering the themes of progress articulated in our fall economic statement. I'll begin by listing the key pieces of legislative business contained in the bill. I will then discuss them in more detail.

In relation to the Securities Act, we are proposing to introduce rule-making authority to allow public companies to digitize access to certain financial documents.

We're also proposing amendments to the Pension Benefits Act, to consult on pension funding and governance policies to strengthen target benefit pension plans.

For the Ontario guaranteed annual income support, or GAINS, we're proposing to temporarily double the payment to low-income seniors.

Interjections.

Mr. Rick Byers: Hear, hear.

Another item is the Legislative Assembly Act—you won't clap for this. Here, we're proposing to extend the current freeze on the salaries of members of provincial Parliament.

We also have proposals related to the Supplementary Interim Appropriation for 2022-2023 Act, 2022, and Interim Appropriation for 2023-2024 Act, 2022. These proposals are customary legislative business, aimed at providing the government with the spending authority it requires to carry on operations for the 2022-23 and 2023-24 fiscal years.

Madam Speaker, we're also proposing an extension of the tax rate reduction under the Gasoline Tax Act and the Fuel Tax Act.

As well, we are proposing amendments to allow companies to claim location fees for the purposes of the Ontario Production Services Tax Credit under the Taxation Act, 2007.

Finally, we're proposing amendments to authorize the establishment or designation of a provincial clean energy credit registry.

Now I will focus on each item in a little more depth.

First, the Securities Act: rule-making authority in respect of the access-equals-delivery initiative. The amendments proposed here would provide the Ontario Securities Commission with authority to make rules enabling public companies to make certain documents such as prospectuses or financial statements accessible to investors online on a central website. These rules would replace the current approach, which requires public companies to provide investors with either physical or emailed copies of prospectuses or financial statements.

Under the proposed model, investors would still retain the option of requesting physical or electronic delivery of documents if they so choose. It will also encourage companies to adopt a digital and environmentally conscious approach to engaging and communicating with investors. The proposed amendment directly responds to recommendations made by the Capital Markets Modernization Taskforce in 2020 and furthers the government's commitment to modernize capital markets in Ontario. The amendments would come into effect on royal assent.

Now for the Pension Benefits Act, specifically pension funding and government policies for target benefit pension plans: Target benefit pension plans have been operating under temporary regulation since 2007 that will expire in 2024 unless replaced by a permanent framework. These amendments will allow the government to work with stakeholders to develop a clear and fair framework for these pension plans, specifically around funding, governance and communication. This supports the government's 2022 budget commitment and will provide employers, plan administrators and members with certainty, stability and confidence in the pension plans. Implementation of a permanent framework will also pave the way for more employers to offer workplace pension plans, increasing the opportunities for workers to save for their retirement.

As I mentioned earlier, we're also temporarily doubling the Ontario Guaranteed Annual Income System, or GAINS, payment. These proposed amendments would temporarily double the payment for all recipients for 12 months starting in January 2023. This act provides a monthly payment to eligible low-income seniors. Currently, the maximum payment for an eligible senior is \$83 per month. Under the proposed amendments, the maximum payment would be doubled to \$166 per month, meaning many seniors will now be receiving almost \$1,000 extra in supports in 2023. This measure, if approved, would help about 200,000 of Ontario's lowest-income seniors manage their costs. And we've also committed to introducing measures to expand the eligibility of GAINS in the future to ensure more seniors who need financial help get it. As with most of the measures contained in this bill, these amendments would come into force on royal assent.

Next, I turn to the Electricity Act and the clean energy credit registry. Here, the proposed amendments would authorize the establishment or designation of a provincial clean energy credit registry by early 2023. To support investment in the province and alignment with Ontario's low-carbon hydrogen strategy, the government is seeking approval for legislative amendments that will allow the designation or establishment of a clean energy credit registry. The registry would attract the transfer and retirement of clean energy credits from clean electricity generated and consumed in Ontario. Launching a voluntary clean energy registry would boost Ontario's competitiveness, attract jobs and investment in the province and provide businesses with the information they need to pursue their environmental and sustainability goals.

Now I come to the Legislative Assembly Act, where we are extending the current freeze on MPP salaries. The Legislative Assembly Act limits Ontario MPP salaries at \$116,550—that is, the salary that has been in effect since 2009. The act currently states that the MPP salary freeze ceases to have effect as of April 1 of the second fiscal year immediately after the provincial budget returns to surplus. As a result of the provincial surplus reported by my honourable colleague Prabmeet Sarkaria, President of the Treasury Board, in the 2021-22 public accounts of Ontario, the salary freeze would end automatically on April 1, 2023, triggering an MPP salary increase. However, we are proposing in the bill to extend the freeze indefinitely until a further amendment is made to the Legislative Assembly Act. So MPP salaries will not be increasing at this time.

0930

I now turn to pieces of legislation that relate to government spending. First, the Supplementary Interim Appropriation for 2022-2023 Act, 2022, is required to provide the government with spending authority to carry on operations. A new supplementary interim appropriation act is normally introduced in years in which the amounts in the interim appropriation act for the year were insufficient to recover expected expenditures. A new supplementary interim appropriation act would provide supplementary interim spending authority for anticipated government expenses, pending the vote of supply. All expenditures under

the proposed act would be in addition to amounts already authorized under the Interim Appropriation for 2022-2023 Act, 2021. The supply act for 2022-23 would replace and repeal the proposed act.

Second, the Interim Appropriation for 2023-2024 Act, 2022—a lot of numbers. As you all know, a new interim appropriation act is normally introduced each fall to provide the government with the spending authority it requires to carry on operations. A new interim appropriation act would provide interim spending authority for anticipated government expenses, government investments and the expenses of legislative offices for the fiscal year April 1, 2023, to March 31, 2024, pending the vote of supply. All expenditures under the proposed act would have to be charged to the proper appropriation following the vote of supply for that fiscal year. The supply act for 2023-24 would replace and repeal the proposed act.

Madam Speaker, our government understands that families and businesses are feeling financial pressure. That's why we are also proposing to extend the cuts to the gasoline tax rate and diesel fuel tax rate. In April, our government passed legislation to temporarily cut the gasoline tax rate and fuel tax rate to nine cents per litre, which took effect July 1, 2022. On January 1, 2023, both taxes were scheduled to revert back to their rates before the temporary rate reduction. Our proposed extension of the cuts to the gas tax and the diesel fuel tax rates mean that the rate of tax on gasoline and diesel would remain at nine cents per litre until December 31, 2023. This is a temporary extension of a further 12 months. It is part of our plan to help keep costs down for Ontario families and businesses.

And now I come to the Taxation Act, 2007: Ontario Production Services Tax Credit and location fees. We are proposing an amendment to include location fees as eligible expenses for the purposes of determining the Ontario Production Services Tax Credit. The proposed amendments would allow productions to include rental fees for on-location filming as eligible expenditures for the purposes of this tax credit up to a maximum of 5% of qualifying production expenditures. The amendment would apply to expenditures incurred after November 14, 2022.

To increase the economic and cultural benefits of the province, the government is also proposing to make regulatory amendments to require that recipients of the Ontario Film and Television Tax Credit provide a screen credit acknowledging government support. This requirement would be effective for productions that began principal photography after December 31, 2022.

Madam Speaker, we are in uncertain economic times, and this bill and our 2022 fall economic statement clearly show that our government has a responsible plan with targeted new measures to help navigate these economic challenges. Whatever the economic uncertainty may bring, the people of Ontario should know that our government is prepared.

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): The parliamentary assistant to continue debate.

Mr. Stephen Crawford: Thank you, Speaker, and thank you to my colleague for leading the way here, and to the

minister, to talk about the fall economic statement we've put forward.

Speaker, I rise to speak to the measures contained in the Progress on the Plan to Build Act (Budget Measures), 2022, measures that will help build the economy, address the province's labour shortage and keep costs down for businesses and families. These are the core principles and guiding ideas that inform our progress report, the 2022 Ontario economic outlook and fiscal review, and the measures contained in this bill.

Our plan is flexible and responsible. We have new, targeted measures that benefit families, seniors, students, workers and business owners throughout this great province. These are the key take-aways I'm here to drive home today.

To start on the core of my discussion, let me say that Ontario's economy has proven resilient amid economic uncertainty due to global geopolitical conflict, elevated inflation, rising interest rates and ongoing supply challenges. Through our plan and the measures in this bill, we are working to ensure the province is in a strong position to manage risks in a challenging global economy, while investing for the long term to build a stronger Ontario. By preserving flexibility, the government is prepared to provide targeted support to people and businesses, while maintaining a responsible plan to eliminate Ontario's debt.

Speaker, our government recognizes we are facing a difficult road ahead. Private sector economists continue to revise their growth projections. An economic slowdown in the near term is a very, very real risk. When faced with this degree of uncertainty, governments need to be ready for anything. They need to be flexible and forward-thinking, with a plan that can support people and businesses when and if the time comes, while at the same time laying a strong fiscal foundation for future generations. But for too long, structural deficits were allowed to grow, debt was allowed to pile up, spendthrift fiscal planning was in style. And now, with interest rates on the rise, this kind of debt accumulation and deficit spending is no longer an option.

This Ontario government is taking a targeted approach, making record investments in the priorities that matter to the people of this province. Supported by our fiscal plan, Ontario's projected deficit in 2022-23 is \$12.9 billion. This is an improvement of \$6.9 billion from the 2022 budget. Eliminating Ontario's deficit while delivering on Ontario's Plan to Build is a critical part of our government's long-term vision for this province.

After unprecedented and essential spending in response to the pandemic, now is the time for governments to show restraint. More spending by government today will only make inflation more painful and contribute to dragging out an economic downturn. We know the economic road ahead may not be easy, but, Speaker, there is nothing that we cannot do together.

Our government is building a stronger province: a province with a strong economy and good-paying manufacturing jobs; a province where it is easy to start and grow a business; a province where you can learn new skills and seize new opportunities; a province where you can start a

career and raise a family; a province connected with new highways, new roads and reliable public transit.

With the 2022 Ontario economic outlook and fiscal review, Ontario's Plan to Build: A Progress Update, our government is delivering the first-ever progress report on our plan to build Ontario. The progress update also profiles new, targeted measures that advance our plan to build the economy, address the province's labour shortage, and help families and businesses keep costs down. We plan to continue to help grow the economy by getting shovels in the ground to build key infrastructure projects and by investing in skills training for Ontario workers and newcomers.

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The progress update provides a refreshed economic and fiscal outlook for Ontario. It highlights how prudent and responsible our plan is and how it positions the province to be ready to manage uncertainty and risk as the world faces emerging economic challenges. The measures contained in the bill represent the legislative changes we propose to help make changes necessary to position the province for these short-term uncertainties and long-term opportunities.

While Ontario experienced strong economic growth through 2021 and the first half of 2022, economic uncertainty remains. As of the second quarter of 2022, Ontario's real gross domestic product, or GDP, has surpassed the pre-COVID-19 level by 2.2%. Employment was 141,700 higher in September 2022 than the pre-pandemic level in February 2020. That is 1.9% higher.

As detailed in our progress update, Ontario's real GDP is projected to rise 2.6% in 2022, 0.5% in 2023, 1.6% in 2024 and 2.1% in 2025. Government forecasts for 2022, 2023 and 2024 have been revised lower since the 2022 budget. This is in line with private sector economists.

The reality is that the world has changed so much since just last spring when the budget was released, so it is clear, for the purposes of prudent fiscal planning, these protections by the government are set slightly below the average of private sector forecasts. It is undeniable that the 2022 Ontario economic outlook and fiscal review is being released, and this bill tabled, when global economic conditions remain very challenging.

This uncertainty is driven by a variety of factors beyond the Ontario government's control. Obviously these include supply chain issues globally, the war in the Ukraine and inflation throughout the world. As a result, for the progress update, the Ontario Ministry of Finance developed faster-growth and slower-growth scenarios. These scenarios project the various paths the economy could take over the next several years. By providing these projections, the government is providing more transparency about how alternative economic scenarios could impact Ontario's finances. The government is now projecting a \$12.9-billion deficit in 2022-23, nearly \$7 billion lower than the outlook published in the 2022 budget.

Regardless of whether Ontario's economy winds up following the faster-growth or the slower-growth model, the reality is that our government is using targeted measures to steer the province's course into the future. Helping

to keep costs down for everyday life is one of these measures.

This government understands that costs are rising for the people of Ontario. That is why one of the key pillars of our plan is keeping costs down. I'm pleased to report that, throughout 2022, our government has implemented changes for new initiatives that have supported this goal. In January, we implemented a general minimum wage hike from \$14.35 to \$15 an hour. That has subsequently gone up to \$15.50 an hour, which is among the highest minimum wages in Canada and, indeed, North America.

In March, we not only eliminated licence plate renewal fees and stickers for eligible vehicles, we also eliminated double fares for riders connecting to and from GO Transit on most municipal transit systems. This has been a great help to commuters across the province of Ontario. Whether you take the GO train, the bus or drive a car, your costs are coming down.

We nearly doubled Presto discounts for youth and post-secondary students. We know that students feel the brunt of an economic downturn and spiraling costs. Helping them save on commuting will give them more money for their education.

In April, we made it so that there were no more road tolls on the 412 and 418 highways. I know many commuters throughout Ontario, and particularly in Durham region, were absolutely thrilled that they no longer had to pay just to drive a highway and commute to work, drive their family to soccer practice or go to work.

People who filed their taxes in April may have recognized supports provided to them through their 2021 income tax returns. These included the low-income individuals and families tax credit, or LIFT credit, which provides tax relief for low-income workers. This was among the largest tax cuts to any group of people in the history of the province of Ontario, affecting the lowest-paid workers, allowing more dollars for those folks to pay their daily bills.

The Ontario Childcare Access and Relief from Expenses tax credit, or CARE tax credit, provides tax relief for eligible child care expenses. We know under the 15 years of Liberal rule, child care expenses went up in this province by over 400% to be the highest in Canada. Our government is helping provide relief to families on this very high expense.

We also brought in the Seniors' Home Safety Tax Credit, which provides tax relief to help make eligible seniors' homes safer. We know seniors in this province did so much to build this province; they want to stay in their home when they can. Helping them with up to a \$10,000 investment in reconfiguring their home, in order to stay in it, through a tax credit will help many seniors stay in their homes longer, putting less pressure on long-term care, retirement homes and hospitals, and most importantly, allow families to stay together longer.

The Ontario Jobs Training Tax Credit will help people with eligible training expenses. We also know that the skilled trades have been undeveloped in this province for many, many, many years, and we have an extreme shortage of skilled trades workers in this province. Helping

those workers retool their trades so that they can participate in the labour force—in good-paying jobs—will help the labour shortage, help our province grow and help a lot of families to provide good-paying jobs.

These measures will provide support in the 2022 tax year as well. I will flag how Ontario taxpayers will also see new and improved tax measures when they file their 2022 income tax returns, including an enhanced LIFT credit, which I already talked about. We are increasing the income eligibility, moving up from \$38,000 to approximately \$50,000, allowing that many more workers to be able to work and pay lower taxes so they can spend that money on their families, on their kids' education, on their kids' activities, on whatever cost that they need.

On the new Ontario Seniors Care at Home Tax Credit and the new Ontario Staycation Tax Credit—we all know that the Ontario hospitality industry suffered tremendously throughout the pandemic. Restaurants, hotels and many businesses were affected dramatically with a dramatic downturn in business; many struggled to survive. Our government made the conscious decision to help these businesses weather the tough time by business supports, but we're also now extending that out. We want the folks in Ontario to travel and see our great province, and at the same time, help the businesses that have struggled so much in our province in the hospitality sector. So we would certainly encourage all Ontarians to take advantage—travel this great province—stay in the great areas, whether it's Niagara, the Ottawa region, the northern region.

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You're certainly welcome to come to my community of Oakville. Come and stay in the community. Have a meal, spend some time with your family and help our great local businesses that have worked so hard to recover from this pandemic.

What are some other things we implemented in 2022 to help keep costs down?

Beginning in July, we cut gas and diesel fuel tax rates for six months, and we know when that was first introduced the public was overwhelmingly supportive. They recognize that the cost of driving an automobile has skyrocketed. Having an automobile and driving is not a luxury; it's a necessity. Again, whether people need to go to work, drive their families to see loved ones, drive the kids to soccer practice or hockey practice, whatever it may be—businesses—our goal as a government is to help people weather this inflationary pressure. Unfortunately, gas prices have gone up dramatically. The war in Ukraine and supply and demand issues globally have shot up gas prices throughout the world. Unlike the federal government, which is actually pushing the price higher to make things less affordable for families and hard-working people in this province and throughout the country, we're trying to do our part to weather the storm, to get through this economically uncertain time of high gas prices, high fuel costs, and get through in a manageable way. So we've extended this gas tax cut—or we anticipate we will, if passed—through this legislation for another 12 months. We know the people of Ontario, businesses in Ontario will be very happy once this passes.

In October, we increased the general minimum wage from \$15 an hour to \$15.50 per hour. We know that workers deserve a living wage. We know that people need to be able to get by through this difficult inflationary period. So our government has increased the minimum wage not once but twice in the last 12 months.

In that month, we also rolled out the direct catch-up payments to parents for child education expenses like tutoring or learning supplies and equipment. Again, people have lived through a difficult period. We know students have faced a very difficult period over the last couple of years. I'm sure many members in this Legislature have children in school and they know what they've gone through. I know, as a parent of four school-age children, my kids have required extra tutoring supports—no doubt about it—to get through. They have missed some of the quality education that we take for granted in this province. We do have a great education system in Ontario, one of the best in the world. Through no fault of their own, and through the circumstances which happened globally, kids did not get the education that we would expect in this province. So our government made the conscious decision to invest with parents so that would help them weather the storm in education, help them with tutoring supports to help their kids catch up in education. This is critically important. We know that the EQAO and the various measures of students have shown that students have fallen behind, and they do require a catch-up. Whether it's building new schools, investing in education or helping parents—there's not one way to help students get through this; it's a multi-faceted approach. So our government has taken that approach to help parents, kids and the education system as a whole.

Here we stand, in November, with more measures to help keep costs down and promote economic growth.

We're launching, as my colleague mentioned, a voluntary clean energy credit registry via the bill that would, if approved, boost competitiveness, attract jobs and provide businesses with more choice in how they pursue their environmental and sustainability goals, as enabled by proposed legislation.

Our goal here in Ontario is to be the economic engine of Canada. It's also to be a leader in environmental stewardship, and we believe we can have both here in this province. Ontario is among the cleanest grids in the entire world; 90% of our energy is emission-free. We have a great nuclear industry, particularly, I know, in the Durham region. We have great companies that are innovating. Ontario has the critical minerals required for electrical vehicle manufacturing. We have a stable government that provides law, order and good government, and is a good place for companies to invest, take the minerals in an ethical and responsible way and contribute to the auto supply chain and the electric vehicle manufacturing chain that we will be building in Ontario.

We've had record investments in automobile manufacturing and electric vehicle manufacturing right here in Ontario, whether it was GM in Oshawa, Stellantis in Windsor or with the Ford Motor Co. of Canada, which has been in my riding of Oakville since the 1950s—they're going to

be reconfiguring that plant to make electric vehicles. We are going to make Ontario the global leader in electrical vehicle manufacturing. Ontario will also be a global leader in environmental stewardship, with great sectors and a great opportunity for our province to excel in this in the future.

As noted in the 2022 Ontario economic outlook and fiscal review, Ontario's Plan to Build: A Progress Update, the government is also providing Ontario's small businesses with \$185 million in tax relief over the next three years. We know businesses in this province have suffered throughout COVID. They are going through supply chain challenges; they are going through labour shortages. There's turmoil, there's turbulence in the marketplace, but we have absolute full faith in the businesses and the people of Ontario that we will get through this and come out stronger than ever. But if we can give a helping hand to those entrepreneurs and businesses here in the province to get through it, we will.

The proposed extension of the phase-out of the small business tax rate would benefit approximately 5,500 small businesses right here in our province. We know that small businesses are the backbone of our province. This, of course, is in addition to automatically matching property tax reductions for small businesses within all municipalities that adopt the small business property subclass.

We're also investing an additional \$40 million in the 2022-23 year, for a total of \$145 million for the latest round of funding in the Skills Development Fund, which will benefit job seekers. This fund has already helped over 393,000 people take the next step in their careers in in-demand industries. A special shout-out to our Minister of Labour, Immigration, Training and Skills Development, Monte McNaughton, for the work he has done in developing the skilled trades here in this province.

We're also investing an additional \$4.8 million over two years, beginning in 2023-24, to expand the Dual Credit Program. This will encourage more secondary school students to enter a career in the skilled trades or in early childhood education. Again, the skilled trades have been an area that we have not promoted in schools, and consequently, we have a huge shortage in these great, high-paying jobs. Our government has taken the initiative to encourage this both in and outside the school and the classroom to get more young people into the skilled trades—more people who traditionally may have not been in the skilled trades, be it women or folks with disabilities. We're also investing \$4.8 million over two years, beginning in 2023-24, in the Dual Credit Program, which I had mentioned.

Now, these last few points in the bill are focused on fostering jobs here in Ontario. Speaker, our province is faced with an historic labour shortage. There are over 387,000 jobs currently unfilled across the province. That's over 387,000 paycheques going uncollected, 387,000 opportunities not seized. Thousands of businesses are not able to meet customer demand, and I'm sure every one of us in this chamber has experienced that. Whether it's driving by the ONroute and seeing that some restaurants are closed, seeing restaurant hours diminished—it's across

sectors, across all different types of businesses and industries here, this labour shortage.

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Awareness of the challenges that are holding back our economic activity informs our proposal to extend the cuts to the gas tax and diesel fuel tax rates through the bill. The tax rate on gasoline and diesel fuel tax would remain at nine cents per litre until December 31, 2023, putting more dollars back in the pockets of families and businesses here in this province. Extending those cuts would mean that households in this province would save an average of \$195 a year between July 1, 2022, and December 31, 2023.

Helping to manage the costs for Ontario's 200,000 lowest-income seniors is why, in this bill, we are proposing changes to double the Guaranteed Annual Income System payments for all recipients. This measure, if approved, would span 12 months, starting in January 2023, and be a maximum increase of almost \$1,000 per person in 2023. This will have a tremendous impact on the lowest-income seniors in this province.

Another bill proposal relates to how Ontario is home to a robust film and TV production industry. Proposing to expand eligible expenditures to the Ontario Production Services Tax Credit to include location fees would help attract yet more domestic and foreign film and television production to the province. It would incentivize more on-location filming in communities across Ontario to the benefit of those places, whether urban or rural.

Ontario is a great location. We have some of the best talent in the world making movies, TV shows. Let's incent them and bring more of those folks back to see the beauty of our great province.

Let me close my comments on the Ontario economic outlook and fiscal review and bill by echoing Minister Bethlenfalvy: Together, we have come so far. This government has attracted investments and good jobs. This government is training thousands of skilled workers and helping keep costs down for families. We have made great progress. Working together has got us here, but there is no doubt there is a tough road ahead. We must navigate these uncertain economic times together.

Our government, with this plan we're proud to report back to the Legislature and the measures in this bill we ask the Legislature to approve, will see Ontario through the days and years ahead. We have a fantastic and great future ahead of us.

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): We'll now go to questions and answers. I recognize the member for Ottawa Centre.

Mr. Joel Harden: I listened intently to the comments the member made about the electric vehicle industry and how the government wants to make it a priority, but I'm wondering if the member can explain for me why this government is cancelling its energy agreement with the province of Quebec? I ask because, in April 2023, Quebec offers Ontario five-cents-a-kilowatt-hour hydroelectricity, emissions-free electricity. It is desperate to sell this energy to Ontario, yet the government is ripping up its agreement with Quebec.

This is precisely what electric-vehicle manufacturers want. They want affordable, emissions-free energy to build their automobiles, and it's what consumers want to power their automobiles. Can the member please explain to this House why you are ripping up an energy agreement with Quebec that would stand to benefit the automotive industry, consumers and a livable future for our kids?

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): To answer, the parliamentary assistant.

Mr. Stephen Crawford: To the member opposite, I would certainly agree that we do want a reliable Ontario energy grid. We do have one; we need to move forward, of course, in the future.

With respect to the Quebec hydro, the issue with that is the unreliability and the intermittency of it. In other words, a lot of the times that Quebec hydro is available for export are times where we don't need it, and vice versa.

Our focus is having a clean energy grid that will support both families and industry here in Ontario, and that would certainly include the new SMR technology we're bringing to the forefront of Ontario.

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): The next question? The member for—I want to get it right—

Ms. Donna Skelly: Flamborough—Glanbrook.

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): Flamborough—Glanbrook.

Ms. Donna Skelly: My question is to the member from Oakville. As we know, there is a huge labour shortage in the province of Ontario, partly because of an aging population but also because of the work that the Minister of Economic Development, Job Creation and Trade and our Premier have done since we were elected over four years ago. We have currently almost 400,000 jobs in the province of Ontario going unfilled. I was just at a job site in my hometown of Hamilton, Heddle Shipyards. They build ships and are restoring Ontario to its once very proud status of being the number one shipbuilder in all of the country. But they are struggling to find people to fill the jobs that they have at their site. Can the member from Oakville please share with the Legislature what this government is doing to create more jobs in Ontario and to fill those jobs?

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): To answer, the parliamentary assistant.

Mr. Stephen Crawford: Thank you to my colleague. I wish I had a lot more time to talk about this, because Ontario has done so many great things to create an environment for jobs here in the province, whether it's reducing red tape, business costs have gone down by about \$8 million in the last four years, attracting investment here. We've encouraged the skilled trades.

We see a job shortage in Ontario in almost every sector. Whether it's manufacturing jobs, skilled trades, hospitality sector workers, we want to encourage people to go into a lot of these high-demand professions. There is a lot more work to be done to fill the gap. We want to get the economic activity really rolling in the province of Ontario and we will continue to encourage students to get into professions where there are opportunities for great-paying jobs.

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): Next question, the member from Toronto Centre.

MPP Kristyn Wong-Tam: To the member across the House, the member for Oakville, thank you very much for your remarks and especially your comments about the fall economic statement.

I recognize that you were talking about the minimum wage that's now been established, and I think I heard you very proudly boasting of a 50-cent increase. You also referenced and said, "Workers deserve a living wage." But I think you realize that, in this week—this is Living Wage Week—this is not a living wage. In many places in Ontario, and I think almost every community in Ontario, \$15.50 does not constitute anywhere close to a living wage. We have communities in Windsor that have a living wage requirement of at least \$18, London and Elgin is \$18, Hamilton is \$19, Brant and Niagara is \$20, Dufferin and Waterloo is \$20, and the city of Toronto is \$23.15.

Can you explain to us why you were calling it a living wage when clearly it's not a living wage?

Mr. Stephen Crawford: I thank the member opposite. I did highlight that Ontario has increased the minimum wage twice in the past year, which I'm not sure many jurisdictions have done. It is among the highest minimum wages not only in Canada, but indeed North America. Further to that, I think we need to look at the context of what our government has done to help low-wage workers. The LIFT tax credit has helped workers that have an income under \$50,000 dramatically. They pay significantly—significantly—lower taxes than they did in Ontario before our government came into power, helping workers in a very meaningful way. Not to mention, of course, helping with other initiatives such as the gas tax credit, which, most people have vehicles and pay for gas, and public transit, which I touched on as well. So let's take it in the context. We've helped low-income Ontarians more than any government in recent memory.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The member for Mississauga—Malton.

Mr. Deepak Anand: I just want to acknowledge and thank the member from Oakville for doing an incredible job and supporting the residents not only in his riding but across Ontario. Mr. Speaker, we know we are going through a time of uncertainty. I just want to ask the member—at this time, through this bill. Could the member tell us what you are proposing to keep the costs down while investing in the priorities that matter most to the people of Ontario?

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Mr. Rick Byers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I thank the member for the question. The people of Ontario work hard, and our government understands that taxpayers are under pressure, whether it's Russia's war in Ukraine, tension in Asia, and inflation that we've not seen for four decades. We recognize the impact that inflation's having on families, and our government is here for them. Our government is committing to putting and keeping more money in the pockets of the people of Ontario. We have a plan to keep costs down.

We're moving forward with one of the most ambitious plans in Ontario's history, including plans to build highways, hospitals, broadband and public transit. It's outlined in the 2022 budget, Ontario's Plan to Build. We've dedicated \$158.8 billion—I'll repeat, \$158.8 billion—over the next decade, including \$20 billion in 2022-23, to support our projects such as transit, highways, schools and hospitals.

Mr. Speaker and honourable member, this government is there for the people of Ontario.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Question?

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: Inflation rates are set at 6.9%, cost of rent has gone up 30%, food costs are so high that people can't afford the basics. Butter is over \$6, milk is over \$5, bread is over \$3.50 a loaf. Food banks were reporting that, as of March 2022, they're up 35% in usage, and most of those are now seniors and students. The government is doubling the GAINS for one year, starting in January 2023. My question is, will this government make a commitment today to maintain the GAINS at the double payment and stop using seniors as a financial yo-yo?

Mr. Stephen Crawford: Thank you to the member opposite. I'll tell you, this government has made a commitment to seniors, whether it's the Seniors' Home Safety Tax Credit, which is helping keep seniors in their homes much longer, keeping them with their families—seniors want that.

With respect to the GAINS, which the government is doubling over the next year for low-income seniors, this is a government that is here—we know that inflation is a reality, although we believe it will likely come down in the next 12 to 24 months, and it's certainly projecting it will come down. That's great, but in the meantime we still have a little bit of time here with inflationary pressures, and our government is—I'll tell you, we have a government that's committed to helping seniors and we have a Minister for Seniors that I think we owe a great round of gratitude to for all the work he has done standing up for seniors.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): There is no more time for questions.

Second reading debate deemed adjourned.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

ROYAL CANADIAN LEGION BRANCH 258

Mr. Vijay Thanigasalam: I am deeply honoured and proud of the Royal Canadian Legion Branch 258, a vital institution within the Highland Creek community. The Highland Creek branch was founded back in 1934 and has advocated for veterans and their families ever since. They have always led a successful poppy campaign, and this year was no different.

They have actively supported local causes by sponsoring local cadets as well as hockey and baseball teams, and they have contributed to many charities because they believe strongly in Canada and its values. More than that,

the Legion has always served as a place for long-time friends and neighbours to gather and have a drink and a good laugh.

Four years ago, when I was a newly elected MPP, they welcomed me with open arms, and for that I will always be grateful. Ever since, we have made it a tradition that I come every Canada Day with a freshly baked cake. In many ways, it is one of my favourite events of the year.

This year the old Legion hall was closed and Branch 258 has moved to its brand new location at 305 Morrish Road. I know this a bittersweet moment for many of us, but I'm confident that we will share many good times in the years ahead.

LIVING WAGE WEEK

Mrs. Lisa Gretzky: Speaker, yesterday marked the start of Living Wage Week, an important reminder to all of us to recognize the need for a livable wage in Ontario.

The Ontario Living Wage Network released their yearly living wage rates for the province for 2022. The stark reality is that there isn't a single one of the 51 communities analyzed where the livable wage has been identified under \$18 an hour, far above the current minimum wage.

Many people in Ontario are finding themselves fully employed yet unable to afford the cost of living as inflation rates continue to soar. The cost of groceries, housing, utility bills and transportation have all increased, while wages have remained stagnant. We know that those making the lowest wages in this province are the most impacted when the cost of living increases.

In my community of Windsor, a livable wage has been identified as \$18.15. That's the lowest hourly wage someone needs to make to be able to put a roof over their head and food on the table. The minimum wage is currently set at \$15.50—a \$2.65-an-hour difference, equalling \$5,500 per year that people are coming up short, yet the Conservatives were just bragging about their minimum wage. That doesn't account for the employees who are forced into precarious part-time positions where hours are not guaranteed.

Many Ontarians are working two or three jobs just to make ends meet. Ontarians deserve to be able to afford the basic costs of living.

It's time for big corporations, which made record profits this year, to step up and pay a fair wage.

We must support Ontarians and raise the minimum wage.

The Conservative government's empty slogan, "Working for workers," doesn't cut it. If they genuinely supported workers, they'd ensure they get paid a living wage. Poverty is this government's policy choice.

GREGORY A. HOGAN CATHOLIC SCHOOL

Mr. Robert Bailey: It's an honour to rise in the Legislature today to share the news of another important investment in Sarnia—Lambton by the government of Ontario.

Mr. Speaker, on October 6, I was honoured to join members of the St. Clair Catholic District School Board family, along with Indigenous partners from the Kettle and Stony Point and Walpole Island First Nations, at the site of the new Gregory A. Hogan Catholic School in Sarnia. This new, state-of-the-art facility, which will include spaces for 659 students and a five-room child care centre, is being made possible by an investment of over \$24 million by the Ontario government. This new school will provide more student spaces in a new, quality learning environment for the growing student population in Sarnia–Lambton, as well as affordable child care spaces for those local parents.

In total, the government of Ontario is delivering more than \$26.6 billion in education funding for the 2022-23 school year, including an increase of over \$600 million this past September, which is the highest investment in public education in Ontario's history.

Mr. Speaker, the funding for the new Gregory A. Hogan Catholic elementary school is great news for our community. This investment will ensure that families and students have access to a quality learning environment in the years ahead and that every young person has the opportunity to reach their full potential.

LABOUR SHORTAGE

Ms. Doly Begum: Speaker, Canada is facing an enormous labour shortage. In fact, recent data from Statistics Canada shows that the “unemployment to job vacancy” ratio in Canada is at a historically low level.

Here in Ontario, our health care sector is a prime example of where we are seeing extreme labour shortages, which has added to the health care crisis, especially as we try to tackle the challenges of overcapacity in our emergency rooms and insufferably long wait times for treatment.

According to the Ontario Chamber of Commerce, more than 60% of their businesses and workplaces are facing difficulty with hiring, whether it's in health care, retail, construction, just to name a few. Our province simply does not have the human resources to fill this gap.

The Minister of Labour himself said that there are over 370,000 jobs across the province but not enough people to meet the demand. This demand is continuing to rise with a continuing increase in retirement and a slowdown of immigration, especially during COVID-19, owing to the massive immigration backlog on the federal level, and we are seeing thousands of jobs go unfilled.

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Immigrants contribute greatly to every sector of our province, be it academic, scientific, cultural, manufacturing, food and agriculture, health care, and many more.

I am calling on the Premier and the Minister of Labour, Immigration, Training and Skills Development to work collaboratively with the federal government to improve Ontario's immigration process and address the massive immigration backlogs so that those who want to contribute to this province are able to do so and have the opportunity to build their life in this great province.

CADETS

Mr. Will Bouma: As many of you are aware, my riding of Brantford–Brant is home to a vibrant, motivated and active cadet movement. We are home to Admiral Nelles, Royal Canadian Sea Cadet Corps; 104 Starfighter Air Cadets; 56th Field Regiment Army Cadets; and Admiral Landymore Navy League Cadet Corps. After a two-year hiatus, this Remembrance Day cadets representing all four corps held a nighttime vigil at the Brant County War Memorial. I stopped by the Dalhousie Street cenotaph to spend some time with the cadets, officers, volunteers and family members as the youth stood in silence paying tribute to Canadian and Allied soldiers who fought, were wounded and paid the ultimate price for our freedom.

I spoke to several officers who were supervising the cadets. Lieutenant James Messecar, commanding officer with the Royal Canadian Sea Cadets, said, “The remembrance vigil is a living act of remembrance that the young people of Brantford–Brant and Six Nations take part in. It has endured since 2011 not only because of the commitment of the community, local leaders, officers, but most importantly the sea, Navy League, army and air cadets who hold the torch of remembrance high each year as they mount their vigil.”

Speaker, witnessing first-hand the solemn respect and sheer professionalism these youth displayed for the fallen soldiers of our country, which far exceeded their young years, I was moved and impressed.

Brantford–Brant has some of the best volunteers in Ontario, and I urge all to support your Legions and cadet corps and encourage them to keep up the great work they do week after week.

CHILDREN'S HEALTH CARE

Ms. Peggy Sattler: Speaker, London West parents are worried. One mother wrote to me: “Parents are looking for guidance from our leadership right now and we are getting nothing. As a parent to a three-year-old son, I am terrified when I see the news about pediatric ICU beds.” Another said, “The state of our health care system, particularly pediatrics, is horrifying. As the mom of a toddler who has been sick with COVID, hand foot and mouth, and pink eye in the past six weeks, I am terrified.... While we have been lucky to not have to go to the ER yet, I am fearful of what we will experience when we arrive.” What she will experience at London's Children's Hospital is a stressful hours-long wait in a crowded emergency room that was built to handle about 100 visits per day but is being overwhelmed by 200 or more sick children—double the usual volume.

Parents of teens admitted to ICU now face the prospect of admission to an adult ICU bed, which has ICU nurses concerned about taking on teen ICU patients without specialized pediatric training.

Children's Hospital emergency room director Dr. Rod Lim warned, “It may get worse before it gets better. I think November and December are going to be tough.”

Speaker, London parents are asking me, “What is this government doing about this crisis?” From the budget that was tabled yesterday, my answer is, clearly, “Not enough.”

MISSISSAUGA HOSPITAL

Mr. Rudy Cuzzetto: On Friday last week, the President of the Treasury Board joined me in Mississauga–Lakeshore for a tour of the construction site at Mississauga Hospital, where work is well under way on a new eight-storey parking structure with spaces for almost 1,500 vehicles. This is an important first step towards the complete reconstruction of the entire hospital. The new 24-storey facility will be almost triple the size, with almost three million square feet of space and almost 1,000 hospital beds, over 80% of which will be in private rooms. It will add over 20 new, state-of-the-art operation rooms. This will be the largest and most advanced hospital in the history of Canada. The fall economic statement yesterday reported that the RFP has closed, and it has confirmed our government is committed to this historic project.

So I want to thank the Minister of Finance for his statement yesterday—and this Minister of Finance cares about Mississauga–Lakeshore. Again, I want to thank him and the President of the Treasury Board for their support for this important project. We have been looking forward to a new, modern hospital in Mississauga for many years, and it is very exciting to see shovels in the ground.

CHILDREN’S HEALTH CARE

Mr. Adil Shamji: Mr. Speaker, I stand before you with a grim realization: Our children are being let down by this government.

It has been said that “the true measure of any society can be found in how it treats its most vulnerable members.” All of us bore witness to this government’s failure of our elders in long-term-care homes during the pandemic. Most recently, this government took aim at our lowest-paid education workers by trying to trample on their charter rights. And now it is our children who our government is failing, and they don’t have a voice to advocate for themselves.

We’re grappling with over-capacity pediatric ICUs, ERs and critical care that are overwhelmed, kids in adult ICUs, and surgeries being delayed. This summer, when this government was nowhere to be found, I called for the government to take measures to prepare for the upcoming respiratory season. And yet the fall vaccination campaign was non-existent and the plan to stay open has not eased the emergency care crisis in the slightest.

I would be remiss if I did not address the current state of the Ontario Autism Program. Under this government, the OAP’s wait-list for core services has more than doubled, skyrocketing from 28,000 in 2018 to 57,000 in 2022. That is enough children to fill the Rogers Centre and then some. This government needs to be transparent with families. How many children are registered? How many are wait-listed? And how many are receiving core services? I eagerly wait for those answers.

MEDICAL EQUIPMENT MODERNIZATION OPPORTUNITY

Mr. Kevin Holland: I recently had the opportunity to attend a fundraising dinner for the Medical Equipment Modernization Opportunity, or MEMO for short, in Thunder Bay.

Since 2004, MEMO has shipped 100 containers to Cuba, El Salvador, Liberia, Nicaragua and Zimbabwe, totalling millions of dollars in equipment and saving countless lives along the way. Every container holds 10 tonnes of medical equipment and supplies that are redundant according to Canadian health standards but remain useful and continue to save lives in developing countries. The organization is completely run by volunteers so that every dollar donated goes entirely to support the work.

I want to recognize Dr. and Mrs. Jerome Harvey, whose dream began 18 years ago while looking outside their kitchen window at the soon-to-be-closed 250-bed Port Arthur General Hospital. He wondered what was going to happen to all the medical equipment left behind in this hospital, as well as the other old hospital to be closed, the 375-bed McKellar hospital.

He discovered that because of Thunder Bay’s isolation, the cost of removing and shipping made the contents of the two old hospitals valueless. Reluctantly, the hospital administration admitted that most of the equipment would be sold to a scrap dealer for \$180 a tonne. This led to a meeting with a Cuban doctor and Cuban ministry of health officials that assured him that anything MEMO could send would be helpful, as Cuba had an adequate supply of well-trained doctors but was woefully inadequate in medical equipment and supplies. Thus, MEMO was formed under the auspices of the Evangelical Free Church of Canada.

I commend Dr. Harvey for his initiative and leadership in this venture that is making a difference in the lives of residents in developing countries.

CRIME PREVENTION

Mr. Vincent Ke: I’m hearing from many constituents in my riding of Don Valley North who are extremely concerned about a dramatic increase in instances of vehicle theft and carjackings in our area. According to an article in the Toronto Star, 70 vehicles were stolen in North York during the week of October 13 to 19. The previous week, the number of stolen cars in the area was 54. There is one vehicle stolen every six minutes in Canada, and the proceeds from stolen vehicles are often used to fund global organized crime and terrorism.

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This issue is being addressed by the police in our community and through public safety initiatives in our province. But without proper registration and procedures to hold accountable those who alter vehicle identification and to prevent stolen vehicles from exiting Canada, we are far from solving this serious public safety issue.

I hereby call out to the federal government to tighten border controls and stop stolen vehicles from being exported overseas.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): With us in the Speaker's gallery today are two distinguished former members of this assembly who are being honoured today by the association of former parliamentarians, and some of their guests.

We have with us the member for Nickel Belt in the 29th, 30th, 31st, 32nd, 33rd, 34th, 35th and 36th provincial Parliaments: Floyd Laughren. Welcome to Queen's Park.

Also with us is the member for Carleton–Grenville in the 31st Parliament; the member for Carleton–Grenville in the 32nd and 33rd Parliaments; the member for Carleton in the 34th, 35th and 36th Parliaments; the member for Lanark–Carleton in the 37th and 38th Parliaments; and the member for Carleton–Mississippi Mills in the 39th Parliament—he moved around: Norm Sterling. Welcome back.

With them are friends and family Joan Sterling, Jack Laughren, Josh Laughren, Tennis Laughren, Harry Yeamans, Fraser Matt and Liat Podolsky.

I also understand Jim Bradley is being honoured today by the association of former parliamentarians. These three members served with distinction for decades in the Ontario Legislature, and we honour them and thank them for the service that they provided to the people of Ontario. Thanks again for coming.

Also with us in the Speaker's gallery today is a delegation from the United States representing the Council of State Governments Midwestern Legislative Conference, which is, as we know, an inter-parliamentary association to which the Legislative Assembly is a key partner. Visiting from the Michigan Legislature are Senator Roger Victory, Senator Jim Stamas and Representative Amos O'Neal. They are accompanied by Ilene Grossman and Mitch Arvidson of the CSG Midwest office. Please join me in warmly welcoming our guests to the Legislative Assembly.

Another former member has just arrived: the member for St. Catharines in the 31st, 32nd, 33rd, 34th, 35th, 36th, 37th, 38th, 39th, 40th and 41st provincial Parliaments, Jim Bradley. Welcome back to the Legislature.

Mrs. Jennifer (Jennie) Stevens: This morning it is a great honour, as the member for St. Catharines, to recognize former MPP Jim Bradley, regional chair for the Niagara region. Thank you, Jim, for your 42 years of service to St. Catharines. Welcome back to your House, and thank you for coming this morning.

Also, I would like to welcome Ethan Gardnere, Anthony Coulter and Callum Robertson. And a special shout-out to Brock University in St. Catharines: Go, BUSU! Go, Badgers! Andrea LePage from Brock University—she's a hometown student attending Brock. Thank you for coming. Welcome to your House, and thank you for your meeting yesterday.

Hon. Lisa M. Thompson: I am pleased to welcome today chair of Ontario Pork, John de Bruyn, as well as GM Ken Ovington. They will be hosting a reception in room 228, the Gathering Place, immediately following question period today.

Mr. Guy Bourgouin: I had the honour to meet the Ontario Undergraduate Student Alliance this morning. I'd like to present Stephanie Ye-Mowe, Lara Weisenberg, Simranjeet Singh et, en particulier, une petite fille que j'ai vue grandir, une jeune demoiselle de chez nous, de Kapuskasing, Anaik Tremblay. Bienvenue à l'Assemblée législative.

Hon. Jill Dunlop: As Minister of Colleges and Universities, the best part of my job is representing students. So I am pleased to welcome the student leaders from the Ontario Undergraduate Student Alliance who have joined us today. They are hosting their annual student advocacy conference and will be meeting with several members of the Legislature throughout the week, so please join us for breakfast tomorrow morning. Welcome to Queen's Park.

MPP Jamie West: I'd like to join the minister in welcoming members of OUSA. From Sudbury, we have Avery Morin, the president of Laurentian University Students' General Association, and her vice-president, Ana Tremblay. Welcome to Queen's Park.

Mrs. Robin Martin: In my role as parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Health, it's my great honour to introduce and welcome Home Care Ontario and their CEO, Sue VanderBent. They're holding their annual Home Care Ontario awareness day in the Legislature today. Home care providers across the province are here to meet with our MPPs, so welcome to Queen's Park.

Ms. Doly Begum: I am pleased to introduce Mr. Emamul Kabir, a renowned Bangladeshi veteran guitarist, who is here today. A recipient of numerous prestigious awards, he has published over 22 musical notations and released over 50 music albums. He is known for playing Bangladeshi liberation music, even when he was forbidden to do so. He's here with his daughter, Nahid Kabir, another talented musician in Scarborough, and his granddaughter, Angkita Sarwar. Please welcome them.

Hon. Neil Lumsden: My riding of Hamilton East–Stoney Creek is well represented today, and I'm proud to say so. I'd like to welcome John Hands and Kaitlin Guarasci from Bay Area Health Trust, a Hamilton-based organization that plays a critical role in Ontario's health care system. And I'd like to welcome Dylan Atack and his dad, Ritch, to Queen's Park today. I'd also like to echo: Go, Badgers! Welcome.

MPP Kristyn Wong-Tam: Good morning to everyone. I'd like to welcome the Ontario Confederation of University Faculty Associations, OCUFA. They are here in a very large contingent. They will be meeting a number of MPPs today. They hosted a wonderful breakfast for us. I wanted to specifically name Jenny Ahn, the executive director, as well as Nig Narain.

Mr. Anthony Leardi: From the beautiful riding of Essex and the lovely town of Kingsville, one of our newest pages: Ms. Kalila I'Anson. Please welcome her to the Legislature.

Ms. Peggy Sattler: I am pleased to welcome the delegation from OCUFA today, including several faculty members from London: Benjamin Muller is here from King's and Tom Peace from Huron. Meris Bray from the University of Windsor is also here and Tim Murphy from

Brock, as well as Manisha Aggarwal. I had the pleasure of meeting with them this morning and warmly welcome them to this chamber.

MPP Jamie West: I also want to join in welcoming Jenny Ahn and Joel Duff from OCUFA, and, in particular, from NOSM in Sudbury, Lorrilee McGregor is here.

M^{me} France Gélinas: I have to say hello to my good friend Floyd Laughren, who is part of the reason why Nickel Belt has been represented by the NDP for 55 years—because of your hard work, Floyd. Thank you.

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LEGISLATIVE PAGES

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): It is now my distinct pleasure to invite the pages to assemble for their introduction.

From the riding of Eglinton–Lawrence, Nicholas Baryliuk; from the riding of University–Rosedale, Joel Bozиковic; from the riding of Peterborough–Kawartha, Isabelle Casselman; from Timiskaming–Cochrane, Kennedy Dabner; from Glengarry–Prescott–Russell, Mabel Follis; from the riding of Essex, Kalila I’Anson; from Brampton East, Serena Joseph; from Sudbury, Ema MacAulay; from Niagara West, Camilla Moscato; from Mississauga–Malton, Yusuf Muinuddin; from the riding of Toronto–Danforth, Aiden Perritt; from Willowdale, Oriana Sethi; from the riding of Markham–Thornhill, Eric Sung; from the riding of Mississauga–Erin Mills, Hussain Umar; from the riding of Algoma–Manitoulin, Havana Rose Thibideau Bello; from the riding of Northumberland–Peterborough South, Alexandra Vanden Bosch; from the riding of Pickering–Uxbridge, Max Weatherhead; from Elgin–Middlesex–London, Scarlett Wilson; and from Sault Ste. Marie, Grace Curran.

Welcome to the Legislative Assembly.
Applause.

QUESTION PERIOD

COVID-19 RESPONSE

Mr. Peter Tabuns: My question is to the Premier. Our children’s hospitals are overwhelmed. Parents are worried. They’re anxious about their sick children. Yesterday, the Chief Medical Officer of Health strongly advised all adults to wear masks indoors to protect our children. The Premier said he will take the advice of the medical officer of health. Why is the Premier not taking leadership and wearing a mask to protect our children?

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

Hon. Paul Calandra: Look, the member will know full well that this government has been taking leadership right from the beginning of the pandemic, even in instances where the members opposite refused to work with the government to ensure that Ontarians’ health and safety was put first. Every single time that we put a measure in place

to improve health care in the province of Ontario, they have voted against it. Bringing on new nurses: They voted against it. When we brought on significant funding for our small and medium-sized hospitals, they voted against it. The most rapid buildout of long-term care in the history of this province, if not the entire country: They have voted against it, Mr. Speaker. We have brought forward incredible vaccinations in this province. We have led North America in terms of vaccinations. We have led the entire North America in terms of our battling of COVID, and in every single instance, they have voted against it.

We will continue to work hard, working with the Chief Medical Officer of Health to ensure the health and safety of all the people in the province of Ontario, regardless of whether the Leader of the Opposition wants to work with us or not.

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

Mr. Peter Tabuns: I go back, Speaker: The medical officer of health recommended that, to protect our children, all adults wear masks indoors. The Premier can send a very strong signal to adults across Ontario that this is serious and that they need to act. And so I ask: Why is the Premier not showing the leadership that’s required at this moment and wearing a mask?

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

Hon. Sylvia Jones: Since the beginning of this pandemic, there is nothing that the Premier hasn’t done to protect our children and our most vulnerable. From the very beginning, when we had no vaccines in the province of Ontario or worldwide, we made sure that the initiatives that we did, the programs that we put in place protected our most vulnerable, protected our most senior, protected our children. We will continue to do that as a government because we understand that when you make investments in people, you make investments in community. We’ve done that from the start.

As the House leader mentioned, the investments that we have made in health care in the province of Ontario are truly historic, and yet when we asked members of the opposition to stand with us and work with us, they refused and they voted against our initiatives.

We’ll make the investments. We’ll continue to do what the Chief Medical Officer of Health recommends, because we know it’s the right thing—

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

The final supplementary.

Mr. Peter Tabuns: Leadership is not simply repeating talking points in the House. Leadership is taking the advice of the medical officer of health, something the Premier says that he does, and acting on it. We need public education to move people. I’m not seeing those programs. We need vaccination teams, because the vaccination levels are at incredibly low levels. I’m not seeing that. We need 10 paid sick days so people can do what the medical officer of health says: Stay home when you’re sick.

What is it going to take for the Premier to show leadership and actually act on the recommendations of the medical officer of health?

Hon. Sylvia Jones: Second in the world; only Japan was able to get a higher vaccination rate and therefore protection rate for their communities. Second in the world—we have nothing to apologize for and certainly no lessons need to be shared by you.

When we make the investments, when we make sure that vaccines are available, we see results, and we have. We have seen the numbers of people who stepped up and said, “I want to protect my elderly,” “I want to go visit my senior in a long-term-care home,” “I want to be part of the solution.” Part of the solution, frankly, is making sure that your vaccines are up to date. We’ve done that, we’ve made those investments, and results prove that they have made a difference.

As I said, we will continue to make those investments to ensure that the people of Ontario have vaccines, have boosters, have flu shots when they need them. We’ll do that work. I’m not going to take any lessons from the member opposite, who refuses to support—

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

HOSPITAL SERVICES

Ms. Jessica Bell: My question is to the Minister of Health. Children’s hospitals are in crisis. At SickKids, care departments are running at 127% to 145% above capacity. And it’s not just SickKids; across Ontario, pediatric hospitals and care units have reached maximum capacity. What is this government’s plan to help children’s hospitals meet the increased demand for care?

Hon. Sylvia Jones: We have already put in place so many initiatives that are making a difference in CHEO and Ottawa. Imagine the ability for them to literally ramp up a second ICU because they saw the need in their community. These are clinicians, these are hospital leaders who are doing the right thing, who are stepping up when we give them the investments and supports.

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Our early efforts—of course, we anticipated a surge in pediatric and took early steps to support the challenging fall virus season. We’ve already done early operational guidance. We’ve provided support fall and winter surge preparedness in pediatric capacity. We saw that in CHEO. We see now SickKids nurses who are doing education to ensure that nurses in other community hospitals know, anticipate and are prepared for an uptake that we have anticipated and we are working towards.

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

Ms. Jessica Bell: Minister, SickKids and hospitals don’t just want to imagine; they want the investments so that they can deal with the very serious issues they’re facing right now.

Yesterday, SickKids began cancelling surgeries to cope with surging demand in its ICUs in its emergency department. SickKids already has a surgery wait-list of more than 3,400 children waiting beyond the clinically acceptable time frame. What is this government’s plan to help children get the surgeries they’re waiting for?

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

Hon. Peter Bethlenfalvy: Mr. Speaker, I had the pleasure and opportunity to table the fall economic statement here yesterday, and our opposition said, “Where’s all the new money for health care?” If they were here in August when I tabled the budget, which was voted on yes by this side and no on that side, they would recognize that there was \$5.6 billion of new investments for health care.

It was this government that recognizes that we’re investing in the surgical backlog, we’re investing in home care, we’re investing in community care—in acute care, more beds. We have a plan to stay open. We came back in the Legislature in August to get the job done for the people of Ontario, and we will not rest until the investments that were neglected by the previous government—

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Response.

Hon. Peter Bethlenfalvy: We’re going to get it done.

Interjections.

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

Ms. Jessica Bell: Thank you, Minister. The SickKids emergency room is also at a breaking point. The average wait time in the emergency room at SickKids is now 12 hours. That is triple what it was in 2019. No one wants to wait 12 hours in an emergency room with a baby or a child in pain, and that is what is happening today in hospitals in downtown Toronto. What is your government’s plan to ensure emergency rooms can quickly help the children who need care?

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

Hon. Sylvia Jones: Speaker, I’ve said it before, and I will say it again: We planned for this expected surge. We have worked with our clinicians, with our hospital leaders, to make sure that they have the resources to properly assess where children and adults need to be in our health care system when they need that care.

That work is ongoing. Those investments in emergency departments, in over 11,900 new health human resources—these are people who are working in our systems today in the province of Ontario who did not have a job in health care before the pandemic. We’ve made sure that those investments translate into ensuring that when we see surges, whether they are for RSV, flu or other COVID-related pandemic issues, we have the capacity and will continue to serve those parents and children.

LAND USE PLANNING

Mr. Jeff Burch: Speaker, through you to the Premier: Despite promising the people of this province not to “touch the greenbelt,” this government has put forward a plan to remove 7,400 acres of land from the greenbelt, claiming they need more land to build housing, yet the province’s Housing Affordability Task Force reported that a lack of land was not the problem. We have already have all the land we need for housing. The greenbelt was created to preserve valuable farmland and connect the forest and wetland ecosystems. Every expert is saying that removing parts of it threatens all of it.

Will the Premier tell the people of Ontario the true nature of his motives in putting their farmland, food security and conservation lands in jeopardy when his own experts are saying that we have plenty of land available for development?

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Associate Minister of Housing.

Hon. Michael Parsa: Thank you very much, Speaker, and I thank my honourable colleague for the question. Yet again, you will see the NDP find any excuse to object to building houses. After the previous government failed the people of this province, we made a commitment to the people of this province. We will not follow their path. We will not let down the people of this province. We have a shortage of homes here in this province right now. We will have a further shortage if we don't do something about it. After they failed—they held the balance of power for years. Was housing a priority, colleagues, for this government? Never. It took this Premier, this party to say, "We're no longer going down that path."

We will not let down the people of this province. We will build homes for the people. We will build. As newcomers come in, we will build the homes that they need. We will not let them down. We will find ways to make sure that the people of this province have a home to go to every night.

Interjections.

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

Mr. Jeff Burch: Speaker, there are many places to build new condo towers and subdivisions that aren't in the greenbelt or on a wetland.

Some of the owners of the protected land the government is opening up to development purchased the land just a few months ago. One parcel of land was bought by the Rice Group back in September and was described as a prime opportunity for "land banking." What interesting timing, Speaker.

Developers like the Rice Group's CEO, Michael Rice, and TACC Development's CEO, Silvio De Gasperis, have donated tens of thousands of dollars to the Ontario PC Party. Four companies controlled by members of the De Gasperis family own 20 properties on the land this government is opening up for development.

Speaker, the greenbelt is vital to keeping Ontario's watershed systems and environment healthy and working. Without it, we increase the risks of flooding, droughts and food security. After promising not to touch the greenbelt, why is the Premier carving it up and serving pieces of it to his hungry friends like one of his homemade cheesecakes?

Hon. Michael Parsa: Mr. Speaker, maybe the opposition could spend some time actually reading initiatives, because if they had seen it—we're expanding the greenbelt by 2,000 acres while building 50,000 new homes.

Whether it's in Niagara, whether it's east, west, north, in Toronto, the GTA, the people of Ontario will not be let down by this government, Mr. Speaker. We will build homes for them.

At the federal government's recent announcement, with 500,000 new Canadians coming here—we will not let

down the new Canadians that are coming here to look for homes, Mr. Speaker. We will not let down the previous generation.

We will expand the greenbelt. We will build homes in every corner of this province, because that's what we promised to the people of this province.

Unlike the opposition—it doesn't matter what the previous government did; they supported them along the way. With us, it's a little different: We're actually for housing in this province.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Stop the clock. We're going to pause for a few minutes to let calm prevail. Order.

Start the clock. The next question, the member for Barrie–Innisfil.

EDUCATION ON INTOLERANCE

Ms. Andrea Khanjin: Thank you, Speaker. I want to thank you for the opportunity to rise in the Legislature today to address a really crucial topic. Unfortunately, there have been reports about steady increases in racist incidents within our education system, including a spike in anti-Semitism and racism within our school settings. I know I can speak for everyone in this Legislature in saying that any form of hate should be removed from our classrooms.

There are new findings by Western University and Liberation75 that find that, when it comes to Holocaust education and awareness, there's a worrisome 42% of students that were surveyed that have unequivocally witnessed an anti-Semitic act or event in their school.

Speaker, can the Minister of Education tell us what else we can do to combat anti-Semitism and stomp out this hate decisively?

Hon. Stephen Lecce: I want to thank the member from Barrie–Innisfil for her exceptional leadership in this space of countering hate in all forms.

Mr. Speaker, democracies and free people around the world have declared, "Never again." And yet, in this country, according to the study cited by the member from Barrie–Innisfil, one in three students in Canada believe the Holocaust was fabricated or exaggerated, and 42% of students have explicitly seen an anti-Semitic incident in their schools. Mr. Speaker, these are startling data points for any government, and we are absolutely committed to confronting this hate through education, to improve the lives of all citizens and to make sure these kids are in schools where they are respected for their inherent dignity, not because of their difference.

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And so I am proud, for the first time in Ontario's elementary schools, to be mandating mandatory elementary learning on the Holocaust to embed in our schools, to ensure students learn from it and to truly keep every child safe in Ontario.

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

Ms. Laura Smith: Thank you for the opportunity to speak about this vital issue that deserves further attention.

Students and families in my riding have been negatively impacted by anti-Semitic hatred and discrimination, whether in our schools or public settings. All students deserve the opportunity to learn free from hate and discrimination, especially the students from my riding. To take meaningful action in combatting what's happening today, we must ensure that young people in this province are aware of the past. This includes Jewish history, culture, perspectives and contributions to Canada.

Mr. Speaker, my question is to the Minister of Education: Why was it only our government that recognized the urgency in taking immediate action by expanding Holocaust education in the curriculum?

Hon. Stephen Lecce: I want to thank the member from Thornhill for her commitment to fighting hate in all of its forms.

Mr. Speaker, we're taking action to counter anti-Semitism and hate in all of its forms because those who fail to learn from history are doomed to repeat it. That's why, through education, we're mandating, for the first time in Ontario's history, mandatory learning within our elementary schools on the Holocaust, to ensure students understand the horrors of the greatest atrocity in modern history. It is absolutely necessary that we do this now, because 90% of anti-Semitic incidents take place in grades 7 and 8, and so we're introducing it in grade 6, following the advice of CIJA, the Friends of Simon Wiesenthal and other leaders across our country.

Mr. Speaker, we are ensuring that respect, diversity and inclusion triumph within our schools, and we're taking action together to confront hate in all of its forms.

HEALTH CARE FUNDING

Ms. Catherine Fife: My question is for the Premier. My constituent Lindsay's youngest son, who is three years old, recently had to be admitted to an ICU for respiratory distress, requiring high-level BiPAP support. A few days after her son was discharged, Lindsay had to take him back to the hospital again for assistance with his breathing. In both instances, she was told by the overworked health care staff that they would like to keep him for observation, but there were no beds. They were sent home and told to come back if it got worse.

Mr. Speaker, this is a nightmare for parents. One ER doctor has asked this Minister of Health, "Did you know that we're resuscitating three to four kids at a time now?" We are seeing a wave of respiratory illness in young children, with limited capacity to properly treat patients, and yet there is no new funding for health care in the fall economic statement.

How can the government justify this, after everything that children and parents have endured during this pandemic? Why will you not acknowledge that six months past their first budget, additional funding is needed to address this crisis, because the crisis is real?

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

The Minister of Health to reply.

Hon. Sylvia Jones: The member opposite's story reinforces how valued and important it is that we have a health care system and health care support workers who are there when we need them. We have done that. We have prepared, through the budget that was passed—without your support, I might add—in August, less than three months ago. We were preparing for what we anticipated was a fall surge: fall and winter COVID, potentially flu and, of course, RSV.

We're doing that investment. We're making those investments. We've had hospital CEOs and presidents say this is not a money problem; this is a health human resources challenge, and we are working through that, with investments that we are making with colleges and universities, to expand the number of health systems. We continue to build a stronger health care system because we know the people of Ontario need and deserve that.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): And I'll remind members once again: Make your comments through the Chair, please.

Supplementary question.

Ms. Catherine Fife: Speaker, we believe the Financial Accountability Officer on this one, because there's a huge gap in where resources should be and where they are going. No amount of government talking points will be able to distract from the fact that more needs to be done to protect families and children. You can't even get the Premier to don a mask in the Legislature. We need to invest in our health care system and the people who are working right now down the street at SickKids. None of us should have constituents like Lindsay begging the government for a basic standard of health care for her family while her child fights to breathe.

Adding more pediatric ICU beds means investing in training and retaining—this is the missing part from your fall economic statement—and paying health care workers a fair wage. When will you repeal Bill 124, which is a wage-suppression piece of legislation? It is driving people out of this province. At the very least, Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Health needs to address the repealing of Bill 124. It should have been in the fall economic statement.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The President of the Treasury Board to reply.

Hon. Prabmeet Singh Sarkaria: Let's look at the facts. Since our government has made these historic investments, an over \$6.2-billion year-over-year dollar increase in health care spending—that is the largest increase in health care spending on record for this province, and, I might add, the members opposite voted against each one of those dollars being added to our health care system.

Over 11,700 new health care workers since March 2020: Every single one of those workers, the members opposite voted against. When we put forward \$342 million to support retraining and upskilling our registered nurses and RPNs, the members opposite voted against that. When we put forward a measure to increase pay for PSWs and DSWs, the members opposite voted against. Every measure that we have put forward as a government to support health care, to invest in health care, the members opposite

have voted against. We will continue to do what we can to support health care in this province.

SKILLED TRADES

Mr. Kevin Holland: In my riding of Thunder Bay–Atikokan and across northern Ontario, I am hearing from many businesses, notably in the mining and forestry sectors, that unfortunately cannot find the workers they need. Businesses in my community want to hire more skilled tradespeople, but face a critical shortage of workers to fill all job vacancies. Over 21,000 jobs are currently unfilled in northern Ontario, many of which are in the skilled trades.

Speaker, I want to thank the Minister of Labour, Immigration, Training and Skills Development for his visit to Thunder Bay last week, and ask him to share with the House what our government is doing to address the skilled-trades shortage in northern Ontario.

Hon. Monte McNaughton: I want to thank the member from Thunder Bay, who is doing a great job representing his community here at Queen's Park. Just last week, I had the pleasure of visiting Thunder Bay with the member to announce that our government is investing \$1.5 million in Thunder Bay training projects with the Carpenters Union Local 1669 and Confederation College.

Our government, under the leadership of Premier Ford, is on a mission to give people in every corner of Ontario a hand up to life-changing careers in the skilled trades. These crucial investments will make it easier for people across northern Ontario to start rewarding careers that provide meaningful work, good pay with defined pensions and benefits. For anyone anywhere in Ontario who wants a hand up, our government is here to help. We're building a stronger Ontario that leaves no one behind.

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

Mr. Kevin Holland: Thank you, Minister. Speaker, we know the demand for tradespeople is continuously growing in northern Ontario. Unfortunately, many young people do not know about the opportunities in the skilled trades that are widely available. In fact, it was surprising to learn the average age of an apprentice in Ontario is 29 years old. Given that the province is facing an ever-growing shortfall in the skilled trades, with a third of tradespeople nearing retirement, urgent action is needed.

Can the minister please share how our government is helping more young people learn about the opportunities available to them in the skilled trades, especially in the communities in northern Ontario?

Hon. Monte McNaughton: Again, thank you to the member for this very important question. Last week, while in Thunder Bay with the CEO of our new agency, Skilled Trades Ontario, we promoted upcoming skilled-trades career fairs for students across northern Ontario. Today and tomorrow, thanks to the Ministry of Education and our ministry, fairs are under way in Sudbury, and on November 29, the fair will be in Thunder Bay.

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For the first time in Ontario's history, students in grades 7 to 12 can learn about the 144 different trades available in Ontario from union leaders, employers and tradespeople all under one roof. One of the best kept secrets in Ontario is the fact that many people in the trades are earning more than those with PhDs. To build a stronger Ontario, we need more hard-working people in the skilled trades.

PARAMEDIC SERVICES

Mr. Sol Mamakwa: My question is to the Premier. Paramedics across northwestern Ontario, including in the riding of Kiiwetinoong, have been raising the alarm. They are dealing with high call volumes, a huge geographical area and understaffing.

What is this government doing to improve ambulance coverage for patients in the area, as well as working conditions for these paramedics?

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

Hon. Sylvia Jones: Thank you to the member opposite for the question. It gives me an opportunity to highlight some of the many initiatives that we've been working on with our community paramedics, end paramedics and other health care providers, like Ornge air ambulance, which would, of course, be of particular interest to the member opposite.

We've ensured that we have opportunities other than paramedics having to drive only patients to their emergency departments. In fact, in some communities, we've seen success and satisfaction rates of over 85%. It means that someone who doesn't need to go to an emergency department and can get services within their community, with the patient's consent, can go to that long-term-care home, can go to that palliative care home, can go to access other opportunities.

I think it is really an example of the innovation that we're embracing in our health care system.

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

Mr. Sol Mamakwa: Paramedics in the Kenora region have the challenge of ensuring ambulance coverage in a region that has 10 ambulance bases spread across 400,000 square kilometres. The current set-up isn't working for the patients or staff. Residents deserve better attention from the levels of government that fund the Northwest EMS. When we don't fund these services properly, the lives and the health of the people of northern Ontario suffer.

What is this government doing to improve this crisis of care across the region?

Hon. Sylvia Jones: As I said, we are working with our partners, we're making sure that programs like the nurse offload program ensure that we have funded an exclusive individual to assist in making sure that as paramedics bring their patients in to the emergency department, there is a paid physician funded by our government to make sure that they can stabilize that patient while they are waiting for care internally. That one initiative ensures that those paramedics can go back out into the community.

We talk about all of the different ways that our health care providers work together to improve the system. These are the initiatives, these are the proposals and changes that our government is funding to make sure that we have the appropriate care and we have the appropriate health human resources doing that work.

HEALTH CARE

Mr. Stephen Blais: My question is for the Premier. Children's hospitals across Ontario are facing unprecedented challenges. In Ottawa, CHEO is operating at 113% capacity, while its intensive care unit is at over 180%. CHEO is cancelling surgeries and converting that space for more intensive care need. There are shortages in the lack of children's pain medications, which is forcing more and more parents to go to the emergency room to seek care for their kids. Under the watch of this government, CHEO has had to cancel appointments and surgeries because of this influx of patients and the lack of sufficient resources to deal with the surge.

They don't have sufficient resources because of Bill 124. They don't have sufficient resources because this government is fixated on election gimmicks instead of investing in our health care. The hospitals don't have sufficient resources because this government doesn't have their back.

Mr. Speaker, what is this government going to do today to fix the health care crisis in our hospitals, in particular our children's hospitals?

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

Hon. Sylvia Jones: I'm going to start with the pediatric pain medication. I wonder if the member opposite has spoken to the federal government and talked about what they are doing to actually ensure that the pain medication that our parents and our children need and deserve is available in the province of Ontario.

I know that I have been speaking to Minister Duclos, on almost a daily basis, to get updates, and I have assurances that that is happening. But I wonder if the member opposite has done the same. I wonder if the member opposite has actually congratulated CHEO on doing something that has added capacity in a very expedited manner. These are the leadership qualities that we need to encourage and make sure that we're acknowledging, we're funding and we're supporting. We're doing that, as our government is; I wonder if the member opposite has done the same.

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

Mr. Stephen Blais: My supplemental is also for the Premier, Mr. Speaker. Almost every aspect of the health care system is in crisis. Under this government's watch, we've seen the time for ER visits for admitted patients increased to over 45.2 hours. We've seen ambulance offload delays go from 83 minutes to 90 minutes in September. That extra seven minutes is almost the entire provincially legislated time for response for an emergency. This has led to a dramatic increase in level zero events right across the province. That means an ambulance isn't there to respond to your 911 call.

Despite the level zero crisis we're facing, neither the word "paramedic" nor the word "ambulance" is mentioned one time—not once—in the fall economic statement. The city of Ottawa is asking for \$5 million to strategically position paramedics at hospitals across the city to help with offload delays. Will the government provide the city this funding to reduce level zero events and ensure an ambulance is there to respond to 911 calls?

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

Hon. Sylvia Jones: In August, we passed a budget that had an increase in the health care budget of over \$5 million. The member opposite voted against that initiative. You cannot stand up—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Order. Order. The House will come to order.

Minister of Health, please continue.

Hon. Sylvia Jones: You cannot stand up and demand that we make more investments in health care without actually doing the work. We've done that. We've made that commitment in our most recent budget. The member opposite can stand up and say that more needs to be done; but, frankly, maybe the first thing that needs to happen is that you actually support the initiatives our government has been bringing forward.

MINING INDUSTRY

Mr. Will Bouma: My question is for the Minister of Mines. Ongoing global economic uncertainty driven by inflation and geopolitical instability is causing disruptions in worldwide supply chains, leading to negative consequences here in Ontario. The mining sector in our province represents an opportunity for Ontario to assume the role of a global leader. For example, as the world moves toward more electric vehicle production, the critical minerals required in constructing these vehicles can be extracted right here in our province. Speaker, could the minister please tell this House about what our government is doing to make Ontario a leader in mineral production?

Hon. George Pirie: Thank you for the question from the member for Brantford. The opportunities for the Ontario mining industry have never been greater than they are now, and that's why we introduced the Critical Minerals Strategy in the spring of this year. It's the perfect marriage of the opportunity of minerals in northern Ontario with the manufacturing might in southern Ontario.

In the words of OMA president Chris Hodgson: "As the world emerges from the COVID-19 pandemic, faces increasing geopolitical uncertainty and as the race to halt climate change accelerates, Ontario is primed to continue contributing meaningful solutions, while capitalizing on rising global demand for green and critical minerals."

I couldn't agree more. Ontario will produce the critical minerals and metals that are fundamental to modern life and key components in the clean energy transition. Just last month, we celebrated the grand opening of the Vale Copper Cliff South expansion that was followed by the Creighton mine. That would be \$1.8 billion that will secure a local supply of the critical minerals we need for the EVs.

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

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Mr. Will Bouma: Thank you, Minister, for that response. Ontario's mining companies set the standard for responsible and safe operations worldwide. Ontario's mineral exploration and mining industry represent a great comeback story, as our government is willing to step up and provide leadership after the years of neglect they faced under the previous Liberal government.

Opening new mines and expanding existing ones will mean producing jobs—good jobs that good people here in this province can rely on. It will increase our economy's revenue, which means we can help pay for the critical services that benefit all Ontarians.

Speaker, can the minister elaborate further on this industry's critical role in our province and what supports we can provide?

Hon. George Pirie: Thank you again for your question. As a former miner myself, I am passionate about this great industry. I used to be part of the Ontario Mining Association, which, for the past 44 years, has advocated for the sector, built positive relationships and celebrated this dynamic, innovative industry.

Mr. Speaker, today we are celebrating the Ontario Mining Association's Meet the Miners Day at Queen's Park. I encourage everyone to join me at the Meet the Miners reception at 5 p.m. in the Terrace room at the Gardiner Museum. It is an opportunity to speak with miners, learn more about the importance of the sector and engage in policy discussion that can move this sector forward.

EDUCATION FUNDING

Ms. Chandra Pasma: Yesterday, the Financial Accountability Office reported the government is on track for a \$6-billion shortfall in education spending over the next few years, including \$400 million this year alone, but yesterday's economic statement didn't do anything to address this gap.

The Premier has now used pandemic disruptions to schooling, largely caused by this government, as an excuse to trample on the rights of low-paid workers and to spend public money on private tutoring companies. If the Premier is so committed to our kids' success, why doesn't he do the obvious thing and adequately fund public education?

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

Hon. Peter Bethlenfalvy: Mr. Speaker through to you to the member opposite: I'm sure the member opposite has read the budget, which included a \$3.6-billion increase for education funding this fiscal year—\$3.6 billion. We tabled that budget in April 2022, took it to the electorate, and that budget was roundly endorsed by the people of Ontario. When we recalled the Legislature back in August to pass that budget, did the member opposite vote for that \$3.6-billion increase? No.

Do you know what's in that increase? That's funding a large funding envelope for child care so we can—more

child care funding to build more schools. The previous government closed 600 schools. You don't need child care spaces when you close schools. We're putting them in new schools, in existing schools—mental health supports, tutorial supports, HEPA filters. We're investing in our children.

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

Ms. Chandra Pasma: It's funny the minister should mention child care, Speaker, because it's not just school-aged kids this government is letting down. The FAO also revealed that the government's child care expansion plan is shockingly inadequate. Even if the government builds all their planned 71,000 net new spaces by 2026, and that's a big if, it won't be enough to keep up with increasing demand. Over 200,000 children will be unable to access \$10-a-day child care in Ontario. The government could ensure access for all with a serious expansion plan and by addressing the workforce crisis with better wages and working conditions for child care workers. My question is, why isn't the Premier doing that?

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

Hon. Stephen Lecce: Mr. Speaker, let me remind the members opposite that their advice to government six to 12 months ago was to accept a deal that would have precluded a third of children in the province of Ontario. They would have exacerbated the very problem they cite today—the irony of the member opposite posing that question.

But I am proud to report that, because of the reforms our government undertook, 92% of operators in this province have opted into our program to ensure accessible, affordable child care, an incredible achievement that's going to help so many families receive 25% on average savings this fall, roughly \$6,000, rising to \$12,000, roughly 50% on average, of savings by January 1, 2023. This is a monumental achievement.

And while we have created the conditions of 46,000 child care spaces since we came to office, in the deal we signed, 86,000 more will be built to increase access, and the federal government has \$1 billion on the table for capital. We urge them to release the dollars so we improve access for families across this province.

GOVERNMENT FISCAL POLICIES

Ms. Stephanie Bowman: A month ago, I visited the Holland Bloorview children's rehab hospital in my riding of Don Valley West. This world-class organization develops treatments and supports and provides specialized care for children with disabilities due to illness or trauma. I asked what they needed from the Ontario government. They said that they have a surgical backlog and need more support to clear it. Now, with children's hospitals overflowing across the province and surgeries being cancelled, bigger backlogs are building.

The economic outlook says the government is holding on to contingency funds in case of unforeseen risk. While this risk of increased hospitalizations was indeed foreseen

and called out by many outside this government, will the Minister of Finance acknowledge that they did not foresee this risk and that now is indeed the time to allocate funds from the contingency, to help get sick kids the procedures that they need?

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

Hon. Sylvia Jones: As I've mentioned in my previous answers, we were preparing for this fall respiratory challenge in the previous budget that we passed in August. We prepared by anticipating that surge in pediatrics and making sure that hospitals serving both pediatric patients and adults were able to build their capacity. We've done that work.

I have to give a shout-out to the clinicians and the hospital leadership, who have worked together to make sure that when they experience a surge in their individual hospital, they work with their neighbouring community hospitals to ensure that patients who can be transferred back to their home community are able to do so.

We're doing that work. We're making those investments. We've invested in additional surgery backlogs, to ensure that people don't have to wait an exorbitantly long time for their surgery. There are going to be challenges as we deal with the surge in flu, or in some cases RSV, but we're working with our hospital leadership to make sure that we give them the support they need.

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

Ms. Stephanie Bowman: We here in this House and the people of Ontario have heard this song before from this government, but it's now an old song, and Ontarians deserve to get the care they need, not excuses.

In the economic and fiscal outlook, the minister states that his government "has always been open and transparent." I just came from the Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs, which, it appears, will now not be reviewing the estimates of the ministry. When presented with an opportunity to reschedule, his colleagues refused to find the time to ensure that the residents of Ontario, and even their own constituents, would get answers about government expenditures.

Does the Minister of Finance agree with his colleagues' decision to block the review of his ministry's estimates? And, if not, when would he be willing to meet with the Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs to be open and transparent with members of provincial Parliament?

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

Hon. Peter Bethlenfalvy: Mr. Speaker, I don't know where to begin on this question. I'm hearing from the member opposite, whose party there, when faced with the Auditor General looking at the books, didn't get a clean audit. The Auditor General of Ontario had a qualified opinion for their books. Not our government—five years of clean opinions from the Auditor General.

And, Mr. Speaker, let's look at the election. In the pre-election budget review—

Interjection.

Hon. Peter Bethlenfalvy: The interim leader knows this full well: The auditor looked at the books and said, "These numbers add up. They're reasonable." When they went to the electorate in 2018, she found that they were not reasonable. They didn't paint a fair picture. Mr. Speaker, our government did.

Interjection.

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

Hon. Peter Bethlenfalvy: Finally, I'm out every 90 days—

Interjection.

Hon. Peter Bethlenfalvy: He knows that. He knows that. His government didn't get out every 90 days.

AGRI-FOOD INDUSTRY

Ms. Laurie Scott: My question is for the Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs. With one in 10 jobs in our province connected to the agri-food sector, that represents one in 10 paycheques in my riding. My constituents depend on agri-food employers like Mariposa Dairy in Lindsay. Their two facilities, measuring over 80,000 square feet, represent North America's largest private-label goat and sheep cheese producers.

Growth in Ontario's agriculture and food manufacturing sector means more good-paying jobs for families across our province, but to grow our agri-food businesses, we need to access new markets for companies like Mariposa to expand. Speaker, can the minister please tell the House what our government is doing to promote Ontario's agriculture and food manufacturers worldwide in order to provide them with greater economic opportunities?

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Hon. Lisa M. Thompson: I'd like to thank the member from Haliburton-Kawartha Lakes-Brock for her question because it allows me the opportunity to share with everyone in the House something that you already know: Ontario consumers have trust in Ontario's agri-food sector because it's reliable and it's stable.

But, Speaker, over and above that, our agri-food sector does \$51 billion worth of two-way trade. And given the leadership of Premier Ford and our government, we've increased our global exports by 13.4% since 2020.

Our government is promoting trust and confidence in made-in-Ontario food at every opportunity. This week, there are nearly 20 businesses in our Ontario pavilion at the Private Label Manufacturers Association trade show in Chicago. They're opening up new doors.

And earlier this fall, Ontario hosted our country's largest grocery meeting, where 44 Ontario companies, much like Mariposa Dairy, held over 160 meetings to discuss nearly \$14 million in potential sales. We're strong in terms of our agri-food sector in the province of Ontario, and we're—

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

Ms. Laurie Scott: Mr. Speaker, I thank the minister for the great work that she is doing for agri-producers.

When an Ontario food business expands, new jobs are created and more money is put back into our economy. The work by our government to promote food and beverages produced in Ontario is greatly appreciated by the 750,000 workers who are employed in the agri-food sector.

The US is our number one trading partner and is a critical market for our agri-food sector. Because of this reality, we must assist our farmers as they pursue economic opportunities worldwide. Speaker, can the minister explain what our government is doing to help businesses in the agri-food sector expand into overseas markets?

Hon. Lisa M. Thompson: Speaker, I'm really pleased to share that we continue to look for new avenues to grow our agri-food sector in Ontario with markets, like in southeast Asia. There are perfect opportunities that abound. Just in meeting recently with representatives from around the world, I can tell you that there's consistent interest in our commodities, in our food, as well as our genetics.

I'd be remiss if I didn't reflect on Ontario Pork, since they're here today at Queen's Park. Ontario Pork exports \$700 million in products every year to 41 different countries—9% of that goes directly to Japan, which is a growing market for Ontario agri-food.

Unlike the previous Liberal government, that turned a blind eye to the agri-food industry, our government is building up the value of our sector in terms of agriculture and food export potential, and we know it's an important driver in our overall provincial economy. Because of that, we're proud to be supporting our farmers, our processors, and we're putting agri-tech innovation at the forefront.

HOME CARE

M^{me} France Gélinas: Ma question est pour la ministre de la Santé. Minister, every single week my office receives multiple phone calls regarding the failures in our home care system. Elizabeth is a senior in my riding who ends up sleeping in her chair at least once a week because Bayshore doesn't notify her that her worker won't be coming to help her transfer into bed.

Home care reliability is so bad that patients who want to, who could, who should be at home, are stuck in hospital, leading your government to pass a law that overrides their rights to consent and pushes them into a long-term-care home far away from home.

Can the minister please tell me if she thinks that our home care system is meeting the needs of Ontarians?

Hon. Sylvia Jones: Does the member opposite believe that home care is an integral and important part of our health care system? I certainly do. Our government has shown that through its investments.

We want to make sure that people who can and want to be able to recover and live in their own home with minimal support, in many cases, have that opportunity, which is why in the 2022-23 budget our government is investing an additional \$1 billion over the next three years to improve the quality of care; \$1 billion will make a huge difference in our community home care system, because it will equate to 739,000 nursing visits; 157,000 nurse shift hours;

117,000 therapy visits, including physiotherapy, occupational therapy and speech language pathology; 2,118,000 hours of personal support workers; and 236,000 other types of home care visits.

Do I believe these investments are a critical part of how we can ensure that the people of Ontario get the home care they deserve and need? Absolutely.

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

M^{me} France Gélinas: Our home care system is broken. It fails thousands of people every single day. Since the government was elected four and a half years ago, nothing has changed.

There is a health human resources crisis in home care, Speaker, because our government does not fund home care adequately. Solving the home care human resource crisis means that you provide permanent, full-time, well-paid jobs with benefits, 10 paid sick days and a pension plan. Do this and many PSWs who work in our community will go back to home care.

When will this government admit that home care is an integral part of our health care system and that it needs to provide directives and financial support to fix our broken home care system?

Hon. Sylvia Jones: Speaker, when we pass a budget that includes \$1 billion in home care support, in community care support and the member opposite votes against it and then stands up today and says we need more—which is it? Are you going to support the investments that we are making in the province of Ontario or are you going to continue to say we're not doing enough?

A billion dollars is a historic investment. It will truly be a game-changer for people who want and have the ability to live and recover at home in their own home. We're making those investments. We're ensuring that people get that support when they need it, where they need it, and we will continue to do that work regardless of what the member opposite spins in her tales.

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

Hon. Sylvia Jones: I withdraw.

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

ASSISTED HOUSING

Mr. Sheref Sabawy: Mr. Speaker, in my riding of Mississauga—Erin Mills, there is a growing need for more supportive housing.

While our government has committed to supporting vulnerable and at-risk populations, the need in my riding is urgent. Many of our most vulnerable not only need a place to live, but they also require additional care and support.

Stated plainly, there is not enough housing supply. There is currently a lack of affordable housing availability that meets their specific needs, a situation which creates additional stress and pressures on those who are already facing challenges and difficulties.

Speaker, can the Associate Minister of Housing please share what our government is doing to meet the supportive housing demands in my riding?

Hon. Michael Parsa: I thank my honourable colleague for the question, Speaker.

This government has always been and will always be focused on making the lives of Ontarians better, particularly when it comes to finding a home. We've committed every resource available to ensuring families and individuals have a place to call home and a roof over their heads. That includes making sure that every person has access to the assistance and support they need.

Speaker, I was just in Mississauga alongside my colleague from Mississauga–Streetsville for an announcement for 40 supportive housing units with an investment of \$4.5 million. We've invested \$2.25 million in Brantford to create 26 bachelor units for vulnerable people experiencing homelessness, \$3 million in Guelph to create 16 units, \$2.5 million in Barrie to create 14 units, \$1.8 million in Windsor to create 26 units, and \$1.1 million in Simcoe for 18 units.

These are just a few of the examples of how we are building 3,100 housing units. We're making the capital investments through the Ontario Social Services Relief Fund so that—

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

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Mr. Sheref Sabawy: Thank you to the Associate Minister of Housing for the answer. It is clear that the lack of housing supply is one of the main barriers preventing Ontarians from finding a home. We have heard directly from experts that high fees are the main obstacle to building more supportive housing units in Ontario.

Speaker, again to the Associate Minister: What is our government doing to provide relief for the high fees imposed on builders to ensure more supportive housing units are available for those who need it most?

Hon. Michael Parsa: Thank you to the honourable member for the follow-up question. Not only are we investing the funding to make it possible to build supportive housing, we're cutting red tape that's blocking developers, non-profits and community partners from getting shovels in the ground. With our latest bill, we address concerns related to development charges. But I must emphasize all the supportive housing units that we've built thus far, Mr. Speaker, whether it's investments in St. Thomas, where we built 20 units, or the \$2.9 million in Thunder Bay for 98 units, \$5.5 million in London to build 30 accessible modular home units—and there is much more to come.

This is a government that doesn't leave anyone behind in this province. We will always make sure that every Ontarian is not only housed but has a home where they feel safe and supported.

PERSONAL SUPPORT WORKERS

MPP Jamie West: In March of last year, the Conservative government unanimously voted down my bill to create a wage floor for all personal support workers. Instead, they chose to extend the temporary pandemic wage enhancement that only applied to some PSWs. Then they promised that they'd make the \$2 top-up permanent.

Except, according to a November 1 Global News article, hospital PSWs are still waiting on the permanent wage increase.

My question, Speaker, is: If the Conservative government wants Ontario to believe that they care about workers, why are hospital PSWs waiting more than eight months for a \$2 raise?

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

Hon. Sylvia Jones: The member opposite raises an important point. As you know, the funds were flowed to our hospital partners and our long-term-care partners in September to ensure that the second tranche of the PSW and nurse retention bonus pay were given. Those should be distributed. They will be retroactive, so as the individual hospitals—perhaps the member opposite could share with me examples so that we could follow up. But the funding has flowed from our government. We understand the value and importance of PSWs in our health care system and we want to make sure—which is, frankly, why we made a temporary wage enhancement permanent.

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

MPP Jamie West: Back to the Premier: I don't know if waiting eight months for a \$2 raise shows that you care about PSWs.

Let's go to home care PSWs, because home care PSWs' employment standards—looking into this: According to the Ministry of Labour, Immigration, Training and Skills Development guide for the Employment Standards Act on home care workers, home care PSWs are only entitled to be paid for no more than 12 hours per day. I learned this because a home care provider told me they don't have to pay more than this. They're also not entitled to daily or weekly limits on hours of work, daily rest periods; home care PSWs are not entitled to time off between shifts; they're not entitled to weekly or biweekly rest periods; and home care PSWs are not entitled to eating periods or overtime pay. That's very serious if you're talking about how important PSWs are to the Conservative government, Speaker.

My question is: Will the Premier direct the Minister of Labour, Immigration, Training and Skills Development to update the Employment Standards Act so that all home care PSWs are entitled to at least some of the standards of every other worker in Ontario, including overtime pay?

Hon. Sylvia Jones: Again, Speaker, I will remind the member opposite that at the very beginning, on October 1, 2020, we made a commitment, we made an investment to ensure that our personal support workers got the support they needed, because we saw how critically important they were in our home care sector, in our long-term-care sector and in our hospital care sector. That temporary wage enhancement, of course, has now been made permanent. And I will reinforce, again, that the organizations that have that permanent wage enhancement have the money from the province of Ontario. That money has been distributed and it will be retroactive. So while I am frustrated that some people are still waiting for those wage enhancements, the money has flowed and it is retroactive. They will get their money.

VISITOR

Mr. Graham McGregor: I'd like to welcome my good friend Harout Matossian. He's the former chair of the Armenian National Committee of Toronto and a current member of the Armenian Community Centre advisory board.

Harout, welcome to Queen's Park.

HOUSE SITTINGS

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): I beg to inform the House that, pursuant to standing order 9(g), the Clerk has received written notice from the government House leader indicating that a temporary change in the weekly meeting schedule of the House is required, and therefore, the afternoon routine on Wednesday, November 16, 2022, shall commence at 1 p.m.

There being no further business this morning, this House stands in recess until 3 p.m.

The House recessed from 1145 to 1500.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Mr. Michael Mantha: Speaker, I was just surprised: I was walking out of my office, coming back here to the Legislature to assume my House duties this afternoon, and I met up with a previous member who served in this Parliament—a fantastic member who served the community of Algoma-Manitoulin: Mr. Bud Wildman. I want to welcome him to the chamber. He's in my office right now using the phone, because he has to escape.

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

2103890 ONTARIO LIMITED ACT, 2022

Ms. Bell moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill Pr11, An Act to revive 2103890 Ontario Limited.

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

First reading agreed to.

NOTWITHSTANDING CLAUSE
LIMITATION ACT, 2022LOI DE 2022 VISANT À LIMITER
LE RECOURS À LA DISPOSITION
DE DÉROGATION

Madame Collard moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 37, An Act respecting the use of the notwithstanding clause / *Projet de loi 37, Loi concernant le recours à la disposition de dérogation.*

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 Ottawa-Vanier like to briefly explain her bill?

M^{me} Lucille Collard: The bill enacts the Notwithstanding Clause Limitation Act, 2022. The act would provide that bills cannot invoke the “notwithstanding” clause in the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms except in certain circumstances.

If the clause is invoked by a minister of the crown, the Attorney General is required to table a report in the assembly detailing how its use can be demonstrably justified in a free and democratic society and describing why alternatives to its use were deemed inadequate.

Bills invoking the “notwithstanding” clause shall not be adopted by the Legislative Assembly without a two-thirds majority of its members.

PROTECTING VULNERABLE
PERSONS IN SUPPORTIVE LIVING
ACCOMMODATION ACT, 2022
LOI DE 2022 SUR LA PROTECTION
DES PERSONNES VULNÉRABLES
DANS LES LOGEMENTS SUPERVISÉS

Mr. Burch moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 38, An Act to establish a framework for the licensing of supportive living accommodation / *Projet de loi 38, Loi établissant un cadre pour la délivrance de permis d'exploitation de logements supervisés.*

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

First reading agreed to.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): I'll invite the member to briefly explain his bill.

Mr. Jeff Burch: The bill requires persons who operate a supportive living accommodation in specified circumstances to hold a licence issued by the minister. It provides for a framework, to be supplemented by regulations, governing applications for and the issuance of licences, the obligations of persons who operate a supportive living accommodation under the authority of a licence, inspections and complaints.

PETITIONS

LONG-TERM CARE

Ms. Catherine Fife: This petition is entitled “Support Bill 21, the Till Death Do Us Part Act.

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas there are 38,000 people on the wait-list for long-term care; and

“Whereas the median wait time for a long-term-care bed has risen from 99 days in 2011-12 to 171 days in 2020-21; and

“Whereas according to Home Care Ontario, the cost of a hospital bed is \$842 a day, while the cost of a long-term-care bed is \$126 a day; and

“Whereas couples should have the right to live together as they age; and

“Whereas Ontario seniors have worked hard to build this province and deserve dignity in care; and

“Whereas Bill 21 amends the Residents’ Bill of Rights in the Fixing Long-Term Care Act to provide the resident with the right upon admission to continue to live with their spouse or partner;

“Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to direct the Minister of Long-Term Care to pass Bill 21 and provide seniors with the right to live together as they age.”

It’s my pleasure to affix my signature to this petition. I look forward to its passage later on today.

DAIRY INDUSTRY

Mr. Joel Harden: It’s a great honour for me to once again introduce this petition, the most signed petition I’ve done in Ottawa Centre. It reads: “I Support Small Ice Cream Shops in Ontario.

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas small ice cream shops offer customers a delicious treat”—even in November—“dairy producers valuable clients, and offer staff jobs;

“Whereas the Milk Act prevents small ice cream shops from local wholesaling, even if the source of their dairy ingredients comes from a certified dairy plant. In fact, the Milk Act currently restricts the wholesale of any products made with dairy ingredients, not just ice cream;

“Whereas small ice cream shops that wholesale without their own certified dairy plants are subject to thousands of dollars in fines” and potential arrests;

“Whereas consumers have the right to choose from a variety of safe dairy products, and not just those made by large suppliers;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to allow small ice cream shops access to local markets for wholesaling, provided all ingredients are fully traceable, and all dairy ingredients come from certified dairy plants in Ontario.”

It’s an honour to sign these many petitions. I’ll be sending it with page Eric to the Clerks’ table.

NURSES

MPP Jamie West: I’m very happy to present these petitions from Ontarians who are served by Hamilton Health Sciences. There are 200 signatures on this petition—with 83% of them residing in Hamilton and surrounding communities. I want to thank the registered nurses for advocating for patient safety by opposing any cuts to nurses in surgery.

The petition reads: “Petition to Protect Patient Care in Operating Rooms at Hamilton Health Sciences (General, Juravinski, and McMaster sites).

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas patients requiring surgery have complex care needs, some of which are urgent or life-threatening

diseases and under anesthetic can become unstable, unpredictable, quickly change or deteriorate; and

“Whereas a scrub nurse is a member of the surgical team who provides a surgeon with instruments while maintaining a sterile environment, acts on and anticipates their requests, prepares medications, assists with retraction of tissue, communicates to circulating registered nurses (RNs) patient care needs, and responds in emergencies; and

“Whereas more health care providers are needed to address the surgical backlog, but surgical patients need a regulated nurse in a scrub nurse role who has the education, training and qualifications of a diploma or degree and a specialized credential in surgical nursing that makes them knowledgeable, expertly skilled and experienced, and anything less puts patient safety at risk; and

“Whereas Hamilton Health Sciences’s new surgical model of care is to replace nurses who perform the scrub nurse role in operating rooms, with unregulated operating room assistants (ORAs); and

“Whereas Hamilton Health Sciences’s actions to replace nurses with unregulated health care providers erodes the standard of care that patients will receive because ORAs cannot respond to patient care needs and they are not accountable to the public for the care they provide; and

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“Whereas the Operating Room Nurses Association of Canada (ORNAC) recommends that the scrub nurse role be performed only by nurses; and

“Whereas cutting nursing care in operating rooms means patients can suffer from unnecessary complications or death because of unrecognized care needs, delayed care, miscommunication, or errors;

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

“Immediately stop operating room assistants from performing the scrub nurse role at Hamilton Health Sciences;

“Stop any further plans to cut and replace registered nurses within the operation rooms at Hamilton Health Sciences;

“Cease the new surgical model of care that replaces scrub nurses with operating room assistants because it does not adhere to Hamilton Health Sciences’s mission to provide excellent health care to the community it serves.”

I’m proud to sign this petition, and I’ll give it to page Mabel.

EHLERS-DANLOS SYNDROME

MPP Jill Andrew: I’m rising on behalf of our wonderful community from Toronto–St. Paul’s. A special shout-out to Liza Butcher and other St. Paul’s community members who are living with EDS, and also the ILC Foundation and thousands of others across Ontario who have reached out to our office.

This petition is to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

“Whereas the Canada Health Act requires provinces to fund medically necessary treatment for Canadians; and

“Whereas a growing number of people in Ontario suffering from Ehlers-Danlos syndrome (EDS) have to seek out-of-country treatment at their own expense because doctors in Ontario don’t have the knowledge or skills to understand EDS symptoms and perform the required delicate and complicated surgeries; and

“Whereas those EDS victims who can’t afford the expensive treatment outside of Ontario are forced to suffer a deteriorating existence and risk irreversible tissue and nerve damage; and

“Whereas EDS victims suffer severe dislocations, chronic pain, blackouts, nausea, migraines, lost vision, tremors, bowel and bladder issues, heart problems, mobility issues, digestive disorders, severe fatigue and many others resulting in little or very poor quality of life; and

“Whereas despite Ontario Ministry of Health claims that there are neurosurgeon doctors in Ontario who can perform surgeries on EDS patients when surgery is recommended, the Ontario referring physicians fail to identify any Ontario neurosurgeon willing or able to see and treat the patient;

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

“Require the Minister of Health to provide funding to hire” at least “one neurosurgeon who can and will perform neurosurgeries on EDS patients with equivalent or identical skills to the international EDS neurosurgeon specialists, including funding for a state-of-the-art operating room with diagnostic equipment for treatments for EDS patients; and meet the Canada Health Act’s requirement to afford equal access to medical treatment for patients, regardless of their ability to pay for out-of-country services.”

Speaker, I support this petition, and I affix my signature.

I know this is an issue that has actually impacted former PC MPPs’ own family members. So I hope they’ll get it right this time.

I’m going to hand it over to Havana for tabling.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): I’m going to remind members to please read the petition without additional political commentary.

LAND USE PLANNING

Ms. Doly Begum: I want to thank the community members who have reached out and signed this petition. It is entitled “Protect the Greenbelt.

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas Bill 23 is the Ford government’s latest attempt to remove protected land from the greenbelt, allowing developers to bulldoze and pave over 7,000 acres of farmland in the greenbelt;

“Whereas Ontario is already losing 319.6 acres of farmland and green space daily to development;

“Whereas the government’s Housing Affordability Task Force found there are plenty of places to build homes without destroying the greenbelt;

“Whereas Ford’s repeated moves to tear up farmland and bulldoze wetlands have never been about housing, but are about making the rich richer;

“Whereas green spaces and farmland are what we rely on to grow our food, support natural habitats and prevent flooding;

“Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to immediately amend Bill 23, stop all plans to further remove protected land from the greenbelt and protect existing farmland in the province by passing the NDP’s Protecting Agricultural Land Act.”

Speaker, I fully support this petition, will affix my signature to it and give it to page Serena.

HEALTH CARE

M^{me} France Gélinas: I would like to thank Pierrette Forget from Val Caron in my riding and thousands of other people who signed this petition.

“Stop Privatization....

“Whereas Ontarians get health care based on their needs, not their ability to pay;

“Whereas the Ford government wants to privatize our health care system;

“Whereas privatization will bleed nurses, doctors and PSWs out of our public hospitals and will download costs to patients;”

They petition the Legislative Assembly “to immediately stop all plans to privatize Ontario’s health care system, and fix the crisis in health care by:

“—repealing Bill 124 to help recruit, retain, return and respect health care workers with better pay and better working conditions;

“—licensing tens of thousands of internationally educated nurses and other health care professionals already in Ontario;

“—incentivizing health care professionals to choose to live and work in northern Ontario.”

I fully support these petitions. I will affix my name to it and ask my good page Nicholas to bring it to the Clerk.

INJURED WORKERS

MPP Jamie West: I want to recognize the Minister of Labour and the Minister of Mines for working together on trying to find a date in the near future for an apology.

“For an Official Statement of Apology on Behalf of the Government of Ontario to the McIntyre Powder Project Miners.

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas over 25,000 Ontario mine workers were subjected by their employers to mandatory, non-consensual inhalation of finely ground aluminum dust known as ‘McIntyre Powder’ between 1943 and 1979, as a scientifically unproven industrial medical treatment for the lung disease silicosis; and

“Whereas the government of Ontario” of the day “supported and sanctioned the McIntyre Powder aluminum prophylaxis program despite the availability of safe and proven alternatives to effective silicosis prevention measures such as improved dust control and ventilation, and also despite expert evidence from the international scientific and medical community as early as

1946 that recommended against the use of McIntyre Powder treatments; and

“Whereas the miners who were forced to inhale McIntyre Powder experienced distress, immediate and long-term health effects from their experiences and exposures associated with aluminum inhalation treatments, as documented through their participation in the McIntyre Powder Project;

“We, the undersigned, petition the government of Ontario to provide an official statement of apology to the McIntyre Powder Project miners.”

I am proud to support this petition. I'll affix my signature and provide it to page Mabel.

ALZHEIMER'S DISEASE

Ms. Jessica Bell: This is a petition called “Develop an Ontario Dementia Strategy.

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas it currently takes on average 18 months for people in Ontario to get an official dementia diagnosis, with some patients often waiting years to complete diagnostic testing;

“Whereas more than half of patients suspected of having dementia in Ontario never get a full diagnosis; research confirms that early diagnosis saves lives and reduces care-partner stress;

“Whereas a PET scan test approved in Ontario in 2017 which can be key to detecting Alzheimer's early, is still not covered under OHIP in 2022; ...

“Whereas the Alzheimer Society projects that one million Canadians will be caregivers for people with dementia, with families providing approximately 1.4 billion hours of care per year by 2050; ...

“Whereas the government must follow through with its commitment to ensure Ontario's health care system has the capacity to meet the current and future needs of people living with dementia and their care partners;

“Therefore we, the undersigned, call on the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to develop, commit and fund a comprehensive Ontario dementia strategy.”

I'm giving this to page Yusuf.

SERVICES D'URGENCE

M^{me} France Gélinas: I would like to thank Suzanne Charron de Blezard Valley dans mon comté pour les pétitions : « 911 partout en Ontario.

« Alors que lorsque nous sommes confrontés à une urgence nous savons tous d'appeler le 911 pour de l'aide; et

« Alors que l'accès aux services d'urgence par le biais du 911 n'est pas disponible dans toutes les régions de l'Ontario, mais la plupart des gens croient qu'ils le sont; et

« Alors que plusieurs personnes ont découvert que le 911 n'était pas disponible alors qu'elles faisaient face à une urgence; et

« Alors que tous les Ontariens » et Ontariennes « s'attendent et méritent d'avoir accès au service 911 partout dans la province; »

Elles pétitionnent « l'Assemblée législative de l'Ontario : de fournir une intervention d'urgence 911 partout en Ontario par des lignes téléphoniques ou cellulaires. »

Je suis d'accord avec cette pétition. Je vais la signer et je la remets à Kennedy pour l'amener à la table des greffiers.

1520

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Petitions?

Hon. Paul Calandra: Can I have a point of order?

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

Hon. Paul Calandra: Pursuant to standing order 7(e), I wish to inform the House that tonight's evening meeting is cancelled.

HIGHWAY SAFETY

M^{me} France Gélinas: I would like to thank Leonne Albrerton from Chelmsford in my riding for this petition.

“Make Highway 144 at Marina Road Safe...”

“Whereas residents of Levack, Onaping and Cartier, as well as individuals who travel Highway 144, are concerned about the safety of a stretch of Highway 144 in the vicinity of Marina Road and would like to prevent further accidents and fatalities; and”

Whereas more than three accidents happened in the summer of 2021 and the summer of 2022, “resulting in severe injuries, diesel fuel spilling into the waterways, the closure of Highway 144 for several hours delaying traffic and stranding residents” as well as killing multiple people; and

“Whereas the Ministry of Transportation has completed a review of this stretch of Highway 144, has made some improvements and has committed to re-evaluate and ensure the highway is safe;”

They petition the Legislative Assembly as follows: “that the Ministry of Transportation review Highway 144 at Marina Road immediately and commit to making it safe, as soon as possible, and no later than December” 2022.

I support this petition. I will affix my name to it and give it to page Joel to bring to the Clerk.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

PROGRESS ON THE PLAN TO BUILD
ACT (BUDGET MEASURES), 2022

LOI DE 2022 SUR LA PROGRESSION
DU PLAN POUR BÂTIR
(MESURES BUDGÉTAIRES)

Resuming the debate adjourned on November 15, 2022, on the motion for second reading of the following bill:

Bill 36, An Act to implement Budget measures and to enact and amend various statutes / Projet de loi 36, 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. Catherine Fife: It is indeed a pleasure to be here in Ontario's Legislature for this afternoon debate on the fall economic statement. I do want to say that it's really interesting timing, personally, because this morning—I don't think that the goal around the financing of the province's expenditures has full transparency. The reason I say this is that earlier today, in SCOFEA, the finance committee, we were supposed to be addressing the estimates for the Ministry of Finance—we were also supposed to be looking at the Ministry of Economic Development; we were also supposed to be looking at the Treasury Board, which is very interesting numbers, and we had lots of good questions. Of course, Mr. Speaker, you'll remember that this government has truncated, streamlined, maybe modernized the estimates process—but in the end, you've reduced our time to do our job by a significant amount. We had hoped to have at least, as in past years, 15 hours to explore the finances of this province. We have seen a fairly disturbing trend, I will say, of a lack of transparency about where the money is going.

On that point, this morning, which was in public session, the government called us to this meeting, called the deputy minister and some staff from the Ministry of Finance, knowing full well that the government was not going to present the Minister of Finance or the parliamentary assistant, and that the accountability piece was not going to be happening. I have to say, getting sidelined like that, as the finance critic and the Treasury Board critic, is disrespectful to our democracy. That sidelining has been a theme of this government. I don't know who the one is behind the curtain pulling the strings and directing these measures—

Interruption.

Ms. Catherine Fife: Somebody stand up. He's snapping at you.

I have to say, this morning's process of that committee was incredibly disappointing, and we actually have no recourse—I think this is the most important part for those who are watching, which includes my parents right now—because the government tabled the estimates at the last minute, and then, essentially, we left this place for five weeks because of a municipal election, which prevented us from having that financial oversight and that accountability on the proposed expenditures for the province of Ontario. We normally would be able to question the minister: “Why is there so much money in the contingency fund? These contingency funds are very problematic. Why is there such a strong discrepancy between the Financial Accountability Officer's numbers and projections around revenue and expenditures versus the government's version of those finances?” This is an important part of our democracy. It's actually a really important part around accountability for His Majesty's official opposition. So I'm really disappointed about that.

The estimates will be deemed passed this Thursday. So we were supposed to be in committee all day today doing our work, and we were supposed to be in committee all day tomorrow doing our work, as was, I believe, social policy. How unfortunate it is that this government has denied us—not just us, because when you deny an MPP

from doing their job or exercising their responsibilities, what you are doing is actually denying the people we represent their due course, their due diligence and their financial oversight.

So I had some strong words this morning in committee because I was completely unimpressed with the process. The government pushed this all the way down to the line to actually prevent us from being able to do this important work.

Just in case people were curious about some of the questions that were going to be posed to the Minister of Finance, I think that it's worth mentioning a few of them. And one of them is really about the process.

What we have seen from this government—and the previous government was pretty bad at it as well—is that when they're designing a budget—and in this instance, it would be the fall economic statement. When you're going through that process, who are you talking to? What questions are you asking? Who's at the table driving some of the decision-making? Who are you talking to and who are you not talking to? I want to say very clearly, based on the outcomes and this so-called prudent plan from the government, you weren't talking to doctors, and you certainly weren't talking to nurses. And we know how you feel about education workers. So they missed out in this fall economic statement, in a very big way. When your process is flawed, then the end product is flawed. So that's what we have here.

We have a fall economic statement, in which I think the people of this province were expecting a call to action, a recognition, if you will, around cost pressures, around inflationary pressures, around health care pressures, the concern around climate and around connectivity and education—yes, education. It was so topical, of course, because of Bill 28, which the government had to repeal because they had to at least recognize, when private sector unions and public sector unions come together and say, “This will not do”—and quite honestly, I think the labour board, actually, on Bill 28, was going to side on the part of those who were seeking a fair collective bargaining process. This government has, to date, lost 14 court cases, so they are batting 100%—but I'm going to get back to that in just a second.

Really, process does matter—and if you have the responsibility, as the Minister of Finance, as the President of the Treasury Board, as ministers of the crown, who you talk to, who has your ear obviously influences who's going to get the money. And there are some pretty interesting people who've benefited through this process.

It's interesting, because even on Bill 23—building more houses faster—do you know who was not invited to that process? The Association of Municipalities Ontario. Imagine this: The provincial government, the minister who says that housing is a priority and it needs to be accelerated, even though, in the fall economic statement, housing starts have been downgraded—so you've already admitted that's a false narrative. The housing starts are downgraded for 2022, 2023, 2024. So you've already failed on the housing front even before you actually got started. And I would propose to the government that

excluding 444 municipalities from those conversations is part of the problem.

1530

When the government finally took Bill 23 out in a very selective consultation process—our critic on this has, I believe, moved some amendments to get more dates so that more people could articulate how concerned they are about housing, where the government is proposing housing, why the government is proposing bulldozing over some of the greenbelt, why they're using immigration as a scapegoat to move forward this piece of legislation, which will not accomplish what the title of the bill says.

I'm pretty sure this government has a dedicated staffer just to come up with names of bills that are very disconnected from the actual goal of the bill.

I think Working for Workers—that was not about workers, let me tell you.

This accelerated housing bill is not, by their own admission, in their own document, going to accomplish what the government has said it will.

And when you even look at keeping kids in school, when they brought forward Bill 28—such an egregious piece of legislation that overrode charter rights, which actually had in the explanatory note, “This legislation will pass despite human rights.” I've never seen that before. Actually, parliamentarians across this country read that piece of legislation and said this is unprecedented. That bill was called Keeping Students in Class—and what happened on the Friday? Students were out of the classroom.

So whoever is doing the titles for your legislation—I would highly recommend that they read the bill before they write the title. It's just a first, small step—and obviously unsolicited advice.

The fact that you've excluded those 444 municipalities from the consultation on Bill 23 does not bode well at all.

If we'd had this opportunity at estimates this morning, I was going to draw attention to the two worlds that exist in this province.

I want to talk about the multi-year fiscal plan, which the Financial Accountability Officer and the Auditor General have also weighed in on.

We like the auditor. She gives us a good reflection, an accurate reflection—she checks the numbers. And we need that all the time in this place.

The Financial Accountability Officer and his projections—he actually has an expenditure monitor. Especially when we are denied, at estimates and finance committee, the ability to do our job, that monitor is our only way of saying, “The government said they're going to spend \$1.5 billion”—you heard \$3.5 billion this morning; there's a lot of billions that get mentioned in this place. Really, the only way that we can truly track the money in this place is through the Financial Accountability Officer. I just want to remind folks: We fought for that position. That budget officer position was part of a minority government—the only minority government I've ever served in, back in 2013. We insisted that that position come to this place because we knew that we needed another layer of financial accountability. At that time, there were gas plants that were being cancelled and contracts being cancelled and

billions going out through the Ministry of Finance and the Treasury Board, and we really didn't have a good idea of how those decisions were being made. However, the FAO has given us that, and so has the auditor.

It is funny—not in a ha ha kind of way—how people really like the Auditor General when they're in opposition, but when they get into government they don't like her so much, because she holds the government to account. She checks the numbers. She looks at the promises that were made in the budgets, and she evaluates where that money went or where it didn't go.

On the health care file, we need the accountability measures to be increased drastically.

The auditor concluded that the 2022 Ontario budget, especially around the provincial revenue from corporate tax for each of the three years, as well as contingency funds recorded in other program expenses for the three-year period, appears to be overly cautious. So she has said to government—and this is part of the narrative: that we see the government say that you don't have the money, because you've parked it in these contingency funds, which is a fairly new practice.

The Liberals were really good at losing money. These guys are pretty good at hiding money.

Right now, there's \$4.5 billion in contingency funds. The Financial Accountability Officer and the Auditor General have said that the common practice for a responsible government, for a fiscally prudent government, is that you have maybe \$1 billion in the contingency fund.

What's interesting is that the auditor believes that the following are underestimates—this is also part of this government's track record: You say you're going to spend the money, but then you don't. This would have been part of the accountability piece today in estimates. She said, “For the year ending March 31, 2023, corporate tax revenue of \$19.7 billion is understated by between \$1.5 billion and \$3.4 billion.” Well, this matches up with the FAO, who said that this province is going to be running surpluses in 2022, 2023, 2024, all the way up to 2027, to \$8.5 billion.

So you have a government that has created a reason—because they're predicting that they're going to have \$12.9 billion in deficit this year.

I'll remind the members who are here in the House and the finance minister that the revenue that is coming into this place because of high inflationary costs, because of personal tax revenues, because of corporate tax revenues—in the last quarter, it wiped out our operational deficit for the first time in the province's history. Because people are paying so much—because people are hurting in the province of Ontario, quite honestly—the revenues coming in to Ontario's Legislature have drastically increased. In fact, last quarter, instead of having a \$13.9-billion deficit, this province had a \$2.1-billion surplus. It shocked everybody, to be fair. Nobody predicted it. But what did the government do? They tacked it down onto the debt.

Madam Speaker, when you have a surplus and you have a health care crisis and you've been through a pandemic

where students in our education system lost the most classroom days out of any province across this country, and you say, “We’re not going to meet these needs. We’re going to put this money over here to the debt, because we’re going to pretend that that crisis doesn’t exist,” that is an abdication of responsibility—and it isn’t just about more money; it’s about strategic investment into health care, it’s about strategic investments into education. Instead of the shiny little baubles of \$389 million with a \$200 cheque—which will pay for maybe two hours of tutoring, if you can get it. We’ve all seen the advertisement from the Ministry of Education for private tutorial services. This does not wash. If you are looking at investments and if you look at a budget almost as a moral document that indicates your priorities as a government—that’s what a budget should do. It should tell the story of what you think is important.

This government, in the last quarter, with that \$2.1-billion surplus, said, “The debt is more important than ICU capacity for children across the province at CHEO and SickKids”—and the story that I told this morning from Waterloo region of a child who was suffering from respiratory illness and was sent home because they didn’t have the resources at the hospital, even though the hospital said to them, “In normal times, we would keep your three-year-old son here to monitor him, because that’s in his best interests, but we don’t have beds.”

So what I say to the finance minister—obviously, we see the way that the finances in this province are being distributed very, very differently.

Had I been the finance minister, or if we had had a say in where that money would go, that money would have gone into education, it would have gone into hospitals, and it would have gone into health care. It would not have gone to the debt, when you have CHEO at 138% capacity. These are choices. And to question the Minister of Health this morning and to get the sound bites and the talking points that do not reflect the reality of what’s actually happening in this province is truly—well, I call it irresponsible; there are other unparliamentary words that I could choose, but I’m respectful of you, as a new Speaker.

1540

When you look at what the Auditor General has said, the disconnect between the numbers that are projected here in the fall economic statement—and what she has said is that corporate tax revenue in 2023 could be between \$1.5 billion and \$3.4 billion; corporate tax revenue in 2024 could be between \$1.9 billion and \$3.9 billion; and, for the year ending March 2025, corporate tax revenue could be between \$2.1 billion and \$4.2 billion. The government is creating a narrative that this is a time of austerity when they have money.

Somebody sent me an email and they said that paying down the debt, the \$2.1 billion, when you have a health care crisis and you have a crisis around child care and you have environmental degradation happening, when you have other choices, would be like you saying, “Oh, I’m going to pay down my mortgage, but I’m not going to feed my children or think about clothing or heating.” It’s a messed-up priority in these times, and especially with the cost of living. We have a 40-year-high inflationary rate of 6.9%.

The government clearly had not met with OCUFA or the faculty or students across this province—or maybe they just don’t care. OSAP funding in the fall economic statement, by your own admission, is underspent, which leads to a very good question. I have the University of Waterloo, I have Wilfrid Laurier, and I have Conestoga College—I hear from students all the time, and they’re trying to access financial aid. What’s going on that the government has allocated \$990 million and that is underspent? What’s happening with that? That would be an opportunity, at estimates, to ask the Minister of Finance this question. And I want to point out that the interest on OSAP loans is prime plus one. Not only are students graduating into very precarious work and very precarious working conditions, but now they have this extra load of debt to carry with them.

Just on this last piece, around the multi-year fiscal plan, this is a direct quote from the auditor: “When revenues are underestimated, the perception can be that the government has less funds available for decision-making than can be reasonably expected.”

She demonstrated that the government underestimated corporate income tax revenue by \$7.9 billion and \$7.8 billion, respectively.

“The amount budgeted for contingencies appears overly cautious. Given the nature of contingency funds, it is challenging to assess their reasonableness.” This has also been said by the Financial Accountability Officer.

It is unprecedented, really, for a government to just have a pile of cash sitting over here and not have it allocated. If the rationale by the finance minister is that we’re waiting for a rainy day, well, I would like to inform the government that it is raining, it is storming, and people are hurting in this province. You’re benefiting from high inflationary costs, from a personal tax perspective, from a corporate tax perspective, so more revenue is coming into this place, and you are not passing on the savings.

We need proper rent control in the province of Ontario.

You’re not recognizing that heating bills continue to go up.

You’re not recognizing the potential of a strong conservation program for housing, which also creates jobs.

You’re not recognizing that food costs are going up and up and up. More seniors and more students right now are using food banks than they ever have in the history of the province. Seniors are going to food banks.

Has this government addressed the price gouging that’s happening from the large corporate grocers? It’s like it doesn’t even exist. It’s almost like what happens with the insurance: “We’re really going to ask the insurance industry to be kind to their drivers who aren’t getting into accidents.” It is lame, lame, lame.

Why would the government—they tabled this budget six months ago, prior to the election, and then when we came back, they tabled it again. They know that people are really struggling.

The Financial Accountability Officer said something really interesting. In his October 27 report, where he does say that in this year we’re projecting a \$100-million surplus—that number obviously does not jibe with what

the finance minister said: a \$1.9-billion deficit. He was asked, “Why are you, as a budgetary officer, not saying that we’re going to be in a recession?” He said, “We’re on a razor’s edge in the province of Ontario.” There is obviously money there to address that—but he said it would take one more economic shock, like global lockdowns, lockdowns in Ontario; this would be the tipping point. The finance minister knows this. The President of the Treasury Board knows this. If you want to prevent an economic downturn, a recession—and the Financial Accountability Officer says we’re on a razor’s edge—we need to do everything to prevent a lockdown. Why wouldn’t you invest in health care? Why wouldn’t you invest in ventilation programs for our schools, for our classrooms? Those ventilation programs, those HVAC programs not only are good for students—because obviously its goal is to try to keep students healthy—but it creates very good local jobs. They can’t be outsourced to China. So there’s an accountability piece there around health and safety and revenue. When you create more jobs, the province generates more revenue. It’s a win-win-win solution. And does this government acknowledge it in the fall economic statement? Things have changed fairly drastically. To listen to the health minister this morning—of course, she said, “We knew this was all going to happen, and we had planned for it.”

We have absolute chaos. Sometimes it feels like that is the playbook. Why else would you bring in a piece of legislation like Bill 28, which was never about kids in classrooms? Of course, it was an epic failure. It was using the nuclear option of using the “notwithstanding” clause during collective bargaining. I don’t know who came up with that idea. I still haven’t figured out who the person is behind the curtain pulling the strings. Clearly, that was intended to start a fire, and I think at the end of the day the government was surprised that they got so burned by it. But it did bring people together, I would say.

In estimates, there would have obviously been good questions around the autism file. I think this latest—it’s 56,000 children waiting?

Mr. Michael Mantha: Was the word “autism” in—

Ms. Catherine Fife: No, but I would have asked about it if I’d had a chance.

The mental health piece would have also been a key part. I would have questioned the government on why, given what we know—the latest data—particularly on child mental health and how the pandemic and how isolation affected our youngest citizens, some additional funding would not be allocated to the mental health file.

I do want to thank the minister who’s responsible for mental health.

I know that the member for Toronto—St. Paul’s has also met with the minister to talk about eating disorders and all that that entails, which is very complex.

I recently met, on behalf of Kaitlyn Roth and her family, with the Associate Minister of Mental Health, and we talked openly and honestly about where the money is going and where the money is not going.

I want to advocate for those additional community-based teams in Waterloo region, because we are historically underfunded—nothing like what the member from Kiiwetinoong is facing, but significant nonetheless.

What I want to say about that is that the autism file, in and of itself, is pretty much a perfect example of a government that is not in touch with what’s really happening in Ontario. For some reason, autism rates in Waterloo region are very high, and the fact that we’re losing time, that urgency, that sense of a critical time for a child’s development—to miss that window, to have so many children waiting, and to definitely not see it reflected even as a priority in this piece of legislation is beyond disappointing.

1550

The overall piece, though, that I think is the most shocking for most Ontarians is on the health care file—because you actually have to actively be trying not to pay attention to what’s happening in our hospitals. Maybe you don’t watch the news. Maybe you don’t read the newspaper. Maybe you don’t talk to your family and friends about what’s happening in our hospitals. When you compare the fall economic statement to the Financial Accountability Office’s economic and budget report from October 27, the government will be short approximately \$6.2 billion in health, \$1 billion in education, and \$360 million in colleges and universities through 2024-25, and the health care spending and planned increases fall far short of what is needed to address this crisis.

I’ll just go back to the FAO discussion. The goal of having a Financial Accountability Officer is to help the government—but I guess, in some respects, the government would need to want to be helped or would need to be receptive to looking at some additional information that is not in their own bubble or in their own fairy tale.

The Ford government also stated in this document that they have added 11,700 health care workers since 2020, but we know that 47,000 new health care workers are needed to be hired per year for the next three years to maintain current service levels. And they are stubbornly—there are a few other words to use—attached to Bill 124. This is another example—you are going to lose this in court as well, I might add, because overriding collective bargaining rights is an enshrined right for workers. The impact of Bill 124 on the health care worker population cannot be denied.

Last night, I hosted a town hall in Waterloo on the privatization of health care. We watched a couple of movies around what has happened in Alberta and what has happened in Saskatchewan, and we learned a lot about the formula for increasing privatization; we instinctively know it. One of the classic measures that was embraced by Ralph Klein and then Jason Kenney and that other guy, Moe, is that you essentially starve the system so badly that you revert and you create this narrative that the only way to save health care is by providing private services and outsourcing and contracting out the work that health care workers do. The ground has been set for this exact thing, and doubled down on in the fall economic statement, the mini budget. Bill 124 is wage suppression legislation. It

has a demoralizing, disrespectful impact on the people who are working in our health care system, all the way down from the PSWs, all the way up to the medical professionals and analysts and diagnostics. Nurses, in particular, are leaving this province for other jurisdictions where they will be treated with respect.

You cannot open a new hospital that you're building or opening up a new bed that you have been talking about for some time without the human resources, without the personnel.

This has been a consistent theme by this government—they do not acknowledge the value and importance of the people who are delivering public services. They say they do, but then they introduce legislation like Bill 28, like Bill 124. The fact that you have not repealed this legislation yet is—aside from being stubborn—incredibly irresponsible. I know that you have nurses in your ridings. I know that you have people who have told you first-hand that they will be leaving the system because that 1% wage cap—when inflation is at 6.9% but was as high as 8% earlier this year—is essentially a cut. So you can't call them heroes; you can't say you value these people, who are, right now, down the street, at SickKids Hospital. We heard today from one of the doctors that they're resuscitating three, four children every single day. We heard that from CHEO as well. Imagine the stress of that work, and then imagine having a government that says you're only worth 1%. The disconnect there is so evident to us.

No Conservative MPP has ever given me a good reason or a good rationale as to why Bill 124 is needed.

I will point out that the evidence on paying people respectfully is very clear. In fact, David Card, a Canadian-American economist who won the 2021 Nobel Prize in economics in recognition of his achievements and contributions to the field of labour economics—he and his colleague Alan Krueger refuted the conventional notion in labour economics that increases in minimum wage led to lower rates of employment in low-paying industries. This has been part of the Conservative narrative for years. I can also say that it was part of the Liberal narrative for years.

You're going to hear some of the members tout that they're increasing the minimum wage. But I just want to go down memory lane for a little bit on the minimum wage, because when you look at how past governments have behaved and then you look at how this current government is behaving on the minimum wage, it tells a very different story than the sound bites that we hear.

In Ontario, the minimum wage has bounced between being frozen and corrected. From 1997 to 2003, the minimum wage was at \$6.85. Up to 2010, it increased from \$6.85 to \$10.25. From 2010 to 2014, it was frozen at \$10.25—four years, frozen; that was compliments of the Liberals. Then, from 2014 to 2017, it increased moderately, from \$11 to \$11.60; they really went wild for that three-year period. Premier Wynne announced overnight that it was going to go from \$11.60 to \$14 in 2018—and then this was followed by a \$15 minimum wage, if re-elected, in 2019. Well, that did not happen, obviously.

One of the first things that the Ford government did when they got elected was, they cancelled the \$15 increase—and the wage remained at \$14 until 2020, when it jumped slightly to \$14.25, and then \$14.35 in 2021; and finally, \$15 on January 1, 2022. So when they tell you how generous they've been, it warrants a little history lesson here. One of the first things that they did was cancel the \$15 increase, in 2018. It's true. Some of you weren't here; some of us were, and it was painful to watch, for certain.

On the education front, I think the government has set up this very tension-filled, acrimonious relationship with the entire education sector. I don't know if you saw some of the feedback following the repealing of Bill 28, but the players, the characters who are trying to negotiate a fair deal for the lowest-paid education workers in the education sector—I don't know if you were out with folks the first Friday after we rose, when those CUPE workers walked out. I know that they visited some of the Conservative offices, and they came to my office as well. We called it a supportive rally, and it was really good to talk to some of the caretakers, some of the ECEs. Most of them were women. Most of them had two or three jobs; they were paid that low. It was so good to see parents out there on that line supporting them. Once parents found out how little educational assistants are making in our system, they were shocked, because as you could imagine, these conversations don't come up at a parent-teacher night. One EA told me that what she was making 12 years ago is less than what she's making today due to inflation, so she has a second job. She was out there and really trying to—they didn't even know what was going to happen. It was complete chaos. It completely destabilized this entire sector.

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I think that the members who stood in their place on Bill 28 and supported it—I feel like those words are going to come back to haunt some of these members, because there had to be an admission at some point that—and the labour board was very set to rule on this—it was completely out of order for the government to use the “notwithstanding” clause during collective bargaining. It would have been good, when our member from Davenport asked the Premier if he would ever use that again—and of course, we got no answer from him. He said that he actually doesn't regret it—creating all that chaos, all that pain, and yet he has no regrets. I don't know what that says about the Premier. I just know that he's really adamant about not wearing masks for some reason, even though he says that the medical officer of health is advising that everyone wear one in indoor settings. Our caucus has them. I have my mask. It's not a big deal to wear a mask. It's not a lot to ask, really, at the end of the day.

The education sector has responded to yesterday's announcement, and I'm connecting this to the fall economic statement because it's the same figure—\$32.4 billion base, the same as the summer budget, so no recognition that there are increasing health care system needs and drivers within that system. This government and this minister seem very happy to dole out \$200, at an overall budget

cost of \$389 million, but not invest that money into more educational assistants, into more child and youth workers in our system.

This is what we're hearing—and this is from CTV Kitchener, just from yesterday. They said that the region of Waterloo public health officials are echoing the province's messaging around masking, but some local teachers—the people who are actually in the classrooms, in the schools—say the directive doesn't go far enough. They said, "The number of absences that we're seeing right now is astronomical, and we don't have enough teachers to cover those absences." So the failure to fill in our systems right now is outrageous.

If you go back to what the Financial Accountability Officer said—we cannot have a major economic shock in Ontario; otherwise, that razor's edge that we are on will in fact push us over into a recession. Knowing this and knowing all the lessons that we learned during the pandemic, or that we thought we learned, around the importance of paid sick days so that people don't have to go to work sick, around the importance of ventilation, around the importance of public health hygiene measures—all of this knowledge you have at your fingertips, because we lived it.

And yet, here we have a piece of legislation that adds not one new penny to health care. The entire health care sector was shocked at this, I have to say. They're in crisis right now, so they can't come to the front lawn of Queen's Park and rally and kick the building, as many protesters have done in the past. They can't do that, because they are done, and they can't afford the time or the energy to fight a government that's so adamant about holding them down to that 1% and around not consulting them.

I go back to process on this. If the fall economic statement had a fair and open process around consultation, around listening to the people who were elected to serve—if that had happened, then this budget would have additional resources for nurses and for doctors and for hospitals, and you could envelope it for sure. It would have money for mental health, and it would have money for autism, because it makes sense to invest in the people you serve. It makes sense to adopt an early intervention process. These are the basic principles of the social determinants of health. And we called on the government to double the ODSP rates.

I did say in my original comments that there was something good in this fall economic statement. I do try to find some of the goodness in some of the initiatives. The one encouraging part was the improvement to ODSP; notably, tying future increases to inflation. So you understand that inflationary costs matter. Why won't you acknowledge that with the education workers, with the educational assistants, with the ECEs? You've said that you're going to tie future increases to inflation and you're going to increase allowable earnings from \$200 a month to \$1,000 a month. However, it does fall very short of doubling ODSP rates and Ontario Works. To their credit, yesterday the media asked the finance minister—they said, "Literally, these are the most vulnerable people in Ontario."

The money is there. The government says they're going to run a \$12.9-billion deficit, but the Financial Accountability Officer says that they're running a \$100-million surplus at the end of this year, and that's without the tax revenue changes from the first-quarter finances, which is \$5.8 billion. So money is going to come into this place.

You've made a decision to put that money down towards debt and not to the pressing issues that are facing our most vulnerable.

The Minister of Finance can't answer that question—I will answer that question. I could not live on the rates of ODSP that are offered in this province—not when the average rent in Waterloo is \$2,200, which is also not rent-controlled.

The media pushed back and said, "How come you're not addressing the needs of Ontarians in the fall economic statement? Why is this mini budget leaving some of the most vulnerable people out—like not even part of the equation?"

Really, you've just said that for those people who are on ODSP who can work—they can actually keep more money.

And it did, actually, especially last year, when the government had given \$210 million to businesses that weren't even in Ontario—do you remember that? Speaker, \$210 million is still a lot of money—it doesn't have a B at the end of it, but it's still a lot of money. I asked the finance minister at the time: "How come you can go after someone on ODSP, who maybe generates \$225—you claw back that \$25, but you're not willing to go after \$210 million that went to people who didn't deserve that small business grant?" The answer was kind of disappointing and shocking. They said, "Well, businesses have been through enough."

Do you know who goes through a lot every single day? An individual who lives on ODSP in Ontario. Life is not easy for these folks.

I have one person in my riding who has really—this may not change her mind, but she has said that she is seriously considering medically assisted dying because the quality of her life is that poor. You would have heard this before. There are many people in this province whose day-to-day existence is hellish.

The government has the money to acknowledge that those on ODSP are deserving of additional funding. You're actually acknowledging it, in many respects, because you're saying, "Well, you can work more." But there are so many people on ODSP who can't work; it's not an option, and also because discrimination out there is quite real against folks who are on ODSP.

I will say something else that's good: The government is addressing the Ontario Guaranteed Annual Income System for one year. This is the GAINS program, and they're providing financial support for low-income seniors, who would see their rates increase to \$160 per month or \$332 per couple. Listen, I've already said and I'm on the record as saying that seniors using food banks is up to a shocking percentage in Ontario right now. I do hear from them, because seniors have certain needs, they like to cook certain meals, and you can't find those meals at the food

bank. And they're mostly women—I do want to say that as well: mostly women.

1610

Finally, the projections for the education spending remain the same from the 2022 budget, despite what you've heard. However, the spending gap between the FAO's projection and the province's outlook is \$400 million in 2022-23, and this increases to \$2 billion. I go back to the original funding formula for education in Ontario, which has truly never been, I guess, modernized. It's never acknowledged. Some of the programs that this ministry has thrown out at the education system, like destreaming—destreaming, in theory, is a great idea, but you have to resource it. You have to fund it so that everybody can be successful.

I don't know if the Minister of Education spends a lot of time in the public education system, but in my husband's class, there are 38 students, and the learning levels and the learning gaps that have happened over the last two and a half or three years are profound. There are sometimes three, four levels in one classroom. So you can say that everybody's equal, but you actually have to say, "But we're going to give you an equal chance of being successful."

MPP Jill Andrew: That's equity.

Ms. Catherine Fife: That's equity; that's right. So to see the education dollars be the same, really, as the summer budget was pretty disappointing.

I want to end on the housing piece, because a lot has been said about the importance of housing. I think that we actually all agree that the value and the importance and the key factor of shelter in an economy cannot be underestimated. But to see the housing starts really costed out and downgraded already, Madam Speaker, is—I mean, I go back to process. Those 444 municipalities that got really shut out of the consultation process—I don't think that that can be ignored.

Just to go back: Where we are right now is the FAO is forecasting a \$100-million surplus this year. That surplus is expected to grow to \$8.5 billion in 2027-28. He's actually projecting surpluses for the foreseeable future.

The formula that the Financial Accountability Officer uses and the finance minister uses—they both consult with various economists, but those formulas are not that different. You look at job creation, you look at revenue through personal tax and corporate tax, and then you look at the expenditures that you've already allocated.

And then you have this little thing called the COVID fund, which actually is interesting because it was tucked away in the Ministry of Finance, and then it was sort of scattered out—which I had questions about, where it was being scattered out to. But remember that that COVID funding, originally, the goal of it was to help the province stabilize. Stability is having a very strong health care system with guaranteed resources which acknowledges the importance of paying people a fair wage so that you can actually retain them. And this seems to be the piece that the government is not willing to acknowledge, the importance of retention.

Retention is important not only because going through a hiring process and going through another recruitment process is costly and takes time away from patients, from clients, but you actually lose the expertise. Then what does the government do? The government looks at agency nurses, and those agency nurses don't have a connection with the unit. They are dropped into a work environment where they don't have connections, where relationships are not there. All I know is that they're making sometimes double what our nurses who are on the regular roster in hospitals are making. What is that doing to the entire staffing human resources issue in our health care system? It's drawing people out to work in the private sector, which the government is also funding at twice the rate.

Imagine if we had a government in Ontario that was truly committed to public health care. Imagine if when they used the word "innovation," then people would say, "When they're talking about innovation, they're actually talking about investing in health care and ensuring that the people in our system are respected, and that the resources are there for children and for seniors in long-term care." Imagine if innovation meant that for this government. It would be incredibly refreshing.

The government, as I mentioned, for the first time in 14 years—in the last quarter, so much money came into this place through high inflationary costs and through tax revenue that we saw, for the first time in 14 years, a surplus—first time, right? You remember what was going to happen, and that is that the former government had tied ending the operational deficit to our compensation. Of course, that should not be any priority for any of us here in this place, especially given what's happening in Ontario, but that's part of the piece of the legislation as well, that MPPs won't be seeing any raise or any increase or even a third-party independent review of remuneration.

But that didn't stop the government from—88% of them became parliamentary assistants, which comes sometimes with between a \$13,000 and \$16,000 increase. That didn't stop the government from ensuring that their caucus was well cared for. That seems to be the trend. They like to take care of their people, and we try to remind them that we're elected to take care of Ontarians. Ontario is not Ford Nation; Ontario is Ontario. We're elected to treat those citizens with respect.

The reason why the fall economic statement, in our opinion, is so irresponsible is that it's another missed opportunity for this government to acknowledge what's actually happening outside of this Pink Palace to people in the health care system, in the education system. The move from an environmental perspective around the greenbelt has really galvanized many people in many rural ridings, because nobody is buying this narrative that, because of immigration, we have to build these mansions out on the greenbelt. That's a misnomer.

Process matters. Denying us the opportunity as the official opposition to do our due diligence through the estimates process is truly something that actually hasn't happened in this place. You're in new, uncharted territory. Given Bill 28, you're obviously comfortable creating chaos, but we are very determined to ensure that

we bring the voices of Ontarians to this place each and every day, and to ensure that your budget and your investments actually match the needs of Ontarians.

Don't take the risk. Don't gamble with people's health in Ontario. We can't afford another economic downturn. If you paid attention to what the Financial Accountability Officer had said, it's not worth the risk. Let's make sure that we avoid another economic shock. Let's try to stabilize.

I'm not sure if we're even going to get a chance to try to make this piece of legislation better, but we're certainly going to try. Thank you for your time and your attention today.

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): We'll move to questions and answers.

Mr. Kevin Holland: It's interesting listening to the remarks and how they are full of a lack of understanding of responsible budgeting, but I want to thank the member opposite for pointing out that our government is handling the finances differently in this province, and thank goodness for that. Ontarians couldn't afford the continued financial mismanagement of the members opposite. We have made record investments in the province—showing return on those investments that support Ontarians, the programs that are important to us, in creating sustainable communities.

1620

Speaker, why won't this opposition support these measures to keep costs down and build the labour force this province needs, and all with a responsible and flexible plan?

Ms. Catherine Fife: Well, thank you for mansplaining budgetary processes to me. I had no idea.

We look at the independent officers, at the Auditor General, the Financial Accountability Officer, and we look at their numbers, because they're not looking at these expenditures through a partisan lens. So we think when the auditor says, "We found that most of the \$19.4 billion budgeted contingency funds included in other program expenses in the multi-year fiscal plan for" those three years were not "earmarked for specific purposes"—that is irresponsible budgeting.

Not having a plan for \$19.4 billion, when you have a health care crisis, when you've acknowledged that the CUPE education workers are the lowest-paid workers and you're actually driving people out of health care and education, that's what I would call irresponsible.

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): Next question?

Ms. Doly Begum: I want to thank the member from Waterloo for her very informative speech. It didn't even feel like an hour, because you were so good at explaining exactly what's happening. You mentioned the troubling trend this government has with all their budgets, really, in terms of really underestimating their revenue and overestimating its deficits.

Would you be able to explain a little bit more in terms of the damage that it does, especially when we look at health care spending, education spending and some of the

more dire needs that we have in our province, especially right now?

Ms. Catherine Fife: Thank you very much for that question. What the government is trying to do is create a narrative of austerity. You're trying to say, "Listen, we're going to have a \$12.9-billion deficit, and don't look over here at these contingency funds." You're not recognizing the true revenue that's coming into this place, and you're doing that intentionally so that you actually don't have to fund health care and education. That's irresponsible, Madam Speaker.

This is right from the FAO: "Despite the economic slowdown, the FAO is predicting that ... the province is on course to record multiple budget surpluses." That's what the FAO has said. "However, the report said tens of billions in government spending was unallocated, while programs were facing funding gaps."

Those funding gaps totalled \$40 billion. I would call that gap in budgeting priorities as irresponsible and damaging to the people of this province.

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): Next question.

Mr. Vincent Ke: Thank you for the member from Waterloo's presentation.

Speaker, we know that inflation is at a 40-year record high in Canada. This government understands that families, workers and seniors—especially low-income workers and those on fixed incomes—are feeling the pressure on their household budget, and we also recognize the impact that inflation is having on families. That is why our government proposed to extend the gas tax cut for an additional year to help Ontarians to overcome this challenging time.

Speaker, my question is simple: Why won't the member opposite support the government's proposed measures to extend the gas tax cut and keep costs down for the people of Ontario?

Ms. Catherine Fife: The best response to that question comes from the CCPA. They say:

"If we've learned anything about how the current Ontario government makes budgets, it's this: Whatever they say the bottom line is initially, the actual number will be very different in the end." This is very accurate.

"We've seen it many times: The government underestimates revenues. It underspends what it budgets. It socks away billions in contingency funds with no plan to spend them.

"Monday's economic outlook ... from the Ministry of Finance continues that pattern...."

So you've done it again. It's just like Groundhog Day around here. The government is predicting this \$12.9-billion deficit. That's a \$15-billion deterioration in the province's bottom line at a time when inflation is driving revenues sky high. It's simply not a credible number, and this financial plan is not a credible plan.

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): Next question.

MPP Jill Andrew: Thank you to the member for Waterloo for an excellent breakdown—what a breakdown

the fall economic statement is, by this Conservative government.

I'd like to ask a question with regard to children being triaged into adult care, hospitals having to turn away sick kids because there's simply no staff or there's a staff shortage and they cannot give them the treatment they deserve. How does this fall economic statement address this? I mean, I look at the document and I see that the health expenditures are the same now in the fall as they were in the summer, even though we know the crisis has worsened. Why is this government not paying attention to the calls from panicked parents who are seeing their children turned away from the health care they need at a time when some of these very parents in St. Paul's don't have paid sick days or are the very front-line health care workers who are being pushed out of nursing because of Bill 124?

Ms. Catherine Fife: Thank you very much to the member for that question. Our entire question set for all day yesterday and today has primarily been about why the government is not meeting this crisis in health care.

I just want to say, when we had over 5,000 seniors die in long-term care—and people were outraged about it because seniors are vulnerable. Well, children are also vulnerable. The story I told this morning around when the hospital says, “We want to keep your son here to monitor his breathing, but we don't have beds,” that's terrifying. So we're genuinely trying to appeal to this Minister of Health to at least acknowledge that there's a problem, because you will never address a problem if you don't acknowledge that it exists.

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): Next question.

Ms. Laura Smith: I want to thank the member from the other side. I was happy to hear that she agreed with the ODSP element, and she talked about the cost of living and seniors.

Another member talked about the dire need. This legislation, if passed, would cut costs for people across this province and support those on ODSP and fixed incomes, and work to help more Ontario students get into the good-paying skilled trade careers that this province needs. By increasing the monthly earning exemptions on ODSP from \$200 to \$1,000 per month, we are making significant changes. Why won't the member from across support the legislation?

Ms. Catherine Fife: Well, there are so many reasons not to support this fall economic statement, and I did highlight most of them for about 58 minutes.

I just want to correct the member from Thornhill. It's true that ending the clawback from \$200 and then allowing people who can work on ODSP to earn \$1,000 each month and not claw back—it was a cruel practice. We spent a lot of time advocating for this change. But you still are leaving those who are on ODSP, who cannot work, in legislated poverty. That's another reason why we can't support this legislation.

The other reason is the autism file, in and of itself. I know that there's an active autism coalition in Thornhill. They've been advocating for a streamlined process to

access those resources, and I spoke about this in my lead. There's a lot to be said about early intervention. Missing that window for those who are on the autism spectrum is irresponsible and, one might actually say, cruel.

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): We'll move to further debate. The member for Mississauga–Malton.

Mr. Deepak Anand: Thank you, Madam Speaker. We're the host of the greater Toronto airport. We're the host for everybody. That's Mississauga–Malton. I just want to say thank you to the residents of Mississauga–Malton for giving me an opportunity so that I can talk on an important bill today.

1630

Madam Speaker, I'm proud to rise in the House today to speak about the wonderful things that this government and all the members on this side are doing to help the people of Ontario through our fall economic statement, which is right here. To all residents of Ontario, take a look at it; read it. It's a wonderful document. It talks about “Team Prosperity,” what your government is doing, where we are investing, and how, together, we're going to build a better Ontario.

The fall economic statement helps Ontarians to provide financial relief by reducing taxes, raising earnings and encouraging participation in the workforce. We are making real progress to get Ontario back on track, help people find work and build Ontario's economy for the future and the world to envy.

From day one, we stood with the workers of this province, and we have made a commitment to build an Ontario for the next generation, and that is what this is doing here, Madam Speaker. That is why we're making critical investments to help people get better jobs with bigger paycheques and, in doing so, building a better and stronger Ontario and better and stronger communities.

I want to take a special focus on what our government is doing to help address the labour shortage in our province. It's not a hidden secret. In the last four and a half years, we have seen the government working together with businesses, with the province and hard-working Ontarians, making sure it is economical to do business here. When you reduce the cost of doing business and increase support in increasing the revenue, what happens next? More businesses create jobs, and that is what has happened. We have seen that the number of jobs has gone up, but the number of jobs still pending and not being filled has gone up by around 380,000 people. That's what we are doing here.

In order to get to the place where we can have those people filling these jobs, we are looking to immigration. And I know, and I noticed that we had a conversation when the Premier stood up and talked about that in the next few years we are going to get approximately 500,000 people coming and choosing Canada as their home. Typically, what happens is, they look for a good place to come, and what could be better than Ontario—something I chose on January 15, 2000. If 60% of those 500,000 come here, that's about 300,000 people. We always welcome newcomers to our province and have wanted to make sure that Ontario remains competitive on the international stage.

That is why what we are doing is celebrating their milestone.

Oh, thinking about milestones, Madam Speaker, I want to talk about my uncle and aunt: Mrs. Raj Bhupinder Kaur Cheema. She got married to my uncle Bhupinder Singh Cheema on November 14, 1964. They just celebrated their 58th wedding anniversary, so I just want to say congratulations. It takes a lot of courage and perseverance to stay together, but you did an amazing job and you raised my cousin very well. So I just wanted to say this to them.

Madam Speaker, talking about finding the skill set, I just want to quickly talk about the OINP program. Since 2020, we have people from 130 countries who have come together and over this period we have been able to support 2,200 different employers in leveraging the Ontario Immigration Nomination Program. By the end of this year, over 40,000 international skilled workers have been nominated through the OINP program, and I just want to give an example of what our government has done and how it has helped. Before our new expression-of-interest system, only 7% of the foreign worker stream were trained in jobs in construction. As we know, we want to build more homes and we want workers in the construction industry. After changing the system, we have seen the improvement in the result and actually the numbers have doubled to 14%. We will continue to work with our economy and the labour market to make these changes so that all these new immigrants who are coming and making Ontario their new home can thrive and raise their families.

We've talked about, through Ontario's Plan to Build, how we are going to help the Ring of Fire, committing approximately \$1 billion to support the critical legacy infrastructure, attracting \$16 billion in investment by global automakers and suppliers of electrical vehicle batteries right here in Ontario and attracting \$2.5 billion in investments to produce clean steel. When we do have these investments coming up, they're actually creating jobs. To fill those jobs, we need people. I always say, in a simple single system, jobs need people, and people need jobs. When we work together, we give them a hand up, and we make sure the economy grows well. That is why we have seen over many years—the last few years, especially—the revenue growing year by year. Thanks to each and every hard-working Ontarian for contributing.

We actually had a bill, our Working for Workers Act. We want to make sure that new immigrants who are making this country, and Ontario especially, their new home have a job in their own field. That is why we made sure that we brought in the changes to the foreign credentials, so that they don't have to wait for their licence and they can go ahead and as soon as they arrive they can start working towards their professional licence and can work in their own field.

By an estimate, we've noticed that if people work in their field, which, in fact—the last data, which we had in 2016: Only 25% of the people were working in their own field. What that means is, if they were working in their field—for an example, if you take somebody who is an undergraduate in engineering, like me, I was working at about \$40,000. If I had had a licence as a professional engineer, the minimum entry salary would have been

\$70,000 to \$75,000. The differential between the two, if you really look at that—you're basically adding the revenue to the businesses, you are adding the revenue to the families, you're adding the revenue to the government as well. If you calculate the whole thing, the differential is between \$15 billion and \$20 billion. And we can collect and use that money to service Ontarians, and that's what we're doing now.

For instance, we are providing an additional \$40 million in 2023 in new funding in the Skills Development Fund to support our priority infrastructure fund and our youth employment training. Along with that, we've provided \$4.8 million over two years for dual credits to enhance pathways for high school students like my daughter, who is in high school, so they can go into the skilled trades and early childhood education. Why do we need this? Well, Madam Speaker, we all know we are going to \$10 child care, and to do that, we need people who can support that child care education, and we need to make sure our youth are ready and supported.

And we helped more than 52,000 people find a path to employment via Ontario's integrated employment services system, which began in 2020. Colleagues, if you really look at this, 52,000 people getting a job means 52,000 fewer cheques from the government. This means 52,000 more people paying to the government. That's what we're doing. With a special focus on the skilled trades, we are continuing the efforts to make sure that everyone who can work and who wants to work is able to work. That is why we're making sure we're making the investments in training more than ever before.

Madam Speaker, we always hear about workers: how we're supporting the workers, how we're supporting the minimum wages. One of the things we did was to increase the minimum wage to \$15.50, including the workers who are in the hospitality business. At the time when we increased from \$12.50 to \$15, the raise was about 19%, something which we believe that our workers need our help, and we are always there to help them. That's how we added 11,700 health care workers, including nurses and personal support workers, as well as 800 internationally educated nurses who have become licensed as nurses in Ontario through government-funded programs.

The statement also mentions our continuous support to the small businesses. Madam Speaker, in 2021 alone, small businesses made up 98.1% of all employer businesses in Canada. They employ 63.8% of the total labour force. Given the fact that the majority of small businesses are concentrated in Ontario, supporting them in offsetting their tax burden is a direct contribution to creating and sustaining job opportunities in Ontario. Under our new program, thousands of businesses will now qualify for the small business corporate tax rate, allowing them to save tens of thousands in taxable income. What do they do with that money? They invest back into their business. By creating more jobs, they bring more people on board and help many more Ontarians to get financial independence.

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Besides providing over \$675 million in Ontario income tax relief over three years by temporarily allowing eligible businesses to immediately expense up to \$1.5 million per

year for certain capital investments, the statement also proposes to extend the phase-out range for the small business corporate tax between \$10 million and \$15 million of taxable capital.

When we look at these things, all these small steps add up to bring bigger results, and that is what we've seen in the past few years. We have seen the increase in revenue. Every paycheque not collected is a missed opportunity for a worker and their family to start a better life. That is why we extended the programs that made a real impact on thousands of lives.

For example, we are doubling the Guaranteed Annual Income System—GAINS—payment throughout 2023 and providing more than \$40 billion in the next 10 years to improve and increase the space in hospitals and build new health care facilities.

As part of the plan to keep costs down, we are helping and making sure that millions of drivers will be relieved from gasoline tax till 2024. We're making sure that the 5.7-cents-per-litre discount that was set to expire at the end of 2022 is extended until December 31, 2023.

Madam Speaker, we've talked about ODSP recipients in the past, how we are able to help them and support them. Through this statement, we're going further and making sure that a recipient is allowed to net \$200 in monthly pay before their provincial payments are reduced, raising their earnings threshold to \$1,000 per month, while also increasing the percentage of support money that's clawed back. We're also increasing ODSP core allowances and the maximum monthly amount for assistance for children with severe disabilities by 5%. This way, over 25,000 ODSP recipients will be encouraged to participate in the workforce, which will help the province address the labour shortage and give them financial independence.

Madam Speaker, I just want to quickly talk about our Skills Development Fund. To date, with the \$560-million investment that we made in the Skills Development Fund, we are proud to say that, to date, almost over 400,000 people around the province have taken the next step in their careers. That's what we see when you help workers. When the government comes together and supports workers, workers come together and support our province of Ontario.

We have seen the high uptake and interest from stakeholders and the continued success of the program. I just want to quickly talk about two things in this program. We have seen in the past that about 10% of our Canadian population has some sort of criminal record; some mistake made and already paid back. They've already taken steps to rectify it, but the stigma stays with the person. What our government is doing through the SDF, we're giving a hand up to those people and making sure they have a second career, a second chance to prove themselves. And we have seen the results of this: Prisha, for example, from Etobicoke, who is actually working into a skilled trade and building an amazing career. That's something we want to continue.

Given the success, we are looking to invest \$20 million in 2022-23 to enhance our SDF, with a focus on supporting priority infrastructure projects by hiring, training and

retaining those workers, including apprenticeships. The intended outcome of this initiative is to ensure that there is sufficient skilled labour and training resources to meet labour demands from the significant capital investments made across the province.

In October 2022 alone, we have seen the results because of all the efforts we all put together: government and our wonderful workers and Ontarians. We have seen Ontario lead the country in job growth by creating over 42,000 new jobs. As the Minister of Finance said recently, we have also added, as I said earlier, over 11,700 health care workers to Ontario, including nurses and personal support workers to our health care system.

Madam Speaker, on top of our skills development program, we are investing hundreds of millions of dollars in innovative training programs to help people looking for work find good jobs close to home. For an example, our government's Better Jobs Ontario program is making sure that it's providing up to \$28,000 available for short-duration training programs.

I'll give you a small example. Before COVID hit, we had over 50 million visitors coming to the greater Toronto airport, and there were approximately between 250 and 300 taxi drivers supporting those visitors. But when the numbers had gone down to about 10 million, there was not a need for those taxi drivers—the people who always worked and made sure they helped those visitors so that they can reach their homes on time or can have a better experience in our province. But because of COVID, they lost their jobs, and that's where the Better Jobs Ontario program comes in handy.

If you are in a profession where you can't find a job or you believe the number of jobs has gone down, you can always take a short-duration course and pick up a career in in-demand jobs. Through this, we were able to help many of the residents in Ontario. We're also making employment services easier and more convenient than ever, so that we are able to help thousands of people get what they need to get into the workforce.

No matter how or where you work, we believe more workers in Ontario should have access to benefits such as health and dental plans, and that is why we are working towards a portable benefit program so that we can help those vulnerable employees, workers, right here in Ontario.

To do this, we actually have a portable benefits advisory panel, which was established in March 2022, to advise the government on the viability, design and implementation of a portable benefits program for Ontario. The panel began consulting with the public and key stakeholders in September 2022, and will provide their final report and recommendations to the government in 2023. This is another way we are helping our workers in the province of Ontario.

Madam Speaker, we are making real progress and changing and supporting the lives of millions of Ontarians, including Ontario workers who stood up during the pandemic and supported our Ontario. We just want to take a moment and thank each and every worker for all your hard work and making sure that we can stand back on our feet, stronger than before COVID. So thank you for that,

and as we continue in our mission, we will continue to work hard to make sure that families are at the centre of our focus.

Stronger families create stronger communities, and that's why our government is making critical investments to help families and build up Ontario for the future. I commend the minister and his PAs for doing an incredible job and making sure that Ontario is the best place in the world to live, work and raise a family.

Madam Speaker, I just want to take a moment and want to commend the whole caucus for coming together, working together so that we can achieve this great success in our province. I look forward to all of you—let's continue to work together and support our great province. Let's support this bill.

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): We'll go to questions.

Mr. Joel Harden: It's always a pleasure to listen to my friend from Mississauga–Malton hold forth in this place.

I have a question around recipients of the Ontario Disability Support Program and what the member talked about in this financial update. He noted that it is a good thing that the clawback on income has been expanded to \$1,000 a month. But as the member knows well, because we've had discussions on this in this place, a requirement to qualify for the Ontario Disability Support Program is a medical note, a certificate, demonstrating that you cannot attain significant attachment to paid employment. You can't qualify for ODSP unless you have a medical professional—a doctor, generally—proving that to qualify for ODSP. So I'm going to ask the member, what is the government's vision for people with disabilities who do not have the capacity to get that \$1,000 of paid employment income? The income levels that we have on ODSP, the \$1,200 a month—are those adequate to live in Mississauga–Malton, Ottawa Centre, or anywhere else in the province of Ontario? I would submit, no. So what is the government's plan to help people with disabilities who can't make that \$1,000 a month? Moreover, what could the government do to acknowledge the volunteer labour that so many of those persons with disabilities do and the value that brings to our province?

1650

Mr. Deepak Anand: I want to acknowledge and thank the member opposite for that question. I was listening intently. I thought he was probably going to take the whole 10 minutes asking the question.

Our government wants to make sure that every worker who is able to work, can work, wants to work is on the path of the dignity of a job.

Talking about the re-entry jobs and the ODSP that the member opposite is talking about—we have seen, in 2019, 88% of all the injured workers were able to return to work and earn 100% of their pre-injury wages within one year.

We have increased the ODSP rate by 5%. Through this statement, we're actually moving further, by increasing the Ontario disability support monthly earnings exemption from \$200 to \$1,000 per month. This change would encourage as many as 25,000 more individuals to participate in the workforce.

Madam Speaker, our government supports our injured workers and anyone and everyone who is on ODSP. We will continue to focus on creating hope and opportunity for all Ontarians.

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): Next question.

Ms. Donna Skelly: Madam Speaker, through you to the member for Mississauga–Malton: You often talk about your journey here, from India to Canada, and how proud you are that you were able to build a career, raise a son and a daughter, and take advantage of the opportunities that Ontario provides.

I would like you to share with the Legislature this afternoon what our government is doing, the measures we are putting in place, so that other new Canadians can also pursue a career and perhaps even realize the dream of home ownership.

Mr. Deepak Anand: Thank you to the member—my seatmate and my colleague—for that wonderful question.

I remember when I landed here on January 15, 2000—and even before I landed, my wife came home from the office and said, "We're going to Canada." I said, "What's that?" She said, "That's the land of opportunities."

Proudly, 17 years after landing in Canada, I want to say thank you to my extended family and God for giving me an opportunity to become a candidate in 2018. Eighteen years after landing, I became a member of provincial Parliament.

What I'm trying to say to every newcomer is, if you can dream it, with your hard work, with the support of other Ontarians, you can achieve it here. That's what we do here.

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): The next question.

Ms. Jessica Bell: I noticed that the Ontario government has made a decision to change the definition of affordable housing. Currently, the city of Toronto has a definition of affordable housing that would put a one-bedroom unit at a purchase price of \$190,000; that means you could buy that if you were earning about \$58,000 a year. Well, now the Ontario government is looking at changing the definition of affordability so that a one-bedroom unit would cost \$444,000, requiring a household annual income of at least \$130,000, which is really shocking.

What is this government's plan to build more affordable housing in Ontario?

Mr. Deepak Anand: Absolutely, housing is a dream of everyone, including the newcomers.

I still remember when I came here, when we bought our first house in Brampton—70 Native Landing in Brampton—we used to go and see it almost every second week to see how far it had gone up.

This government is committed—as we heard this morning from the Associate Minister of Housing, we will continue to support Ontarians, and we will make sure that we will build 1.5 million homes in the next 10 years.

Again, going back to, if you can dream it, through hard work here in Ontario you can achieve it—that is what our government is doing.

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): The member for Durham.

Mr. Todd J. McCarthy: Speaker, there are so many aspects to Ontario's Plan to Build. I want to therefore ask the member from Mississauga–Malton if he could explain how this proposed legislation will support the government's efforts to address the labour shortage in Ontario, particularly the shortage in skilled trades, and in reference to the Skills Development Fund.

Mr. Deepak Anand: Thank you, member from Durham, for that wonderful question. That's actually something very close to my heart.

When I came here, the first thing I did was, I went back to Sheridan College. I understand the value of education. Back then, we used to start in the morning—by the evening, we would have two or three jobs. Back then, also, in 2000-01, there was a huge labour shortage, something which we are facing now.

Thankfully, we have a government that believes in and understands giving a hand to Ontarians through the SDF program. We are helping Ontarians through Better Jobs Ontario. We are making sure anyone who is looking for a job, who wants to do a job, who is able to do a job—through the small credentials, we will support them.

Along with that, we know that our youth needs a hand, needs help. We know there are going to be over 100,000 jobs in construction alone coming up. That's why we are investing in the Ontario Youth Apprenticeship Program. I encourage everyone: Reach out to your guidance counsellor. We are actually doing career fairs across the province. We want to tell these youth: Come join the skilled trades and enjoy the benefits.

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): Next question.

Ms. Doly Begum: I have a very simple question for the member: Why does your government's fiscal update not include any new money in the health care budget?

Mr. Deepak Anand: Madam Speaker, I want to encourage every Ontarian—we have two such wonderful documents which I want to allude to. In August, we had a budget, and we have the fall economic statement, wherein we actually are making huge—our President of the Treasury Board always uses the word “historic”—investment into the province of Ontario. Again, I don't want to say it's only us; it's actually the hard-working workers and each and every member of Ontario—because of your hard work, because of your perseverance, because of you, we are able to come together, work together, able to have such wonderful results.

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): We have time for one last question.

Mr. Billy Pang: My question to the member is about keeping costs down.

The people of Ontario work hard, and our government understands that taxpayers are under pressure.

Could the member tell us some more about why the proposed plan in this legislation keep costs down while investing in the priorities that matter to the people of Ontario—and also my riding, my constituents of Markham–Unionville—so critical during this time of economic uncertainty?

Mr. Deepak Anand: Before I answer the question, I want to take a moment and thank my OLIP intern Esma Boztas for helping me out, and the member from Oakville for doing an incredible job and helping me out today.

Regarding the question the member asked, I have a very simple answer: Read this wonderful document you have. There is a lot for our province of Ontario. Together, all of us—

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): Thank you. We are out of time.

We are going to continue with further debate.

1700

Ms. Peggy Sattler: I am pleased to rise today, on behalf of the people I represent in London West, to participate in debate on Bill 36.

I certainly have some thoughts about the government's progress on their so-called plan to build, but first I did want to observe that I think what we see in this document and this bill that is before us today is another fundamental misread of what the province of Ontario is looking for from this government and where Ontarians are at in their daily lives. We saw that with the government's decision to ram through Bill 28, the bill that used the “notwithstanding” clause to remove workers' rights to bargaining and impose a collective agreement on the lowest-paid education workers in our system. It created chaos in our schools, and it completely ignored some of the issues that are priorities for the people in the province. That's what we see today in this bill. That's what we saw yesterday when the minister stood up to present the fall economic statement.

The priorities that the people in this province have identified right now, the pressures, the crisis that they are living through, are in our health care system, and one would have expected that the government would have recognized this as they were preparing the fall economic statement, and that they would have put in additional funding to mount an aggressive campaign to recruit and retain and return nurses. We have seen nurses burnt out, exhausted, leaving the profession in numbers that we've never experienced before in Ontario. They're switching careers. They are retiring early. They are going to other jurisdictions where they're better compensated. Instead of seeing this government taking the aggressive actions that would be necessary to shore up that health care workforce, to prevent the overwhelming of our pediatric ICUs, of our pediatric ERs, and prevent the closure of emergency rooms in small hospitals across the province—this government decided, “No, that's not a priority for us right now. We're not going to put in any additional funding to deal with that crisis.”

We saw nothing in this fall economic statement or this legislation to repeal Bill 124. That has been consistently raised by nurses and health care workers and public sector workers as one of the biggest impediments to their ability to sustain the kind of workforce that we need to deliver those vital public services, those vital health care services to Ontarians. We saw nothing in here to indicate that the government has any kind of a plan to put forward a comprehensive and effective public education campaign

to get people to mask, to get people to recognize the link between wearing masks in public places and protecting kids from having to go on ventilators in pediatric ICU rooms. We saw nothing in this legislation or this statement that would indicate that the government understands the severity of the crisis and how much Ontarians care about the government dealing with the crisis, taking the actions that are necessary.

In my community, in London, the Children's Hospital reported double the typical volume of pediatric patients ending up in the pediatric emergency room. Typically, they would have about 100 visits a day. Now they have 200 and more visits a day. These are critically ill children who are, with their parents, waiting hours on end to get access to the care that they need and they deserve.

I'm sure that other MPPs in this room read the comments from the CEO of Toronto's Hospital for Sick Children on the weekend. He was talking not just about cancelling surgeries—because that had happened previously—but he was talking about the overwhelming of the pediatric ICU beds at SickKids hospital. He said that the cancellation of surgeries was “heartbreaking for the families” and “morally distressing” for medical professionals, who are not able to do the surgeries that they know these kids need in a timely manner. He said, “There is no child who ever has an elective surgery. There is just a question of what is life-saving, what is very urgent and what is less urgent.”

So I would say that it's shameful that this government made the decision not to rise to the occasion and do an all-hands-on-deck response to the crisis that we are seeing in our pediatric ICUs.

Also, in London, we are continuing to see the problems with off-load delays of ambulances, of code zeros being declared when there are no ambulances on the road to be dispatched to help people who need emergency assistance.

We had a motion that we debated in this House just a couple of weeks ago—and it was actually passed unanimously, if I recall, by members on all sides—calling on the government to develop a plan to deal with the code zeros, to put an end to code zeros, because people in this province deserve to know that if they are in a crisis and need an ambulance to come, that ambulance would be available.

In London, we are seeing regular lineups of 16 or more ambulances waiting in the bays to off-load patients. That means that those ambulances can't be on the road responding to emergencies, and the paramedics in those ambulances can't be providing the support that they need.

Again, just as with the nursing workforce, we are hearing about paramedics who are experiencing burnout at levels never before witnessed. They are also making decisions to leave that profession.

We also know that in London and across the province there is a dire shortage of family physicians. There's nothing in this economic statement to deal with that shortage of family physicians. I hear regularly from people in London that they can't get access to a family doctor. That just puts more and more pressure on our emergency departments at our hospitals across the province.

We have a crisis in children's mental health. I am hearing awful stories of the kinds of experiences that parents are having to go through with their children who are in dire mental health crises and absolutely cannot get the supports they need.

CSCN, the local agency that helps children who are having mental health issues, told at least two of the families who recently contacted my office that the needs of their children were too high for the programs that they had available. A response that we got from the ministry, when we contacted the ministry about one of these families, was that there is no provision in the existing model that facilitates a crisis response if or when one is indicated. We are reliant on community-based, ministry-funded services to address the needs of the community youth, to the extent that they are able. Well, they're not able to address the needs of youth in the community, the needs of youth who are self-harming and are attempting suicide and all manner of experiencing mental health distress.

We also know, in my community in London, that there is a housing crisis. I want to point out, Speaker, that this document that we received yesterday has just three mentions of London, which is Ontario's fifth-largest municipality, and one would think that, in a document of this size, London would be mentioned.

1710

There was one mention of raising the speed limit on Highway 402 between London and Sarnia, and then there were two mentions of long-term-care homes in London that are getting upgraded beds. But interestingly, Speaker, as we consistently see from this government, the focus on beds comes without any kind of a plan to ensure that the staffing is there to care for those long-term-care home residents who are in those beds. There is nothing in the legislation, nothing in this document that suggests that the government has any kind of a plan to get to those four hours of hands-on care that long-term-care residents certainly deserve and have been waiting for, for far too long.

Nothing about the housing crisis in our city, and as my colleague, our finance critic, the member for Waterloo pointed out that, in fact, what the government does highlight in this document about housing is a downgrading to the targets they had previously committed to to reach the 150,000 new housing starts that are needed annually in order to get to that 1.5-million-homes target that we need to achieve in this province over the next decade. So the government has now reduced its projections for new housing starts and leaving it—you know, even after they introduced Bill 23 to deregulate, to restrict the role of conservation authorities and housing development and to make it easier for for-profit private sector developers to build. But we know that the needs for deeply affordable housing, for non-market housing, are not going to be met by the private sector, and yet the government has not included the kind of investment that would be necessary to meet the needs of Ontarians in our community who are under-housed, who are living in substandard housing or who are homeless.

I just want to refer to the Vital Signs report for London that came out earlier this month. According to the city of London, there are more than 6,000 people currently on the wait-list for social housing, and as of September 1, 2022, 2,241 individuals in our community were experiencing homelessness.

London Cares is an agency of the city that provides wraparound supports through an outreach team for people who are experiencing homelessness, and they have reported a 68% increase in their outreach team's interactions with homeless individuals in the last year.

We need supportive housing, Speaker. We need housing that that will address the mental health needs of people who are homeless, who are under-housed.

I just want to share a couple of shocking stories that were in the media just over the last week in London. Charles Pearce is living at Bruce Residence in London. He's been living there for two years. He is on ODSP. Bruce Residence is a for-profit business. They announced a \$200 rent increase for him, even as there is a rampant bedbug infestation and a rampant cockroach infestation at his building. He gets about \$1,100 in ODSP. He's being asked to pay \$1,000 in rent for this facility that he is living in because there are no options. There are no options for people like Charles, who ends up having to stay in a horrifying place like that.

Another story just came out yesterday. Tom has both legs amputated. He has lost several of his fingers to frostbite. He was discharged from London Health Sciences Centre and has been lying at the corner outside the hospital for the last four days because the electronic wheelchair that he was discharged in—the battery died, and he has no way of getting somewhere to stay.

This is the kind of dire circumstances that people on ODSP are facing. The government's plan to allow recipients to earn \$1,000 before they start clawing back ODSP instead of \$200 won't do a thing to help Tom. Tom has difficulty with a lot of issues around daily living. He's not able to go out into the workforce. He needs the doubling of social assistance rates that the NDP had called for, as does Charles, who is living in that bedbug-infested Bruce Residence.

Speaker, we also know that Londoners are experiencing food insecurity, again, at rates that we haven't seen before. The London Food Bank said that the record for monthly visits was broken three times over a four-month period, and many of these people who are visiting food banks—one in three, in fact—are first-time users of the London Food Bank. Many are students. Many are seniors.

My colleague the member for Waterloo talked about the fact that in last year's budget, the government underspent OSAP funding for students by \$83 million. They withheld \$83 million of financial aid to students that would have made a huge difference. But we also know that this government has decided that student loans are the way to go, instead of the grants that students in financial need should have access to, to attend post-secondary.

But when you have students who are facing big loan repayments and interest rates are rising to the extent that we've seen them, you're going to see things like what we

saw at Western University: Demand at food banks for Western University students doubled. Students are facing financial hardship, again, like they haven't seen before. And more students are turning to the food bank on campus, to the food bank operated by London Food Bank, than they ever have before.

I also want to, in the last minute and 40 seconds I have, highlight that November is Woman Abuse Prevention Month. Today is Shine the Light on Woman Abuse. It's a campaign that originated in London to raise awareness of gender-based violence. In June of this year, we had an inquest release 86 recommendations coming out of the Renfrew murders of three women by an intimate partner. Over the last year, there have been 43 femicides in this province, and yet the government has decided: no new investments in violence-against-women programs; no new investment in counselling and support for survivors of gender-based violence.

We know that those deaths, in all of those inquests that have been held into intimate-partner violence, were preventable if the proper supports had been put in place. It's very disappointing that what we saw today—or yesterday, when the statement was read and the bill was tabled. We saw a bill that really fails to address the highest priorities and concerns of Ontarians. But frankly I'm not surprised, because that is what we have seen all along from this government.

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The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): Thank you. We'll move to question and answer. The first question to the member for Scarborough—Rouge Park.

Mr. Vijay Thanigasalam: Speaker, we know that affordability measures like the gas tax cut work. When the gas prices were slowing down the past summer, the Statistics Canada Consumer Price Index for July reported that the gas price fell most in Ontario compared to other provinces because of this temporary gas tax cut.

Right now, we are proposing to extend this gas tax—meaning to reduce the rate of gasoline and diesel—to remain at nine cents per litre until next December, 2023.

Will the member opposite support the proposed extension of this proven measure?

Ms. Peggy Sattler: Look, the NDP has been pushing for action to address rising cost of living for months, if not years. This is one of the things that we have called for.

This government, however, seems to forget that there are people who don't drive cars. There are people like Charles who I mentioned, Tom who I mentioned, who need some relief from cost of living through increased ODSP.

There are students who don't drive cars who need some relief from rising food prices through breaks on financial aid. They need more OSAP. They need grants instead of loans.

Even the people who do drive cars—one of the biggest things that I hear consistently is about the need to rein in auto insurance companies who are jacking up premiums for no reason whatsoever.

These are the kinds of measures that we would like to see in this—

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): Thank you. Next question?

MPP Jamie West: Thank you to the member from London West.

One of the things she said very early on in her debate was the need to repeal Bill 124. We hear this everywhere we go. I'm sure the Conservative members hear it as well; I'm not sure they're listening though. She talked about how this is leading to shortages, how people are exiting from the health care system and leaving the profession in record numbers.

Often the government will talk about the number of people they're hiring or planning to hire, but I often try to explain to people: That is like filling a bathtub with the plug pulled; it doesn't matter, as long as people are exiting faster than you can pull them in.

Could the member from London West explain why repealing Bill 124 would be an excellent step forward to showing respect for our health care workers and also to increase retention and attract people into that profession?

Ms. Peggy Sattler: I appreciate the question from my colleague the member for Sudbury.

Yes, certainly. Bill 124—when that was introduced by this government back in 2019, what it said to all public sector workers is, “We don't value your work. We think that your work is worth a 1% wage increase regardless of what the cost of living is, regardless of inflation, regardless of the value of the services that you provide to our community.”

And Bill 124 has become a symbol—for public sector workers, for health care workers—of just how much this government disrespects and devalues the work that they are doing, and the constant call for the repeal—not just from us; from health care workers across the province—are to tell this government, “Take that bill back. Tell us that you value our work, and maybe we will stay.”

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): We'll go to the next question.

Mr. Joel Harden: I enjoyed the remarks from our friend from London West.

Just to continue this discussion of Bill 124: Ottawa's nursing leader back home in our community, Speaker, is Rachel Muir, president of ONA Local 083. She's referred to Bill 124—which the member was talking about—as “misogynist” legislation, which seems like pretty heavy rhetoric. But when Rachel explains that, she says there are exemptions in the public sector for first responders, who do valuable work in our communities—police, fire—but for the predominantly women-staffed professions—like nursing, personal support work—there's a 1% cap.

So I'm wondering if the member could talk about the fact that, if the government is in fact doing as the member is suggesting, which is throttling the finances of this province by capping wages—not spending money that's announced, to the tune of, if I understood the member from Waterloo correctly—

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): Thank you. I'll ask the member to answer.

Ms. Peggy Sattler: I think that the fact that public sector workers are predominantly women in health care,

in education, in social services—I think that one of the things that resonated so strongly with the public was when, in the reaction to Bill 28, they saw these low-paid ECEs, EAs and other education workers who were overwhelmingly women, whose rights were being removed by the government. It's the same thing with Bill 124: There is a constitutional challenge ongoing right now about Bill 124 as an attack on workers. But it's not just an attack on workers; it's specifically against women workers, because they are the ones who make up the majority of the public sector workforce.

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): We'll go to the next question.

Ms. Natalia Kusendova-Bashta: Speaker, as we know, the gas tax cut is not only for the eight million drivers in Ontario, but, frankly, for everyone, because we know that when the price of gas is low, things like food, for example, are also maintained low. When our farmers want to bring their produce to market, well, guess what? They use our highways and they do go to that gas station to tank up. So it's not only beneficial for the eight million drivers, but, frankly, for all of us, who eat every day.

But since we're talking about health care, I want to point out a number from the Financial Accountability Officer. He states that there is an 8.1% average annual growth, from \$6.8 billion in 2021-22 to \$10.9 billion in 2027-28, so this government is investing heavily into our health care sector, like long-term care, by hiring 27,000 more PSWs into the sector, which are largely women professionals. Why can't the opposition support the work this government is doing in hospital infrastructure, in health care workers?

Ms. Peggy Sattler: I'm glad that the member brought up the FAO projections, because there is a huge discrepancy between what this government is putting forward and what the FAO told us just over a month ago. The FAO had projected a budget surplus this year of \$100 million. He also estimated that this government is underspending significantly in health care, \$23.4 billion; in education, \$6 billion; in children and social services, \$4.3 billion. He told us that there is a \$44-billion unallocated contingency fund that this government could choose to apply to OSAP, to ODSP, to implement paid sick days, and yet this government has made choices that fail to respond to the actual needs of people in this province.

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): We'll go to the next question.

MPP Jill Andrew: Thank you to the member for her passionate and informative presentation, and thank you also for raising the fact that sexual assault survivors are often left without any support, frankly, under this Conservative government.

I'm wondering if the member can offer any insight on how the fall economic statement is helping survivors, who currently, in some cases, have to travel out of town for hours, or even go home in the clothing in which they've been assaulted, sleeping in that clothing, because there are no staff or there's a shortage in staff at the hospitals to take care of them. How is this government taking care of survivors, if at all?

Ms. Peggy Sattler: Thank you to my colleague for asking that question, because sadly, Speaker, I have to say that there is absolutely nothing in this fall economic statement, absolutely nothing in this legislation, that will address the needs of survivors of gender-based violence. We saw through the pandemic an epidemic of gender-based violence within the pandemic, as people were staying at home, often in very unsafe environments with their abusers, unable to leave.

We have seen and we have all heard, I think, from the violence-against-women agencies in our communities that they are seeing a huge spike in calls, they are seeing a huge spike in service levels and don't have the capacity to respond effectively.

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): That's all the time we've got for questions. I'm going to go to further debate.

Report continues in volume B.

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