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Mercredi
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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

Wednesday 16 November 2022

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

Mercredi 16 novembre 2022

Report continued from volume A.

1450

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Orders of the day.

Point of order?

Ms. Andrea Khanjin: Madam Speaker, if you seek it, you will find unanimous consent to see the clock at 6.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Ms. Khanjin is seeking unanimous consent to see the clock at 6. Agreed? Agreed.

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Order, please. Please to leave quietly. Thank you.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' PUBLIC BUSINESS

WINTER HIGHWAY MAINTENANCE

ENTRETIEN HIVERNAL DES ROUTES

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): The member for Thunder Bay–Atikokan.

Mr. Kevin Holland: I move that, in the opinion of this House, the government of Ontario should implement a 12-hour bare pavement standard during the winter season on Highways 11 and 17, the new Ontario TransCanada Highway designation.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Mr. Holland has moved private member's notice of motion number 16. Pursuant to standing order 100, the member has 12 minutes for their presentation and the member has two minutes to reply.

Mr. Kevin Holland: It is my pleasure to rise in the House today and speak to my first private member's motion, which calls on the government to implement a 12-hour bare payment standard during the winter months on Highways 11 and 17, the new Ontario TransCanada Highway designation.

Coming, as I do, from the great riding of Thunder Bay–Atikokan, I along with members of this House from the north understand that winter in the north is a very different thing from winter in the south. And it's very fitting that we are having this debate on a day when Toronto finds itself covered in snow for the very first time this season. In northern Ontario, where the average snowfall is 200 centimetres per winter season, we call what we have here in Toronto today a dusting. And because of the significant amounts of snow—

Hon. Greg Rickford: They're calling it a polar vortex, Kevin.

Mr. Kevin Holland: Oh, are they?

Because of the significant amounts of snow that fall in the north, it is important that we spend some time discussing how we as a province maintain northern highways in an operational state during the winter months. It is a topic that has generated a good deal of interest in this House, with at least two pieces of legislation being tabled here over the last several years. And it has generated a good deal of activity within the Ministry of Transportation as well.

In my former role as mayor of the township of Conmee, I had many conversations with the Minister of Transportation about how important it is to keep northern highways operational in the winter months. In parts of my riding, there is no alternative route if the highway is closed and cross-Canada traffic stops. This is because, as I mentioned, winter in the north is more severe than winter in the south, and this is backed up by the data.

For example, the Ministry of Transportation publishes a winter severity index. The index measured snowfall, temperature, freezing rain and the amount of blowing snow in Ontario between 2015 and 2020, and it supports the statement that northern winters are more severe. The amount of snow, wind, freezing rain and low temperatures lead to road conditions that are dangerous and unusable, hindering workflow and travel.

Not only does the weather itself cause challenges, but the local geography and low traffic volume make winter road maintenance more difficult in the north. Traffic volume is essential as it assists in the activation of the winter materials. The traffic volume, in addition to the extreme low temperatures, higher winter severity and local geography, makes winter maintenance in the north more of a challenge.

An example of local geography or local weather conditions affecting the state of roads would be Lake Superior's "lake effect" that contributes to road and highway closures due to poor visibility and/or dangerous driving conditions.

So it's clear, Speaker, that this is an important matter for those of us in northern Ontario, and the importance of this issue is something that the Minister of Transportation has also taken seriously. Over the last couple of years, the Ministry of Transportation has conducted a technical review of service levels on Highways 11 and 17, launched a pilot project and established a task force to seek ways to improve highway maintenance in the north.

Published in December 2020, the technical review of Highway 11's and 17's highway winter service levels provided an extensive evaluation of winter maintenance services that observed weather, traffic volume and levels of service. This report indicated that the current winter

maintenance levels of service were appropriate, and there is a recognition that highway reclassification is only one component of road safety.

Another important factor is the bare pavement standard, which seeks to achieve bare pavement within a certain time frame 90% of the time following a storm. Bare pavement, in this context, is defined as when 95% of the driving surface is free of snow, slush and/or ice.

When looking at the data collected over the course of winter 2021-22, it's evident that the bare pavement condition was regained to a total of 92.69% within 16 hours and 89.37% within 12 hours. In my region of Thunder Bay, gauging bare pavement performance, an average of 93.34% of all contracts were met within 12 hours.

Following the technical study, the Ministry of Transportation launched a pilot project during the winter of 2020-21 to discern where on Highway 11 and 17 higher winter maintenance standards would be beneficial and where contractors were having the most difficulty meeting the standard.

After the first winter season of the pilot, in fall 2021, the Ministry of Transportation received the approval needed to extend the Highway 11 and 17 pilot project to 2021-22. This was to assist in the further collection of data and its analysis to bring greater informed decision-making. This approval also allowed the Ministry of Transportation to initiate a trial implementation of a 12-hour bare pavement target for the Thunder Bay east contractor-directed maintenance contracts, Marathon ministry-directed maintenance contracts and in my home, Kakabeka, the ministry-directed maintenance contracts.

In addition to the technical studies and pilot projects, the ministry struck a task force and has conducted meetings with many stakeholders in order to get their recommendations based on their experiences. These stakeholders included the Ontario Trucking Association and the Women's Trucking Federation of Canada. The Northern Transportation Task Force was also consulted and includes three former or current mayors of north-western Ontario, drawing from their experience.

It became clear, Speaker, that there is more that can be done, and more is being done. MTO is making several enhancements to assist with winter road safety in the north, enhancements like the construction of 14 new road weather information system stations in northern Ontario, seven of which are along Highways 11 and 17. Along with these information system stations, 16 solar-powered mini-RWISs have been recently added in northern Ontario. These vital information system stations will better enable a timelier response to the constantly changing winter weather conditions and enhance the delivery of services.

1500

In addition, increased use of underbody plows is recommended, as they perform better in the removal of snow-pack compared to conventional plows. The ministry is requiring these underbody plows to be part of new contracts, where beneficial, and to be encouraged on existing contracts. Anti-icing liquids, where appropriate, are

also being treated the same way. A trial involving potassium acetate, which has a lower freezing point, is planned for Kakabeka, my home region, this winter.

Implementation of new CDMC and MDMC contract models is anticipated to assist in further tangible improvements, with all contracts in northern Ontario to be transitioning by winter 2024-25. These contract models include optimized routes and prescriptive requirements.

Other enhancements include geometric improvements. The plan is to push back high rock cuts in 56 locations to improve sunlight exposure of impacted roadway sections and to reduce steep grades in 12 locations where they significantly impact the winter road conditions. The "2+1" highway model will also be implemented, being the first "2+1" highway pilot in North America, and will contribute to highway safety.

Along with these changes and enhancements to the service and road itself, 14 rest stations will be augmented to provide a safe place for travellers to stop during the winter season. The rest areas along Highway 17 at Argon Park, Manitouwadge and the Manitoba border; on Highway 11 at Ryland; and along Highway 599 at Mulligan Lake, which includes truck parking and year-round washrooms, will be rehabilitated.

Through my experience as mayor of Conmee—and speaking with the Ministry of Transportation, they have made clear in their actions that they live up to their word and get things done. That is commendable, Speaker; truly it is. There is no doubt in my mind that the Minister of Transportation gives this issue the serious attention it deserves.

But there is more that can be done. That is the reason for my motion today, which calls on the government to implement a 12-hour bare-pavement standard along Highways 11 and 17. I said earlier that the bare-pavement standard is one aspect of road safety, and I commend the ministry for taking action in those other areas, but we still need to address the bare-pavement standard in the north, and that's why I am asking all members to support this motion today.

As a former firefighter, and having experience with my family towing business, it is clear that road maintenance needs to be improved in Ontario. This motion will continue to enhance the conditions of the roads in my home region, and ensure we live up to our government's promise to get things done.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Further debate?

M. Guy Bourgouin: Ça me fait plaisir de me lever pour parler de la motion 16 : the snow clearance standards on Highway 11 and 17.

Comme vous le savez tous, j'ai déposé le projet de loi 125 en 2019, et le projet de loi 59 en 2021, pour modifier la Loi sur l'aménagement des voies publiques et des transports en commun en ce qui concerne les normes d'entretien des routes hivernales. Mon projet de loi avait pour but de changer le classement de la route 11 et de la 17 à la classe 1, comme les routes 400 dans le sud de

l'Ontario—le déneigement après huit heures et non 16 heures comme on l'a actuellement comme classe 2.

Cette motion du député Holland propose un déneigement complet dans les 12 heures. C'est sûr que c'est une amélioration, mais c'est la première fois qu'on entend ce gouvernement-là [*inaudible*] qu'ils reconnaissent qu'on a un problème sur les routes 11 et 17. On a tout le temps entendu qu'on était au-dessus des standards, puis on ne reconnaissait pas qu'il y avait un besoin pour nos routes hivernales dans le nord de l'Ontario.

Ce que je ne comprends pas non plus, c'est : pourquoi une motion? Pourquoi pas un projet de loi? Puisqu'un projet de loi a beaucoup plus de mordant, plus de viande, puis on peut enforcer la loi. Une motion, c'est beau, mais ça reste une motion.

On n'est pas des citoyens de deuxième classe. On mérite des routes en sécurité. On mérite une classe 1 et non qu'on nous crée une autre classe. Les contrats parlent soit de classe 1 ou classe 2. Il n'y pas une troisième classe, là. Contractuellement, il y a juste deux classes.

Je vous dis que quand on parle de nos régions, des personnes sont mortes sur nos routes. On a du monde qui n'est pas capable d'aller à leurs appointments médicaux, il y a des fermetures d'écoles, et la liste—écoutez, il l'a bien expliqué. Tout est là.

Je demande au gouvernement de reconsidérer. Oui, c'est bien; c'est un avancement. Mais on doit supporter mon projet de loi que je vais déposer au début décembre. J'espère qu'on va pouvoir compter sur votre support.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Further debate?

MPP Jamie West: I want to thank the member for Thunder Bay–Atikokan for tabling this, about clearing snow from Highway 17 and Highway 11 within 12 hours. The current standard is 16 hours, which is a long time in the north with snow pile-up.

This is a bill that's very similar to two bills that the member from Mushkegowuk–James Bay had tabled in the past. He tabled Bill 125, which was voted down by the Conservatives. That I was actually surprised by, because there are members of the Conservative Party in the north who fought tooth and nail for this standard when the Liberals were in government, so I was very surprised when they voted it down.

The second time they brought it forward, it was Bill 59. That one had passed, but never came back from committee, so they let it die on the vine, probably because we were heading into an election and they didn't want the feedback from the constituents in the north to say, "Why didn't you pass this?"

So it's very encouraging to see this—coming within 12 hours. But the difference between this bill and the bill from my colleague from Mushkegowuk–James Bay is that his standard was eight hours. It's a TransCanada highway, and southern Ontario highways have a standard of eight hours. They actually have, traditionally, less snow, so eight hours in the north would make more sense, especially when you consider that that line is the artery to western Canada. As the economic powerhouse of Ontario, if you cut off that artery with a snowfall, a blockage, a fatality, that means

goods and services can't get there. It just reinforces that, very often, the Conservative government seems to think that Ontarians in the north are second-class citizens to Ontarians in the south.

I raise that because of Highway 69. Highway 69 was a promise that the Premier had made in 2018. There were 68 kilometres to be tendered then; there are still 68 kilometres to be tendered. Other projects are moving forward, which I think is excellent—it's fine; do that—but let's save the lives of people on Highway 69 who continue to die, including one again this summer.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Further debate?

Mr. Ross Romano: I'm very pleased to be able to rise and speak today in support of my colleague the member for Thunder Bay–Atikokan, and I'm very happy to support this motion. Quite frankly, I'm looking forward to seeing the support of the entire northern caucus of the opposition members that I see present here today.

Interjection.

Mr. Ross Romano: It is a small caucus, no doubt, but it is still something. I look forward to seeing the support of the caucus, notwithstanding the size of it.

The reason why I look forward to that support is because this is how you get things done. You identify a problem that we know exists, and in the north we know there's a problem. The member from Mushkegowuk–James Bay brought forward a motion years ago, because he certainly noted that there is a problem—and there is.

We have highways, as the great member from Thunder Bay–Atikokan has noted, in the north: Highways 11 and 17. There are times in the winter where they are unusable and, quite frankly, dangerous. We've all heard the stories. There's no politics involved in any of this; we don't have to play any games about it. It is dangerous and it is scary. For many of us who have travelled those highways, many, many times, and done the white-knuckling, as we call it, it's scary, and sometimes it can be extremely dangerous; on many occasions, it has been.

It is important, though, when we know that there's a problem—which we do—that we think and that we talk and that we do things to come up with meaningful solutions. That's important. Coming up with a meaningful response is important.

So what did our government do? Well, for the previous two years, we studied and did a pilot project. We learned. We know what we can and what we cannot do, and we have the ability to make a meaningful change. We have the opportunity, through this motion, to make a meaningful difference, to ensure that not only are Highways 11 and 17 in the north more usable but safer for all those people who are travelling, for our families, for our loved ones, for workers.

1510

I used to spend a lot of time on that highway. In my prior profession as a lawyer, I was back and forth from Sault Ste. Marie to Elliot Lake, Blind River—often from Sault Ste. Marie to Wawa, Hornepayne. Travelling along these roads, again, when you've white-knuckled those drives, especially if you get around Montreal River—I

know my friend from Algoma–Manitoulin would know it well and probably a number of other members in the area. Going up that Montreal River Hill on the day of a snowstorm and the amount of times that it's been shut down—again, there's the usability and there's the safety factor, and they're both important. Obviously though, when it comes to safety, we want to ensure it's safe.

Again, it has to be meaningful, and the solution has to be one that is actually going to achieve the end outcome you seek to achieve. This motion is not based on, "Hey, I looked at the chart and I see that if we have a freeway designation"—which requires more than 10,000 vehicles travelling on it, which is not what we get on these highways in the north and which would change a whole lot of other circumstances and would not tackle the root cause or the root issue that we're trying to fix.

So this pilot project has been able to identify that we can get down to 12 hours. If we can get from 16 to 12 hours bare pavement, we can implement some of these other measures that are going to help, that are going to provide meaningful help to the problem that we all want to fix.

I think it's imperative, Madam Speaker, that we don't use this as an opportunity—because it's really unfortunate when sometimes in this arena it happens where we use these as opportunities. We're talking about safety. We're talking about something important. We're talking about people needing to be able to get to where they want to go safely, on time. While we don't expect it's always going to be perfect, we should still strive to get there, and this motion is based on good, reasoned decision-making to get us there.

I am very happy to support the motion of the member from Thunder Bay–Atikokan, and I look forward to all my friends across the aisle doing the same.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Further debate?

M^{me} France Gélinas: I was happy to hear the other side talk about the root cause. Let me tell you what Claude Secord from Gogama had to say when he phoned me. We had our first dump of snow last week, and guess what? Highway 144 was closed. Why? Because the private contract for winter road maintenance was given to IMOS. They knew a year ago that they had this contract. Comes the first snowfall, they haven't got any staff. There is nobody who's able—there are three snowplows but no snowplow operators. There is nobody to fulfill this contract. So what do they do? They shut the highway down and wait for the weather to warm up so that the snow goes away.

This is a root cause of why we white-knuckle whenever we drive in the north and there is snow on the horizon. The Conservatives privatized winter road maintenance, the Liberals privatized the management of winter road maintenance, and we have the mess that we have now. Am I happy we go from 16 hours to 12 hours? Yes, absolutely, but if the private operators don't have the staff to do the work, it doesn't matter what kind of legislation we pass in here; nothing is going to happen on the ground. You have to enforce those contracts, and if those contractors are not meeting the contracts that they signed, get rid of them and

bring that back into the public sector where they will show up on time, they will have good jobs and they will be there to make our highways safer.

I drive in northern Ontario; my family drives in northern Ontario. I want those roads to be safe. Sixteen hours to 12 hours—yes, absolutely, but when there are contract operators that are not respecting their contracts, let's get rid of this and bring them back into the public help.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Further debate?

Mr. John Yakabuski: It's a pleasure to join the discussion on this motion from my colleague from Thunder Bay–Atikokan today here in the House and I appreciate the comments from the members on the opposite side, as well. I did just want to touch on the comments from my friend from Nickel Belt. When I was driving here last weekend, I saw an advertisement at a municipality—that would be a public job—begging for snowplow operators—almost begging. It doesn't matter whether it's private or public, we have an employment challenge across so many sectors here today, and I would say to the member, whether it's public or private, we're trying to get people into all sectors, and snowplow operators would be no exception to her comments earlier.

But I want to thank my colleague from Thunder Bay–Atikokan for bringing this forward, because we all know how important it is to have adequate winter maintenance here in the province of Ontario. I have always maintained that the bare pavement standard in the summertime is absolutely much easier to maintain, but bare 90% of the time after 12 hours—that would be one heck of an improvement over the standard that exists today, which is 16 hours—16 hours for that thing. And I know the members from the north know what it's like, they know better than me; and no one knows any better than my colleague from Conmee, when he was the mayor up there and also a firefighter, having to respond in all kinds of circumstances.

I had the opportunity, years ago, when I was in opposition—my God, that was a long time—I flew north to Thunder Bay and had to rent a car and then drive to Atikokan. And it was at night; the whole time of it was at night. And we were just getting a little bit of—and it was in the wintertime, so let's be clear; it was in the wintertime. It wasn't in the bare highways of the summer—snow and I thought to myself, "Where in the name of Sam Hill am I going if the road gets too covered?" Because I know I'm in the—relative to people who live down in the GTA—middle of nowhere, as they say when you're up there, because you've got massive stretches of highway and there doesn't appear to be a whole lot of civilization or services because there's vast amounts where there's nothing on the side of the road other than trees. So it crossed my mind what kind of a mess I could be in if the road was closed and because there's not very many opportunities to take a different road. There just isn't; they don't exist.

But our Minister of Transportation, the Honourable Caroline Mulroney, has recognized that, and she brought in a pilot to try to find out and establish what would be reasonable. I know, yes, it's easy to say, "Well, we'd like the same standard as the 401: eight hours." That's not quite

the same; the conditions are different, the amount of daylight is different, the temperatures are different, and the circumstances, of course, are 90% of the time.

I've got to tell you a story: Highway 41 in my riding—we had a wicked storm one time, and a lot of snow came down, and then wet snow, fairly mild temperatures, and then we got an instant deep freeze. We had ice on the roads for three or four days, because there was nothing they could do. You get to a certain temperature drop, and even the salt really doesn't activate properly or just isn't as capable of making a difference, so we literally had plows scraping across the ice for a few days because the temperature dropped so fast that it could not be prevented and it couldn't be quickly dealt with. And I got complaints high, wide and handsome over those days, that somehow—I don't know; maybe they figured that I should be out there with an axe, chopping that ice on the road. But eventually, we got through it, because people also understand that sometimes circumstances are beyond anybody's control.

1520

But here's what we can control, and here's why I want to thank my colleague here today: What we can control is what we try to do to make things better, and this step that he's taking today by putting forth this motion here to raise the standard to 12 hours on Highways 17 and 11 in northern Ontario is a vast improvement over what we have today. To bring this forward—I want to thank him, because having been on those highway a few times—not like you guys up there in the north, but I've been on there a few times—I can just imagine what you go through even getting home sometimes on the weekends.

So I'm more than happy to support this motion, and even though they will object and want something better than what's happening today, because that's the nature of them, I hope the members on the opposite side will stand with us today and support this motion. It's a good motion.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Further debate?

Mr. Sol Mamakwa: It's always an honour to speak on the issues that affect the people of Kiiwetinoong. I know that Highway 11, Highway 17—even though they're not part of Kiiwetinoong, we use these highways to travel for our jobs, for school and not only that but to get medical attention, for medical appointments in places like Winnipeg, places like Thunder Bay. And because we are so familiar with these highways, we know that in the winter they are the most deadly highways, provincially. Drivers in northern Ontario are two times as likely to die in a car crash as anywhere else in the province. If you live in the north, there are days you will be taking your life into your hands, travelling on snow-covered highways, because you don't have a choice.

So I think it's important that northern communities deserve to be safe and have access to well-maintained roadways. While this motion seeks it, it doesn't go far enough. I know that what would actually save lives would be to reclassify and upgrade Highways 11 and 17 to class 1 or 2, which go far beyond the 12-hour bare pavement standard.

Anyway, I think it's important that faster snow removal in the winter means, again, enhanced traffic flow to ensure the economies of smaller towns can thrive despite inclement weather. If we do it right, we can make real change and keep people safe. Meegwetch.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): The member from Algoma–Manitoulin.

Mr. Michael Mantha: I want to start by saying that the individuals, the men and women, who get behind the wheel of a snowplow have immense courage in the work that they do. Not everybody has the nerve or the strength to stand beside a wheel in the middle of a snowstorm as you're watching traffic race toward you, not being cognitive of the fact that they have to give the way to these individuals who are trying to keep the roads safe. To them, to all of them, I want it to be loud and clear from the Ontario NDP: We take our hats off to you, and we commend you for the brave work that you do each and every day.

This problem has been raised and identified many times from members. I have walked with the previous ministers—ministers and governments—many a time to try to identify the problems that we've had with our winter snow removal programs. Multiple bills have been put forward. Why does it take a member from the sitting government to say, "Hey, there's a problem," in order to get an action?

Will I be supporting this? I look forward to working with the member in moving this motion forward, but I fail to see the teeth in it. I'm going to be very honest with you. It's a motion. It should have been a private members' bill. It should have actually been through legislation that this government has the ability to bring forward to bringing these changes ahead. That's what I was waiting to see actually come forward.

Our roads and our lives matter in northern Ontario, and there's no way that I'm ever going to accept our roads and our lives to be second-rate anywhere in this province.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Further debate?

Mr. John Vanthof: I'd like to thank the member from Thunder Bay–Atikokan for bringing this motion forward, and I'd like to echo the member from Algoma–Manitoulin: The people on the plows, on the sanders, regardless if they're public or private, are on the front lines and they face conditions that many of the rest of us have never faced. We need to remember that.

We have been pushing for improvements in road conditions on the TransCanada Highway for years, not just for northerners but for everyone in the country. It's the TransCanada Highway. We have been told by this government for many years that we have the safest roads in North America, and we all knew that wasn't the case for Highways 11 and 17. We all knew that. The member is from northern Ontario, as the other members who spoke are from northern Ontario. They know it as well. I commend the member for that.

The issue, however, is a motion that suggests 12 hours does not a difference make. We're going to support it, because if it actually came to fruition, it would be a step forward. But, right now, with highway classifications, such a thing doesn't exist. The contracts of series one-and-

a-half highways doesn't exist, so you're going to have to rewrite the contracts. There's going to be a lot of work involved.

We'd be much more confident if this was actually—and maybe it will be brought forward by the Ministry of Transportation so that the contractors are actually paid to provide better service. We're not in favour of the private sector managing the contracts, but no one in the system is trying to provide bad service; they're trying to do the best with what they have, and they need concrete steps more than motions.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): The member from Thunder Bay–Atikokan.

Mr. Kevin Holland: I'm happy to hear that my colleagues across the floor are going to support this motion. It's a good step in making sure that the standards in northern Ontario are being upheld.

I've heard the request for eight hour standards and, in my discussions over my 31 years as the mayor of my township with several ministers—this is the first minister, by the way, who has actually taken any action on our deputations with regard to the conditions we are facing, so I thank the Minister of Transportation for doing that.

When I spoke with her, eight hours isn't reasonable and it's not responsible. The studies show that with the conditions that we have in northern Ontario, 12 hours is realistic, 12 hours is what we can achieve within the standards that have been established. I hear you say that it's not good enough and it's this, and then I also hear with regard to the fact that—why now? I can't speak to why things didn't happen before I was in this House, but things are happening now.

This is a good first step, and I will continue to work with the Minister of Transportation and the ministry staff to ensure that highway safety is top of mind for northern Ontario. This is a good first step, but there's more work to be done, and my plan is to continue to work with the minister to make sure that we have the safest highways that we possibly can have.

I appreciate your comments that you're going to support this motion and I look forward to actually seeing you do it.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): The time provided for private members' public business has expired.

Mr. Holland has moved private member's notice of motion number 16. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? The motion carries.

Motion agreed to.

1530

ADJOURNMENT DEBATE

CHILDREN'S HEALTH CARE

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): The member for Ottawa South has given notice of dissatisfaction with the answer to the question given by the Minister of Health. The member has up to five minutes to debate the

matter, and the minister or parliamentary assistant may reply for up to five minutes.

The member for Ottawa South.

Mr. John Fraser: Here's the good news: It is not a late show. It's a matinée. It's still light outside and nobody has to stay late after school. We're all good with that.

I was dissatisfied with the answer, simply because there's a situation in Ontario right now at our children's hospitals that's not just unprecedented; it poses a serious risk to children's health. The people who work in those hospitals—nurses, doctors—and the administrators who run those hospitals are saying, "We need your help." They're asking us to mask. That's all they're asking us to do, to put this thing on. I don't like wearing this. None of us likes wearing it. But it's not that much to protect our kids.

I told the story about our oldest daughter, Kirsten, who will be 44 this year, so 43 years ago next month she had her first admission for pneumonia. It was pretty scary. She was a one-year-old. She was a baby. She was, like, this big. She had four more admissions, and each time she'd be admitted she'd end up in an oxygen tent and she would be medicated. She would get well in three or four days; she'd spring back quickly. But for those two or three days, while she was in acute distress trying to breathe, it was a terrifying experience for a young parent—a terrifying experience for anybody.

We all know what it feels like not to be able to breathe. We all have experienced that at some point. A lot of us here have probably witnessed someone close to them gasping for air. It is a very frightening situation. You can't help; there's nothing you can do.

I was thinking about this last night before I asked the question. What if what happened 43 years ago happened now? What would I be thinking as a parent? How would I feel? How much more dangerous would it have been for her because those people who did such a great job of helping her wouldn't have the capacity to do that? It's frightening when you think about it.

More recently my grandson had what was called orbital cellulitis, last spring, in the back of his eye, a bad infection. He could have lost an eye. Hospitals weren't overwhelmed then. What if he got that infection today?

My point is, they are simply asking us to wear masks. We have called for masking in schools and public transit because I think those are the places where it's most critical. It also sends a message to everybody: We need to wear masks. Why do we need to wear masks? To protect our children. To protect the people who are caring for our children.

As leaders, as people who have been elected to represent ridings and people across Ontario, people look to us. They look to leaders. So we have to walk the talk. We can't look as if we are indifferent to what we're being asked to do to protect children: wear a mask. It's very easy to show that you're not indifferent by simply wearing one. Wearing a mask is a symbol. It protects you, but it's also a symbol, and it's an important symbol. It's an important symbol right now. What it says is, I'm not indifferent. I

care. I'm doing what I can to protect you. It may not be perfect, but I'm with you.

That was the point of my question. I was very disappointed in the answer. We need to do better. Thank you, Speaker.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): The PA to health, the member from Eglinton–Lawrence.

Mrs. Robin Martin: COVID-19 vaccinations and boosters, as well as getting your annual flu shot, remain the best tools to help keep people healthy and out of hospitals. The bivalent vaccine, along with continued access to testing, antivirals and updated public health guidelines, give Ontarians the tools they need to make the best decisions for themselves on how to stay safe and healthy.

The Minister of Health, along with our Chief Medical Officer of Health, continues to work with our public health units during respiratory illness season and monitors impacts on our health system. Our government is in constant contact with our pediatric hospitals, Ontario Health and other health system partners to alleviate critical care pressures and ensure that all patients receive the care they need.

This fall, Ontario Health provided direction for all pediatric hospitals—and this was in the fall; not recently but in the fall—to have a surge plan in place to respond to increased demand that was anticipated. All Ontario hospitals have also been directed to use adult hospital capacity to support pediatric surges.

We're taking a Team Ontario approach, and we've increased hospital capacity across the board by adding over 3,500 new critical care, acute and post-acute hospital beds. As Dr. Chris Simpson, the executive vice-president of medical and chief medical officer at Ontario Health, said earlier this week, "We're taking action to ensure these sick children get the care they need."

As we've done before, we're taking a Team Ontario approach, ensuring that all of our provincial resources are being used to support pediatric patients across the province. A team of experts meets daily to ensure that we're maximizing our health system resources. This team works with hospitals and regional incident management structures to support and coordinate care.

All hospitals and their emergency departments have implemented surge plans to increase bed capacity and refocus resources to deal with the influx of pediatric patients. The number of available pediatric ICU beds is monitored closely. It is very fluid and changes rapidly as children are admitted and discharged to a ward bed when clinically safe to do so.

What is important to emphasize is that "all pediatric patients will be seen when they come to a hospital. If they require admission, then we will look after them."

I am also a parent. As the member opposite was saying, he's a parent. I'm a mother, and I have had to take my children to hospitals over the years—not so much recently, because they're pretty grown up now, but 30 years ago I was there with my infant son and I understand the fear a young parent would have waiting with their ill child for care. But I think I've always known that my child would

get care because we've got great health care providers and a great health care system, even though it's under some stress now, and the child will get the care required when they need it. We have confidence in that, and I know Dr. Simpson said the other day that he has that confidence as well. We know our health care providers will make sure that children who really need it will get the care they need.

Speaker, our Plan to Stay Open is ensuring that Ontarians will continue to have access to the care they need when they need it. Our plan supports the health care system to address urgent pressures of today while preparing for a potential fall and winter surge so our province and our economy can stay open. We're adding 6,000 more health care workers, including nurses and personal support workers; 2,500 hospital beds so that there is more care there for people who need it; and expanding models of care. We've already added 3,500 new critical care beds and 11,900 new health care workers, and we continue to do more.

1540

We look forward to continuing to work with all partners, including Ontario Health, to make sure that we have the care we need for patients when and where they need it.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): There being no further matters to debate, pursuant to standing order 36(c), I will now call the orders of the day.

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 16, 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 Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): When the debate stopped, we had the member from Essex. We will return to the member from Essex.

Mr. Anthony Leardi: Earlier this morning, I had commenced my remarks, and I was referring to the fact that I had begun running a law office, which had created jobs, and it was landing clients, and things were running very smoothly. But then things started to get a little tougher because the Liberal government of the day was making things harder and harder. Every day, there was more provincial debt. Every day, there were more regulations, making it harder to create jobs.

Over the entire time of that Liberal government, Ontario lost 300,000 jobs, and manufacturing was leaving the county of Essex. That was bad for Essex. In fact, the Liberals even went so far as to tell people just to get out of

manufacturing. They talked about manufacturing and they said that we should be transitioning to a different type of economy, an economy where people didn't produce manufactured products. I found that hard to believe, because, I thought to myself, "Well, how can you have an economy where people don't actually make things?"

At the time, Ontario had plenty of electricity. In fact, we had more than what we needed. But despite that, the cost of electricity was going up and up, and that didn't make any sense. The provincial debt was going up, the provincial deficit was going up, provincial taxes were going up, and we were getting less for our money and less for our taxes.

Specifically, to refer to that, we were getting fewer schools; the Liberals were closing schools. They closed the only high school in the town of Harrow. That town had one high school and the Liberals closed it. The Liberals closed Western Secondary School. That was a great school. People loved that school. It was a school that trained young people in the skilled trades, and the Liberals closed it. The Liberals actually closed a skilled trades high school in my riding.

Now, on my eight-minute commute to work—you would think that was a rather short commute, and it is, but it still gives you enough time to think about things. Do you know what I thought about when I was driving on my eight-minute commute to work? Here's what I thought: "How are the Liberals going to make my life worse today?" Because they were just getting worse and worse.

And then I ran into a friend of mine. He said he was going to go to the Fogolar Furlan Club—that's an Italian club in the city of Windsor—and he was going to go listen to somebody who was giving a speech. He told me about this person. This person was from Toronto. This person had a famous last name, but I didn't know much about this person. So I went to Fogolar Furlan Club, and the room was packed. It was so packed, I had to sit in the back row with my friend. Just before this person started to speak, my friend leaned over to me and he said, "Anthony, this is going to be a religious experience."

Then the speaker started talking, and he talked about opening up Ontario, being open for business, investing in key infrastructure like highways, creating jobs, reducing red tape and helping people get jobs—skilled jobs. He talked about the future of Ontario. He talked about the Ontario I knew, the Ontario I grew up in; the Ontario with opportunity and jobs, where you could get a skilled trade; where you could buy a home, start a family, and grow up and know that tomorrow was going to be better than today; an Ontario with a future. At the end of that speech, I felt like standing up and singing, "Glory, Hallelujah." Maybe it was a religious experience after all.

Well, that fellow went on to become the Premier of the province of Ontario. That was four years ago and one pandemic ago. Where are we today? Today, manufacturing is coming back to Ontario. It's coming back to the county of Essex. These are good jobs, skilled-trades jobs, jobs that offer you a good career, jobs you can buy a house with and start a family with.

We're getting new highways. Let me tell you about Highway 3. It goes from Leamington and Kingsville to the border with the United States. We're increasing that to four lanes. It's going to be safer. It's going to let trucks from Leamington and Kingsville—1,500 trucks a day—get to the border faster. People are going to be safer. Business is going to be better.

And this government is keeping costs down: no more sticker fees on your licence plates; the gas tax reduced by five cents, and then reduced by another five cents, for a total of 10 cents per litre. That helps everyone who drives a car. It helps truckers. It helps soccer moms. It helps anybody who purchases anything that actually gets transported by truck, which is just about everything in the province of Ontario. It's like we finally have a government that's on the side of the people, a government that just wants to get things done, rather than trying to impose some kind of ideological theory on the population.

On Monday I had the pleasure of hearing the economic statement for the fall delivered by the Minister of Finance. An economic statement in the fall delivered by the Minister of Finance: That in itself is fascinating, because such a thing did not happen before under a previous government. It's like they didn't even care about economics. Yes, under the Liberals the debt got worse and worse and the deficit got worse and worse, but now the deficit is going down—not up, but down. In fact, we might actually balance the books by 2025. Under the Liberals, they didn't talk about balancing the books.

Under the Liberals, people were told to get out of manufacturing, as if manufacturing was something that was looked down upon, but in this government we tell people to get into manufacturing. We are telling people to actually make things again. This government is supporting major automotive manufacturers, providing \$213 million to support retooling of assembly plants, and to maintain and create new manufacturing jobs. This government is supportive of automotive research and development, so we can build electric vehicles, the cars of the future.

The ODSP earnings exemption is going up to a thousand dollars. That helps individuals on ODSP, because they can earn more money now and still keep their ODSP. We're helping 200,000 low-income seniors with a proposal to double the guaranteed annual income payment.

1550

This government is increasing health care spending, adding \$5.6 billion more to the health care budget, and we're doing it even though the federal government isn't paying us their fair share. The federal government controls health care with federal legislation. They're not paying their fair share, but our government here in Ontario is still going to increase health care spending despite that.

The government is increasing base funding for hospitals, making 3,000 acute-care beds permanent, and in my riding of Essex we're getting a new hospital. It's now moving into phase 2. That's a design phase. We know it's not going to happen overnight—we know that—but we know it's moving forward. And personal support workers are going to get a permanent wage enhancement. That was introduced during the pandemic, and now it's permanent.

We've got a plan to build, Madam Speaker: a plan to build more homes, because everyone needs a home. The Liberals didn't have a plan—or, should I say, they had a plan to make it harder to get a home: more regulations, more red tape, more roadblocks, more taxes. But this government is going to make it easier to get a home. We're going to do that and we're going to protect the environment at the same time.

We're converting steel production furnaces to clean electricity. That move alone is the equivalent of removing two million cars off the roads. With that one decision, this government has done more for the environment than a previous government did in 17 years.

Speaker, I could spend a lot of time talking about facts and figures, but I want to talk about a couple of real people now. I want to talk about a couple of ladies I met at St. Clair College. I'm going to call them Jane and Susan. They were being trained in the skilled trades at St. Clair College. They're both mothers. We met them when we were visiting there with the Associate Minister of Women's Social and Economic Opportunity. We walked into St. Clair College and we went into the machines training area—and when you're from Essex county like me and you walk into a machine shop, that makes you feel comfortable, and that's how I felt.

We were there with about 40 women who were in their working overalls, and they were getting trained on various machines. It made me think about that black-and-white photo that you'll see in many areas of skilled industrial workers sitting on a steel girder in a skyscraper in New York. I think you know that photo; it's the one you see on posters in university dorms all over the world. I told the ladies about that photo, and we talked about it. I said that they were going to be the next famous photo that all the university students were going to hang on their dorm walls, and those ladies approved.

That's why this government is building on the success of the Skills Development Fund. That fund was originally in the 2020 budget, and we're putting another \$40 million into that fund for a total investment of \$145 million. That funding is going to create training programs, and it's going to help people jump over barriers to employment, and that includes women.

Now, Speaker, I get to talk about one of my favourite topics: the Ring of Fire.

Présentement, madame la Présidente, j'aimerais parler au sujet du Cercle de feu, un de mes sujets favoris. Comme adjoint parlementaire au ministre des Mines, je représente une des circonscriptions les plus au sud de la province. Vous vous demandez sûrement, quel est le lien entre le Nord et le Sud? Bien sûr, madame la Présidente, le lien est le Cercle de feu, qui est une des richesses naturelles. Nous dans le Sud, nous avons besoin de ces minéraux critiques que l'on retrouve dans le Nord. Ce sont les richesses trouvées dans la terre dont nous avons besoin.

Et les gens du Nord, ils ont l'expérience, la sagesse et les compétences pour extraire les minéraux critiques, les faire raffiner et les transporter au Sud pour manufacturer les véhicules électriques.

C'est pour ça que ce gouvernement a donné son appui à la construction des routes au Nord. Ce sont les Premières Nations qui vont prendre l'initiative pour la construction des routes vers le Cercle de feu. C'est la Première Nation de Marten Falls qui dirige l'évaluation environnementale pour la route d'accès Marten Falls, et la Première Nation de Webequie qui dirige l'évaluation environnementale pour la route d'approvisionnement Webequie.

Le Cercle de feu contient des minéraux critiques suivants : le nickel, le cobalt, le cuivre et le lithium. La société Vale a déjà déclenché les premiers pas pour le projet de la nouvelle mine qui s'appelle Copper Cliff. Vale a consacré un investissement d'environ 900 millions de dollars simplement pour commencer l'ouverture de la nouvelle mine.

La richesse du Nord, dans le Cercle de feu, peut dépasser 10 milliards de dollars de production à l'année. C'est l'équivalent d'un nouveau Sudbury. Imaginez la création d'une nouvelle ville d'environ 160 000 personnes dans le Nord près du Cercle de feu. Oui, une nouvelle ville, une nouvelle industrie, un nouvel espoir pour les gens du Nord et pour tout l'Ontario.

Et cela me ramène à la deuxième concession du canton Anderdon. And that brings me right back to Anderdon township on the second concession.

Because you see, Madam Speaker, the fall economic statement is about numbers, but it's about a lot more. It's about what I had when I was growing up on the second concession of Anderdon township, where we knew that if you worked hard, you were going to make it. We always knew that.

And the fall economic statement says the same thing: investing in highways and key infrastructure, keeping costs down, working for workers, a plan to stay open, investing in Ontario's economic recovery—we are going to get it done, Madam Speaker.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Questions?

Ms. Marit Stiles: I was listening carefully to the member from Essex's comments, and he paints a rather rosy picture of where things are at in Ontario—something that I think would be very inconsistent with where many Ontarians see things today.

In fact, over 49,000 people left for another province in the second quarter of this year. The outflow was 77.6% higher than the previous quarter. Ontario has never seen this many people rush for the door in a single quarter. In 2021, 108,000 left, a number that hasn't been seen since the early 1980s. I wonder if the member opposite would explain to me why so many Ontarians don't want to stay in this province under this government.

Mr. Anthony Leardi: I challenge and refute the member's statistics.

Ms. Marit Stiles: Really?

Mr. Anthony Leardi: I challenge and refute them, because we have to talk about net population flow, and we all know—or at least we know—that population moves between province and province all the time within Canada, so you have to talk about net population flow. And I can't recall a year, except perhaps during the War of 1812, when

the province of Ontario—back then called Upper Canada—actually lost population in the net balance. That’s why I say what I say.

We’ve created, what is it, 45,000 or 49,000 new jobs in the province of Ontario since the last report came in. People are coming in, and of course they’re coming in, because Ontario is a great place to live and grow.

1600

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): The member from Richmond Hill.

Mrs. Daisy Wai: I just want to say thank you to the member from Essex. I don’t think you’re painting a rosy picture at all. You just mentioned how many manufacturing jobs we’re bringing back. We’re listening to the economic development—how many new people are investing in Ontario. This is great news for all of us.

I would like to talk about the gas tax cut that is important for all of us, especially in winter—the amount of money that we have to spend on gas. I would like to know how the gas tax cut helps all of us, especially when Ontarians are facing all the rising costs in our day-to-day living.

Mr. Anthony Leardi: I thank the member from Richmond Hill for that question. Her optimism is infectious and brightens up my day; that’s for sure.

Here’s something else that should brighten up everybody’s day: paying 10 cents per litre less on gas. As the member pointed out, everybody benefits from that—particularly in my riding, because my riding is not conducive to mass transit. We don’t have a subway. We don’t have a bus system. We have to drive. That means moms and dads who are driving their kids to the arena, or to the indoor soccer field, in this weather. They have to drive. It’s not as if their commutes are getting shorter.

We talked about food. Everything we consume in the province of Ontario has to be trucked, so if you have a 10-cent reduction per litre in the price of gas, you are keeping costs down on everything, including food.

I think that these measures are important for everybody to keep costs down.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): The member from Davenport.

Ms. Marit Stiles: I’d like to challenge the member on his response to my last question, because I think what the member is referring to is immigration numbers kind of levelling things out. But I’ve got to say to the member opposite, and this is what economists are saying right now—and it has been a major news story; I think he should probably catch up on that. In fact, what’s happening now is, immigrants are taking a look at what’s happening to Ontario and the population that’s fleeing from our province because of the high cost of living, because of the lack of opportunity, because of the crisis in health care and education—and then what happens, and what economists are predicting is going to happen is that immigrants are going to take one look and say, “What do those people know that I don’t know?” So good luck trying to attract those folks to this province. This is a major issue, and this member wants to pretend that it’s not happening. It’s in every major news report. I challenge him to go back and

do economics 101 and learn something about immigration and outflow.

Mr. Anthony Leardi: I thank the member from Davenport for her ideologically laden comments. Let me demonstrate something that is utterly unideological and totally rational. The member simultaneously says that the population of Ontario is going down but we have a housing crisis. If the member is correct and the population is going down, then there should be all sorts of vacant houses all over the city of Toronto, but there aren’t, because the population is going up and up and up, and it’s going to go up by another two million individuals over the next 10 years or 15 years. That is why we need more houses. There aren’t any vacant houses because the population of the province is going up and up and up. That’s rational, but I know the member won’t accept it because it’s not ideological.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): The member from Mississauga–Malton.

Mr. Deepak Anand: First of all, I want to say thank you to the member for Essex. As a first-generation immigrant, I can tell you, I get a lot of calls—and I want to tell every person who’s making Canada their new home, welcome to Ontario. We’re the place where you will grow and thrive.

Madam Speaker, I just want to share with you an open secret: When the government creates better conditions for businesses, and when government makes investment in infrastructure, and when we have a Minister of Economic Development, Job Creation and Trade bringing in a lot of investments, do you know what happens? What happens is it creates economy, it results in job creation.

But with the job creation, we are facing a labour shortage. So I want to ask the member: Through this FES, what exactly is our government doing to make sure that we do not have a labour shortage and we are able to support our Ontarians, including the newcomer Ontarians who are coming in the next few years?

Mr. Anthony Leardi: I want to thank the member from Mississauga–Malton for his comments, because all of the newcomers to Canada make this a better place, as we know.

We have so many people coming to the province of Ontario and so many jobs coming back to the province of Ontario. The Minister of Economic Development, Job Creation and Trade has been doing so much that jobs are coming back, pouring back into my county of Essex, and the poor Minister of Energy has been scrambling, scrambling to give us all the energy that we need. He’s actually going to build three new transmission lines to my area to provide us with the energy that we need, because the Minister of Economic Development has created so many jobs and there are so many people wanting to build in Essex county and in Windsor.

In order to provide the skilled trades that we need, the Minister of Labour has had to create a \$145-million fund to train the people that we need, because we need more and more and more skilled tradespeople.

That’s where we are as a result of the policies implemented by the ministers that I have mentioned and the

Premier—so many jobs, so many people. We need so much power. It's way different than where we were five to 10 years ago, and so I thank the member for that question.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): The member from Spadina–Fort York.

Mr. Chris Glover: Thank you to the member from Elgin for your comments today.

One of our biggest competitive advantages in Ontario and in Canada is our public health care system, and our system right now, under this government's watch, is in crisis. The average wait time in emergency rooms across this province is 20 hours, and it's been 20 hours since June. The ICU at SickKids hospital is at 127% capacity.

Your government has been boasting that you've got the highest level of funding in history, but the fact is that the FAO—the Financial Accountability Office—of the government of Ontario reports that you're imposing a \$6.2-billion inflationary cut on our health care services and that's fuelling this crisis.

So my question is, will you push your caucus to actually make the investments so that we're not cutting health care services and we can end this crisis?

Mr. Anthony Leardi: I thank the member from Spadina–Fort York for that question. I have a little story to tell, if I can squeeze it in. There was a promise to build a health care hospital for my riding. That promise was reneged on around 2015 by—

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Thank you, sir.

Further debate?

M^{me} France Gélinas: It is my pleasure to talk about Bill 36, an Act to implement Budget measures and to enact and amend various statutes.

As everybody knows, the Minister of Finance put forward his fall economic statement on Monday. Like everybody else, I listened intently to see what they are going to do to deal with the crisis in health care. You can imagine my disappointment when I realized that not one more penny will be going to our health care system, although, since we have been back at Queen's Park, every week we have groups that come to talk to us. They come to talk to me and I'm sure they come to talk to all members of this House to tell us things have to change.

The first one, on the day we came back, on October 24, was hospice palliative care. They came to explain to us that the funding model for hospices pays barely half of what it costs to run a hospice. We don't have very many hospices, but the ones that are there, everybody loves them. They do fantastic work to add life to our days rather than days to our lives, and they do this in a very compassionate way, a very high-quality-care way that you cannot get in most other places, including our hospitals.

1610

Our hospices are top-notch, but some of them are looking at having to close beds. Some of them are looking at maybe having to close altogether because for reasons unexplained, the government doesn't fund hospice food. Do you figure that somebody who is admitted into a hospice bed stops eating? They don't fund the hospice to have cooks. Somebody has to cook that food for palliative

care patients to eat. They don't pay for anybody to do any cleaning. Do you really think that palliative care patients will get up every morning, mop the floor and clean the bathroom? No, you need staff to do this. They don't receive any money for this. They don't receive any money for anything that has to do with the need for electricity or heating. It would be nice to have WiFi and the Internet, maybe a phone line so you can phone your loved one—none of that.

They came to Queen's Park on our first day back and asked that—they don't even ask to be funded 100%, Speaker. They say, "Look at our budget, the budget we have to pay to stay open, to cut the grass, to open the driveway, to shovel the snow, to pay for the food—the cooking, the cleaning, the lights on." They only ask that 75% of those expenses be covered.

I thought they had done a really good job explaining to us how they are helping the health care system. A lot of people would much rather spend their last days in a hospice than in a hospital. If you look at the costs, they are not even a fraction of the cost of keeping somebody in the hospital—our over-capacity hospitals. If we transfer them into a hospice, we pay a fraction of what it costs to keep them in the hospital. Their care is better. The family feels more supported. They have lots of bereavement happening for the family members left behind.

And then I listened closely to the fall economic statement. I look at Bill 36 and there's nothing in there for hospices. Do we really want them to close? Do we really want people to die in hospital where they don't want to be, where it's overcrowded, where they wait for hours before being admitted? You can go directly from your home to a hospice; no need to go to the hospital. They will look after you. They will provide quality care. They will control your pain. They will add life to your days. But zero, they're not mentioned in that, but I think they should be. So that was on the first day.

Today, we have the Nurse Practitioners' Association of Ontario, NPAO, at Queen's Park, and the same thing: They have very good ideas to help with the health care system. Ontario has 25 nurse practitioner-led clinics. I am really proud to say that this is a model that was developed in Sudbury by Marilyn and Roberta, two nurse practitioners in Sudbury who brought this model together, who started the first nurse practitioner-led clinic. We have 25 of them. Many of them have multiple sites, though, and in every one of them the client satisfaction is through the roof. People love them.

A nurse practitioner-led clinic can only take unattached patients. Those are patients who don't have a family physician. Most of them have complex, chronic illnesses. If they go to the nurse practitioner-led clinic, they will be supported, they will gain their primary care access through them, and they will have access to an interdisciplinary team. They cost a fraction of what other primary care—mainly a family physician's office—costs. People love them.

Believe it or not, there are nurse practitioners right now, even in northern Ontario, who are underemployed. So here

we have a resource that could help with the 1.3 million Ontarians who do not have access to primary care—some say 1.8 million; the government stat says 1.3 million. We have nurse practitioners who are licensed to practise in Ontario, who live in my riding and every other riding, who would love to get a job.

We have clinics, such as in Capreol, in my riding—a beautiful little community. Wahnapiatae First Nation is a little bit further. They all want financing for more nurse practitioners. In Wahnapiatae, it is the band that pays for the nurse practitioner. Why is it that in Ontario, right here, right now, First Nations within the city of Greater Sudbury have to pay for their own health care? This is a provincial responsibility that is being unfilled, so the First Nations themselves pay to run the clinic. In Capreol, again, in my riding, there are thousands of people—there are 40,000 people in Nickel Belt who don't have access to primary care. There are thousands of people in Capreol who would love to go to the nurse-practitioner-led clinic. There are nurses who would love to work at the Capreol nurse-practitioner-led clinic. The clinic has written submissions to the government. We're talking about \$150,000 or \$200,000, and you could give access to thousands of people who right now depend on Health Sciences North, which has a wait-list in their emergency room that is days long—we're not talking hours anymore; we are talking days long, before you are seen at Health Sciences North, which has always operated at 130% capacity.

Why is it that those small investments that would help patients—they would gain access to primary care, and that would help the health care system. Those patients would not have to go to the emergency room anymore—when they get sick, they would go—and that would save the system money. I call this a win-win-win. It's good for the patient. It's good for the health care system. It saves the system money. And yet, there is not a penny in Bill 36 for those—why not? We have solutions that would work even in rural northern Ontario, where I live, and there is not a penny in there to help them. I'm not happy with this.

Same thing—for reasons unknown, this government decided that there could not be more than 25 nurse-practitioner-led clinics. Why not? Coniston, another community that I serve, has zero access to health care. There isn't a doctor there. There isn't a dentist there. There isn't a chiropractor there. And yet, there are nurse practitioners who are willing to open up a nurse-practitioner-led clinic but who are told, "No, we're only going to have 25 in Ontario." Where does this number come from? I have no idea, but it makes no sense.

There are eight communities right now like mine that have community support for a nurse-practitioner-led clinic, that have the staff, that are willing and able—certified in Ontario, living in those communities—to take on patients, and we have a government that does not even bother to respond to their request for proposals. I sent it a second time—I hand-delivered those things to the minister—and sent it again to the ministry liaison and everybody else I could think of. They don't even get an answer back—and yet we have the resources, we have the knowledge, we have the skills. It would help people with

multiple chronic illnesses gain access to health care, keep those people away from getting into trouble and lining up in an overcrowded emergency room—and they don't even get an answer? And there is not a penny in the act to implement budget measures, Bill 36, to change any of that.

1620

On Monday or Tuesday—it's all a blur—home care was here.

Interjection.

M^{me} France Gélinas: It was Tuesday?

Mr. John Vanthof: I think so, yes.

M^{me} France Gélinas: You remember the association was here at Queen's Park. They came again and talked to each and every one of us. Home care is broken. They cannot recruit and retain a stable workforce. Why, Speaker? Because it doesn't matter how good of a PSW you are; it doesn't matter how good the care you provide to your home care patients, how much you love your job and how good you are at it and how the patients just love you as their PSW. It doesn't matter how hard you work in home care; you will not be able to pay the rent and feed your kids.

At 18 bucks an hour, when you are not paid for travelling from one patient to the next—and in northern Ontario they will show me travelling: They get reimbursed 34 cents a kilometre for driving about 700 kilometres. You know how long it takes to travel 700 kilometres per week in northern Ontario in the middle of the winter on roads that are not kept clean for 16 hours at a time? They don't get paid for any of that. It doesn't matter that they put in 10, 12 hours; they'll be lucky to be paid for seven hours at 18 bucks an hour.

How do we fix this? The government has a role to play, to make sure that we mandate permanent, full-time, well-paid jobs with benefits, with sick days, with a pension plan—and problem solved. We have thousands and thousands of PSWs throughout every city, every community in Ontario who do not work as a PSW because working as a PSW, you cannot pay the rent and feed your kids. It is not a living wage.

So you figure that—home care was here—there would be something in the bill for them. No, Bill 36 has zero money for home care. It's not like it's a new problem, Speaker. It's a problem that we've all known about. But we also know that there is a solution because most frail elderly people did not want to go to long-term care before, but now that they know more about what's going on in some of the long-term care after COVID, they really don't want to go into a long-term-care home. They want to stay home. But it's always the same thing: a frail elderly person, and the PSW that was supposed to come doesn't come.

I get a phone call from Elizabeth at least once a week, where she phones me and says, "My PSW didn't come again last night. I spent the night in my chair." With frail elderly people—with anybody—if you spend the entire night sitting without moving, there's a good chance you're going to develop pressure ulcers. Once they have pressure ulcers, they're in the hospital till the pressure ulcers are not infected anymore, get debrided and all of this. And then

the physician says, “You would be ready to go home, but I don’t want you to go home because I’m afraid the PSW won’t show up again, and you will spend another night sitting in your chair, and if you spend another night sitting in your chair with your pressure ulcers getting bigger and bigger and on the verge of being infected, things are no good.” So they put them on the list for long-term care.

But if we had a strong and robust home care system, all of those people would be happy to go back home. This is where they want to be. We all want to be home—many, many of them. Ontario has the knowledge, they have the skills, they have the know-how to support people in their own home. And you know what, Speaker? It is way cheaper than sending them to a long-term-care home: \$184 a day from the government in a long-term-care home; at least \$400 a day to keep them in a hospital; and we’re talking about 50 bucks a day to keep them at home. Why don’t we do this? It’s cheaper. It’s better care. It’s what people want. But our home care system is broken, and Bill 36 does not give us a single penny to fix this.

I had a lot more to say, but I realize that I only have three minutes.

I would encourage each and every one of you, if you haven’t already done it, to watch the movie put out by SEIU. It’s called *They Called Us Heroes*. It shows the story of what it was like to be providing care during the pandemic. Some 13,407 SEIU health care members took sick from COVID during the pandemic. You will see the story of people who get really sick, spend weeks that turn into months in intensive care, end up needing a double lung transplant to stay alive. You will hear the story of health care workers who get COVID at work and die, pass away from the disease, and what SEIU did to bring their family here, to see them and send the remains back to the country of origin, to try to support that family—and the story of those 13,407 health care workers who took sick at work because they were trying to help us stay healthy. Is there money in Bill 36 for those people who have given up so much?

Are you surprised, Speaker, that we have a health human resource crisis when the people around you are getting sick, when the people you work with—who you know, who support you, who are part of your team—are in intensive care units for weeks and months at a time, waiting for a lung transplant so that they can stay alive? Are you surprised that we have a health human resource crisis? I’m not.

Our system was underpaid before. We are the province that spends the least amount of money on our health care system per capita. We are the province that has the least amount of nurses per 100,000 of population. We are the province that has the least amount of hospital beds per 100,000 of population. We were already in a bad situation. The pandemic came. Our long-term-care system was really ill-prepared, and many, many health care workers took sick. Some of them died, and some of them will never be healthy again. You would have thought that in Bill 36, in 2022, we would see something for those workers, but there is nothing in Bill 36 to help them.

I could go on, with everything else that is not in this bill. It is a real disappointment. I expected better. Our society expected better, but it didn’t come—zero new money for health care in Bill 36, or in the fall economic statement. That’s a shame.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Questions?

Mrs. Daisy Wai: Thank you, member from Nickel Belt, for sharing with us about when we have home care groups coming to us, as well as nurse practitioners. We do not just respond to them when they come to us at Queen’s Park to lobby on anything; I share what they are asking for. I share the message, as well. In fact, this government—before they even come, we have already gotten reorganized, have a bill introduced to get them from hospital to long-term care. We’re doing a lot of that work. But this bill that we’re focused on this time is really for the weaker group, the most volatile, especially the one that is ODSP—we increased the tax credit to \$200 to \$1,000. And then also the one for the seniors: We doubled GAINS—and also for the gas tax. So I’m asking the member opposite, do you think all these are important? The other ones that you mentioned have already been covered earlier, in our past bill.

1630

M^{me} France Gélinas: Speaker, I have talked about Bill 7 before—the bill that the government prepared to deal with people in our hospitals and transfer them to a long-term-care home not of their choosing, up to 150 kilometres away. I could never ever support a bill like this, a bill that takes away the right to give consent, a bill that takes away the right to keep your personal information private. We take those rights away from frail, elderly people—we didn’t. You took the rights away from frail, elderly people—the right to consent and the right to keep your private information private. I could never support this. I never will.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): The member from Oshawa.

Ms. Jennifer K. French: I want to thank the member from Nickel Belt for her very thoughtful and comprehensive remarks on this fall economic statement focusing on health care. I’m awfully grateful that she and others on this side continue to focus on health care. She raised the challenges in home care that we are seeing—that that isn’t being addressed in this bill.

When you talk about PSWs, many of us hearken back to the last couple of years, when we’ve really focused on long-term care. So the four hours of hands-on care that we have said, as a province, is a goal, is something that is a target—I’d like it to actually be what happens. How does this fall economic statement get us closer to that? Or does it?

M^{me} France Gélinas: I think the first time I introduced the four hours of hands-on care—the name of the bill was *Time to Care*—was in 2014; I’m going by memory. I introduced that bill many, many times. That was the level of care that was needed in our long-term-care homes at that time.

Fast-forward to 2024, when this change will actually be implemented: The level of care in our long-term care has gone through the roof. They now do intravenous treatment. They never did that before. They now do all sorts of treatments in our long-term-care homes—provide palliative care—that we never were even thinking of in 2014, when the research was done to say that people needed four hours of hands-on care.

So am I happy that it would go up to four hours of hands-on care? It's better than the 2.25 we have now; yes, absolutely. But is it enough? Probably not. The research needs to be brought up to date, and going up to four hours of hands-on care needs to happen way faster than it is happening now.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): The member from Kitchener–Conestoga.

Mr. Mike Harris: I have a lot of respect for the member from Nickel Belt. She has been here for many years. Oddly enough, I used to watch her on TV, if you can believe it, when I was a lot younger and tuning in to see what was happening in the Legislature. I know she has been a very fierce advocate for health care, being the health critic for the opposition for quite some time.

I hear what she's saying, and I get it, but there have been so many bills that have been introduced in this Legislature that had home care spending, had health care spending, and she voted no for every single one of them—and I know she's going to say there was a poison pill or there was something in it that she couldn't support. But at the end of the day, there has been more money spent in health care by this Progressive Conservative government than any government in the history of Ontario, ever. It's interesting, because no matter what we do as government, they're going to vote against it, and it's just the fact, it's just what's going to happen.

There are so many great things in this fall economic statement that are phenomenal for the people of Ontario. So will the member opposite stand up and support this bill and get it passed through the Legislature?

M^{me} France Gélinas: I would like to disagree for quite a big part—except the part that I'm old and he's young; we'll agree on that, but all of the other parts I tend to have more problems with. There haven't been too many health care bills. I can tell you that I follow each and every one of them.

Bill 7, the last health care bill, did not have anything to do with money; it had to do with taking the rights of people away. That's not an investment.

The Financial Accountability Officer, who follows the money, will tell you that we are \$6.4 billion short to meet the level of care that we were in before; that is, your government is shortchanging our health care system by \$6.4 billion just to keep our overcrowded hospitals, just to keep our very long delays in emergency rooms, just to keep the very long delays in emergency response.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Question?

Ms. Marit Stiles: I really appreciated, as always, the member for Nickel Belt's excellent comments on this legislation and this fall economic statement. The member

pointed to the lack of even one additional penny of spending for health care in this budget, and in other areas.

I think this week we've all, in the official opposition, noticed a troubling tendency by the government members on our committees that are supposed to be reviewing estimates of using tactical manoeuvres to avoid having ministers have to answer these really important questions about spending, about the government's opportunity to outline their spending—and it's a very important moment. I wonder if the member would comment a little bit on the connection that she might see between what the government's economic statement does not provide and their refusal to actually allow us the opportunity to ask these questions.

M^{me} France Gélinas: We live in a democracy. We have to be able to hear people. When you get elected as an MPP, you have a responsibility to bring the voices of the people you represent here at Queen's Park. You also have a responsibility to make sure that the programs and services of Queen's Park are available to the people, the families, the businesses you represent—and more and more of that is being eroded away.

We did the health estimates on Monday. We used to have 14 hours to do health estimates; we had to get it done in three hours.

We had many opportunities to bring people in—I'm thinking of Bill 23—who want to be heard about different bills. But it's always the same: The time for people to be heard is legislated by the majority on the committee—very, very limited. That's not democracy.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): There's time for a quick question.

Mr. Deepak Anand: Madam Speaker, our government has always worked to keep costs down and put more money back into the pockets of the people of Ontario, whether it is doubling the guaranteed annual income—GAINS—or whether it is giving more to the ODSP.

What I specifically want to talk about is the gas tax. We know affordability measures like the gas tax cut work. When gas prices were slowing down, Statistics Canada actually reported that the gas prices fell the most in Ontario out of the other provinces because of this temporary gas tax cut. So my question is very simple: Do you support this?

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Thank you.

Further debate?

Mr. John Fraser: I guess it is a double-bill matinee, because we had a late show a little earlier and I had to get up, and now I'm getting up again.

I do want to say, before I start what I wanted to speak about specifically, that I listened to the member from Nickel Belt, and I had the pleasure—I was able to join the member from Nickel Belt, the member from Sudbury and my colleagues from Don Valley East and Scarborough—Guildwood at *They Called Us Heroes*, a film that everyone in this assembly should watch. It tells the story of people who, at a very, very low wage, risked everything, in some cases, to care for people who are in danger. And they didn't do it because they were getting rich. I mean, they

had to put food on the table, but they did it too because they cared about people, and that's very clear.

1640

When I look at this fall economic statement, I see something different from what I saw in that film. What I saw is, in some ways, an indifference to what's happening in our province right now. I will say, there are two things that I think are good, because I think it's important when you see those things. One is the GAINS increase; it could be more, but that's a good thing. The increase to the claw-back for ODSP—it's not going to help everybody. There's a lot of people who still can't work. That's a good thing to do. It did get rolled back when this government came in, in 2018, and you've increased it beyond where we had it, so I want to say that's a good thing. That's a good thing.

The lack of investment in health care at a time when we are experiencing critical staff shortages and experiencing what is beyond a crisis in our hospitals, not to mention it, not to actually mention a new investment in that, not to say, for instance, in the city of Ottawa—who is asking for \$5 million to train paramedics so they can keep ambulances on the road so those paramedics can take care of those patients that are in emergency departments. We've all driven by emergency departments with six, seven, eight ambulances parked there. We're in the middle of a triple-threat crisis. Not investing in that sends the wrong message to people. It feels like indifference.

Public health has been cut. I don't have the figure exactly, but it's a couple billion dollars. News flash: The pandemic is not over. Actually, right now we've got a pandemic—it's not over—and a couple epidemics probably. You could call it that. We've got RSV and the flu out there, a bad flu, and COVID. Children's hospitals are overwhelmed. What are the children's hospitals asking us to do? We talked about this earlier in the late show; I'm not going to repeat it again. Wear a mask. Please wear a mask. That's all. They need other things. They need other support, but just please wear a mask. I don't understand why that's so hard.

More importantly, back to cutting public health, I heard the Minister of Health say the other day that we were number two in the world for vaccinations. She let us all know, but that was inaccurate. She was wrong. She was boasting about something that wasn't true. If you actually look at our vaccination rate, we did well in the primary series, the first two, but as you go through all the next doses, it declines steadily. The number of five and younger that have been vaccinated is a single digit—single digit. That's nothing to crow about.

What I would liked to have seen in this fall economic statement is—maybe more importantly than a huge number like billions of dollars—an effective public education campaign for vaccination. I don't see anything on TV. I don't hear anything on radio. I do know that when I watch football games south of the border, in the state of Massachusetts—at least the last game I watched—the state was pounding the airways about vaccinations. There were really great commercials, really good, solid commercials that said, “You know what, vaccinations are safe and effective. They will protect your family. You need to get vaccinated.” Sometimes they'd go two, three times in a

row. That's the way advertising works. I think the government side would know that, especially with sporting events, because I did watch their advertising during the campaign on hockey and baseball games, where their political ads appeared two or three times in a row. And that's fine; they paid for it. That's a good thing. But how come they don't actually understand that they can apply the same principles to do some good, to get our vaccination rates up? Because they're not where they need to be. They're anemic. They're underwhelming. They're not satisfactory. They're not good enough.

I just think that there's an indifference to that. There's an indifference that says, “Hey, we're number two in the world.” Well, actually, no, we're number two in the G20, which we're not actually sure is even accurate. What we do know is that steadily, after the primary series—third booster dose, fourth booster dose and even a fifth—those rates dramatically decline. For kids, they dramatically decline. That's not the way vaccination works. You have to get yourself to an amount of the population that slows down the spread of disease.

The second thing I want to talk about—I talked about the public education campaigns; why not put \$20 million or \$30 million into that? Buy some TV advertising. Do some good advertising that will help people, maybe save lives, keep people healthy. People need good information to make informed choices.

It's pretty hard for people to get the information that we need in this province on COVID and public health when there's no more science table. They'll say, “Well, we regularly report.” The Chief Medical Officer of Health appearing once every four weeks to tell us we should be wearing masks—that's not good enough. Why aren't we reporting? Why aren't we reporting vaccination rates? Why aren't we reporting disease rates regularly? Why aren't we saying every day—why is the government, through the Chief Medical Officer of Health and the Minister of Health, not saying every day—that vaccinations are safe and effective, that they'll keep your family safe and healthy, that you should get vaccinated, that you need to wear a mask?

The thing about advertising and the business that we're in here is—we all know this—we all have to say the same damn thing over and over and over and over and over and over again until people start listening, until everybody hears us. Not everybody is listening all the time, and sometimes when they hear it the first time they need to hear it again.

So the really great thing, along with a public information campaign, would be transparency—regular transparency—and reporting of important public health information from trusted sources, so that people could make informed choices for themselves and their families. That would protect Ontarians. That is a thing that's not a huge number, that should have been in the fall economic statement. That is something that needed to be there and wasn't there.

Speaker, I'm happy to take questions.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Questions?

Mr. Anthony Leardi: Part of this government's plan to rebuild Ontario—I was going through it—is a plan to develop the Ring of Fire in the north, one of my favourite topics. This is going to require access roads, and these environmental assessments, we think, are going to be undertaken by a couple of First Nations who want these roads and who want to develop the Ring of Fire. This could unlock great potential for the north. It could solve a lot of problems for Ontario, and it has to be done so that we can guarantee the critical minerals we need to make the electric batteries for the vehicles that are going to be produced in Essex county by Essex county people. That's why I talk so much about the Ring of Fire.

My question to the member is this: Is he going to support the development of the Ring of Fire? Is he going to vote in favour of that?

Mr. John Fraser: Well, that's a bit of a spurious question, because we all know that there are things in this bill that I can't support, and we all vote against things that we can't support. I can support the development of the Ring of Fire—I did while I was in government—but here's the thing—

Hon. Victor Fedeli: You did nothing while you were in government—nothing.

Mr. John Fraser: No, that's not true. That's not true.
Interjection.

Mr. John Fraser: That's not accurate.

Hon. Victor Fedeli: It's 100% accurate.

Mr. John Fraser: It's not accurate.

1650

What I'm saying here is that we've got a problem with our health care system. We've got a big problem, and whether you live in the north or the south or the east or the west in Windsor, we need to do something to address the problems that are there.

The fall economic statement—"underwhelming" is not the word to use; "disappointing" is not the word to use. You're taking your eye off the ball, and the ball right now is, "Is the health care that people need going to be there for them? Will they have the information that they need to make the choices that they need to make so they'll be healthy and safe?"

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Questions?

Mr. Chris Glover: Thank you to the member for your comments today. One of the things that's in here is that the government is going to increase the allowable income for people on ODSP, to rise from \$200 to \$1,000, but only 20% of people on ODSP actually can work or are able to work. So that's 80% of the people who are going to be stuck on \$1,167—actually, plus 5%, so around \$1,200—and it's simply not enough.

That's one of the things, but this is also a Liberal legacy, because under the Liberals, the Ontario Works rate dropped by 30% relative to inflation. The Ontario Works rate was \$722 in 2018, when you were elected out of office, and you were going to raise the ODSP rate by 3%. This government decided 3% was too rich, and they reduced it to 1.5%. Will you support doubling OW and ODSP rates?

Mr. John Fraser: Well, what I will say—and I've said it in this House many times—is that I'm in support of basic income. I believe that's the answer to what we need to do with the changing nature of work, and it will treat everybody fairly and equally.

Without getting too partisan about this, I was around in 2014, so I did not see this as one of the demands when we were doing a minority budget in 2013-14. I didn't hear that. I'm just saying, the thing is, I believe that we need to do things in a different way. We should go to a basic income.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Question?

Hon. Stan Cho: Speaker, I'm glad the member brings up 2013-14, when he says he was here. I was chatting with the Minister of Children, Community and Social Services earlier, and she sent me some interesting statistics: 1% targeted, 2014; 2013, 1%; 2012, 1%; 2011, 1%; 2010, 1%, all while the Liberals were in power. That's the rate that they increased ODSP. How do you explain that?

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): A quick response.

Mr. John Fraser: It's relative to the rate of inflation—different then.

Interjections.

Mr. John Fraser: Well, okay. Do you want to get into that? You've got a plan for autism for kids that you tore down—

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Further debate?

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): The House will come to order.

Further debate? The member from Newmarket–Aurora.

M^{me} Dawn Gallagher Murphy: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I'll be sharing my time today with the great member from Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke.

It is an honour to be able to represent the good people of Newmarket–Aurora and discuss the fall economic statement with my colleagues here today. When I went door to door in my riding and asked my constituents what is the issue that concerns them the most, many of them expressed concern about the economic uncertainty the world is facing today. I also heard from my constituents about the hardships they were facing due to rapidly rising costs and the cost of living these days, as well as parents telling me they do not see their children being ever able to realize the dream of home ownership.

I can proudly say that our government's 2022 fall economic statement, Ontario's Plan to Build: A Progress Update, is bringing relief from financial hardships to all. With our fall economic statement, the government is helping keep costs down for low-income seniors. As prices rise, it is crucial that Ontario supports those that need it the most. As an immediate step, the government will support about 200,000 of Ontario's lowest-income seniors by doubling the GAINS payment for all recipients starting in January 2023. By ensuring that these increases do not affect our seniors' eligibility for other government benefits, seniors will continue to have access to the supports they rely on.

Furthermore, the government is delivering on its promise to help manage rising costs for low-income people with disabilities. Beginning in July 2023, the government plans to adjust core allowances under the ODSP and the maximum monthly amount for the assistance for children with severe disabilities—this benefit will be annually to inflation.

Currently, people on ODSP can only earn \$200 at their job before their government support payments are reduced. Such policies often cause recipients to rethink possible employment as they do not want to lose their government support. I believe that being part of the workforce has many benefits, from developing your skills and abilities to improving your overall mental health and well-being. Our government will make significant changes to this policy by increasing the monthly earnings exemption from \$200 to \$1,000.

Madam Speaker, it is clear that there is only one party who will lower the cost of living for the people of Ontario, and I am proud to be part of that party.

Another challenge which Ontario is facing today is a labour shortage which has affected many sectors of the economy. Whether it is individuals retiring from the workforce or workers who felt the need to leave Ontario to pursue other opportunities elsewhere, including workers who want to become homeowners—however, given the current housing shortage in Ontario, they felt no alternative but to leave our great province. Employers have been expressing to us their need for more employees. I hear this often in Newmarket–Aurora, from restaurants to manufacturers.

This is why our government has made significant investments in skills training, allowing young people and those looking for a chance to start a new career to pursue their dream. Our government is investing an additional \$40 million in 2022-23 in the Skills Development Fund, for a total of \$145 million, which will support youth employment and training, prioritize training programs to help people with prior involvement in the criminal justice system, at-risk youth, Indigenous people, people with social disabilities, those on social assistance, as well as Ukrainian newcomers and others facing barriers to employment.

We are expecting this investment to reach over 393,000 people. In my riding of Newmarket–Aurora, there are a couple of recipients, over this past year, of this Skills Development Fund. Newmarket Chamber of Commerce received a total of \$3.7 million between 2021 and 2022 for their Accelerate Newmarket program. This is an innovative program developed to provide education, training, skills development and support to new and existing entrepreneurs.

Fair Chance Learning received a grant of \$1.5 million and developed the skills accelerator online learning program platform, enabling participants to earn in-demand, industry recognized micro-credentials. Its innovative approach to skills training features a unique blend of wrap-around supports. Just last week, during my constituency week, I was visiting with Fair Chance and I was happy to hear that they have had over 1,000 people go through their program who successfully gained accreditations.

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Last week, when I was attending the Remembrance Day parade in my community, when we returned to the Legion for a time of fellowship, I was introduced to a young man by the name of Cameron. Cameron is an Indigenous youth—also a cadet—who is working full-time as a carpenter. I was asked by the person who made the introduction as to what our government is doing to help young Indigenous people find careers in the skilled trades. I was happy to share with them the recent announcement of our government's investment of \$1.5 million in three Thunder Bay training projects to make it easier for people in northern Ontario to start rewarding careers in the skilled trades. Over 100 Indigenous people will get practical, hands-on training and apprenticeship experience to prepare for well-paying jobs in the north.

The Ontario Jobs Training Tax Credit for 2021 and 2022 provides up to \$2,000 in relief for 50% of a person's eligible training expenses for the year. We estimate this tax credit will assist over 240,000 Ontarians.

Our government understands that the pandemic has had a huge impact on small businesses. Although our economy faces the challenges of rising inflation and slower global growth, the government of Ontario has confidence in the resilience of the province's economy as well as its workers and its people.

We have been able to assist small businesses in these tough times by providing an estimated \$8.7 billion in cost savings and support for Ontario businesses, with \$4 billion going to small businesses, through actions such as lowering payroll costs and providing electricity price relief. The government has also reduced red tape to help create jobs quickly and make it easier to invest and build in Ontario.

On a health care front, our government is building a stronger health care workforce to provide Ontario's nurses, doctors, PSWs and other health care professionals with the resources, support and guidance they need to provide quality care to the people of Ontario. Our plan is expected to add up to 6,000 more health care workers. This is in addition to the 11,700 health care workers, including nurses and personal support workers, already added to the health system since 2020. We have also licensed over 800 internationally educated nurses this year alone. The 2022 budget announced a suite of initiatives to bolster the province's health care workforce, including \$230 million in 2022-23 to enhance health care capacity in hospitals.

I would also like to take this opportunity to highlight how our government's support of the health care system has impacted Southlake Regional Health Centre in my great riding of Newmarket–Aurora. Our government has continued to actively engage with our hospital and health care partners to identify solutions and respond to the pressures our health care system is facing. Thanks to the government's investment of up to \$4.6 million in Southlake's health human resources, the hospital was able to strengthen their health workforce. This investment in the Enhanced Extern and Clinical Preceptor Programs and the Supervised Practice Experience Partnership helps support valuable hands-on clinical experience for nursing and allied health workers, and supports internationally trained

nurses. Investing in our nurses, who are so critical to delivering hospital programs and front-line patient care, is a key priority for our government.

I'll pass it over to my dear colleague.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): The member from Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke.

Mr. John Yakabuski: I want to thank the member from Newmarket–Aurora for sharing her time.

Earlier today, I mentioned in the House about our granddaughter Adelaide, who is nine today, and our granddaughter May, who will be 15 on Friday, and the reason I want to mention that again is that our government recognizes that the future belongs to them. We've got to make sure that we're building the kind of a province that affords them the opportunities that I had.

We used to call Ontario the province of opportunity. I'm old enough to remember that, when it was actually on our licence plates: "Ontario, the province of opportunity." But we've lost that. We lost that under the previous government, when 300,000 manufacturing jobs left the province of Ontario. And we've got a challenge: We're bringing those jobs back each and every day.

We have a challenge today where we have the jobs and we're waiting for people. We're waiting for the people to fill those jobs. Now that's a challenge and a problem, but it's certainly a better problem to have than when you have people losing their jobs like they were under the previous government.

And that's been the focus of our government, to make sure that the opportunity for this generation and the next generation—that future generations such as our grandchildren have the kinds of opportunities that you should have in a tremendous, great province like Ontario.

And that's why we had a budget—it was passed by the House earlier this summer. It was a budget that we ran on in the 2022 campaign, and it was resoundingly supported by the people of Ontario, to the tune of 83 seats for the Progressive Conservatives, when the opposition went from 40 to 31 and the independents roughly stayed where they were.

We've got things in this budget for everybody. I want to say to the Minister of Economic Development, Job Creation and Trade, thank you for over \$8 billion in reduction in business costs in the province of Ontario. Because who is working to provide those jobs for that generation, like our grandchildren—which Adelaide and May are just two of 12, by the way. That is the businesses that are creating the jobs and creating the wealth.

We're not just thinking of the youth, though, I say to the Minister of Economic Development, Job Creation and Trade, who, as some would know, is a senior citizen himself. We're making sure that the people who are in his age category have supports as well, such as doubling the Guaranteed Annual Income System payment. So we're making sure that we're not leaving anybody out when it comes to Ontario: no one left behind; no one left out.

And the fall economic statement—which, by the way, the previous government missed multiple opportunities to bring updates on this condition of the province's finances to the House, multiple opportunities because they didn't

want to face the people. Yes, in 2018, they ran on a budget. Do you remember? They tabled a budget and immediately went to the polls, but the people in Ontario weren't buying what they were selling. They weren't buying what they were selling—it was a fantasy budget. And then when we came into office, they tried to somehow imply that the things that were being offered in that budget were realistic for us as government. No. We ran on a platform, which we have stuck with, that we are going to build Ontario. We're going to bring back Ontario to the kind of province it was in the days when my dad was an MPP, when Ontario was the envy of the entire country—in fact, it was the envy of the world. It was the envy of the world, and those were the days when Ontario moved forward faster than anywhere else.

Some of the things we've done: You know, all those businesses that we're talking about, they all use energy. We have stable energy prices in the province of Ontario. Why? Because businesses said, "You keep doing what you're doing"—

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Just a second. Thank you.

Pursuant to standing order 50(c), I am now required to interrupt the proceedings and announce that there have been six and half hours of debate on the motion for second reading of this bill. This debate will therefore be deemed adjourned unless the government House leader directs the debate to continue. House leader?

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Ms. Andrea Khanjin: Speaker, the member is doing such an excellent job. Please continue.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Thank you. The member from Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke.

Mr. John Yakabuski: Whew. For a minute there, I thought I was going to be cut off. Well, I was, but it was only a temporary thing, and I appreciate that.

So, stable energy prices: Do you know what that means to businesses, every business? And by the way, of that over \$8 billion in reducing of business costs, most of that is for small businesses, the backbone of our economy. They create jobs in every single riding across the province. But every one of them was begging for someone to fix the energy mess that the Liberals left us. I was the energy critic in 2009 when they passed the Green Energy Act. We told them then that this would lead to massive job losses in the province of Ontario. And if you're losing jobs, you can't improve upon the standard of living. That's why we are working, absolutely every single day—and also facing the realities of the future. I want to thank the Minister of Energy for the work that he's been doing as well.

What about the skilled trades? We've heard other people talk about the skilled trades. We have challenges getting projects done these days. Why? Because we have a hard time attracting enough people into the skilled trades because of the failures of the previous government. But no government in the history of this province—and no one can refute what we're about to say—has done more to bring people back into the skilled trades. Women and men, young people all across the province, are being told we

have great opportunities in the skilled trades. I want to thank Minister McNaughton for the work that he has done. The amount of support for the skilled trades—\$145 million over the next four years. But even in my own riding, which is a very, very focused riding on the forestry business, for example: \$5 million, thanks to Minister McNaughton, to help people train for the good jobs in the new forestry business, where technology is such an important component. Without that kind of support, it's very hard to attract people into those jobs, because they've been—a lot of people have been given this sort of pretty notion about what your job should be and that the skilled trades don't fit into there. Well, they do. Technology has changed many of them, but I'll tell you what's really good in the skilled trades: the money; the money.

Our son is a Red Seal carpenter. I know he'll make more money than I do this year, that's for sure. There's not much doubt about that. And he loves his work. He loves his work, and we need more people like him to get into the skilled trades so those projects that are being held up—we've had so many infrastructure projects that aren't moving ahead as quickly as we'd like. Part of the reason is that we need more people in the skilled trades.

Our government, Premier Ford, Minister McNaughton and Minister Dunlop, we're recognizing that we've got a challenge there and we're facing it head-on. We're going to make sure that we can build Ontario. I'm not even going to be able to get into the issue that we're talking about building 1.5 million homes in the province of Ontario in the next two years, because for every job that we create, for every one of those 500,000 immigrants who are coming to Canada and 60% coming to Ontario, we're going to have to have a place for them to live, because if you haven't got a place to live, you're not coming here. I know every day the opposition tries to stand in our way when it comes to building homes in the province of Ontario, but we won't quit, because Ontario comes first.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Now is the time for questions and answers.

M^{me} France Gélinas: I was very impressed when the county of Renfrew came to Queen's Park—not last week; the week before. There was a program that has been developed in Renfrew that allows paramedics to take calls, to make visits to help people gain access to primary care in an area of Ontario where access to primary care is difficult. I already checked. The member was not involved in getting this up and running, although he could have been. I'm just curious to see, did you see any money in the fall economic statement that would allow this project to continue beyond March 31?

Mr. John Yakabuski: Thank you to the member for the question. I can tell her that I have been working with the county from day one on the VTAC, and we can tell you that that is a project and a program that we believe is adaptable anywhere in the province of Ontario, particularly in the rural areas. I'm very proud of our people in Renfrew county, where innovations such as this—this is not the first one. Renfrew county was the birthplace of community paramedics, and we now see that that is being adopted in other places across the province of Ontario.

I can tell you that Mike Nolan, the chief of paramedics, is an absolute genius when it comes to finding ways to deliver health care in a challenged area where we're short of family doctors. And, yes, the province did fund it again for another year so that we have VTAC right till March 31, 2023. We're continuing to work with the government on extending that program.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Questions?

Ms. Natalie Pierre: My question is for the member from Newmarket–Aurora. Thank you for your remarks. I'm wondering if you could tell us some more about the proposed changes to the ODSP system and tell us why they're such important changes to the way ODSP works in Ontario.

M^{me} Dawn Gallagher Murphy: Thank you to the member for the question. Our government is delivering on its promise to help manage rising costs for low-income people with disabilities. In August 2022, the government announced an increase to ODSP, with core allowances and the maximum monthly amount for assistance for children with severe disabilities, of 5%. Beginning in July 2023, the government plans to adjust core allowances under the ODSP and the maximum monthly amount for the ACSD annually to inflation.

The government is also making significant changes that would allow a person with a disability on ODSP to keep more of their money that they earn by increasing the monthly earnings exemption from \$200 to \$1,000 per month. Now, for each dollar earned above \$1,000, the person with the disability would keep 25 cents of income support. These changes would allow the approximately 25,000 individuals currently in the workforce to keep more of their earnings and could encourage as many as 25,000 more to participate in the workforce.

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

Ms. Peggy Sattler: My question is to the member for Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke.

Speaker, 43 women have died in Ontario over the last year in acts of intimate partner violence. Nineteen of those deaths have occurred since June 2022, when the Renfrew coroner's inquest released 86 recommendations to address intimate partner violence. My question is, why does the fall economic statement contain no mention of moving forward with those 86 recommendations that were made in the Renfrew inquest?

Mr. John Yakabuski: I thank the member for the question, and I can assure you that we have had significant discussions with our cabinet ministers, including Solicitor General Kerzner, with respect to the recommendations of that inquest that took place in Pembroke, in my county of Renfrew, in the summertime.

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We've also been working closely with JoAnne Brooks, who has been a tremendous advocate in trying to see the end of intimate partner violence. I remember very well, in 2015, when this terrible thing took place in Renfrew county; we were at the International Plowing Match in Finch at the time.

I can assure the member that our government is absolutely committed to doing everything we can to

eliminate intimate partner violence, but you don't just simply take a list of recommendations without looking at the considerations and making sure that they are well analyzed and considered. But let me assure the member: Our government will act, and has acted, in doing many, many things to reduce and eventually—hopefully, we can—eliminate intimate partner violence.

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

Mr. Rick Byers: Thank you to the members for their comments.

A question to the member for Newmarket–Aurora around infrastructure: As we know, the fall economic statement confirmed the massive infrastructure plan that this government has under way, whether it's over \$60 billion for transit, \$40 billion for health care and infrastructure, \$25 billion for education—on and on and on; broadband. I wonder if the member can reflect a little bit on the potential infrastructure advantages she's seeing in Newmarket–Aurora as being part of the broader GTA and how important transportation, health care and education are to your community. Are you seeing the benefits of that huge infrastructure program in your community?

M^{me} Dawn Gallagher Murphy: Thank you to the member for that question. Our government is moving forward with one of the most ambitious plans in Ontario's history to build. In my riding of Newmarket–Aurora, the Southlake Regional Health Centre is receiving a \$5-million planning grant to plan towards a two-site location. That will be a brand new facility as well as renovating the current site on Davis Drive. So the constituents in Newmarket–Aurora are extremely excited about that.

Our community has grown. The catchment area for Southlake Regional Health Centre has grown immensely. We talk about the population growth; we've got a huge number in Newmarket–Aurora. And, trust me, the constituents are very excited about this growth plan for this infrastructure for health care in my riding of Newmarket–Aurora.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The member for Algoma–Manitoulin.

Mr. Michael Mantha: I want to go back to the member from Newmarket–Aurora. I asked this question twice this morning. I didn't get an answer. I'm going to try with you since you touched on the ODSP rates.

What I'm asking is: On page 7 of the introduction, it talks about what you alluded to in your comments about the increases to ODSP, the clawback which will not happen, which will be increased from \$200 to \$1,000. That's great. But what's missing is—the sentence starts with “We plan to raise the amount...” I'm looking for a date. When is this government planning to actually do that? The inflationary rates will be increased—the inflationary adjustments—by July 2023, but when will those clawbacks be put into place?

M^{me} Dawn Gallagher Murphy: Thank you for the question. These changes that we've discussed about the ODSP would allow the approximately 25,000 individuals currently in the workforce to keep more of their earnings and could encourage as many as 25,000 more to partici-

pate in the workforce. Beginning in July 2023, the government plans to adjust core allowances under the ODSP and the maximum monthly amount for the assistance for children with severe disabilities annually to inflation. This government—

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

Ms. Marit Stiles: It's a real pleasure to rise, on behalf of the official opposition here and my community of Davenport, to respond to the fall economic statement.

The member for Waterloo, in her very excellent response to the Minister of Finance, noted, “Budgeting is about priorities.” Indeed it is. If this was ever an opportunity for this government to share their priorities with Ontarians—wow. They are saying, very clearly, Ontario, they don't support your priorities. Health care, education, the rising cost of living, urgent climate action, truly affordable housing—this government does not share your priorities, Ontario.

They had a choice, and the choice they're making is not to invest in our hospitals or in our schools or in our kids—not one penny more. In fact, they chose instead to sit on billions. That's right, Speaker: In the worst health care crisis in generations, this government is not allocating a single new penny to health care in this fall economic statement.

The government members we've heard all afternoon say they don't need to spend anything more because they're already, apparently, prepared for a surge in illness. Again, I want to reference the member for Waterloo, who mentioned this earlier today: Parents are being sent home from Grand River Hospital because hospitals are at 150% capacity. That does not sound prepared to me.

The government is making a choice. They're making a choice to allow cancelled surgeries, to allow ER closures and long waits. Now there aren't enough pediatric ICU beds for little kids; that, apparently, doesn't merit a single penny in this economic statement. That's what happens when a government like this says, “You know what? We're just going to sit on this cash. We're just going to sit on it,” instead of using it for a purpose like, for example, what health care workers, the experts, are telling us needs to happen, like incentivizing the recruitment and the retention of health care workers, bringing them back into our health care system and helping ensure—and this is very important—that they stay there, which is what they want to do.

Let's be clear, right? Personal support workers, nurses, RNs, RPNs, so many of our front-line health care workers—they're saying, very clearly, “We want to work in health care. We trained for this. This is what we do, and we care for these patients. But we can't afford it anymore, and we can't afford this kind of treatment. We can't afford to be exhausted and stressed all the time, and we don't want to be providing substandard care for our patients.”

Nurse practitioners are telling you today, meeting with MPPs all around the Legislature, saying they're underemployed. They could be serving—and the member from Nickel Belt has told you this—800 people, each one of

them, who aren't getting care right now, who don't have access.

Meanwhile, this exodus of health care workers is continuing. Why doesn't this government seem to care? Why isn't it reflected in investment, in health care, in this economic statement? We don't know why. We don't know. Or do we?

Actually, I was looking today at a story on Global—I think it was Global—that had done an FOI of the minister's briefing book. It was very interesting because we've definitely been questioning this government for months—for years, really—on what seems to be a burgeoning private delivery of health care services. Global, through freedom of information, got a hold of the talking points in the Minister of Health's binder. In that, there was, actually, a line in that document, which said originally, in response to questions from the opposition about the privatization of health care, that what the minister was being advised to say was, "No, we are not privatizing health care. Full stop." That's what the document read. And then it said, "Ontarians will continue to use their OHIP card not their credit card when receiving services."

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Do you know what's interesting, Speaker? In these documents that were obtained by Global some time around August of this year—the document was amended, and that key phrase that I just shared with you was scratched out, was eliminated. The commitment, in fact, as we know here all too well, has never been uttered by the Minister of Health, and it wasn't just an oversight. I think that's very clear. This was intentional, and that's what that story tells us; it confirms it. Again, it's not a mistake. It's not the minister just not getting to that in her response to the questions. It's an intentional thing to leave that mention out. Why? We're going to get to that.

Over and over and over, the official opposition have shared examples of what's happening in our ridings and also, frankly, what's happening in the ridings of the government members, because sometimes those stories don't make it here, strangely. We know that their constituents have concerns as well. In fact, what we hear instead from the other side is, "It has always been like this"—that's what we heard earlier today—but, sorry, it hasn't. It's worse, and it's getting worse and worse. The nursing shortage is 300% greater now than it was two years ago. It shouldn't be acceptable that our pediatric ICUs are over capacity. Even if that was normal, that's not okay.

My office has been deluged recently with parents reaching out, worried that their children and their children's classmates have been home sick for more days than they've been in class since September. Many of these are workers who themselves—their sick days have maxed out, if they're lucky enough to have any. These parents are the ones waiting 14 or 20 hours for emergency room care for their kids.

Just this week, Ontario's Chief Medical Officer of Health said the province's health system is facing "extraordinary pressures."

And yet, despite this crisis that's clearly before us, the government is projected to spend \$6.2 billion less in health

care than what's needed through to 2025—and I want to repeat: not one penny more in this fall economic statement. I guess the government hasn't seen enough babies on ventilators yet. We'll have to continue to bring those stories forward—I hope we don't, because I hope it doesn't continue, but boy, I tell you, we will.

As staffing shortages plague our hospitals—

Interjections.

Ms. Marit Stiles: That was funny, apparently, according to some over there.

The Ford government touts that they have added 11,700 health care workers since 2020. But we know that 47,000 new health care workers need to be hired per year for the next three years just to maintain current service levels, which, as I've just reminded you all, are not good enough.

Why are health care workers leaving the system? As I mentioned earlier, it's because of burnout, because of stress, because of exhaustion and, frankly, because of the disrespect being shown by this government—a government that continues to cap their wages with Bill 124.

So, you see, there's a pattern here: Starve the system, create a crisis, and then use that as an excuse to divert more public dollars into private pockets, the pockets of your friends. Somebody profits, but not the people of this province, because more and more of those dollars—and we've seen it over and over and over again—go to administration, to CEO salaries. Power profits from disaster. That's what's happening here in Ontario today.

This Minister of Health was told by her advisers, "Don't say the words, 'No, we are not privatizing health care.' Don't say it out loud, because we sure as hell are." We know it's not just an oversight. We know it's intentional.

As I mentioned earlier, I cannot believe that this government isn't aware of what Ontarians are experiencing. And if they're not—if, for some reason, any of the members opposite don't really get the state of the crisis we're in right now, go back, pick up the phone, talk to your constituents. Open the door. Here's an idea: Be there on a Friday. Be there on a Friday when people like education workers and parents and health care workers show up at your offices to talk to you. Be there. Don't shut your offices. Be there, open the door, talk to them, listen to them.

You know, I've been thinking a lot about it because I can't—again, why starve the system? And we know; I've said what I think, what I suspect, but my greatest concern is that this is all about ideology. It's not about what works best, because we know—and you look at it all around the world, jurisdiction after jurisdiction—that we know that public health care, that public education, that dollars that are put into public systems are much more efficient and much more effective for more people.

We see the same thing happening in education, as well. I want to talk a little about that, because it's a very similar pattern that we're seeing here, right? Over the past few weeks—and I want to say, in two ways: Both in terms of the privatization, eventually, of education where this is heading, but also in terms of how this crisis is presenting itself. Because a lot of it is down to the people on the front

lines, and what I think will continue to be a growing staffing crisis in education. Over the past few weeks, we saw the government lowballing CUPE education workers and imposing a collective agreement on them, with very meagre increases—really well below inflation. And remember, again, these are the lowest-paid education workers.

The fall economic statement continues that trend of underspending. In fact, comparing the document before us, this fall economic statement, to the FAO report from October, the government is going to be short \$1 billion in education from 2024-25. What does that mean for our kids or our education workers? I can tell you that, for the average person out there watching this, that means—let me explain it—repair backlogs persist and grow; it means students sitting in crowded classrooms; it means inadequate educational assistant staffing ratios—so that means less help for kids with special needs, and that means less support for those kids in the classroom, and that means it's tougher for teachers, it's tougher for the other kids and it's tougher for those kids.

I can tell you, I talked to a lot of education workers across this province and I've asked many teachers and educational assistants and others, "What are the numbers that you think we need to increase the number of it? How much do we need to increase educational assistants by in this province?" And, generally, what I get back is something like, "If you triple the number we have now, it wouldn't even start to address the need because need is so great and the number of educational assistants is so low."

I was talking to folks in a riding in northwestern Ontario recently, in a school board up there, and they have a shortage right now of 44 educational assistants. That board, which is a little unusual, is able to contract out in a crisis like this. So, they're contracting out—and you know where that money is all going? Into administration. So they're paying way more to some outside company to help bring in people to provide that kind of assistance than they would if they just hired more people. But they can't hire more people. Why? Why can't they find more people? Because nobody wants to work for this pittance of a wage. Because people can't afford it. Because they could be juggling and doing a full-time job as an EA and still have to go to a food bank.

There's something very wrong in our province. I want to just let that sit for a minute. There's something very wrong in our province if you have a full-time job—any full-time job—and you still have to go to a food bank. What's wrong? If you are an educational assistant, somebody we know we desperately need in our educational system right now, and you work a full-time job and then—like a woman I met the other day in Barrie. After she finishes a full-time job as an EA, she then goes to FedEx and works for FedEx for hours, and she still struggles to pay the bills for her and her family. She only does the EA job because it's so meaningful, because she loves it and she knows the kids and their families need her.

1740

This is a very sad situation. But what is this government's solution to the problems in our education system? Hand out cheques for private tutoring. Encourage people

to go to the private sector for help. What a surprise. Rather than take all those millions and fund the public education system to provide the excellent education that Ontarians expect—I'll tell you, I first came to this province from Newfoundland to go to university, and I stayed in this province, like a lot of people of my generation, because Ontario had excellent opportunities. There were great schools. There was health care in your community. The resource sector—the fishery in my province was falling apart. In Ontario, there was hope—not anymore.

As I pointed out earlier today to some of the members opposite, people are leaving our province to go to other provinces, because you can no longer afford to raise a family on a working-class salary, because you can't afford to keep up with the tutoring costs that you have to pay in addition to everything else because your public school does not have enough supports in it.

A reporter who's quite friendly with the current government recently floated the idea of vouchers. "Oh, let's get voucher programs going. Let's start giving people more 'choice' in education." Can we just say I kind of predicted that? It was buried in a little report from PricewaterhouseCoopers in 2018, when this government was first elected. They got PricewaterhouseCoopers to do a little analysis of where our government could find cost savings. There were just a couple of lines on education: "Let's explore voucher and charter school options, like in the United States." That's what it said. I tell you, I looked at it and thought, "Well, here we go again. We could have seen this coming." And the next thing you know, the government over there was proposing laying off 10,000 education workers—10,000 teachers in that case. Why? How on earth could that possibly help our children?

Fewer teachers means bigger classrooms. Fewer educational assistants means less support for our kids. This is a government that is not interested in paying them a decent wage, and it's not interested in investing one single penny more in this mini budget/fall economic statement, even though they know that this is hurting Ontarians. Why? Because this is the crisis they are creating to lead us in the direction that I've shared.

I want to say, Mr. Speaker, in wrapping up here, that since April, when this government first tabled its budget, inflation has gone up. Our health care crisis—yes, it has worsened. This government had a choice and a chance to make key adjustments to shore up health care, to shore up education; they chose not to. It's about priorities. It's a choice. They did not choose your priorities, Ontario. And do you know what else? These Conservative choices are costing us too much. They're costing us really excellent people who take care of our kids in schools, in hospitals, who take care of the most vulnerable people in our province. They're going to leave the system.

We have a staffing crisis, and nothing this government has proposed in this economic statement does anything to truly address that. It's a very significant missed opportunity. We can do better and we must do better for the future generations in Ontario.

I want to thank you, Mr. Speaker, for the opportunity to speak to this.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Questions to the member for Davenport?

Mrs. Robin Martin: I was listening to the member, and I find it interesting that your complaint is that there isn't money in the fall economic statement for health care or education or other important priorities. Certainly they're important priorities for this government. As you know, we just passed a budget in August of this year and there were historic investments in health care, in education—lots of pennies.

You said there's not a single penny for health care or education in this budget, but this isn't the budget. This is the fall economic statement. It's an update. The money allocated in the budget, passed just a few short months ago, of course has not all gone out the door the next day; it's money for the year, for the programs that we're funding.

I ask the member—you must acknowledge that we've made lots of investments in health care and education in our budget, and that that money is flowing to fund programs in health care and education right now.

Ms. Marit Stiles: I thank the member from Eglinton–Lawrence for her question. I think maybe she didn't hear me, or didn't follow along: not a single new penny.

Let me be clear, Mr. Speaker: What was in the budget previously was not enough, and the proof is in the pudding. It's right now. It's the crisis we're experiencing. If you think that this government is somehow solving the recruitment and retention crisis in health care, in education, news flash: You're not. It's not working. It's not enough. You need to do better. It's not happening in this fall economic statement, and that is disappointing—a missed opportunity.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): I'll remind members to make their comments through the Chair, not directly across the floor of the House.

The next question, the member for Trinity–Spadina.

Mr. Chris Glover: Spadina–Fort York.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): There I go again.

Mr. Chris Glover: Thank you, Speaker.

I want to thank the member from Davenport, because you're talking about exactly what we should be talking about in this House, that this government is creating a crisis in our public education and our public health care systems in order to privatize them, in order to open them up to private, for-profit companies.

We're seeing it with our health care system. Right now, we've got what the FAO is declaring is a \$6.2-billion inflationary cut to our health care system, and at the same time, this government has got Bill 124. They're losing nurses. Nurses are going to these private, for-profit agencies, some of which are owned by the former Conservative Premier of this province. The University Health Network reports that they have spent \$6.7 million on agency nurses because of the staffing shortage.

This is exactly how this is happening: create a crisis; open it up for private, for-profit agencies; and then profit off of it. Can you talk about why this government's direction is so wrong and so harmful to all of the people of this province?

Ms. Marit Stiles: Thank you so much to the member from Spadina–Fort York for that. I appreciate the question. It's a really important one.

My advice would be to follow the money, as he put it. Follow the money. If you see where the money is going, and you link it to the donations and the people behind it—and generally, I would say, too, this government's ideological slant, which is that somehow the market is going to magically solve everything, when in fact what we see over and over again is that when you put money into private health care or private long-term care, a lot of that money, more of those public dollars, go to things like administration, shareholders, CEOs and bonuses, and not actually to patient care.

And so it really is a very wasteful approach to governing, actually. It's a very wasteful approach. It's inefficient, and frankly, it's going to result in continuing degradation of the quality of care in our province and it's going to cost us more.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): The member from Elgin–Middlesex–London.

Mr. Rob Flack: It's interesting to stand here this evening and listen. Every time I hear a word come from the opposition, it's "crisis" this, "crisis" that. This government, this Premier, this minister have invested more in health care than any government in the last 15 or 20 years. At least acknowledge that. There's lots of work to do.

My question is, will the member opposite support the proposed legislation that would let a person with a disability on ODSP keep more of the money they earn by increasing the monthly earnings exemptions from \$200 to \$1,000 a month? Do you support that?

1750

Ms. Marit Stiles: First of all, let me just say again, if the member from Elgin–Middlesex–London doesn't see this as a crisis, I don't know what else we can do here. People in Elgin–Middlesex–London, call your MPP. Explain the situation.

In terms of spending, it's pretty basic—the cost of things has gone up, but spending has not, at the same rate. So that is effectively a cut. It's like, if you've got to replace your porch because your porch is falling apart, it costs more to replace your porch this year than it did last year—if you're lucky enough to have a porch. It's apples and oranges, and this government knows that and is choosing not to do what needs to be done.

I want to also mention on the ODSP thing, there's a hint of going in a direction that is not harmful, but the doubling of ODSP rates still hasn't happened.

When you combine everything in this economic statement, all the harmful and, unfortunately, inadequate content in this, it's a drop—

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Thank you. The member from Mushkegowuk–James Bay.

Mr. Guy Bourgoon: Thank you to my colleague for her presentation.

The government is doubling the Ontario Guaranteed Annual Income System for a year. In my riding, some people came to my office and said that because of the increase, they could not qualify anymore for the Trillium

program. That means they lost dental care and they lost their credit for electricity and other services. This new increase will directly affect people who are low-income, elderly. Yes, we're increasing; in other words, we're putting money in one pocket but we're removing it from the other pocket. I would like to hear from you what you think of this program and how it is going to affect seniors.

Ms. Marit Stiles: I want to thank the member, who does such an extraordinary job advocating for his community. Thank you so much for raising that point. Like any piece of legislation that comes before us in this place, the devil is in the details with this government. I hope that they've seen the error of their ways and that they're going to address that, especially since you're doing such a great job of advocating around it, but I fear they won't. I think that's part of the plan here—taking from one pot and then putting it in another. In the end, these people lose out again—always. So I think it's very unfortunate. I hope that the government will make amendments and address this, and I hope that people will not lose out because of this government's terrible decision.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Question?

Mr. Anthony Leardi: The plan to build contains a \$40-million enhancement to the skilled trades fund. That brings the total of that to \$145 million, and \$3 million of that is specifically earmarked to train persons of First Nations in skilled trades. I think that's wonderful, and I think it should be done. My question to the member for Davenport is, does she support this initiative and will she vote for it?

Ms. Marit Stiles: I want to thank the member from Essex for that question.

In my riding, I have one of the highest concentrations of folks in the trades anywhere in this province. I think it's wonderful. It's exciting. I know the former member from Timmins is working a lot on bringing more First Nations people into the trades, and that's pretty exciting stuff.

But I think that what seems to be happening here, just generally, when it comes to Indigenous affairs in this budget is, a lot of one-time COVID transfers and not a lot of long-term, significant commitments. In fact, there's almost no other mention here, I think, of First Nations or Indigenous programs—any kind of funding or anything in this economic statement.

Again, what this government tries to do is, they throw a whole lot of stuff into an omnibus bill and then expect us to support something that is, overall, just going to do nothing to address the crisis.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Further debate? The member from God's country.

Mr. Dave Smith: God's country. Thank you, Speaker.

When we take a look at the fall economic statement—it has been talked about a fair bit; well, more than six hours so far. It is just that: It's an economic update on where we are in the province.

During COVID, we made some changes. We switched in the first year of COVID and we had our budget actually come out at the fall economic statement time instead of a fall economic statement. Maybe that has caused some confusion for some of the opposition members, because they remember back two years ago, almost three years ago

now, where the actual budget was put out at the time period of the fall economic statement.

The reality is, our budget was passed in August, and this is just that mid-year update. It's not that long-term vision for the next five, 10 years for the province. It's where we stand right now on things and what the forecast is going to be in the short term. We're not talking about long-term projections on the economic statement. It's just the update on where things were in the current year.

There have been some excellent updates, some excellent adjustments that have been made. I know a lot of members have focused on a lot of different things, and I'm going to talk about some things in the fall economic statement that most members haven't talked about. I want to touch on one in particular, and that's the Skills Development Fund. There's an additional \$40 million that's being put into the Skills Development Fund.

Why would we do something like that? The reason that we're doing that is we're seeing a great deal of success in the Skills Development Fund in actually retraining people, in actually getting people placed. It's kind of a novel concept: You have a fund, something that was put out in the spring, and it's implemented very quickly and you're seeing great results with it. Why wouldn't you, then, make an adjustment and increase the funding to it to get more results? That's exactly what we're doing.

Now, I'll talk specifically in my riding. In Peterborough, the YMCA is administering this. We had an announcement with it. What a great thing. We have a number of people who were out of the workplace for a significant period of time. They have come through this program and are now gainfully employed.

I'll talk slightly hypothetically about one individual. It's a true story, but I haven't had the opportunity to get in touch with her to see if I can use her name, so I'm going to call her Laura—Laura is not her actual name. She's somebody who had been out of the workplace for a couple of years because she was acting as a caregiver for a family member and didn't have the confidence to go back into the workplace. She didn't know what she was going to do, and enrolled in this program. Lo and behold, she got retraining, she got the skills she needed for an interview, she had the skills that she needed to do a resumé, and she got a job. She's working as a PSW. Why? Because she had been a caregiver for a family member and actually enjoyed it and saw that as her career calling.

I'm 52; she's older than I am. This is somebody who, realistically, has 10 or 15 years that they could have been in the workforce before they would have been ready to retire, but they didn't have the confidence to go back into the workforce until they went through this program. One of the things that has been said to me about it is, "How many employers will take someone who is in their mid-fifties or older as that first opportunity with a company?" She was really, really concerned about that, but this is a program that we're actually seeing results from.

1800

Premier Ford has said a number of times that you can't manage something unless you measure it. He's right. If you're not measuring success, then you have no way of

knowing, no way of looking at whether or not a program is actually successful.

There are different metrics that you can use. Previous governments—I won't specifically name the McGuinty or Wynne governments—but previous governments, after the last Conservative government in the 1990s and the early 2000s, measured based on the number of people who went into the program, not the number of people who completed the program and were successful in getting a job.

This is one of the seismic shifts in what we're doing with this particular fund; we're measuring not the number of people who go in the front door, but we're measuring the number of people who graduate and actually find meaningful employment. Because it's about finding that job. It's about having that income. It's about being productive. And that's what we're measuring, and that's where we see the success, and that's why we're investing an additional \$40 million into it; because it is something that's successful.

The next thing I want to talk about is a program that probably 99% of the province of Ontario knows nothing about, and that's the Dual Credit Program. There has been talk about education. Sometimes people talk about education in a very positive manner; sometimes people talk about it in a very negative manner. Sometimes there are a lot of things that people complain about in education. This is one of those success stories though.

We know right now that there's about 380,000 openings in skilled trades. We know that, for generations, the education system has devalued any job where you've gotten your hands dirty. And probably for 30 years there was a focus on: When you go to high school your next step is that you're going to go to university, and you're going to go to university because you're going to get a good job.

Here's the cold, hard reality. Our caucus has twelve lawyers. Love them all to bits—great individuals—love them to bits. I'm not sure we need a whole bunch more lawyers, but we've got twelve of them. They spent four years at university to get their undergrad, and they went on and got their law degree on top of that, and they paid for it every step of the way. And they went to university in total for up to eight years, some of them more because they specialized in things.

They walked away from the university with this massive debt, and then they started working as a lawyer, articling first, and they were doing all of those things. But they didn't have any income while they were going to school. It takes 10 years before you get back to the point where you're really earning a good income as a lawyer.

Now I'm going to challenge the theory on that and that that's the way that someone should go. I pay almost as much per hour for a plumber as I do for a lawyer. There's a shortage of plumbers, and I can guarantee you—regardless of what is happening in the economy—we all do stuff that requires plumbers, and it doesn't matter what's happening with the economy. But when the economy is tanking, we don't always need to have lawyers.

So there is great job security in some of those skilled trades. I'm going to actually quote the Minister of the Environment, Conservation and Parks: "You can't just clench." I had to get that in on Hansard.

But the reality is: As a student, you get paid to be an apprentice. You get paid while you're going to school. Then when you finish, you have a very good income for it.

And that brings me back to dual credits. Why would I be talking about being in skilled trades and dual credits? What do the two have to do with each other? In high school, what the Dual Credit Program allows you to do is take college courses at the same time as your high school credits, and that's where the dual credit comes in. If you want to be in a skilled trade, it is possible for you to get more than a year's worth of your apprenticeship while you're still in high school, getting high school credits. You're shortening the length of time it takes for you actually to become a journeyman.

This is a program that absolutely is working for a lot of students, and we are filtering high school students, encouraging them to get into the skilled trades. By doing this, we're reducing the length of time it takes once they're finished high school to actually get their Red Seal in it. We're reducing the cost for the student because you don't have to pay for those college credits to get it and then they become more productive citizens sooner for us, filling that gap of the 380,000 that we're missing right now. Fantastic ideas—this is something that should be applauded, and it's not something that's talked about enough.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): The member from Oshawa.

Ms. Jennifer K. French: As the member spoke about budgeting and about government priorities as we're talking about the fall economic statement, one of the things we've been hearing in our community from the students—and I'll riff off of his comments about students. The people who are coming out of post-secondary right now with significant OSAP loans just got punched in the gut by this government who decided to follow the Bank of Canada interest rate raises and, for no reason really except to grab some quick money from OSAP repayment, the OSAP interest rates now are jumping up to basically 7% from 3.5%. That was a choice this government made on the backs of students as they're trying to set off on this next journey and have a successful future. Why?

Mr. Dave Smith: Actually, I summarily dismiss the notion of the comment that came out, that we were trying to do something to get money off the backs of students. What we're trying to do is, we're trying to encourage so many of our youth to be taking a look at the skilled trades because we have such a shortage in them.

Imagine right now, the demand that we have up in northern Ontario in the mining sector—because Ontario is going to be the world leader in critical minerals. We're going to be the world leader in electric vehicles, we're going to be the world leader in the processing of all of those things. You'll be able to go from raw material to final product all here in Ontario, and we're encouraging all of those youth right now in high school to head down that path because that's going to give you a career for the rest of your life, that is going to feed your family and do so much more for you.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): The member from Brampton West.

Mr. Amarjot Sandhu: Thank you to the member from Peterborough for a wonderful speech.

Mr. Speaker, we have heard lectures from the opposition time and time again, but there was no action when it comes to making life more affordable for Ontarians. This is a government that is making life more affordable for Ontarians by cutting the gas tax, eliminating licence plate stickers and putting more money back into the pockets of Ontarians. Can the member explain and give us some detail on why the proposed measures to extend the gas tax cut is so important to keep costs down for the people of Ontario?

Mr. Dave Smith: Thank you so much for that question because I didn't have time in my 10 minutes to actually talk with about that, but I'm going to bring it back to my riding because, as everyone knows, I refer to it as God's country. It's one of the greatest places to live.

The challenge that we have—and I'm going to talk about one community in particular: Apsley is part of my riding. They're up in North Kawartha. They're about a 40-minute drive from the city of Peterborough. They're about 40-minute driver from Bancroft. They're about a 50-minute driver to Havelock. The only grocery store they had burned two years ago.

Now, imagine if you lived in the city of Toronto and the grocery store across the corner from you burned down. Not that big a deal; you go to the other one that's only another block away you. A 40-minute drive to get your groceries—you're doing that every week. A 40-minute drive to take your kids to the sports centre, to take your kids to the theatre, to do all of those things. Gas is something you have to have because, right now, electric vehicles don't have a big enough range that you can go from one side of my riding to another side of the riding. This is tangible savings for all of those families in my area by reducing the gas tax.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Further questions?

Mr. Chris Glover: I appreciate the comments from the member from Peterborough. At the beginning of your comments, you were talking about ODSP and increasing the allowable income from \$200 to \$1,000, which is a good measure, but that's only 20% of Ontarians with disabilities that are on ODSP. The rest are going to have to try to find a way to live on \$1,200 a month, and the average rent in downtown Toronto is now \$2,400 for a one-bedroom. The average rent for a one-bedroom across the province is \$1,900. So we have at least 5,000 Ontarians with disabilities who are homeless. This financial update does nothing for them. What will your government do so that Ontarians with disabilities are no longer homeless?

1810

Mr. Dave Smith: I'm not sure what speech he was talking about, because I started off talking about the Skills Development Fund. I only had 10 minutes. I focused on a couple of specific things.

But what I will say is that our government is laser-focused on reducing the costs for everybody in this province, to make sure that every person in Ontario has an opportunity to live here successfully. And all you have to

do is look at the different types of bills that we have put forward.

More houses faster—why? Because the average price of a rental one-bedroom in Toronto is more than \$2,000, as the member said. Why is that? Because there are none that are available. The only way we're going to fix the housing problem, the only way we're going to fix the high cost of rental properties is to build a whole lot more of it really quickly so we can get people into them.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Question?

Mr. John Jordan: I thank the member from Peterborough—Kawartha for his focus on the trades. Those jobs are the backbone of our economy. Without the trades, new construction will grind to a halt, transit systems will stop and our economy will falter.

Skilled trades have long been ignored by previous governments. Can you tell this House what we are doing to promote the skilled trades? I went to school in the 1970s—I know everybody was thinking it was the 1980s—and there was a stigma attached to skilled trades. What is this government doing to address the skilled trades shortage?

Mr. Dave Smith: Thank you very much for that question. I got a text message while you were asking the question from my staff: "You're getting a little bit too excited about it when you talk about the skilled trades, so try and tone it down a little bit. Don't be so excited about the skilled trades themselves." But how can you not be excited about the skilled trades?

One of the things that we're doing is we're working with schools. I mentioned the dual credits. That is a fantastic way for students to be fast-tracked so that while they're in high school—imagine this: You're in grade 10. You have the opportunity then to take a dual credit. Then you go to grade 11 and you have the opportunity to do a dual credit or two. And then you get to grade 12 and you have the opportunity to do a dual credit or two. Now you have one less semester in the trade school that you have to go to. You're getting through the program faster. You're graduating from the program faster, you're getting into the world of work faster and you're making more money quicker.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): The member from Nickel Belt.

M^{me} France Gélinas: I was wondering if the member was surprised that there was no money in this announcement for Peterborough Regional Health Centre, which has been struggling with a health human resources crisis. I would have liked this government to put incentives in place, to repeal Bill 124 so that health care workers could be respected and bring them back to the Peterborough Regional Health Centre so that the wait times can be better managed.

Mr. Dave Smith: It's always great to talk about my riding. It's unfortunate that the member from Nickel Belt actually doesn't know what's going on in my riding when she's talking about that, because Peterborough is one of the greatest areas. We are piloting a fantastic program with community paramedicine.

What we are doing in Peterborough that is going to reduce the wait times at the ER: Treat and release. So when the paramedics get called—previously, the only place they could go was the emergency department, but now, with the changes we have made to it, they can redirect where needed. They can take somebody who has an overdose. They can give them naloxone, and rather than take them to the emergency department, they could take them to the consumption and treatment site now, where they have the people there who can monitor them. They could take somebody who perhaps had a fall—it wasn't something that really, truly was an emergency, but you had to deal with the wound. If you deal with the wound, they don't need to go to the emergency department. They can then be released—

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Thank you. Further debate?

Ms. Jennifer K. French: I'm pleased to be able to stand and offer a few comments today on the fall economic statement, which is that economic update where we would hope to see the government—well, where we do see the government priorities and what they've budgeted for. What we don't see are the priorities that folks across our ridings are calling for. We don't see the needs addressed that our neighbours in our communities are asking for to be met. So it is a missed opportunity, I think, on a lot of fronts, but I'll break it down a little more specifically.

This fall economic statement should be a call to action. We all look around and see a lot of reasons to worry these days. Whether you're a senior, whether you're a parent of a young child, whether you are a student heading out into the world, there are a lot of concerns for folks right now. It should be a call for action when it comes to health care and education, but there is no money in this fall economic statement—no new money for health care, no new money for education. There's nothing for mental health, autism—we're not meeting the needs of everyday Ontarians.

I want to bring the voices of some actual folks and some of these—you know, these are letters that we're all receiving, Speaker. All of the MPPs in this House are receiving them. Whether the government members read them or address these concerns—I don't know how they triage the needs coming into their office. But I'm happy to share this letter from someone. I'm going to protect her identity because it's sensitive, but she wrote and said:

"I am currently living in an abused women shelter. I fled my partner and I'm grateful to have survived.

"Along with the many other women I'm currently staying with we have nowhere to go, our only option is to stay in a shelter as landlords continue to discriminate against us due to our financial situation and personal circumstances. I'm extremely upset at the fact that no one is helping myself and the other women, we are all on some kind of waiting list to get subsidized housing and yet we are told we can wait up to two years to find affordable housing, we fled our abusers for a reason and we now face the challenges of getting our lives back together and yet there are no resources available to help us find affordable housing.

"When we try to find even a place to rent it's so high and it's not affordable. Why is the government not willing to help people like myself who actually need the help... Most women who have fled their abusers return as staying in a shelter for more than three months is not allowed and when you have no other options do you really blame them....

"Our lives along with our children's should matter. Having a safe place to live should not be considered a luxury it's a basic need and yet we cannot obtain a place. Any resources you do find there is no funding....

"I don't want to be homeless anymore I want a safe place to live that I can pay for monthly and actually afford it."

That's a real person who's really hurting. I don't know how to help her beyond making her feel heard, because the waiting list is real, because the services in our community are frozen in time. Will they get government funding? Will they get any more? They're working with what they've got and it isn't enough. And the needs are through the roof in the community—if they're lucky enough to have a roof.

They're real folks, and there's nothing in this fall economic statement for the shelters. There's not money in here for the kind of housing that she's asking for. This government can talk all day about housing, sort of, but they're not talking about affordable housing. They're not talking about protections for renters. This government has failed to increase supports for tenants in need of affordable rental housing and failed to increase funding for homelessness, and instead it's actually cutting funding. So I guess that's what I'll tell her.

Other folks like her that are in dire need right now—we've been talking about ODSP and there are some changes that we have been talking about that are positive for some, for 20% of the people. But for those on ODSP, it doesn't go far enough for people to survive. The change that the government is making—and while we agree it's a positive change—will only help roughly 20% of current ODSP recipients. I was very proud to go outside with other members of the NDP—was it last week or the week before?—when folks were here, calling for this government to raise the rates. We were glad to go out and talk with them.

1820

I watched the—what is he now; he was the President of the Treasury Board—the Minister of Finance; I watched him walk by that rally. We were there talking to them to bring their voices in here. I don't see enough for them in this.

People in Ontario with disabilities who can't work are choosing to die because they can't live on the pittance that is provided. ODSP rates kill because they don't provide Ontarians with disabilities enough income to live. So, some changes, but not the doubling of the rates that we're calling for or that is needed.

I raised a number of issues from people that we've heard from in our community, folks who don't want to be forced to live beholden to skeezy landlords who take advantage of their desperation, like was outlined in the letter

from the woman I read. They can't find safe places. They're in debt. They're in debt to utility companies. They are trying to clothe their children and they can't.

I want to read something else. My staff works with folks on a regular basis who call in about one issue but often people have complicated needs. My staff was telling me about Heather, who is a retired education worker. She had to "retire" early because of a physical injury at work in the mid-2000s that prevented her from continuing her work. Her CPP disability benefits are so low because she retired at 39—and her wages at the time were low then—that she has had to return to work driving a school bus. She still doesn't earn enough to live on. Her work is aggravating her disability and making it worse. She has a disabled son she's trying to support. She has to use food banks to make her money stretch.

Why am I talking about Heather? Because she's one of our neighbours who doesn't see any of her needs being met in the fall economic statement. I don't know how this government classifies folks like Heather and others who are complicated folks with real needs. Try meeting them.

We've got a lot of seniors—and you'll probably start hearing this. We've got a lot of low-income seniors who might have, at one point, qualified for the Ontario Seniors Dental Care Program. The lowest of the low-income seniors, who at one point qualified for that, I think now because the feds have upped—barely; they've increased—some payments to them, a lot of them are going to suddenly be ineligible, like people we're working with, by like \$18 bucks. So because the feds have incrementally increased some of their benefits, it has bumped them out of qualifying for your Ontario Seniors Dental Care Program, which already was too low. The threshold didn't allow enough people to qualify initially. I'm willing to bet that when that year is up for those folks, they will no longer qualify. Could the government not have made some allowance here to increase that so that people can keep their dental coverage, the lowest of the low-income seniors?

Where is the care? You guys know about this. This is not like I'm telling you something that the government doesn't know. By 18 bucks people are being disqualified. And the pain that goes with that, the discomfort, the agony: "Oh, well"? You know that one.

I hate when the time goes from 20 minutes to 10 and we don't have enough time, because I have a lot more letters to share. But I shared a lot of them last week and I was glad to meet with the I think it was 750, almost 800 people who came to our office. The education workers came on that Friday, and I cleared what of my schedule I could so that I could walk and talk with them and hear their stories and hold their hands while some of them cried or said thank you. It was emotional. Those of you who chickened out and closed your offices and didn't meet with them, you missed out. These are real folks and they're great people.

I have a lot more of their letters. People like Amanda, the educational assistant, who has been an educational assistant for 19 years: She has watched the job dramatically change over that period of time. She is saying, "It is heartbreaking when I have to tell" my own children, "I

am sorry mommy is so tired and short-tempered today," because the days with no supplies for absent employees are more common than not now and so draining physically and mentally. Or when my daughter says things like, "Why did you have a long day? Did one of the kids at work hurt you again?"

They've got unbelievable circumstances at work, and we don't see even a new dollar into education. Then the government will say, "But we're spending so much." Yes, but inflation and the needs—you are not meeting the needs in the province of Ontario.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): The member from Brantford–Brant.

Mr. Will Bouma: I always appreciate speaking to the member from Oshawa, because I know the passion that she has for her community, for emergency services and for emergency services providers.

I've been intrigued over the past couple of days to hear the opposition. Their only criticism of the fall economic statement is that it doesn't go far enough. I hear that; I can see that, and especially as opposition, you have to say something. Often, though, the opposition will say that there's a poison pill in a piece of our legislation. We put good things in there like allowing ODSP recipients to be able to keep \$1,000 more before there are clawbacks. I was wondering—there's no poison pill in this legislation that I've heard of over the past couple of days. Would you support the bill on principle, even if you agree that it doesn't go far enough but it does make a step in the right direction? Could we count on your support on the fall economic statement?

Ms. Jennifer K. French: This is always their favourite question, eh? "But are you going to support it?"

I support the people in my community, and I wish that you would too. I support educators, education workers. I support the kids who are being turned away from hospitals right now because there isn't enough room for them, and that's a bigger, more complex thing. We're talking about, yes, the fall economic statement, but why should I support something that really falls flat and doesn't acknowledge not only the need but the hurt and the harm? What part am I supposed to get excited about and say thank you for when real people are struggling and suffering—real people that this government, only a couple of weeks ago, were applauding themselves for smashing into the ground and taking away their rights? Fine, they backtracked, but couldn't even meet them in their own communities.

I don't know; I think the spirit of this speaks for itself. It's a missed opportunity, and—I don't know.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): The member from Sudbury.

MPP Jamie West: Thank you to the member from Oshawa who, in a very short amount of time, covered a lot and, I can see by her notes, had a lot more to cover.

One of the things she said at the very beginning, Speaker: She talked about housing—and there's been this disconnect between the Conservative government and the New Democrats in terms of housing in general. There's this idea on the Conservative side that if you build enough,

it will trickle down—the way the trickle-down has failed us for 40 years. Eventually, it will trickle down, and there will be some affordable housing.

She shared a really great story about somebody who needed emergency shelter and then affordable housing as well. I think it's important to talk about why it's important to invest in affordable housing, not mythical affordable housing that might happen 10 or 20 years from now, but today—affordable housing that people desperately need.

Ms. Jennifer K. French: I will never guess what they're thinking, because I've learned after eight years that I can't think like them. The concept of "affordable" has to mean something real, though, right? It's not housing that you can afford or I can afford, but it's what people can afford where they are. We talk about, whether it's the missing middle or it's safe and affordable rentals, there is the need for all sorts of kinds of housing. And housing just ain't going to pop out of the ground like daisies.

This government's focus on developers that will do the right thing versus taking leadership as a government and saying, "Let's ensure that that happens"—there's so much more rein-taking that they could do to actually make sure communities have what they're asking for and our neighbours have a place to live.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): The member from Niagara West.

Mr. Sam Oosterhoff: My thanks to the member for Oshawa for speaking to the fall economic statement and the progress that the government is trying to make on many different issues and seeking to ensure that we're supporting the people of our communities.

I respect the fact that the member opposite raised some concerns about areas that she feels this legislation doesn't go far enough, and the member for Brantford–Brant asked if she was going to vote yes. And I respect that she didn't respond to that with a yes. She didn't really say whether or not she was going to vote in support or against, but the only other real option that she has is to vote against this legislation. So if she's not saying that she's going to vote for the legislation, I'm assuming she's going to vote against it. My question is, how will voting against this legislation address the issues that you just brought up?

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Ms. Jennifer K. French: I actually quite appreciate the question. It was a little more clever than some that I've heard. I'm not going to tell you whether I'll vote for or against. I'm actually going to let you just wait with bated breath.

I think that, as many times in this House I've had to do, when I've had to vote against something or when I've chosen to vote against something, often it's been on principle. Often it's been because I bring a sense of right and wrong, and I so often sit across from a government—in fairness, in the one before, before you, there was a lot that was wrong there too. Right and wrong, I felt I was taking up the cause on behalf of real people that I know, that I listen to and that I believe deserve to be represented in this House.

If I support harmful initiatives when this government puts them forward, I would be turning my back on people that I genuinely know and care about, and I'm never going to do that.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Question?

Mr. Chris Glover: I'm really interested in the way you have that relationship with the school bus driver, and you were talking about what the government's priorities are. Right now, before the House, there's Bill 23, which will reduce development charges for developers by millions of dollars. They just passed legislation to force seniors into for-profit long-term-care homes. They're also allowing this crisis to foment in our health care system, and the only ones who are benefiting from it are the for-profit nursing agencies who are billing millions of dollars—\$6.6 million just to the UHN.

At the same time, this government has left minimum wage at \$15.50 an hour, when the minimum living wage in Ontario is over \$23 an hour. Who do you think this government is serving? What do you say to that bus driver?

Ms. Jennifer K. French: Man, you pack a lot in a question. What do I say to the bus driver? Well, that was Heather, who my staff was supporting. When we talked to her, we dealt with the issue she actually called us about, and then she was talking about education workers because she had been one.

We do our best to connect with folks and understand their issues, and to try and connect them with services and supports that aren't there anymore or that—we've watched waiting lists be created so that technically they don't have to say they've ended funding; it's just nobody gets it.

You asked a lot of stuff. In fact, I don't really remember the main take-away.

I'm going to keep saying to Heather and to other people that we are listening, and we will continue to bring their voices to this space and try to fight for meaningful legislation that makes a real difference in their lives.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Question?

Mr. Will Bouma: I appreciate the opportunity to ask one more question of the member for Oshawa. Again, what's been reiterated over the conversation this evening is the fact that there is nothing that has been put in this bill that is an absolute killer for the opposition not to be able to support this. And I understand that there's a lot more that they would like, but I was wondering, Speaker, if, through you, she might be able to tell the people of Ontario whether she would want to help move the needle so that someone who's on the Ontario Disability Support Program can bring home \$1,000 of income without having any clawbacks. I just think that's such a great step in the right direction. That's something I've been fighting for, for the last four years. It's actually more than I was asking for from the minister. I just think that's such a great move. Since there's no poison pill in this medication, could you just support the legislation?

Ms. Jennifer K. French: To his piece about the changes to allow people to earn more before the clawbacks, we've said that, and we're on record: That's important. It does only apply to 20% of the people.

The incremental nature of this I think just speaks to the missed priorities—and I love that you really, really need my approval of this piece of legislation, but I'm going to tell you that it takes me back to when I taught grades 7 and 8, and I was doling out report cards and people were desperate for that great mark. And you know what? I can't give it that. I can't give this whatever high grade you're wanting. I want—

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Further debate?

Ms. Andrea Khanjin: I'm pleased to rise to speak about our budget measures this evening: Bill 36, Progress on the Plan to Build Act. I think the name and the title of this bill really build on our successes of the past and really speak volumes on what we're debating late in the evening tonight.

Speaker, when I speak to my constituents—Barrie—Innisfil is really known for its manufacturing might, as is the whole province, so many of them were pleased to see that in this fall economic statement we're really building upon building jobs throughout this province within the manufacturing sector, and really building on our success of investing into the skilled trades. If you were to read our fall economic statement, you would quickly find out that we're investing an additional \$40 million for a total of \$145 million for the latest round of funding in the Skills Development Fund, which has already helped over 393,000 people take the next steps in their career in in-demand industries. And we're doubling up on that, and we're investing an additional \$4.8 million over two years to expand the Dual Credit Program, encouraging more secondary school students to enter a career in the skilled trades or in early childhood education.

This is something I heard most recently. I had the pleasure of hosting the Minister of Education, Minister Lecce, in my riding of Barrie—Innisfil. We were at Kaleidoscope with Sergey and many other parents, and many of them asked, "Why in Ontario can we not have skilled programs or programs like they have in other provinces?" One of the members mentioned—her name is Samira; she's very active in the Persian community locally, and she does a lot of work with the Barrie Persian Association, so I want to thank her for all her work to do that. But she mentioned how in BC, when she talks to her friends and colleagues there, they're able to get university credits while still being in high school, and she doesn't see that often in Ontario. To have the Dual Credit Program is a really good step towards that ability.

What else it's going to do for us, when we talk about encouraging people into the skilled trades, it's going to allow us to run a lot more programs to really get people excited about and into the skilled trades.

I wanted to use this opportunity, because I don't have that much time, Speaker, to really highlight some of the local initiatives that are happening because of this government's initiatives into the skilled trades. You just have to look, most recently, when we talk about manufacturing and how—in Barrie—Innisfil we have a huge manufacturing might. Whether it's SBS Drivetec, who benefited from

our southwestern economic fund, Tempo plastics, Matsu Manufacturing, Innovative Automation, Jomi, Linear Transfer Automation—all of them have really benefited from this government's investment not only into manufacturing but also in the skilled trades.

And coming up not too long from now—in fact, November 22 and November 30, for my constituents watching at home tonight—there's going to be a Women in Manufacturing event, which is really exciting. They're going to be able to discover the diverse roles available in the manufacturing industry. They're going to be able to meet local manufacturing employees. They're going to be able to network and make new connections and learn more from women in manufacturing. So if they're listening to this now and they're interested—it's outside of my area, but in Simcoe county—Midland is hosting a session at the Midland library, November 22 from 4 to 6:30 p.m. In Barrie, we're hosting a session November 30 from 4 to 6:30 at our favourite place in Barrie, the Sandbox on 24 Maple Avenue; they're always doing very exciting things, not only encouraging more entrepreneurs throughout Simcoe county but also helping out with the manufacturing sector as well.

These types of events wouldn't have been possible without our government. In fact, they're one of the presenting partners and investors in this initiative, getting more women into the manufacturing sector. It's very much needed.

When I talk to manufacturers and folks in my riding—like, most recently, Kelly McKenna, who used to run the downtown BIA but now is an executive director with the Simcoe-Muskoka Workforce Development Board. They partnered up with the Literacy Network, which is a not-for-profit organization, to run a lot of these skilled trades seminars.

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When speaking with her about the fall economic statement, which really builds upon everything we've been doing in skilled trades since we first got elected back in 2018 and things that we've really doubled down on our last budget, which we've talked about only a few months ago, she said the following:

"The labour market has never been more disrupted than it is today! Not one thing is to blame; COVID, boomers' retirements, quiet quitting ... these are just some of the issues contributing to our labour market disruption. SMWDBLN"—which stands for the Simcoe Muskoka Workforce Development Boards—"is encouraged to see the Ontario fall economic statement address many of these issues by proposing opportunities to build a pipeline of job-ready graduates and help more people to upskill or learn a trade. It is this type of labour market focus we need to help bring about the change."

Again, that's Kelly McKenna, the executive director for this particular program.

It is no wonder while we talk about investing in the skilled trades, you just look at the results of these investments, the result of investing in manufacturing, and you talk about what has that meant and is our government

really delivering. Well, if you look at the last job numbers just recently in the month of November, you will see that our investments as a government have really paid dividends. Ontario is actually investing more than \$100 million through our Regional Development Program to foster business growth at the regional level, and, to date, \$60 million has been invested in 62 companies across the province through the Eastern Ontario Development Fund and the Southwestern Ontario Development Fund, and this fund has supported \$736 million in investing to create more than 1,300 jobs. Again, when you talk about results, this government is doing it and, at the same time, we're doing it by saving a lot of individuals money to get to their job and to get to work.

For example, everyone needs to gas up, and this fall economic statement—we heard it loud and clear during the election. One of the reasons that we got elected with a strong, massive majority, a stable government, was the fact that we were focused; in everything we did, we put the people first and focused on the cost of living from day one. We heard clearly that the price of gas has always been an issue. It's one of the reasons one of first pieces of legislation we introduced as a government was getting rid of cap-and-trade, and those measures by cancelling cap-and-trade actually saved Ontarians \$1,260, which really builds up in our support.

If you look at our overall investments we've made in helping people save money, in our first two years in government we saved the Ontario taxpayers \$3 billion in what would have been tax increases by a previous government. We saved the Ontario taxpayer \$150 million in fee increases in our first year of getting elected and, again, this fall economic statement—very appropriately named—builds on those successes. In fact, if you look at the lump sum, we've got \$8.4 billion in supports that we're offering to the Ontario people.

Again, going back to the gas prices, we first promised in our election platform that we were going to reduce gas prices over the summer months, and now we're going to be extending that commitment and offering the extension up until December 31, 2023. Again, recognizing that costs of everything are going up and this is something that's going to help everyone, from those going to the manufacturing sector to those going in all kinds of different professions, be it health care, education, etc.

We don't just stop at manufacturing; although there are a lot of great things happening. I was just speaking of individuals who I talked to in my area; I was also talking to Jerome Horowitz, who I obviously talk about a lot in this Legislature. Even he knows that they really benefit at Brotech—really benefit from these investments into skilled trades because they're always looking for labour. This is a company that does precision components, this is a company that's involved in the refurbishment of our nuclear power plants—they're a big player in that. When speaking to Jerome Horowitz about this exact fall economic statement, he said, "I'm pleased to see the Ontario government continuing to pay attention to critical items for our economy such as helping small businesses

reduce costs like EHT and WSIB, investing in skilled trades and investing in low-cost power generation sources such as the Pickering nuclear facility refurbishment." Again, that's Jerome Horowitz, president of Brotech Precision CNC.

It's not just him. There are lots of manufacturing—I went to Albarrie with the labour minister, Monte McNaughton, and they really applauded our WSIB changes. It truly puts money back into these businesses. It puts money back into training their employees.

Speaker, this is just building upon—we're lowering the gas tax to help people with the price at the pump. We're investing in daycare. We have the child tax credit that we did from day one. We reduced the licence plate sticker. We stabilized the electricity grid. We increased the minimum wage. We enabled the LIFT tax credit. And this is just the last four and a bit of this government being in government, so there's more to come.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): The member from London West.

Ms. Peggy Sattler: I'd like to ask the member for Barrie: She would be aware, certainly, that November is Woman Abuse Prevention Month. She will also be aware that in June 2022 an inquest was held into the murder of three women by their intimate partner in Renfrew county, and that a coroner's inquest brought forward 86 recommendations to prevent this kind of femicide, this kind of intimate-partner violence from occurring again in Ontario.

And yet since the release of those 86 recommendations in June, 19 women have died at the hands of intimate partners. I'm wondering why the government chose not to reference the Renfrew county recommendations and not to include any additional resources in the fall economic statement to move forward on those recommendations.

Ms. Andrea Khanjin: I thank the member opposite for that question. The reason the measures are not in the fall economic statement is because we did a lot of measures in our budget, which the member opposite voted against. As she would have known, we are trying to make the system more accessible for women fleeing violence, through the great work—whether it's the Solicitor General, the Minister of Health or our Attorney General; whether it's our minister for children and women. Again, this is an all-of-government approach we're taking.

It's a topic I'm very passionate about. In fact, this summer I jumped out of an airplane—a perfectly good airplane—just to raise money for our local women's and children's shelter, which is very near to my heart. I want to thank all the folks at the Women and Children's Shelter of Barrie for all the work they're doing. Certainly we're very lucky that we have the supports in place. There are many countries where women are protesting for their freedoms, like in Iran today, that don't have that luxury, and so it's nice that we're able to, in our democracy, stand up for those women and do more to progress their values.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): The member from Brantford-Brant.

Mr. Will Bouma: I always appreciate the point of view from the member from Barrie-Innisfil, and I was wondering: We've been having some back and forth this

evening with some of the opposition members about the ability for them to be able to support this legislation, because so often in the House—and you’ll know that yourself—they’ll say that we put a poison pill into a bill, so that they can’t support it.

Over the last few days, I’ve been listening avidly to all of the debate from the opposition members, and their only criticism of this bill is that it doesn’t go far enough. So I was wondering: You’ve been in this game of politics longer than I have, and I really respect your opinion on so many of these things. Do you think that there’s any downside for the opposition to be able to support this legislation that will make such a huge difference to the people of Ontario, especially some of our most vulnerable?

Ms. Andrea Khanjin: I thank the member for that question. I think about some of the measures in the fall economic statement, like when it comes to allowing people who are on ODSP to work more, so they’re not being clawed back for their ability and their willingness to work and get out there.

Most recently, I was able to participate in the Empower Simcoe fashion show, the community champions fashion show, where we also raise money for Empower Simcoe. I often talk to Dr. Claudine Cousins, who is the CEO of Empower Simcoe, and do you know what she said about this fall economic statement? She said, “We welcome this announcement,” in relation to the impact the fall economic statement will have for the people we support and their families. She recognizes that we still have work to do, but she does support what we’re doing here. I want to congratulate her—now she’s Dr. Claudine Cousins—for all the work that she has done. In fact, she was just nominated for an RBC award for all the work she’s doing. They know that I’m a big friend of Empower Simcoe, and I’m really thrilled about the work they’re doing in helping the vulnerable population in our community.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Questions?

MPP Jamie West: Thank you to the member from Barrie–Innisfil. I want to talk about the most vulnerable people in Ontario as well. Very often during debate, we talk about the less than 7% of people on ODSP who could be helped by this increase, if they’re able to work. I want to talk about the people who are not able to work. With the 5% increase, they’re going to make \$15,474 a year, so not even \$16,000 a year.

The people who are on OW are not going to receive 5%; they’re not going to receive anything, so they’re going to make, and I had to double-check this because it’s so low, \$8,796 a year—\$8,796 a year to put food on your table and shelter above your head. Is the member from Barrie–Innisfil comfortable with people in her riding living on these really, really low, low wages?

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Ms. Andrea Khanjin: It’s interesting when the opposition talks about helping the most vulnerable. They voted against the LIFT credit, which is helping the vulnerable in our community. They voted against an ODSP increase, which also helped our people. We had a minimum wage

increase, which helps the lowest-paid workers in our community. They voted against it.

Speaker, when the opposition start voting against measures to help the most vulnerable in our community, then I’ll start addressing and believing they’re putting their values where their mouths are.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Question?

Mr. Anthony Leardi: One of the things that I really, really love about Ontario’s Plan to Build is this fund that we’re going to add \$40 million to, an additional \$40 million to the skilled trades training fund, which brings the total value of that fund to \$145 million, because we all know how important it is to have skilled tradespeople trained here in the province of Ontario. They’re desperately needed. I think that’s a great thing, and in particular \$3 million of that fund is earmarked for persons of the First Nations. So my question to the kind member from Barrie–Innisfil is this: Could she tell us how this legislation proposes to help address the labour shortage in Ontario, especially in the skilled trades?

Ms. Andrea Khanjin: I think it’s great that in the province of Ontario, we really drive the value of equal opportunity, to allow everyone who wants to pursue the skilled trades an ability to do that. But I think it also takes government investment to really get people from a young age, which is the Dual Credit Program, investing in our young and getting them, encouraging them to go into the skilled trades. It’s something we did early on.

And as a government, we recognize that if you’re going into the skilled trades, the tools cost money, so we doubled the tools tax credit. Again, this is called “building on.” This is a fall economic statement that builds on things we’ve done. When we talk about supporting our labour, supporting our skilled trades, this government is constantly building on our accomplishments.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Question?

Ms. Chandra Pasma: Thanks to the member from Barrie–Innisfil for the comments. I want to follow up on my colleague from Sudbury’s question. By the government’s own admission, the change to the employment clawback for ODSP will only help 25,000 people out of the hundreds of thousands of Ontarians who are living on ODSP. The government claims that this might be able to help an additional 25,000 people get into employment, which neglects the fact that most of these people can’t work because of their disability, which is why they’re on ODSP in the first place, leaving the majority of the people receiving a benefit that is less than the average cost of rent in the city of Ottawa and in many cities across the province. Doesn’t the member agree that this was a missed opportunity to actually help people living on ODSP by doubling the rates?

Ms. Andrea Khanjin: I want to share a story with the member opposite. I had a great gentleman I got the pleasure of knowing when I first was getting elected named Myles. He was on ODSP, and he was really passionate about politics. He’d always work campaigns, and the reason he’d work campaigns is because he couldn’t get a

certain amount of hours for a job because he'd be clawed back on his ODSP.

When I got elected, he really wanted to work in the office. We said, "Okay, well, how many hours could you do?" He quoted me how many hours he could do without getting his ODSP clawed back, and it was deplorable, Speaker. Now, thanks to changes like this, people like him can actually work in a field they're passionate about while still not being clawed back on their ODSP. I think that's a success story we should celebrate in this province.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Question?

Mr. Will Bouma: When I was on county council and we were doing a boundary adjustment negotiation with the city of Brantford and the county of Brant, I can remember our mayor at the time, a former member here, Ron Eddy, a Liberal member, and he said, "You can't always get what you want, but better half a loaf than no loaf." It seems to me, especially listening to your speech and to the responses you've given this evening, that we've been making incremental change for the better of the most vulnerable people in the province of Ontario since 2018.

I was wondering if you can think of any reason personally why the opposition could not vote in favour of the fall economic statement, to make a difference for the most vulnerable people in the province of Ontario.

Ms. Andrea Khanjin: I would hope the opposition would help the most vulnerable in terms of people in our society but also sectors. This fall economic statement is investing in our tourism and film sectors, which has been applauded by Sergio Navarretta in my riding, who is the director of *The Cuban*, which was filmed in Brantford-Brant, in Brantford county, for the member opposite. He's thrilled to see that we're not only helping the vulnerable people, but actually the vulnerable sectors. This is what he said: "I applaud the Ontario government for their continued support for film production on-location, outside the city centres. These new" initiatives "will be invaluable to fostering a thriving local film industry in my own area of Simcoe county, and around the province, that builds on careers, creates jobs and reflects"—

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Thank you. Further debate?

Mr. Sol Mamakwa: Meegwetch, Speaker. It's always an honour to be provided an opportunity to speak about the government's bill, Bill 36.

Sometimes I'm not surprised, but as a First Nations person, as a person who grew up in far northern Ontario, this budget is disappointing. I say that because one of the things I know—I lived—is that incremental change perpetuates the crisis in our communities. An example: One of the things that happened in the last session was that the Indigenous curriculum-writing sessions in Ontario were cancelled.

I think, over the past four years, we have seen this government make significant funding cuts in all areas, including health care, including education—I spoke about the Indigenous curriculum-writing sessions—and housing. We also know that health care workers continue to be underpaid and overworked. We also know that emergency

departments around the province are closing, and that Indigenous lands are about to be exploited. We hear the Premier say that he's going to jump on a bulldozer himself. But a warning: We've got swamps in our traditional territories, so be careful.

Also, people do not think about or talk about or mention the climate crisis. In the north, we're the first people who see, live and feel the impacts of the climate crisis that's happening.

One of the things that this government did as well is—I don't know how many cents—the provincial fuel tax. It doesn't help when a First Nation pays \$3.25 to \$3.50 for a litre of gas. There is none of you in this House that would be willing to pay \$3.25 to \$3.50 for a litre of gas. There is no way that you would stand for that. But people in Kiiwetinoong are doing that today. What I'm talking about is inflation.

I think, sometimes, we ask, who exactly in this budget is benefiting? Who is prospering? It is surely not First Nations. It's certainly not the hard-working Ontarians who are struggling to make sure that ends meet. It is also not our youth and the future generations. These people, the youth, the future generations, are left to deal with a changing climate. I know this much: It is certainly not the people of Kiiwetinoong, who are consistently being ignored by this government except for when resources and land are concerned.

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One of the things that I want to speak about is health care: doctors, nurses, health care workers, who have been working day and night for the past two and a half years as we navigate the pandemic, overworked and underpaid. The health care heroes in the riding of Kiiwetinoong are tired. There is no indication of things getting better; in fact, things are getting worse. There are more needless deaths and unnecessary suffering. It has become a way of life for the people of Kiiwetinoong. I know that in March 2022, the hospital in Red Lake closed its emergency room for 24 hours, forcing emergent individuals to drive three hours to the next emergency room to receive care. It's in crisis. I know that what you feel, what you hear, what you see here—the situation is dire in the north.

Over the last four years, I've talked about the boil-water advisories. There is no funding in place in this budget for ending boil-water advisories. Today, there are 14 long-term boil-water advisories in my riding. In Ontario, there are 25 First Nations under long-term boil-water advisories. "Long-term" means anything over a year. In Ontario, there's a First Nation on its 28th year of long-term boil-water advisories—28 years, in Ontario, and the government boasts about "all Ontarians." It depends where you live. They use jurisdiction as an excuse not to do anything. Using jurisdiction as an excuse is how oppression works. That's how colonialism works. Because I live it on a daily basis. It has become a way of life.

We cannot continue to accept the way government talks about reconciliation. Reconciliation is just a word for this government when we talk about the relationships, the programs, the services that the government talks about.

They never talk about sovereignty; they never talk about treaties; they never talk about self-determination; they never talk about self-governance. Those are the real issues that we need to be able to talk about, not programs and services. I've lived under that system for many years. That's how oppressors work; that's how colonialism works.

I can say that this budget shows us that this government does not have a plan for things that matter to the north, to Ontarians. When we talk about the real needs, it's not about speaking points anymore; it's about the real things we need to be able to come up with. Again I ask, who exactly is the budget benefiting? Who is going to prosper? Not First Nations. Meegwetch.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): The member for Niagara West.

Mr. Sam Oosterhoff: My thanks to the member from Kiiwetinoong for his speech this morning and for showing passionately the concerns he has and of course speaking on behalf of his constituents here in this chamber. I want to thank the member for raising some different points and some interesting points that I might not have considered prior to his speech. I appreciate always the voices of the opposition in sharing their concerns and perhaps some suggestions for improvements to legislation. So I want to thank the member opposite for that.

I know his riding is a large one, a vast one in fact, and I know there are a lot of areas where people have to fly in and also where people have to drive for great distances. I know you mentioned people having to drive for several hours. Of course, in that sort of context, it's important that people see the ability to have the price of their fuel reduced. So does the member opposite support the government's decision to extend the gas tax cut for another year for his constituents?

Mr. Sol Mamakwa: Whatever the provincial tax is—I think it's 7.5 cents.

Mr. Dave Smith: Ten.

Mr. Sol Mamakwa: Is it 10? According to this member from—but I think it's just so small. I think that doesn't change really anything. If you talk about \$3.25 or \$3.50 for a litre, and you get 10 cents off, that's incremental change and incremental change, again, perpetuates the crisis in our communities. It perpetuates the oppression. It makes it look as if they're doing something without really doing anything, and that's not acceptable anymore. This is the 2020s; it's not 1950 anymore.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Question?

MPP Jamie West: One thing that stands out to me when the member for Kiiwetinoong speaks is that the whole place goes silent. I think it's a good reminder for all of us that we bring a voice from each of our ridings. I'm guilty of this as well, generalizing and thinking my riding is the same as somewhere else.

One of the things he said, and I think it stood out for all of us, is that in his riding there are 14 long-term boil-water advisories. In Ontario, there's 25, and one of them has been going on for 28 years.

Now, the Conservative Party has accused us of saying that this doesn't go far enough, it doesn't go far enough.

To me, it's a two-legged stool. But what would it mean—let's take the one that's had the boil-water advisory for 28 years. What would it mean if, in the plan, it was to address the boil-water advisory just for one of these areas—just one of them. What would it mean to those people?

Mr. Sol Mamakwa: Back in November 2020, I was at this rally, a children's rally, eight-year-old to 12-year-old children, about 25 of them. They were from Neskantaga, and they had a rally. I saw them emotional, I saw them cry, and one of the things they wanted, the number one thing was, they just wanted clean drinking water. And the second request they had was, they wanted to go home, because they got evacuated for 61 days because of the oily sheen that they found at their water treatment plant. I think if the province of Ontario, if the government of Ontario fixed that water issue, that would be so amazing for that community. Meegwetch.

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The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Member for Niagara West.

Mr. Sam Oosterhoff: Again, my thanks to the member for Kiiwetinoong for his address. One of the pieces that I was thinking about in terms of the legislation that I didn't have the opportunity to hear his perspective on, and I'd love to hear it, is with regard to the Guaranteed Annual Income Supplement, and of course, understanding that for many in Ontario this income supplement really does make a major difference in their lives, especially those who are in lower-income situations and are receiving the supplement. A doubling of that supplement has a big impact for my constituents, and I'm hoping that it does for his as well and would be able to help address the increased cost of living that I know all communities are seeing, but especially in the north, with some of the vast distances, again, as was mentioned in my previous question.

So I'm wondering if he could speak a little bit about the doubling of the Guaranteed Annual Income Supplement and what that means for constituents in his riding.

Mr. Sol Mamakwa: Thank you for the question. When we talk about cost of living—a lot of homes in the north still use wood stoves, right? If you think about a truckload of wood, that is \$150, \$200, and that will last you maybe five to seven days in the winter. And then when you talk about a loaf of bread, you pay \$5 to \$7 a loaf. When you talk about a bag of milk, four litres of milk, you're talking about \$15 to over \$20 for four litres of milk. Just imagine if you had to live like that. That supplement—again, an incremental change that makes it look as if they're doing something, but they're really not doing anything. Meegwetch.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Algoma-Manitoulin.

Mr. Michael Mantha: I'm just going to look at the people of Algoma-Manitoulin right now and I'm going to ask you the question. We have several members in the room today. Tomorrow morning, when you wake up, let's just say public works contacts you at home and says, "You're going to have to wait 28 minutes for your water." Your 28 minutes turns into 28 days. Your 28 days turns

into 28 months. Your 28 months turns into 28 years. How in the heck would that be accessible to anybody in any community across Algoma–Manitoulin?

I look at the members that are here now: How could that be possibly acceptable to any of you? How could that be acceptable to anybody in this province? This budget is a signal that we're sending you from this side: You've missed your goal; you've missed the priorities of what people are looking for in this province. And that's just one—one—ask: clean drinking water. Investments in education, investments in health care, addressing the cost of living that real people are feeling in this province—I come back to the comments that I made this morning. You've missed the priorities of Ontarians.

Mr. Sol Mamakwa: In Neskantaga First Nation, February 1, 1994, was when the boil-water advisory was implemented. As we sit here in Ontario in the year 2022, that boil-water advisory is still on. Again, sometimes I talk about oppression. Sometimes I talk about racism. Sometimes I talk about colonialism. This is exactly what it looks like. Meegwetch.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Question?

Mr. Sam Oosterhoff: My thanks to the member opposite. I was listening very intently to his response to my previous question, and I have to say, I'm a bit frustrated. The member opposite spoke about the investments that this government is making to improve the lives of Ontarians. He said we are doing nothing—those are your words. I ask him if he would look at the people who are now able to ensure that they're filling up a tank of gas for less than they had to fill it up prior and say that that's nothing. I ask him to tell people who are now going to be able to make it home on time for their kid's soccer game because we're addressing congestion in this province if that is nothing. I ask him if he looks at families who are able to see their loved ones enter into a long-term-care home that they waited for for a great deal of time before they were able to see that and ask them if that is nothing. I don't think it's nothing, and neither do the members on the side of the House, who are going to continue to invest—

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Thank you.

A very quick response, member from Kiiwetinoong.

Mr. Sol Mamakwa: I don't even know which one is more expensive: gas or water in First Nation communities. It's just outrageous.

And for the people of Kiiwetinoong, the boil-water advisories—it makes no difference. I'm sure you are frustrated—I get that—but you're a privileged person. You have clean drinking water.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Further debate? The Minister of Mines—sorry, the Minister of Energy.

Hon. Todd Smith: It's Minister of Energy tonight. I'll be performing that role on the legislative TV channel this evening, and I look forward to it, actually.

Thank you, Madam Speaker. It's great to be with you this evening. It has been a long day of debate on the fall economic statement, which, again, follows up on our budget that was passed earlier this summer and really was

the election document, to be quite honest, that won our party one of the largest majority governments in the province's history, with 83 seats. So I believe a large majority of the people of Ontario are in favour of the plan that we've set out for the province.

I'm going to talk to a very, very specific piece of the fall economic statement that deals with my ministry, the Ministry of Energy, this evening. Here in Ontario, we are really fortunate to enjoy one of the cleanest electricity systems in the entire world. Over 90% of our generation is emissions-free electricity. In 2021, for instance, it was 92% emissions-free, and it's largely due to our nuclear advantage. I've talked about that many times in the Legislature.

As Ontario's population grows, we are preparing to meet the rising demand for reliable, affordable and clean energy. This includes capitalizing on our world-class clean electricity grid to give businesses new options to meet environmental and sustainability goals. You may be saying, "Okay, I've heard this before. What is he talking about?" Well, I'm talking about clean energy credits. That is the section of the fall economic statement that was rolled out earlier this week by the Minister of Finance, Minister Bethlenfalvy. CECs, or clean energy credits, are going to benefit Ontario. They're going to benefit Ontario consumers and they're also going to benefit our provincial grid. These clean energy credits are certificates that each represent one megawatt hour of clean electricity that's been generated from our clean or renewable generation resources.

As environmental and sustainability goals increasingly influence corporate decisions that are being made on where to invest and where to grow, our government is leveraging the province's world-class clean electricity grid by launching a voluntary—and I have to emphasize, this is voluntary—clean energy credit registry to boost competitiveness and attract jobs to our province. The registry is going to be an online ledger that accurately records the ownership and retirement of the credits in this province. Ontario-based generators that make credits available for sale are going to have to do so on the registry, and they cannot make these credits available for sale outside of Ontario. They have to be here in the province.

There's no doubt that a clean energy credit registry is going to make Ontario even more attractive for investment, and we know how attractive Ontario has become since our government has been able to flip the script on what was a very, very sad story, where we were seeing hundreds of thousands of manufacturing jobs fleeing for other jurisdictions now being repatriated back to Ontario and employing people in this province.

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Access to 100% clean electricity is increasingly a key priority for companies investing in large-scale manufacturing projects, like some of the ones we're seeing in southwestern Ontario or in eastern Ontario—actually, all over the province, but especially for those electric vehicle mandates and the battery supply chain that's going to serve it.

Our government understands this, and by allowing companies to purchase these credits from clean generation sources—which include our nuclear facilities, providing about 60% of our electricity every day; our clean hydro-electric facilities; our run-of-the-river generation stations, the type of generating stations that we see down at Niagara Falls and on the Saunders dam in eastern Ontario, near Cornwall—these proposed credits will provide all businesses with more choice in how they pursue their environmental and sustainability goals, helping us to attract jobs and investment to the province.

This registry is also going to add to the growing list of factors that make Ontario a top destination for manufacturing investment, such as the province's well-trained workforce, the tax credits that we have in place, and a world-class research and development ecosystem that includes R&D hubs here in Toronto, the Waterloo region and also Kanata, one of our top R&D and innovation hubs.

On top of that, the clean energy credit registry is going to provide businesses with a new tool to meet their corporate sustainability goals and demonstrate that their electricity has been sourced from clean sources. There's a lot of excitement around the clean energy credits, and for good reason, from their ability to help clean up our grid to their potential to draw businesses to the province.

Revenue from the sales could reduce costs for ratepayers in Ontario and potentially also support the development of new clean energy projects in the province, potentially siting small modular reactors in the future. This could help to keep costs down for Ontario families. It could support electrification of the province and help the province reduce emissions even further.

I'd like to take a couple of moments here to highlight some of the feedback that our government received earlier this year about the clean energy credit registry, from industry leaders.

Trevor Dauphinee is the CEO at Invest Ontario. He says, when it comes to the CEC registry, "The best places to do business are those that are forward-thinking. Access to a clean energy mix is becoming one of the driving factors for companies when thinking about where to grow their business. This is an important initiative that positions the province as a smart partner for companies looking to reduce their carbon footprint." And he's right, Madam Speaker. Here in Ontario, we take pride in our forward-thinking initiatives and having one of the cleanest grids in the world—the envy of jurisdictions around the world.

Diane J. Brisebois is the president and CEO of the Retail Council of Canada. She said:

"Retail Council of Canada ... supports the Ontario government's commitment to develop a clean energy credit system. Delivering products—be it clothing or groceries, toys or power tools—to our customers in an environmentally friendly way is a top-of-mind imperative for retailers. This made-in-Ontario initiative will lead to a competitive marketplace, wherein businesses can voluntarily make commitments which will green our grid, drive local innovation, all while delivering competitively priced credits to business."

David Paterson is the vice-president, corporate and environmental affairs, at General Motors Canada. Mr. Paterson said, "GM applauds the Ontario government's announcement of a new program to introduce a voluntary clean energy credit registry that gives businesses options to meet environmental and sustainability goals."

Ken Hartwick is the president and CEO at Ontario Power Generation. Mr. Hartwick said, "The government's proposed centralized CEC registry is a significant step that will benefit ratepayers and support Ontario electricity consumers wishing to track and report on their emissions goals."

All of these organizations—and many others—support our plan. They understand that the creation of a clean energy credit registry will give businesses the opportunity to meet their corporate, environmental and sustainability goals when choosing to operate in Ontario, and will also generate revenue which can be returned to ratepayers down the road.

Ontario families have done the heavy lifting. We've built one of the cleanest electricity grids in the world. There's still a lot to do, but our government is ensuring that Ontario is leveraging this competitive advantage to drive investment and continue to create jobs.

Over the last few months, my ministry has been seeking public input on our proposal for this clean energy credit registry through Ontario's Environmental Registry, including how these revenues can be used to return value to Ontarians and support new clean energy generation in our province. Public input has informed the legislative amendments and continues to be considered in the overall policy design of the clean energy credit registry.

I look forward to sharing more about our next steps soon. As Ontario's Minister of Energy, I am proud to say that CECs are going to help companies to document and legitimate their claims of clean electricity use in relation to their environmental, social and corporate governance goals.

I think it's really important just to end by saying that this is a voluntary clean energy credit registry. This isn't something that the government is imposing on businesses. This is something that companies that are looking to invest in Ontario—or in any jurisdiction, as a matter of fact—want to see. These companies are setting out their ESG goals, their ESG targets, their environmental, social, governance targets. They want to be able to say that the products they are producing, whether they're brand new electric vehicles or the steel that potentially could be used in those vehicles or many other areas of our economy, come from 100% clean energy resources. This clean energy credit registry is going to allow them to voluntarily do that, and it's happening right here in Ontario because of our stable, reliable, affordable, clean, safe energy policy.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Question?

Ms. Chandra Pasma: This bill is such a missed opportunity on so many of the challenges that our province is facing, it's almost hard to know where to start. But one that is particularly important to me as the poverty critic is

the hundreds of thousands of people in our province who are living in deep poverty because of this government's policies. The government had an opportunity to change the employment clawback threshold for people living on Ontario Works, something that has not changed for nine years and so has failed to keep pace with inflation, much like the rate of Ontario Works. So I'm wondering, since the government seems to think that everybody on Ontario Works should just go out and get a job, why wouldn't they make it easier for people to make the transition from Ontario Works to employment by raising the employment threshold for people on Ontario Works?

Hon. Todd Smith: We believe that those who contribute to our economy or can contribute to our economy should be doing that, and we've made it possible for them to do that in a much more effective manner than at any time in our history.

That member wasn't here when we announced earlier this year, or maybe last year, that we were increasing the minimum wage in Ontario to \$15. Her predecessors on that side of the House were talking about the fact for years that they wanted to see the minimum wage go to \$15. Then, as soon as we announced that it was going to \$15 and then \$15.50 in October of this year, they said, "We want it to go to \$20 an hour."

I understand what it's like to be in opposition. I was in opposition far too long—seven years. Some of my colleagues here were in opposition a bit longer than I was. I suspect this party will remain in opposition a lot longer. We are making tremendous changes to allow people that can work to get into the workforce. We're big proponent of that happening and getting them the skills training that they need.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Question?

Mr. Rick Byers: I thank the minister for his as usual outstanding remarks and for his extraordinary track record as our Minister of Energy. I appreciate you outlining ESG objectives, which are currently a very big factor in financing major projects like the ones you're seeing. It's environmental, social and governance factors that are very big factors.

Can you give us a little more about what you're hearing about those, and in particular how it supports the fantastic economic development initiative that we have under way in other parts of our economy, with electric vehicles and battery plants and the northern development in clean steel? I'd be curious about your comments there, Minister.

Hon. Todd Smith: Thanks to the member from Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound—now the member responsible for Warton Willie, I should add.

He knows, because he has worked in this sector in the past and knows where companies are looking to invest. One of the reasons that they're looking to Ontario now is because we brought in the stable energy policy, as I mentioned earlier. Minister Fedeli, the Minister of Economic Development, Job Creation and Trade, can really tell you what the companies are saying when it comes to ESG goals and targets that they have set out. One of the things that makes Ontario so attractive is the fact that over 90%

of our electricity system is already clean, so they're not going to have to purchase that many credits to get them to 100%, which is what they all want to be able to claim, that they're 100% sourced by clean electricity.

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They're flocking to Ontario's shores. This is just going to be another reason why: the CEC registry.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Question?

Ms. Peggy Sattler: As the Minister of Energy will know, less than a month ago, the Financial Accountability Officer released a report on Ontario's economic and budget outlook, and he projected a surplus of \$100 million this year, which would grow to \$8.5 billion in 2027-28. What we have seen consistently from this government is an overestimation of deficits and an underspending of the amounts that are budgeted. The FAO says that the government is sitting on \$44 billion of unallocated contingency funds over the next six years.

Given the FAO's findings, why is this government not making the necessary investment in health care, in education and social supports that people in this province deserve?

Hon. Todd Smith: Our government has made historic investments in health care and in education, and in community and social services. The list goes on and on. The spending is very, very important, but it's more than just the spending. What we saw under the previous government was 15 years of neglect. There has to be fundamental changes to the way these services are delivered, otherwise we are going to continue to see us falling short. While we need to spend more money, absolutely, and we are making those investments, there has to be a better way to ensure that we have the health human resources that we need and that we're delivering a proper education to the children in Ontario so that they are ready to fill all of those jobs that we're creating because of our stable energy policy.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Question?

Mr. Anthony Leardi: As this House has been told several times, the county of Essex is going to be benefiting from an incredible and historic investment of several billion dollars in the electric vehicle manufacturing industry. My county, the county of Essex, is a place where a lot of people work in the automobile industry. They're very, very excited about these opportunities, and we're going to need power for that.

I know that the Ministry of Energy, led by this minister, is supplying power for those projects, so I'm asking the minister if he can elaborate on the plans to supply us with that power.

Hon. Todd Smith: I can, absolutely. There are a whole bunch of different ways that we're going to do that. We've just put out a competitive procurement with the Independent Electricity System Operator for 4,000 megawatts of power. We've also designated hydro lines down into the member's community, through Chatham and down through Essex county and into Windsor, so that we can get the power to them to light up these huge investments that are coming to our province, the largest investments that our

province has ever seen: The \$5-billion LG battery electric vehicle plant, the new EV platforms that are going in there.

We've also brought in new energy efficiency programs and expanded energy efficiency programs. I always say the cheapest gas plant or electricity generation station to build is the one you don't have to build. These new energy efficiency programs are now a billion dollars worth of funding over the four-year framework.

We've also expanded and extended Pickering through the summer and into the fall of 2026, if the CNFC approves, and many, many other items to ensure that we have the power that we need going forward.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): The member from Sudbury.

MPP Jamie West: Thank you, Speaker. Thank you as well to the Minister of Energy on his debate. While he was speaking, I was reminded of, I think it was pre-COVID, when he was the Minister of Children, Community and Social Services and he came to Sudbury and met with all these autism families to hear about the concerns in the north. I want to compliment him for it. I'm going to be critical about the outcomes, but honestly, there was a time when the Conservative government wasn't really listening to the north, and he came up and he spoke with a lot of the members from Sudbury about their concerns and issues, the French-language services and distances travelled and stuff. But going to the fall economic statement, there isn't any real support for these autism families, and so with that breadth of knowledge that you bring, in opposition and in that role, do you think it's worth advocating for more supports and funding for autism families?

Hon. Todd Smith: I enjoyed being in Sudbury a couple of years ago—it seems like an eternity now since we were in Sudbury together, meeting with parents. I think it's very, very important to remind the member that we didn't just listen to those parents; we took action. We took all of their recommendations and put them into a strategy going forward that is going to ensure that we have the gold standard when it comes to autism programs, not just in this country but the right across North America.

It's because of those meetings with parents in Sudbury and right across Ontario—the good work of our Ontario autism panel that met for a long period of time and then the work that was done by the Implementation Working Group. We knew it would take time to roll this thing out. These are monumental changes. After years and years and years of non-action on this front, our government took action. We increased the size of that budget—not just by a couple of bucks; we doubled it: \$300 million is now in that program. I know that parents—

Interjection.

Hon. Todd Smith: Yes, \$600 million; \$300 million to \$600 million, so it was a significant increase. The plan is continuing to be rolled out by the minister and our government.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Further debate?

MPP Jamie West: It's difficult to know where to start when you're debating something this large, so I'm going to chip away at things that I think are important.

We're talking about the fall economic statement. Tonight, during the debate, there's been a lot of focus on—as opposition, you're looking for improvements, and I think that's important because our role really is to create good legislation together. There's a story that I think everyone tells about the owl and the eagle. It really is the role of the opposition to take what could be a good idea and find ways to improve it. So I want this to come across in the spirit of trying to help you create good legislation. I'm trying to help you make your statement even better and more successful for the people of Ontario.

I'm going to start off with ODSP. Before I do, though, I want to read a letter from a constituent who is on ODSP that I wasn't able to read earlier today, and he really wanted me to share it:

“Dear Jamie,

“I'm writing to you because I want the Ford government's plans around health care privatization stopped in its tracks.

“I'm sick and tired, more than ever since the pandemic, of watching all our institutions and the social safety net being slowly and insidiously eroded.

“I also have no interest in seeing OHIP dismantled. As a person with a disability in receipt of ODSP, I do not want to find myself paying more than the \$2 fee I already do for most of my medications—I can't afford it, period.

“In the same way, I don't want health care providers to have the option to back out of OHIP, leaving Ontarians to pay munificent costs themselves—or to do without.

“I am not okay with lesser levels of health care, or with the spectre of people dying because of the lack of it, or having insufficient care.

“Neither is it okay by me that the medical personnel would be diverted from the present health care system to staff these private clinics.

“That creates two levels of care overseen by insufficient numbers of staff who are already overworked. A two-tier system just isn't a good idea—not from any angle.”

I hope I get to the point where I can talk about inadequate funding for health care in the fall economic statement. But I want to share this as well because we're talking about someone on ODSP who is saying that he cannot afford to pay more than the \$2 fee he already pays. I bring that up, Speaker, because in the economic statement—and we've heard it from just about everyone who spoke—it's going to bring allowable earnings from \$200 a month to \$1,000 a month. And let me cut you off at the path: We're aligned. That's a good step forward.

The part where we're not aligned is that this is helping people who can work. As my colleague mentioned earlier today, I thought the number was that less than 20% of the people would be helped by this; it's actually 6.5% of the people on ODSP will be helped by this. So literally 90% of the people won't be helped by this. I know that sometimes getting into the numbers gets a little bit boring, but I want to remind people: If you're a single person on

ODSP—and a lot of people on ODSP are a single person, because God forbid you fall in love and move in with your partner; all of a sudden you become a dependent with your partner, so there are a lot of issues around that.

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But let's just talk about a single person. They get \$1,228 a month. That's one person. In that, for some reason, the government—and this happened under the Liberals, and proceeded with the Conservative government. They think that shelter is \$522. I would love to find shelter that's \$522. When I was a college student—and that is a very long time ago; I had hair back then—my rent was more than \$522, so I don't know how you fast-forward 30 years and that's still an affordable rent, but let's pretend it is—it's not. The 5% increase from \$1,228 gives them \$61.40 a month. It's better than nothing, but still, \$61.40.

Now, I looked up rent in a couple different areas in the north, and I went with Sault Ste. Marie, because it was the lowest. It was lower than Sudbury, lower than Thunder Bay; the numbers may be old and off. But in Sault Ste. Marie you could find rent for \$950, and electricity in Sault Ste. Marie would be \$137.74. And so I added that together, and it gives you \$1,087. That leaves you \$141 at the end of the day if you're on ODSP, and that's just rent and electricity. You don't have a phone, you don't have Internet and you don't have any other services; all you've paid for is rent and electricity, and you have \$141 at the end of the day. That gives you just over \$35 a week to spend on groceries, and again, you don't have a phone and you don't have any other services. You just barely are surviving with \$35.25 a week.

In this, what they do, Speaker, is they'll talk about, "Well, we're raising it 5%," and so if people don't know the numbers, if they don't know that yearly it's \$14,736 that they're making, and that 5% is going to bump them up to \$15,500—I'm going to say \$15,500, but it's not quite, but let's just say \$15,500—that isn't a significant increase. If you can't afford food, if you can only afford shelter and electricity and you have to budget for food—and many people who are on ODSP require special diets and special circumstances.

Then the Conservative government wants to high-five themselves, because they're going to tie it to inflation, but what you're telling these people—and these are valuable citizens of our society—is, "I have decided as a government to legislate you into poverty, and I will tie it to inflation, so that any time someone tries to argue that you need more money, we can point to how much it's climbing with inflation, even though we've held your head under the water. You've been under that poverty line, and we're going to hold your head underwater for as long as we can."

Now, I know it stings to hear this, but every member of the Conservative caucus has an additional position. We talk often about the PAs, and if you're a parliamentary assistant you get a \$16,000-a-year raise. That's on top of what you make as an MPP. I want to point out, Speaker, that that \$16,000, that top-up, is more than what someone on ODSP makes for the entire year. The total of what an ODSP person makes for an entire year is less than what a PA makes in the top-up on top of the MPP salary.

That's hurtful, but let's talk about OW, because OW is even more shocking. If you're on OW, Ontario Works—welfare in the old days—this fall economic statement has for you—I wish I could drumroll; I'm too tall to reach the table—nothing. There's nothing for you, and do you know why, Speaker? It cannot be because they make too much money, because OW is \$733 a month. I did the math, and I had to check with my colleagues, because I was sure I was wrong, because it's less than 10 grand a year. I don't know how anyone can survive on this—\$8,796 a year, which is more than \$7,000 less than the parliamentary assistant top-up of \$16,000 a year.

God, time flies. I want to read one letter from Kristiina. She's on OW right now, but she's also disabled, unable to qualify. She said, "As a disabled single parent of two beautiful children, I am struggling to provide for my family. OW was my last resort to keep us afloat after Laurentian University cancelled my programs in 2021. With the current OW rates, I cannot afford to pay the rent of my two-bedroom apartment, which is \$1,250—not to mention the rest of my bills or groceries, and I cannot save any money for emergencies. Doubling the ODSP and OW rates would change not just my life but my daughters' lives as well"—two daughters—"and so many others that are in the same situation I am. The current rates are akin to legislated poverty: How can you, members of provincial Parliament, allow for so many people to be poor when you have every opportunity to give us a chance at a good life? How can you justify receiving 100 times what we do and benefits on our tax dollars when I cannot feed my family? Double the rates now to help put a stop to this injustice." This is a mom with children.

I want to share another story from somebody who doesn't want me to use their name but is on OW and has to go to food banks. Halloween just passed recently, and what they told me was that at night, after the kids go home, she goes around and she collects the pumpkins off of the stoops and she makes different meals out of the pumpkins, the jack-o'-lanterns that people had carved. That's the level of poverty that we're looking at.

Mrs. Robin Martin: I make pumpkin soup.

MPP Jamie West: I think a snide remark—"I make pumpkin soup."

Mrs. Robin Martin: I do.

MPP Jamie West: You are missing the point, and I'm trying to share the point with you. This isn't someone outside saying, "I feel like pumpkin soup." This is someone so desperate for food that they're taking jack-o'-lanterns from their neighbours and eating them, and you're missing the point.

I'm running out of time, Speaker, and I think I'm talking to a brick wall. I am telling you about people who are in poverty, who have no food, and I think that they're not listening. It's very unfortunate, because they had the opportunity, with this statement, to change people's lives and pull them out of poverty, which would also stimulate the economy because they would have money to spend in the community—money that would power small business, money that would move things forward. Instead, it becomes a system where we have to volunteer through

charity, where we have to give to food banks, where it causes economic stress, where their children aren't successful in school because their stomachs are rumbling. These is an important conversation to have. It really is an important conversation to have, and it's unfortunate that they're not listening, because they need to. They really need to.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Question? The member from—

Mr. Rick Byers: Bruce-Grey-Owen Sound. Wiarton Willie.

Thank you, Madam Speaker. I thank the member for his comments. I was listening, as other members here were, and I do appreciate you acknowledging, at the start, the change in the ODSP program and the income incentive threshold that was changed from \$200 to \$1,000, which I believe—and I will confirm—will come into effect when the bill is given royal assent.

My question to you is, my understanding is that people on the ODSP program—that is typically not the only program that they are on. What you've done is you isolate numbers only on—and again, I don't have the full, but is it not the case that many ODSP recipients have a number of other programs that they can put to work and help with their assistance?

MPP Jamie West: I don't know how to answer that, Speaker. People on ODSP are living in abject poverty—abject poverty. When you see somebody—and we're seeing many people now, in Sudbury—who is panhandling at streetlights, your first thought might be that they're homeless, but more than likely, they're probably on OW or ODSP.

The government, which is responsible for providing for the citizens that are in these situations, is neglecting that duty. To assume, as the Conservative government, that there are other services that provide for them is just negligence. When people are living in abject poverty, under legislation, it's the responsibility of the Conservative government—as government, whoever is in the role of government—to provide for these people and pull them out of poverty. When we knocked on doors and we told people, “We're looking out for you. We're for the little guy”—well, you guys said, “for the little guy”—those are the little guys who you should be looking out for and helping.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Question?

Mr. Sol Mamakwa: Just a quick question. I know that sometimes in Ontario we talk about the north, and some people refer to Barrie and North Bay as the north. Sometimes I feel—not feel; I know—that the people that are the decision-makers are here, and they don't understand us. They don't know about the real north—when we talk about the cost of living, when we talk about the ways of life of who we are.

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Does this budget make change for the people who are struggling, who are legislatively driven into poverty? Does it help those people?

MPP Jamie West: Speaker, I would say it doesn't help people.

Mary Jane sent me an email early in September regarding her concern about the rising natural gas costs after her bill showed a 50% increase in the rate that was charged. She called Enbridge Gas regarding the increase and was told that it was for Ontario residents only and had been approved by the Ontario Energy Board. Mary Jane is concerned that the increase will really impact households when they start getting their heating bills this fall and winter—and it will.

It's chilly here; I feel cold in Toronto, mostly because of the wind chill off the lake. But it is very, very cold in the north. So when natural gas climbs like that, when a 50% increase comes, especially for people who are on fixed incomes, who are so tightly balanced, I don't know how they're going to make ends meet. We're all feeling the pinch of inflation no matter what bracket we're in, but the poorest of the poor are going to feel it the worst, and they're literally going to freeze.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Question?

Mr. Anthony Leardi: The plan to build includes an increase of \$40 million to the skilled trades fund, which now brings the total of that fund to \$145 million—it's an enormous benefit to people seeking skilled trades in Ontario—and \$3 million of that is specifically earmarked for persons of First Nations. So my question to the member from Sudbury is, does he support that initiative, and will he vote for it?

MPP Jamie West: Every bill has good parts in it. One of the members opposite talked about the poison pill—and there's not a poison bill; all we're saying is that it doesn't go far enough. What I would argue is that there's a definition of what goes far enough. It isn't like we're asking the government to provide everybody with a Lexus and all they're getting is Toyotas. A great initiative to attract more people to skilled trades is an excellent idea. I went through the college and university circuit, and then I became an apprentice afterwards and found out how rewarding that was, and I recognized how well it pays people. But to pull out one section and to ignore the opportunity to really invest in schools, really invest in health care, really help people who are living in abject poverty, and to say, “Will you support this bill because of this line here?”—what I'm saying is that we have an opportunity here to work together and really support everybody, to pull everyone out of poverty, to make things better for all Ontarians, not just certain ones.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Question?

Mr. Michael Mantha: This government's economic update comes on the heels of a multi-billion dollar surplus. Instead of looking at investing in hospitals, they're sitting on billions of dollars. We're in the middle of a health crisis. And there's not a single new penny that has been put towards education, towards health care. What we're seeing in our communities is cancelled surgeries, ER closures, and there are not enough pediatric beds in the ICUs to care for our most treasured loved ones. Our chief medical officer has said we're under extraordinary pressures. If this shouldn't be the priorities of this government with this fall economic update—what am I missing; what is wrong with the obvious that is not being seen or accepted by this government?

MPP Jamie West: I do not know. It's weird to have a surplus and have the opportunity to fix a lot of things at a time when inflation is so high, when people are feeling the crunch, but to not take that opportunity.

The number one issue we hear about, and I'm sure they do as well—we talk about it, though—is Bill 124, how it's punitive, and it isn't the financial side. When I talk to SEIU, when I talk to health care workers or PSWs, what I hear all the time is that it's disrespectful. "You talk about us as heroes, but it's very disrespectful to have this thing in place that treats us as inferior." Even today, the Police Association of Ontario was here, and one of the topics was Bill 124.

You have an opportunity now to really help people. There's lots in Bill 124, but when you limit wages to 1% when you know that inflation is much higher than that—normally around 3% but much higher this time—what you're doing is telling people, "You are not valuable, you are not worth keeping up with the cost of living, and we do not care about you."

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): The member from Newmarket–Aurora.

M^{me} Dawn Gallagher Murphy: We know affordability measures like the gas tax cut work. When gas prices were slowing this past summer, Statistics Canada's consumer price index for July reported that gas prices fell the most in Ontario out of any other province, because of this temporary gas tax cut. Will the member opposite support the proposed extension of this proven measure?

MPP Jamie West: There is a lot of bragging with the gas tax cut. The thing that I'm concerned about is that fuel companies gouge. There is a gas station that's less than 20 minutes from Sudbury that is always 10 cents less than it is in Sudbury. I don't know how expensive it is to transport stuff, but I do know that a watermelon is not 10 cents more and no other product that comes to Sudbury is 10 cents more. When you reduce the gas tax, there is nothing to prevent the company from increasing that amount going in there.

It's going to save, on average, \$195 per year for people, and that's great. Who is going to say no to that? The thing I need to focus on, though—I talked about this earlier—is that the Enbridge bill is doubling. It's rising by 50%. Connie talked about it doubling in the last month. She has a natural gas fireplace, a gas barbecue and a tankless hot water heater. She doesn't have a furnace and uses electric heat for heating her home. She is a senior on CPP and OAS and finds it hard to understand and accept such a huge increase. She is worried about affordability. The \$195 a year—if Connie has a car—is not going to help her. It will make a small dent but it's really not going to help her make ends meet, and that's what we're trying to explain to you on the opportunity to make things better for people.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Further debate?

Hon. Merrilee Fullerton: As Ontario's Plan to Build made clear on Monday, our government will continue to improve the way that social assistance is delivered in the province. In doing so, we will help give people a faster

pathway to the support that they need, while making participating in the workforce more rewarding for people with disabilities.

People benefiting from ODSP are very diverse in their backgrounds, their circumstances, their needs, their abilities and their talents. And even though they may need support from ODSP, many of them want to work and many can work. They have their own unique aptitudes to offer that would help their employers and help them find meaningful employment and participate in the job market.

In a province with about 400,000 jobs waiting to be filled, this is also the perfect moment to give people with disabilities a rewarding experience and help them keep more money in their pockets. That's why we are improving ODSP rules around the employment income threshold, so that the 25,000 people on ODSP who are already working will soon be able to earn up to \$1,000 a month while keeping all their income support from ODSP. The money earned will be their income and supplemented by support from ODSP.

We believe this change in policy will empower another 25,000 people with disabilities who can and want to work to seek employment. It will give them an opportunity to apply their skills, to learn new skills, to contribute to their local economy and to support themselves and their families and their communities. They will also keep the added security of ODSP health benefits as they earn money from work.

Our improvements to ODSP will also include protection for all people and families receiving support from the program, regardless of whether they are working, by offsetting the effects of inflation.

On top of the historic investment that we made earlier this year in ODSP—the highest percentage increase the program has seen in decades—we are also delivering on our promise to help almost half a million people benefiting from the program to manage increased costs of living.

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To help with costs of household expenses, we are fulfilling our promise to align ODSP core income support rates to inflation starting next July. This is also a permanent measure that people can count on year after year. It's simple: When the cost of living goes up, so do ODSP rates. This means people receiving ODSP will see another increase to their benefits less than a year after the historic increase that we made in September of this year.

Along with our government's commitment to improving the lives of adults living with disabilities, our plan includes help for families raising a child with a severe disability. Just like with ODSP, we will adjust the maximum monthly amount that families can receive under the Assistance for Children with Severe Disabilities Program. Again, this means an increase on top of the 10% increase we provided in July and the further 5% increase we provided in September.

As we make these important improvements, we will stay focused on providing better and more timely support to the people who need it while making sure that people who don't qualify for ODSP are connected to the government's many programs and services for training, retraining and upskilling so that they can find meaningful work.

We are already making it easier for people to connect to the services they need and streamlining processes so that front-line workers can focus on people rather than paperwork. This means case workers can help clients get services through the Better Jobs Ontario program offered by the Ministry of Labour, Immigration, Training and Skills Development and Employment Ontario, which is becoming a one-stop shop for job seekers, including those who are currently on social assistance. This makes it easier for people to find help to start or restart their careers and support their families.

Improving the social assistance system is something we've been working on across government, including co-operation with my colleagues the Minister of Finance, the Minister of Labour, Immigration, Training and Skills Development, the Minister of Health and others, and we will continue to do this important work and collaboration.

We are also committed to our continued engagement with First Nations partners to transform social assistance delivery. This means creating a separate plan to renew social assistance in First Nations communities that recognizes their unique needs and priorities, and we will continue to advocate for the federal government's swift delivery of a Canada Disability Benefit to support low-income Ontarians with disabilities, and we will continue to work with them to achieve this improvement for the people that we all serve.

I want to share some feedback from those who provide support and services to people with disabilities every day. They know that this is a positive development, and I'll share a few of their comments.

Brad Saunders, the CEO of Community Living Toronto said, "This is great news for people receiving ODSP as the employment income threshold will have a huge positive impact for them. Thank you to the government of Ontario ... for your ongoing support."

Valérie Picher, Community Living Toronto's board chair, echoed the same sentiments: "We are pleased with the announcement. This means more money in the pockets of the people we support, as well as improving their quality of life." We thank the government of Ontario for their continued support."

I was pleased to hear the CEO of Community Living Ontario Chris Beesley's comment that, "Monday's announcement is a signal from the government that they are listening. This is a definite step in the right direction. We look forward to continuing our work with the government."

Mark Wafer, the interim CEO of the Abilities Centre, put it succinctly: "A game changer," and "change in a very, very significant way."

As we face our economic challenges, some of them new, some of them long-standing, we are committed to helping people with disabilities succeed, and we're doing that in more than one way. It's about helping people who rely on ODSP and who can work to start a career or move to a new phase in their career, and it's about supporting those who can't work, as we've done with the largest increase to ODSP rates in decades, in tandem with a permanent annual alignment to the cost of living going forward.

We're also making it easier to access support with new digital tools and modern service options, including an online application form, an expansion of the MyBenefits platform, and new communications channels to allow two-way digital messaging between clients and case workers. These changes will transform the system to provide better support for our most vulnerable, allow front-line staff to focus on results for people rather than paperwork, and help people to return to work and participate in their community.

These measures are all good policy, but, more importantly, they are the right thing to do for the people that we serve, and that will always be this government's priority.

Speaker, I move that the question now be put.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Ms. Fullerton has moved that the question be now put. I am satisfied that there has been sufficient debate to allow this question to be put to the House, with over nine hours of debate and 25 members having spoken.

Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? I hear a no.

All those in favour of the motion that the question be put, please say "aye."

All those opposed to the motion that the question be put, please say "nay."

In my opinion, the ayes have it.

I declare the motion—

Mr. John Vanthof: No, you don't. No disrespect, Speaker.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): A recorded vote has been required. It will be deferred to the next instance of deferred votes.

Vote deferred.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Orders of the day?

Hon. Paul Calandra: No further business.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): There being no further business, we'll declare the House adjourned until 9 a.m. tomorrow.

The House adjourned at 2006.

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French, Jennifer K. (NDP)	Oshawa	
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Gélinas, France (NDP)	Nickel Belt	
Ghamari, Goldie (PC)	Carleton	
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Hardeman, Ernie (PC)	Oxford	
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Lumsden, Hon. / L'hon. Neil (PC)	Hamilton East—Stoney Creek / Hamilton-Est—Stoney Creek	Minister of Tourism, Culture and Sport / Ministre du Tourisme, de la Culture et du Sport
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Pang, Billy (PC)	Markham—Unionville	
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Pasma, Chandra (NDP)	Ottawa West—Nepean / Ottawa-Ouest—Nepean	
Piccini, Hon. / L'hon. David (PC)	Northumberland—Peterborough South / Northumberland—Peterborough-Sud	Minister of the Environment, Conservation and Parks / Ministre de l'Environnement, de la Protection de la nature et des Parcs
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Pirie, Hon. / L'hon. George (PC)	Timmins	Minister of Mines / Ministre des Mines
Quinn, Nolan (PC)	Stormont—Dundas—South Glengarry	
Rae, Matthew (PC)	Perth—Wellington	
Rakocevic, Tom (NDP)	Humber River—Black Creek	
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Riddell, Brian (PC)	Cambridge	
Romano, Ross (PC)	Sault Ste. Marie	
Sabawy, Sheref (PC)	Mississauga—Erin Mills	
Sandhu, Amarjot (PC)	Brampton West / Brampton-Ouest	
Sarkaria, Hon. / L'hon. Prabmeet Singh (PC)	Brampton South / Brampton-Sud	President of the Treasury Board / Président du Conseil du Trésor
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Sattler, Peggy (NDP)	London West / London-Ouest	Opposition House Leader / Leader parlementaire de l'opposition officielle
Saunderson, Brian (PC)	Simcoe—Grey	
Schreiner, Mike (GRN)	Guelph	
Scott, Laurie (PC)	Haliburton—Kawartha Lakes—Brock	
Shamji, Adil (LIB)	Don Valley East / Don Valley-Est	
Shaw, Sandy (NDP)	Hamilton West—Ancaster—Dundas / Hamilton-Ouest—Ancaster—Dundas	
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Smith, Dave (PC)	Peterborough—Kawartha	
Smith, David (PC)	Scarborough Centre / Scarborough-Centre	
Smith, Hon. / L'hon. Graydon (PC)	Parry Sound—Muskoka	Minister of Natural Resources and Forestry / Ministre des Richesses naturelles et des Forêts
Smith, Hon. / L'hon. Todd (PC)	Bay of Quinte / Baie de Quinte	Minister of Energy / Ministre de l'Énergie
Smith, Laura (PC)	Thornhill	
Stevens, Jennifer (Jennie) (NDP)	St. Catharines	
Stiles, Marit (NDP)	Davenport	
Surma, Hon. / L'hon. Kinga (PC)	Etobicoke Centre / Etobicoke-Centre	Minister of Infrastructure / Ministre de l'Infrastructure
Tabuns, Peter (NDP)	Toronto—Danforth	Leader, Official Opposition / Chef de l'opposition officielle Leader, New Democratic Party of Ontario / Chef du Nouveau parti démocratique de l'Ontario
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Taylor, Monique (NDP)	Hamilton Mountain / Hamilton-Mountain	
Thanigasalam, Vijay (PC)	Scarborough—Rouge Park	
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Triantafilopoulos, Effie J. (PC)	Oakville North—Burlington / Oakville-Nord—Burlington	
Vanthof, John (NDP)	Timiskaming—Cochrane	
Vaugeois, Lise (NDP)	Thunder Bay—Superior North / Thunder Bay—Supérieur-Nord	
Wai, Daisy (PC)	Richmond Hill	

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West, Jamie (NDP)	Sudbury	
Williams, Hon. / L'hon. Charmaine A. (PC)	Brampton Centre / Brampton-Centre	Associate Minister of Women's Social and Economic Opportunity / Ministre associée des Perspectives sociales et économiques pour les femmes
Wong-Tam, Kristyn (NDP)	Toronto Centre / Toronto-Centre	
Yakabuski, John (PC)	Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke	
Vacant	Hamilton Centre / Hamilton-Centre	