

Legislative  
Assembly  
of Ontario



Assemblée  
législative  
de l'Ontario

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## Official Report of Debates (Hansard)

IN-3

## Journal des débats (Hansard)

IN-3

### Standing Committee on the Interior

### Comité permanent des affaires intérieures

#### Estimates

Ministry of Energy  
Ministry of Northern Development  
Ministry of Mines  
Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry  
Ministry of the Environment, Conservation and Parks

#### Budget des dépenses

Ministère de l'Énergie  
Ministère du Développement du Nord  
Ministère des Mines  
Ministère des Richesses naturelles et des Forêts  
Ministère de l'Environnement, de la Protection  
de la nature et des Parcs

1<sup>st</sup> Session  
43<sup>rd</sup> Parliament

Monday 14 November 2022

1<sup>re</sup> session  
43<sup>e</sup> législature

Lundi 14 novembre 2022

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Chair: Aris Babikian  
Clerk: Thushitha Kobikrishna

Président : Aris Babikian  
Greffière : Thushitha Kobikrishna

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House Publications and Language Services  
Room 500, West Wing, Legislative Building  
111 Wellesley Street West, Queen's Park  
Toronto ON M7A 1A2  
Telephone 416-325-7400  
Published by the Legislative Assembly of Ontario



Service linguistique et des publications parlementaires  
Salle 500, aile ouest, Édifice du Parlement  
111, rue Wellesley ouest, Queen's Park  
Toronto ON M7A 1A2  
Téléphone, 416-325-7400  
Publié par l'Assemblée législative de l'Ontario

ISSN 2816-7279

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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

## STANDING COMMITTEE ON THE INTERIOR

## COMITÉ PERMANENT DES AFFAIRES INTÉRIEURES

Monday 14 November 2022

Lundi 14 novembre 2022

*The committee met at 0900 in committee room 1.*

### ESTIMATES MINISTRY OF ENERGY

**The Chair (Mr. Aris Babikian):** The Standing Committee on the Interior will now come to order. The committee is about to begin consideration of the estimates of the Ministry of Energy for a total of two hours.

As this is the first ministry before the committee, I would like to take this opportunity to remind everyone that the purpose of the estimates committee is for members of the Legislature to determine if the government is spending money appropriately, wisely and effectively in the delivery of the services intended.

As Chair, I will allow members to ask a wide range of questions pertaining to the estimates before the committee to ensure they are confident the ministry will spend those dollars appropriately.

In the past, members have asked questions about the delivery of similar programs in previous fiscal years, about the policy framework that supports a ministry approach to a problem or service delivery or about the competence of a ministry to spend the money wisely and efficiently. However, it must be noted that the onus is on the members asking the questions to make the questioning relevant to the estimates under consideration.

The ministry is required to monitor the proceedings for any questions or issues that the ministry undertakes to address. I trust that ministry staff has made arrangements to have the hearings closely monitored with respect to questions raised so that the ministry can respond accordingly. If you wish, you may, at the end of your appearance, verify the questions and issues being tracked by the research officer. Are there any questions from members before we start?

I'm now required to call vote 2901, which sets the review process in motion. We will begin with a statement of not more than 20 minutes from the Minister of Energy.

Minister, the floor is yours.

**Hon. Todd Smith:** Thanks very much, Chair. Good morning, everybody. I hope everybody had a good week back in their ridings for Remembrance Week.

I'm really pleased to be here with you today to discuss the 2022-23 estimates for the Ministry of Energy, as well as the plan that we've been implementing over the past year

to meet Ontario's growing energy needs, all while driving innovation and moving our economy forward.

Before we begin though, I'd like to recognize some of the senior officials from the ministry who have joined us today, either in person or virtually. Our ADMs are Karen Moore—she's also the CAO and she is sitting next to me here in the committee room. Steen Hume and Scott Mantle are joining us online today. Should they be required to provide further insight, I'll be calling on them throughout the next couple of hours.

I'd also like to recognize my deputy minister, Jason Fitzsimmons, who couldn't be with us today. I'd like, however, to take this opportunity even in his absence to thank Deputy Fitzsimmons and the staff across the whole ministry for their hard work and their professionalism.

As I think the next two hours will make clear, it's been a very, very busy year at the Ministry of Energy. Thanks to their hard work, as well as the hard work of the teams at the Independent Electricity System Operator and the Ontario Energy Board, we've accomplished a lot. We have really accomplished a lot.

So now let's dive into why the last year has been as busy as it has been at the Ministry of Energy. As many of you know, one of my first jobs in our new government was as Minister of Economic Development, Job Creation and Trade. At that time, all I heard from industry was that they were worried that they would have to move out of Ontario, that they would have to move out of the province. I was the one who took that phone call from General Motors stating that they were closing their Oshawa plant and moving south—a direct result of skyrocketing electricity rates under the previous government which made investing in Ontario virtually impossible.

But what a difference we've seen in just four years. We have, as I like to say, flipped the script in Ontario. We've made the changes needed to create an environment in Ontario that's attracting jobs and investment at a record pace, and today, we're seeing incredible economic growth across our province.

We're investing in electric vehicles and battery manufacturing, whether it be with Stellantis-LG in the Windsor area or Umicore in eastern Ontario. We're investing in clean steel-making in Hamilton and Sault Ste. Marie with Dofasco and Algoma.

We're giving consumers more opportunities to manage their electricity use and control their costs, whether it be our new, ultra-low overnight electricity rate or the new

Green Button standard that's rolled out across the province. As our population grows and investment continues, we're ready to meet the rising demand for reliable, affordable and clean energy—all while supporting electrification. That's because last year I wrote to the Independent Electricity System Operator—IESO—asking them to move ahead with a series of steps to secure Ontario's energy future. I hope everyone did their homework and reviewed those documents before today's meeting.

In recent months, I've made a number of announcements as we made progress on the plan that began last year with those directives to the IESO. One key step was my direction to the IESO to proceed with a competitive procurement to acquire 4,000 megawatts of new electricity generation and storage resources. This energy is going to be essential when it comes to supporting the incredible economic growth and electrification that I've mentioned, while at the same time creating good, high-paying jobs in the energy sector. A critical part of our approach is ensuring a diverse supply mix, and this procurement expands our tool box on that front.

With at least 1,500 megawatts of energy storage, this process represents the largest procurement of energy storage in our country's—and possibly North America's—history. That's a huge expansion from the 100 megawatts that's currently on the system. The procurement will also ensure reliability, with up to 1,500 megawatts of natural gas generation, which the IESO has said is critical to meeting peak demand.

Now, I know some of the folks in this room have asked, "Why build natural gas generation at all?" To be fair, it's a question I asked the experts at the IESO last year. Frankly, the response I received back is that, while other generation can meet much of our upcoming electricity needs, we can't ensure a reliable electricity grid without some small portion of new natural gas generation on the margin. We need that certainty that electricity will be there when we flip the switch, because without a reliable and affordable grid, we can't expect Ontarians to adopt electric vehicles or even consider electric heat pumps, and we can't expect that industry will electrify—changes that will help drive down emissions. And we definitely can't expect to create new jobs or attract investment if we can't guarantee reliable power.

And let me be clear: Saying no to investment is a non-starter for our government. An unreliable and unaffordable grid that drives costs up for families is also a non-starter. I'm hopeful that the members opposite can agree on those two points, and I hope we hear from them today a commitment to work with our government to get this new generation built so that we can continue to support our growing and electrifying economy. Saying no to blackouts doesn't seem like a controversial position to me, Mr. Chair.

I'm also hopeful that we can have some positive discussions about how nuclear energy will help meet our growing energy needs. I've had the opportunity to speak with energy ministers from around the world in the last six weeks or so, especially last month, and there's absolutely a growing

recognition of the role that it needs to play in electricity production.

While I know that the NDP and their current leader have never been supporters of low-cost nuclear power—which employs 76,000 workers in Canada, most of which are right here in Ontario—I hope they're also seeing the incredible opportunity that we have in front of us. That includes the recent announcement I made in front of more than 200 workers at Ontario Power Generation, that our government is supporting the continued operation of the Pickering nuclear generating station through September 2026.

In recognition of the essential role that nuclear energy plays in our electricity system, I've also asked OPG to conduct a feasibility assessment on the refurbishment of the station B units. These are the newer units that first entered operation back in the 1980s. Keeping Pickering operational, at least through 2026, will secure the continued generation of reliable and low-cost electricity for our province. That's critical because our nuclear advantage is a clean energy advantage. This extension alone will reduce emissions by 2.1 million tonnes in 2026. That's like taking more than 640,000 cars off the road. It's also a jobs advantage, with 76,000 jobs supported across the country, as I've already mentioned.

#### 0910

It's even a health care advantage. There is incredible work happening across the province on medical isotope production, something that doesn't often get nearly the recognition that it deserves, as part of our nuclear advantage in Ontario. In fact, Ontario's Candu reactors benefit millions of people in countries all over the world by producing 50% of the world's supply of cobalt-60, a medical isotope used in cancer treatments and medical equipment sterilization. That has been so important as countries around the world have responded to COVID-19 and as countries look to shift their supply of medical isotopes away from Russia after their unprovoked invasion of Ukraine.

Building on that nuclear energy advantage and advancing the important work ahead of us requires more than just words. That's why we're also looking ahead to new opportunities, and I'm thrilled that Ontario is on track to be the site of the world's first commercial grid-scale SMR, or small modular reactor, at Darlington, providing clean electricity to our grid by 2028.

The federal government has certainly recognized how important this project is for Ontario, as just a couple of weeks ago, I joined the federal natural resources minister, Minister Jonathan Wilkinson, to announce the investment by the Canada Infrastructure Bank in the Darlington SMR project, to the tune of almost a billion dollars—\$970 million from the CIB. That's the CIB's first-ever investment in nuclear.

One area where I'm certain we can agree, though, is on our government's decision to increase funding by \$340 million to expand our energy efficiency programs as we move out of a period of costly oversupply and into a period of increasing electricity demand. That brings the total

investment to more than a billion dollars over the province's current four-year electricity conservation framework. That can mean huge benefits, whether it's funding for a municipality to upgrade the chiller at their local arena, where the kids play hockey; funding for a hospital to make HVAC upgrades; or funding to help a local business install new insulation or better windows and doors. These types of upgrades will not only reduce demand on the provincial grid, but they'll also reduce energy use and operational costs. By 2025, these expanded programs will help deliver enough annual electricity savings to power about 130,000 homes every year and reduce costs for consumers by over \$650 million. That's a win for customers, it's a win for the environment and it's also a win for our province.

These enhancements will also have a particular impact in southwestern Ontario, with regional peak demand savings of 225 megawatts, which will allow for even more economic development in this region, and we know there's a lot of economic development planned for that southwestern part of the province.

But that's not the only thing that we're doing in the southwest; we're also making investments in transmission to ensure that we can get the power to where it needs to be. In April, our government issued two orders in council to accelerate the development of critical transmission infrastructure that we need to support the incredible growth that we're seeing in southwestern Ontario. The first order in council declared three transmission line projects in southwest Ontario as priorities, streamlining the Ontario Energy Board's regulatory approval process. The second directed the OEB to require Hydro One undertake development work for four of the identified transmission lines. This is the kind of regulatory environment that job creators are looking for so they can make new investments, and in this case, we know it's going to pay off with new economic development.

These lines will support the new Stellantis-LGES battery plant that I mentioned earlier, in the Windsor area, the growing greenhouse sector in that area as well and other job creators in southwestern Ontario. And I have to say, it's this commitment to getting it done and building the infrastructure we need to bring new jobs to the southwest that resulted in seats like Windsor-Tecumseh and Essex flipping in the last election.

It's also because, at the same time as we build out our electricity grid, we're continuing to keep costs down for families and businesses. And I think that commitment to keeping costs down is a great opportunity to talk about the estimates that we have tabled.

The 2022-23 estimates include \$6.6 billion for the Ministry of Energy. Almost all of that funding—more than \$6.2 billion—supports our broad suite of electricity rate mitigation programs. That includes our Ontario Electricity Rebate, or OER, which provides rate relief to residential consumers, small businesses, long-term-care homes and farms. This year, the OER is saving the average household about \$14 every month, or more than \$165 just this year. We also have our more targeted programs which support rural, remote and low-income customers, as well as our

First Nations Delivery Credit, which provides a 100% credit for delivery or service charges for all on-reserve First Nations residential customers.

The Financial Accountability Officer, the FAO, confirmed that as a result of our approach that we've taken over the last several years, electricity bills for households will be 23% lower in 2029 than they would have been under the previous Liberal government's disastrous plan. That's a huge success. I want to say that again: 23% lower in 2029 than under the previous government's long-term energy plan.

Our government is also keeping costs down for large commercial and industrial consumers through the comprehensive electricity plan, which is reducing costs by between 15% and 17%. Over 50,000 customers are benefiting from this plan, allowing them to focus on reinvesting in their operations and creating jobs here in Ontario, rather than looking outside of our borders.

But let's be clear why programs like this are even necessary. Why is this major spending even necessary? These programs are here because the previous government drove up the cost of electricity to a point where families would have seen a 6% increase this year and every year until 2028. We all remember the soaring electricity bills during the 2013-17 period. It's because the previous Liberal government sold off Hydro One, creating new long-term costs for our energy system. They signed more than 33,000 contracts—not just contracts, overpriced contracts: over-market-value contracts well above the going rate for power. That includes contracts that, you will remember, paid 80 cents per kilowatt hour when our hydro or nuclear fleet provides it for well under 10 cents a kilowatt hour. There are long-term costs. Many of these overpriced, over-market contracts will still be on the books for another 15 years.

We did, however, act very quickly when we were first elected to prevent these costs from ballooning even further. We did that by cancelling as many of those long-term contracts for power that we didn't need as we could. That saved ratepayers \$800 million. But going forward, we still need programs like the comprehensive electricity plan to cover the above-market costs of those poor decisions by the previous government. We're avoiding these pitfalls by taking a responsible path when it comes to building out our grid—an approach that recognizes the costs that families are facing.

Our competitive process is going to help keep costs down as we procure the 4,000 megawatts of new electricity generation and storage that we need. That competitive approach has already borne fruit. This summer, we announced that we had re-contracted more than 760 megawatts of existing resources at a 30% savings when compared to the previous government's contracts. That's a huge decrease which means lower costs for our system and for ratepayers.

We're also working with the federal government, and over the past few months we've had great success in securing funding to support our growing grid in Ontario. That includes the \$970 million that I mentioned earlier of support for the Darlington small modular reactor project, their recent

clean technology tax incentives, which I spoke about with Minister Wilkinson many times, as well as work that we're doing now to get CIB support for our clean energy storage procurement.

**0920**

I'm proud of the work that my ministry is doing to ensure continued access to reliable, affordable and clean electricity for Ontario's homes and businesses. Stability and certainty—policy certainty—are what people are looking for in Ontario's energy sector.

**The Chair (Mr. Aris Babikian):** Minister, you have two minutes left.

**Hon. Todd Smith:** Thank you, Chair.

We're building the reliable and affordable generation and storage that we need to support the incredible economic growth that we're seeing, to support electrification across the province and to support our growing population. Keep in mind, we're expecting to see an additional two million people moving to Ontario over the next number of years. Not only will we need new homes for those individuals, but we're going to need the power for electricity in those homes. That's why the procurements that we put in place are so essential to ensuring we have the power that we need.

As we move forward, my ministry is going to continue to champion initiatives that support Ontario's electricity consumers while strengthening the province's energy sector and promoting sustained economic growth across Ontario.

If we want to continue to see the type of investment that we've been seeing in Loyalist, at the Umicore facility in Bath, and if we want to continue to see the type of investment that we're seeing in Essex and the Windsor area at the LG-Stellantis facility, we have to ensure that we have price certainty, that costs remain stable in our energy sector. Otherwise, we'll experience what we saw during the Liberals' last term in office. We saw manufacturing jobs fleeing our province at a record rate. Over 300,000 manufacturing jobs left Ontario during their term.

During our term, we've been able to put the foundations in place for an environment where companies want to invest, and a large part of that is because of responsible energy policy; it's because of responsible electricity policy. The changes that we have made to our policies in Ontario have put us on a level and competitive playing field—

**The Chair (Mr. Aris Babikian):** Thank you, Minister. The time is up.

We'll now begin the questions and answers in rotations of 20 minutes for the official opposition members of the committee, 10 minutes for the independent members of the committee, and 20 minutes for the government members of the committee, for the remainder of the allotted time. As always, please wait to be recognized by me before speaking. All questions and comments will need to go through the Chair. For the deputy minister, assistant deputy minister, staff—when you are called on to speak, if you would give your name and your title each time, so that we can accurately record in Hansard who we have.

I will start with the official opposition. MPP Tabuns.

**Mr. Peter Tabuns:** Thank you very much, Chair. I appreciate this opportunity.

Good morning, Minister. Usually, it's you and me on this side, historically, so this is an interesting change.

One of the things that puzzled me when I looked at the ministry's vision and priorities is, there isn't a mention of the climate crisis or climate change. Why is that?

**Hon. Todd Smith:** We are making changes that are going to have a positive impact on our environment. I just outlined many of them. The fact that we have the largest procurement ever in energy storage in our province's, in our country's and probably in North America's history—that 4,000-megawatt procurement that just went, as I directed to the IESO last week, is going to have one piece of it. But when you factor in our nuclear advantage that we have—

**Mr. Peter Tabuns:** Excuse me. I understand all of that because I was listening to you.

You don't mention taking on the climate crisis or climate change in this document. Why is it not considered part of your vision or part of your priority?

**Hon. Todd Smith:** Well, it certainly is. Keeping emissions low is a priority. We have one of the cleanest electricity systems in the world at over 90% emissions-free right now. Our diversity in our energy sector is the envy of the world. I can tell you that we get over 60% of our electricity from nuclear—you know this—and 20% to 25% comes from our hydroelectric fleet. We also balance off a portion with the 33,000 solar and wind energy projects that we have in Ontario, and then balance it off with a small amount of gas.

**Mr. Peter Tabuns:** Thank you. I'm hearing all that. You're not going to tell me that it's one of your priorities, because it's not in your document. So I'm going to move on to the next question—

**Hon. Todd Smith:** We're putting our—instead of saying words, which happens quite a bit on the other side, we're actually putting things into action and reducing emissions across our province.

**Mr. Peter Tabuns:** Typically, Chair, when—

**The Chair (Mr. Aris Babikian):** I remind everyone to put your question through the Chair, please.

**Mr. Peter Tabuns:** Typically, Chair, when you think something is important, you mention it. I agree with the minister; just talk is not enough. But if you don't even say it's one of your priorities, what signal does that send to the public and to your employees?

But I'm going to go on. Given what the minister has said, what are the greenhouse gas emissions targets for our electricity system in 2030 and in 2035?

**Hon. Todd Smith:** Our vision at the Ministry of Energy is to ensure that we're keeping our emissions as low as we possibly can while providing a reliable and affordable electricity system to the province of Ontario. Justin Rangooni, who is the executive director of Energy Storage Canada, said "Energy Storage Canada ... applauds today's announcement from Ontario's Minister of Energy, Todd Smith,



whose government has just committed to the largest storage specific procurement in Canada.”

**Mr. Peter Tabuns:** Minister, I like Justin Rangooni a lot. He’s a good guy, he’s smart, all of that. But I asked you, what are your targets for GHG emissions for the electricity system in 2030 and 2035? That’s a fairly straightforward question. It’s not rhetorical. What are your targets?

**Hon. Todd Smith:** Well, to the member opposite, Mr. Chair, we’re ensuring that we are keeping our electricity rates reliable and affordable, while at the same time ensuring that we’re keeping emissions low. CanREA, the Canadian Renewable Energy Association, said that our “2,500 megawatt procurement affirms Ontario’s status as a Canadian leader in energy storage.” And then Brandy Giannetta, CanREA’s vice-president of policy, regulatory and government affairs, said, “The Canadian Renewable Energy Association ... applauds the decision to procure up to 2,500 megawatts of energy storage”—

**The Chair (Mr. Aris Babikian):** MPP Tabuns, go ahead.

**Mr. Peter Tabuns:** Chair, it is apparent that the minister either doesn’t have a target or is not prepared to release it, because he’s not answering the question, so I’ll go on to my next one.

You were campaigning at the same time as I was, in May, when the derecho came through, when it hit Ottawa really hard. A number of people died. Climate adaptation is going to be a central task for us in Ontario. It is going to disrupt our power system as well as our transit and our transportation systems. Who in your ministry monitors the issue of climate adaptation and the actions of the natural gas sector, petroleum sector, electricity sector to deal with adaptation? Who in your ministry is monitoring adaptation of the energy sector in Ontario?

**Hon. Todd Smith:** I’ll pass this to Karen Moore, who’s one of my ADMs, and she can elaborate further on that, if you wish—

**Mr. Peter Tabuns:** That would be great. Sure.

**Hon. Todd Smith:** —but one of the most important things that our ministry is concerned about is a reliable and affordable electricity system. The backbone of our system is a non-emitting nuclear fleet. I’m going to pass this on to Karen Moore, but another 25% comes from a non-emitting hydroelectric fleet—

**Mr. Peter Tabuns:** I note that the time is short and I asked about climate adaptation.

**Hon. Todd Smith:** I’ll pass it to Karen.

**Mr. Peter Tabuns:** If you want a reliable system, you have to have adaptation measures in place. You have to have a plan. You have to understand what’s coming at you. Who is responsible for monitoring that? And while I have you, Deputy Minister, could you tell us what the budget is for the people who are monitoring climate adaptation measures and compliance?

**The Chair (Mr. Aris Babikian):** Ms. Moore, identify yourself, please, and go ahead.

**Ms. Karen Moore:** My name is Karen Moore. I’m the acting deputy minister for the Ministry of Energy and the assistant deputy minister for strategic network and agency policy in the ministry.

**Mr. Peter Tabuns:** Could you bring the microphone closer to your mouth?

**Ms. Karen Moore:** Can you hear me now?

0930

**Mr. Peter Tabuns:** You’ve got a good voice, but you’re not a loud person—unlike many of the others in this room.

**Ms. Karen Moore:** My mother appreciated that, growing up.

Thank you very much for the question. Certainly, the ministry recognizes that disruptions to electricity supply caused by extreme weather as a result of climate change are an urgent issue, and they create financial and safety risks for Ontarians and for our energy infrastructure.

Our ministry monitors those impacts and recognizes that the electricity system does need to adapt to these changing conditions. To that end, our ministry works with its agencies and its distribution utilities and partner ministries to enable cost-effective decision-making on adaptation investments. Adaptation actions need to be fully compliant with the Ontario Energy Board’s mandate to ensure that utilities are spending their rate-regulated funds prudently, so we have asked the Ontario Energy Board to provide guidance to local utilities on the investments that can be made to support climate adaptation and resilience, and we continue to work with the Ministry of the Environment, Conservation and Parks in the development of their provincial climate change impact assessment. Work began on this in 2020 and is in its final stages. Through the development of that assessment, the ministry has provided input and ensured that relevant energy sector stakeholders were able to share their expertise and their insights.

**Mr. Peter Tabuns:** So—

**The Chair (Mr. Aris Babikian):** Thank you. Go ahead, Mr. Tabuns.

**Mr. Peter Tabuns:** Thank you. Through you, Chair: I don’t need to know the name of the person, but is there someone who is designated as the person responsible for tracking what’s being done by the different entities in the energy sector, tracking what they’re doing on adaptation and bringing it to the attention of the minister if adaptation plans are not in place?

**Ms. Karen Moore:** Yes, there is a team of people that works in the ministry—

**Mr. Peter Tabuns:** How many people?

**Ms. Karen Moore:** —that reviews climate change policy, including climate adaptation issues in the energy sector.

**Mr. Peter Tabuns:** How much of their time is spent on adaptation? Are we talking a week a year? Are we talking six months a year? How actively are they monitoring the situation and monitoring the plans of the natural gas companies, for instance?

**Ms. Karen Moore:** MPP, I would hesitate to put an exact date on the amount of time that they spend on it. They actively work on it, as I mentioned. They have provided input on the MECP provincial climate change impact assessment. They actively worked on that and continue to monitor climate change policy developments and work

with the Ontario Energy Board to ensure that the appropriate guidance is provided to utilities who are responsible for identifying investments to their systems.

**Mr. Peter Tabuns:** Through you, Chair: In your budget, in these estimates, is there an amount of money, operations and capital, allocated to dealing with adaptation issues for the energy sector in Ontario?

**Ms. Karen Moore:** Individual utilities apply to the Ontario Energy Board for rate regulation of their assets, including investments in infrastructure related to climate change adaptation and investments in the work related to that. So I could not give you a figure for that, for each utility, off the top of my head.

**Mr. Peter Tabuns:** So the Ministry of Energy doesn't actually spend money on adaptation, then? That's what you're saying to me.

**Hon. Todd Smith:** I can—

**The Chair (Mr. Aris Babikian):** Go ahead, Minister.

**Hon. Todd Smith:** The work is actually done through the local distribution companies in their applications to the Ontario Energy Board.

**Mr. Peter Tabuns:** But it isn't just local distribution companies. We have a transmission company that supplies power across Ontario. If you remember the ice storm in Quebec in 1997, it was the big transmission towers that went down, which was why Montreal was without power for a long time.

**Hon. Todd Smith:** Absolutely.

**Mr. Peter Tabuns:** So it's not just the local distribution companies—

**Hon. Todd Smith:** Well, Hydro One is a local distribution company.

**Mr. Peter Tabuns:** Well, it's both. It's both transmission and local distribution.

**Hon. Todd Smith:** That's right.

**Mr. Peter Tabuns:** And we have Enbridge. If you remember Texas and their problems with the winter storm, their natural gas facilities froze up, which is why people were without heat. We have petroleum distribution. And you're responsible for all of those. You're not allocating any capital funds; you're saying all of those individual groups are doing their own plans. Are you, as a minister, satisfied with the planning for adaptation and the investment for adaptation that's being done by the different companies and entities operating in the energy sector? Are you satisfied? Are they doing what needs to be done?

**Hon. Todd Smith:** Thanks to the member opposite for the question. I would like to ask him a question, because he has said in the past that he doesn't believe that nuclear energy should be a part of our make-up in Ontario. I have a whole list of quotes here from that member. When we have an emissions-free source of electricity that's providing 60% of our energy in our province—

**Mr. Peter Tabuns:** I would just like to say, Chair, that the minister can dodge all he wants—

**Hon. Todd Smith:** It's not dodging.

**Mr. Peter Tabuns:** If he wants to engage in a debate with me, maybe another time, but I'm asking a concrete question. I have to ask. You're the minister responsible:

Are you satisfied that energy companies and regulators are doing what's necessary to adapt so that we don't have disruption of our energy systems? Are you satisfied or not?

**Hon. Todd Smith:** Disruptions in our energy system are less now than they ever were. I can pass it over to the assistant deputy minister again for the answer, but there are fewer outages now than there ever were. As LDCs are applying to the Ontario Energy Board to beef up or firm up their system in the face of increased weather activities, there are actually fewer outages now than at any time in our history. Would the ADM like to expand on that?

**Mr. Peter Tabuns:** If I could go back, I just want to know—and I'm hearing what you're saying, Minister. You are satisfied that the utilities, the energy companies, have in place the adaptation programs and investments to protect Ontarians. I'll just note: History is not necessarily a guide to the future. What happened in Ottawa, according to Hydro Ottawa, was unprecedented—the number of hydro poles that were brought down. So we're looking at thousand-year storms coming in, not hundred-year or fifty-year storms. Are you satisfied that the energy sector is doing what's necessary to protect Ontarians from the disruption of climate change in the future?

**Hon. Todd Smith:** I am very satisfied that we have put in place a system that is going to provide reliable and affordable electricity for the people of Ontario, giving them more choice.

I would have to question the member opposite when he talks about a reliable and affordable system that doesn't include nuclear or doesn't include natural gas—where that gets us, Chair. It tells us that we will be experiencing brown-outs and blackouts. It's the Independent Electricity System Operator that has said that in their recent "off gas" report that they presented to me as the minister. That member from the NDP would like to shut off our nuclear facilities and would also like to eliminate natural gas from our system. You can imagine the mess that we would be in if that was the case.

**Mr. Peter Tabuns:** Mr. Chair, although I appreciate the master class in dodging questions and the minister's experience—we've been on this side; you and I together have tag-teamed on a variety of Liberal ministers over the years. I see one of the parliamentary assistants over there who also was a master at doing this. Sorry. At going after Liberal ministers, sir, you were fabulous, I have to say. I was a fan. But you're not answering my question. You won't answer it, so I am going to assume that you're not willing to say that you have confidence that utilities in Ontario are ready for what's coming at them.

I'm going to move on to my next question. You are talking about a new gas plant investment. I guess the first thing to ask is, what would be the capital costs of the new gas-fired generation that you're looking to have installed in Ontario?

**Hon. Todd Smith:** I can't give you an actual cost today because we have begun what the previous Liberal government didn't do and have a competitive procurement process in place. What we have done over the last several months, actually dating back to last year, was ensure that we had

competitive procurement when it comes to new electricity generation in our province of all kinds. What we saw previously was sole-sourced contracts that resulted in an explosion in electricity pricing in Ontario that resulted in energy poverty. Through the midterm RFP, the request for proposals process—

**Mr. Peter Tabuns:** I accept that you don't have the capital costs for the new gas-fired generation. What is your projection for the greenhouse gas emission impact of this investment in new gas fire generation? How many megatonnes of CO<sub>2</sub> per annum are you expecting to have come out of these new plants?

**Hon. Todd Smith:** You know, the most important thing that we can do for the people of Ontario right now is ensure that we have power when we need it. That's what we have done in this request for proposals process.

**Mr. Peter Tabuns:** I'm not asking a really partisan question. I'm asking how many tonnes of greenhouse gases are going to come out of the plants that you plan to commission. If you won't answer the question, I'll assume either you don't know, which is not good in terms of planning, or you refuse you tell us, which I don't think is good in terms of committee operation. But, Minister, I'm surprised that you can't tell us how many tonnes of greenhouse gases are coming out of these plants.

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I'll go on, then. The federal clean energy standard is imposing some tight timelines for phasing out fossil fuel electricity generation. You have said, according to the Star, that Ontario would keep paying for new gas-fired generation even after gas is phased out. Is this true, and how big a bill are we looking at for having these plants just sit around?

**Hon. Todd Smith:** I just want to reply to your previous question first—

**Mr. Peter Tabuns:** No, no.

**Hon. Todd Smith:** We do know that 3% of our emissions from the electricity sector are coming from gas. That's it, 3%, right? So we have a sector that is very, very clean and the envy of the world. I will ask Karen to pick up on your latest question if that's okay.

**Mr. Peter Tabuns:** It's odd, because I actually asked Minister Smith if he was correctly quoted in the Toronto Star that Ontario would keep paying for new gas-fired generation even the gas is phased out and the plants are no longer able to operate. Is this true?

**Hon. Todd Smith:** We need to ensure that—

**Mr. Peter Tabuns:** Sorry, were you quoted—

**The Chair (Mr. Aris Babikian):** Two minutes left for the opposition.

**Mr. Peter Tabuns:** Were you quoted accurately or not?

**Hon. Todd Smith:** We need to ensure that we have affordable and reliable electricity in our province. Because of the mistakes that were made by the previous Liberal government, we wouldn't have that if we phased out our natural gas now.

I know that the member opposite wants to phase out gas now. We simply can't afford to do that—

**The Chair (Mr. Aris Babikian):** MPP Tabuns.

**Mr. Peter Tabuns:** I'm surprised that you won't even confirm whether or not you were accurately quoted in a newspaper. That isn't that fancy.

So what will the impact be on hydro bills for paying for a fleet of gas plants that are just sitting there?

**Hon. Todd Smith:** Sorry; say that again.

**Mr. Peter Tabuns:** What will be the impact on people's hydro bills if we're paying for a fleet of gas plants that are just sitting, not producing power?

**Hon. Todd Smith:** We have flattened electricity rates across our province. At a time when we were seeing an explosion in electricity bills, we, because of the work that we have done, flattened the cost of electricity in Ontario.

**Mr. Peter Tabuns:** Chair—so either you don't know or you're not telling. Which is it?

**Hon. Todd Smith:** You asked previously if we could tell you what the capital costs were going to be. But because we have a competitive process in place—

**Mr. Peter Tabuns:** Yes—

**Hon. Todd Smith:** —one that's going to drive down costs, it is impossible for me—

**The Chair (Mr. Aris Babikian):** MPP Tabuns.

**Mr. Peter Tabuns:** I accepted that you couldn't give me the capital costs. So I'm asking, what's the price going to be to ratepayers for plants sitting idle for a number of years after they can no longer burn gas? If you've got 1,500 megawatts of plants just sitting there and you're feeding them payments every month, it's going to cost money. So what's your projection? Because obviously you've done a cost-benefit analysis.

Or maybe I should ask, did you actually look at the cost, Minister, before you committed to this? Did you actually say, "How much will this cost ratepayers?"

**Hon. Todd Smith:** In our mid-term RFP that we did on procuring gas, we saved 30%. The mid-term RFP—that's the very first of our requests for proposals, our competitive proposals that we put in place.

You know, it's really rich for the member of the NDP to be talking about this—

**The Chair (Mr. Aris Babikian):** Thank you very much, Minister. Thank you very much, Mr. Tabuns. The official opposition time is over.

Now we move to the independent members, and you have 10 minutes to share between you. Thank you very much. Go ahead, MPP Schreiner.

**Mr. Mike Schreiner:** Thank you to the minister for being here today. Minister, I want to pick up on a few questions that the member from Toronto–Danforth was asking. It's clear from your previous responses that there are no climate pollution reduction targets or plans within what the Ministry of Energy submitted, so I'm curious if you can tell us the increased percentage in GHG emissions that will result from the decision to procure 1,500 megawatts of fossil gas.

**Hon. Todd Smith:** The Independent Electricity System Operator, which manages our electricity system, has told us that by ensuring we keep rates flat in the electricity sector, we are going to see a reduction in emissions in other

parts of Ontario's economy, like in industry or in transportation. If we do not have a reliable source of electricity in Ontario—

**Mr. Mike Schreiner:** Excuse me, Chair, I appreciate—

**Hon. Todd Smith:** —we are going to see a spike in electricity cost, which then results in higher emissions from those sectors—

**The Chair (Mr. Aris Babikian):** The floor is for MPP Schreiner.

**Mr. Mike Schreiner:** Thank you, Chair.

To the minister: There have been some estimates in the media that have suggested that this decision will increase GHG emissions by as high as 300% over the next decade. Now, that could put Ontario's competitive advantage of having a clean electricity grid at risk. Has the government considered that in its decision to increase fossil gas?

**Hon. Todd Smith:** If we don't have a reliable electricity system in Ontario, we aren't going to see the move to electrification in our green steel-making process, which is going to have a far larger impact on the reduction of emissions in our province. We wouldn't see Dofasco going to an electric arc furnace, we wouldn't see Algoma going to an electric arc furnace if we didn't have a reliable form of electricity.

**Mr. Mike Schreiner:** Minister, could you provide this committee with a cost-benefit analysis of your decision to increase fossil gas generation in the province? We just need a yes or no.

**Hon. Todd Smith:** The IESO has done a report for us. We've asked them to do a pathway report, which will be coming out very, very soon, to look at eliminating—

**Mr. Mike Schreiner:** So you—

**Hon. Todd Smith:** Let me answer the question. It's to look at eliminating natural gas entirely in our system. That pathway report is going to be coming out in the next couple of weeks.

**The Chair (Mr. Aris Babikian):** The floor is for MPP Schreiner.

**Mr. Mike Schreiner:** Thank you.

So you made the decision to increase fossil gas prior to having that report in your hand?

**Hon. Todd Smith:** We have to ensure that we have a reliable and affordable electricity system, or else it's game over. We can't afford to have brownouts and blackouts in our province. That's a complete non-starter for our government, and it should be a non-starter for everyone on this committee and everyone in this House.

**Mr. Mike Schreiner:** I recognize and support the desire to have a low-cost electricity system that's also clean, so I'm curious: There have been public estimates that the cost of power generated by the SMR at Darlington will be 16 cents a kilowatt hour; meanwhile, wind generation can range between three cents and seven cents a kilowatt hour, utility grade solar between three cents and five cents a kilowatt hour.

Why is the government choosing higher-cost sources of clean generation versus lower-cost sources of clean generation?

**Hon. Todd Smith:** Because we need to have a reliable source of electricity for our province, and we don't yet know what the final cost of that small modular reactor project is. We can't go down and make the same mistakes that the Liberal government previously made with the Green Energy Act by contracting 33,000 intermittent power sources that don't provide the electricity for the province when we need it.

The small modular reactor is going to be a reliable, emissions-free source of electricity, and the fact that so many other jurisdictions, including the federal government, have jumped on board this project, and the Canada Infrastructure Bank has jumped on this project, only, I think—

**The Chair (Mr. Aris Babikian):** MPP Schreiner.

**Mr. Mike Schreiner:** One quick question then, Minister: Do you feel that you have put electricity consumers at risk by procuring gas generation that you've indicated you don't know what the stranded asset cost risk is because we don't know what the cost is going to be when they stop generating, and you're investing in an SMR that is, at least the public reports I've seen, 16 cents a kilowatt hour—are those decisions putting electricity consumers at significant cost risk in this province?

**Hon. Todd Smith:** What put electricity customers in danger in our province was the previous Liberal Green Energy Act. I think we can all agree on that now. Even Kathleen Wynne has apologized for the impact of the Green Energy Act on the province of Ontario and the impact that it had on rates in driving people into energy poverty.

What we are going to do and what we have done is ensure that Ontario has stable energy policy, and that includes the small modular reactor at Darlington.

**The Chair (Mr. Aris Babikian):** MPP Hsu, the floor is yours.

**Mr. Ted Hsu:** I'd like to ask the minister what the first date is that he thinks we can start generating electricity from a small modular reactor.

**Hon. Todd Smith:** So 2028 is the date. That is the target that has been set by OPG for generation of 300 megawatts of clean electricity on grid.

**Mr. Ted Hsu:** Is that something you can guarantee or is that just a hope? We need you on the record here.

**Hon. Todd Smith:** I can tell you that because of the expertise of our energy officials and those who do the work every day, they've refined the refurbishment process at Bruce and at Darlington—

**Mr. Ted Hsu:** No, I'm talking about the SMRs.

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**Hon. Todd Smith:** Yes, and we have every faith that those same people who are doing excellent work every day in refurbishing the large Candu reactors will do that same type of work in our small modular reactors.

**Mr. Ted Hsu:** It's different engineers, though.

**Hon. Todd Smith:** Well, no, it's largely the same people that are working on those projects.

**Mr. Ted Hsu:** Where are we going to get the fuel for these SMRs?

**Hon. Todd Smith:** Well, largely from Saskatchewan is where the source of uranium comes from and—

**Mr. Ted Hsu:** No, but you have to enrich the uranium, so where are we going to buy our enriched uranium?

**Hon. Todd Smith:** We have a certified source—

**Mr. Ted Hsu:** Not in Canada, though?

**Hon. Todd Smith:** We have a certified source—

**Mr. Ted Hsu:** Do we have one in Canada?

**Hon. Todd Smith:** We have a certified source of fuel. We've been using this fuel—

**Mr. Ted Hsu:** So no.

**Hon. Todd Smith:** We've been using this fuel that is going to be used in this boiling water reactor in North America—

**Mr. Ted Hsu:** But not in Candu reactors.

**Hon. Todd Smith:** We have a small modular—

**Mr. Ted Hsu:** Because it's not enriched fuel in Candu reactors and you're going to buy enriched fuel from outside.

**The Chair (Mr. Aris Babikian):** Mr. Hsu, please make your comments through the Chair.

**Mr. Ted Hsu:** Through the Chair, I just want the minister to confirm that we'll be buying enriched fuel from outside of Canada.

**The Chair (Mr. Aris Babikian):** Minister.

**Hon. Todd Smith:** We have a domestic supply of uranium in Saskatchewan that already provides Candu fuel to our nuclear fleet here in Ontario. There is no question about the solid source of fuel that we have for this small modular reactor that's going to be built at Darlington, the GEH model. Other jurisdictions around the world are signing up to have it in their jurisdictions because it's going to help them do what we've already done in Ontario—

**Mr. Ted Hsu:** Minister, I just want to—

**The Chair (Mr. Aris Babikian):** Through the Chair, Mr. Hsu.

**Mr. Ted Hsu:** Through the Chair, I just want to put on the record that the Candu reactors use unenriched uranium, which we can supply from Canada. But in order to enrich the uranium, we have to go through a supplier outside of Canada.

I'd like to, in the time that I have remaining—

**The Chair (Mr. Aris Babikian):** Two minutes left.

**Mr. Ted Hsu:** I'd like to ask the minister, in response to the questions from Mr. Tabuns: It's pretty clear that the minister doesn't care about climate change. The minister has no targets for greenhouse gas emissions because he doesn't know how many natural gas plants he's going to build to supply electricity. We do need electricity, but this minister seems to be betting everything on natural gas plants in the short term and medium term.

How can you face your grandchildren, Minister, is my question, if you don't care at all about climate change, as was clearly brought out by Mr. Tabuns? How can you, Minister, face your grandchildren? And I'm sorry these are fighting words, but, Minister, you used fighting words in your comments and so that's why I'm fired up here. Minister, how can you face your grandchildren?

**Hon. Todd Smith:** Our energy sector in Ontario is the envy of the world. It's over 94% emissions-free. Nuclear

energy is providing 60% of our electricity every day. We should be very proud of that. We should also be very proud of the fact that the other 25% is coming from hydroelectric facilities: clean run-of-water facilities like Niagara Falls and the Saunders dam at Cornwall and many, many others across northwestern and northern Ontario.

We have 33,000 generators of electricity that are unreliable and intermittent—and that should be the shame of the Liberal member that sits from Kingston—that provide electricity at huge overmarket costs. We had his former Premier apologize to the people of Ontario, and that includes my grandkids, should I ever have any, because what it did was bury them in future debt. We have to have a reliable and affordable electricity system in Ontario. It's something that your government was never able to provide.

**Mr. Ted Hsu:** So, Minister, you're—

**The Chair (Mr. Aris Babikian):** Direct your comment through the Chair, Mr. Hsu.

**Mr. Ted Hsu:** Yes, Mr. Chair. So the Minister is willing to strand all sorts of natural gas assets—

**The Chair (Mr. Aris Babikian):** The time is up. Thank you very much.

Now we move to the government side. You have 20 minutes. MPP Yakabuski.

**Mr. John Yakabuski:** Thank you very much, Chair. It's been a lively session so far. It's hard to fall asleep in this room anymore. I want to thank the minister for his address, as well.

Minister, you did spend some time talking about nuclear in your opening address. Coming from the birthplace of Canadian nuclear in Chalk River, Renfrew county, I was very pleased to hear that, and also not only about the tremendous record that we have in nuclear, but also the future that you're talking about. Of course, the refurbishment of Pickering—at this point, the extension of Pickering—is going to be a critical part of our electricity supply going forward.

Minister, Ontario needs a reliable, affordable and clean electricity system to power the province, drive electrification—which you spoke about—and support strong economic growth, which you spoke about as well. What options are your ministry looking at as economic growth and decarbonization efforts contribute to growing electricity demand?

**Hon. Todd Smith:** Thanks to the member from CNL in Chalk River for that answer.

We're looking at every option to meet the electricity needs of the future, and unlike the NDP and the Liberals, we're doing so by listening to the experts at the Independent Electricity System Operator. They like to think that they know better than the industry experts, in those parties, and that's what got us into the mess that we've been in in this province until we came along and cleaned it up.

It's true, though, that the demand for electricity is quickly growing, and we need to do more. This is in part because of our government's success in flipping the switch. There was a time when manufacturing jobs were fleeing the province in droves because of ideologically driven policies from those opposition members which lead

to soaring electricity rates in Ontario and a grid that we couldn't rely on. Now, they're coming back to Ontario. It's great news for our province, but we know it means we have to be ready for even higher demand for the future.

With more people and businesses than ever before using electricity to run their operations, to heat their homes and to get them from point A to point B, our government stands ready to deliver the reliable, affordable and clean electricity they need. Unlike the former government, the Liberal government of Dalton McGuinty and Kathleen Wynne, we won't say no to new investments in Ontario or tell families that they have to live with bill increases of \$100 a month or rolling blackouts and brownouts. It's simply a non-starter for our government and our team.

I'll turn it over now to Karen Moore, who can expand further on our plan.

**Ms. Karen Moore:** Thank you very much, Minister. I will invite Assistant Deputy Minister Steen Hume to provide some more detail on meeting system needs.

**Mr. Steen Hume:** Good morning. Thank you, everyone. My name is Steen Hume; I'm the assistant deputy minister of energy supply policy.

To the member's question about meeting system needs: I think I'd probably say we're kind of breaking it up into a couple of different chunks. Obviously, first and foremost, it's important that we have a reliable grid. As the minister indicated, that reliability is the backbone of what is going to ensure that not only do we have an adequate supply for residential consumers but also an adequate supply to animate the economy, as the IESO has identified in its 2021 Annual Planning Outlook, where for first time in a number of years we saw an increase in future demand largely dictated by the likes of electrification of the broader economy as well as economic development of the economy increasing; particularly in southwestern Ontario we've seen an uptick.

As the minister indicated in response to previous questions, we have launched a number of competitive procurements under IESO's resource adequacy plan. This is to ensure that we are getting affordable, reliable power in a transparent and competitive manner.

We have also stood up, through the Independent Electricity System Operator, the capacity option, which again, on an annual basis, seasonally—winter and summer—procures capacity from existing resources both domestically but also from imports from places like Quebec. This is to ensure that the cost of this power is affordable and also that we're doing it in a transparent, non-technology-agnostic manner.

The final thing we're doing as part of resource adequacy is, as necessary, entering into strategic bilateral contracts where we need to, to maintain system reliability, or standing up specific programs to support energy generation—thinking of things like the program that we're working on to support small hydro, large hydro.

This is particularly done for a couple of different reasons. One is system reliability, but then also there are the social benefits that small hydro provides to local communities in the form of water management as well as local jobs.

So those are some of the key things that we're doing through the resource advocacy framework. As the minister

will also acknowledge, we're looking at the Pickering extension, we're looking at the SMR at Darlington. We're also entering into re-contracting of targeted biomass facilities throughout northern Ontario.

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**The Chair (Mr. Aris Babikian):** MPP Yakabuski.

**Mr. John Yakabuski:** Thank you very much, Minister, and to the ministry staff as well.

Based on what I heard today in the questions from all members of the opposition side, it would appear that they're speaking with one voice on this issue. They are actually willing to trade and sacrifice reliability in place of ideology. Minister, how much risk does that put Ontario's economy and standard of living at, if we are to go down that road and walk away from the reality of the need for reliability?

**Hon. Todd Smith:** Well, I'll tell you, reliability and affordability are the two most important things that I hear about when I talk to Ontarians and when I talk to potential investors in our province. It's why we've taken that extra step to continue the operation at Pickering generation station, as well, until 2026.

It's quite shocking to me to hear the questioning coming from the opposition members, who seem to be against our nuclear advantage that we have in Ontario. Whether it's the member from Kingston or the member from the NDP—they're talking down our nuclear sector, which provides 60% of Ontario's electricity generation every day. It's astounding to me that that is their perspective.

Our government is standing shoulder to shoulder with all of those who work in our nuclear sector, particularly those at the Pickering generating station; those who are in the skilled trades, particularly in Durham region; those in the clean energy frontier over at Bruce.

It's extremely unfortunate that the members of the opposition would like to see these skilled jobs disappear in our province, let alone the affordable, reliable electricity that they're supplying to Ontario every day. We shouldn't really be surprised, though. The NDP leader, MPP Tabuns, especially, has looked the other way when it comes to nuclear and has tried to pretend nuclear isn't the cornerstone of Ontario's clean-energy advantage as well as our pathway to a zero-emissions future. I can think of a dozen examples or more—I have them in my binder here, which is very, very thick—where he has made comments against nuclear. What he's really saying is that he's against the good-paying jobs that provide us the affordable electricity; he's against the clean and reliable grid.

Our government is going to continue to work with the nuclear sector because we recognize the incredible work that they're doing every day and the benefit that they are providing to our province.

I'll turn it over to my officials now, who can speak more to the important role that Pickering and our nuclear fleet play in our system.

**The Chair (Mr. Aris Babikian):** Identify yourself, please.

**Ms. Karen Moore:** Acting Deputy Karen Moore, assistant deputy minister for strategic network and agency policy.

I will turn it over to Assistant Deputy Minister Steen Hume to discuss the importance of nuclear.

**Mr. Steen Hume:** Thank you very much, Deputy.

To riff on what the minister has been saying, nuclear power is the backbone of Ontario's clean electricity grid.

We've been very successful over the last number of years with the refurbishment program at Darlington as well as Bruce. As folks know, the work being led at Darlington is done by Ontario Power Generation, which is an agency of the government, and the Bruce Power refurbishment is being done through Bruce Power, which is a private company with shareholders. Both of these projects are commencing on time and generally on budget, which is great news, because it's a big capital project with lots of moving pieces. I think the preparatory work that both Bruce Power and OPG did in advance, before taking on the projects, put them in good stead to have a very successful refurbishment exercise.

That same kind of thinking has been applied to the work that OPG is leading with GE Hitachi in the development of a first of its kind in Ontario, a small modular reactor, which, as the minister said, is going to be coming into service in the late 2020s. This work is, again, in good progress to date. A number of commercial agreements have been made with different participants in the project, as well as the work that's ongoing with our friends at GE Hitachi.

There are also conversations very actively going on with other provinces throughout Canada who are also taking a strong interest in nuclear power as key step towards their decarbonization efforts. In particular, Saskatchewan is planning to build themselves a small modular reactor, led by GE Hitachi. Alberta has been looking at the roles that SMRs play in their electricity grid and more for industrial applications, and folks in New Brunswick are also leading work with a small modular reactor project as well. So a fair amount of work is going on.

Then I would finally get to—with respect to Pickering, this is, again, part of the backbone of our grid. The decision to consider extending Pickering out to 2026 was an opportunity to give us a bit more space, reduce GHGs and not rely on gas, per se. That work is ongoing. Obviously, the final decision-maker on this is the Canadian nuclear safety authority, which is responsible for ensuring the safety and reliability of nuclear facilities in Canada.

Three points that I would leave on Pickering: Again, it's that around-the-clock baseload clean power that we rely on. It's pretty important. The GHG reductions are quite significant, by about 2.1 megatons in 2026, which is great, with the equivalent of over 600,000 cars off the road. Finally, the jobs that are provided at Pickering, the good-paying jobs, are to the tune of over 4,000 directly and then over 7,000 indirectly—that support the operations, I should say. Overall, I think it's a good story.

**The Chair (Mr. Aris Babikian):** MPP Leardi, go ahead.

**Mr. Anthony Leardi:** First, I want to say that I come from the county of Essex, and I know that the county of Essex lost jobs because of the expensive electricity policies of the previous government. So the people of the county of Essex are very, very happy to know that this government

is bringing new transmission lines to the county of Essex, because that's going to give us jobs and reliable electricity, which is what we need.

My question to the minister today is on the subject of the Pickering generation station: How is continuing to operate the Pickering generation station until 2026 going to help with our shared goal of maintaining a reliable, affordable and clean grid?

**Hon. Todd Smith:** Thanks to the member from Essex for that question. I think we've talked at great length about our nuclear advantage that we have when it comes to not only Pickering but also Bruce Power and Darlington as well. Both Darlington and Pickering fall under the OPG umbrella, and Bruce, as was just mentioned by Steen Hume, is a private company that is providing about 30% of Ontario's electricity every day over on Lake Huron and doing it in a safe and reliable way.

When it comes to Pickering, I was thrilled to be there about six weeks ago to announce that we were going to be extending the life of Pickering Nuclear Generating Station through to the fall of 2026. There are good-paying jobs there. When I met with officials and those who were working at the plant over the last year and a half that I've been fortunate enough to be the Minister of Energy, the one thing that really stands out in my mind when it comes to Pickering is that it is operating better now than it ever has in its history, and that's because of the talented people who are working at Pickering Nuclear Generating Station—those folks who are doing the upgrades on that facility.

Even on the plant A side, which went into service in the 1970s, two of those units have already been put into safe storage, but the other two units are continuing to work extremely well. Unlike your old 1980s Chevrolet Chevette that didn't have upgrades on it every year because we let it diminish in its value, I can tell you that the folks who work at Pickering Nuclear Generating Station and at OPG and at Bruce ensure that they're constantly monitoring, along with the CNSC, to ensure that those plants are safely operating and working efficiently.

Again, Pickering Nuclear Generating Station is working more efficiently now than it ever has, so it makes sense to ask the CNSC to take a look at extending to the fall of 2026, but then there's also the question of whether or not it makes sense to refurbish the B units, which went into operation in the mid-1980s, getting another 30 years of clean, affordable electricity, safely produced at Pickering, to ensure that we have the power that we need, not just in the greater Toronto area but right across Ontario.

I don't know, ADM Moore, if there's anything else that we want to add on our nuclear advantage. I talked at length about the health care advantage; we've talked about the jobs advantage and we've certainly talked about the clean electricity advantage. Was there anything else that you or ADM Hume would like to touch on?

**Ms. Karen Moore:** Thank you, Minister. I think you covered it quite well. Steen did speak to the advantages of extending Pickering as well, in his previous comments, so I think we've covered that one. Thank you.

**The Chair (Mr. Aris Babikian):** Any more questions? MPP Leardi, go ahead.

**Mr. Anthony Leardi:** If I may, Chair, I would like to hear some comments with regard to the medical advantage of nuclear in Ontario, because this is something that, I'm quite sure, prior to my experience in the energy sector through the minister, was unknown to myself and I'm sure is unknown to many people in Ontario. I'd like to hear more about that, please.

**Hon. Todd Smith:** Well, thank you for that question. First of all, there's the emissions-free power that's being provided, which means we don't have smog days in our province like we used to have. I used to be the news director at Quinte Broadcasting in eastern Ontario for radio stations.

**The Chair (Mr. Aris Babikian):** Two minutes left.

**Hon. Todd Smith:** The way that we led off our newscast, back in the 1990s, was to talk about smog days in Ontario, and air quality indexes and those types of things. We don't talk about those things anymore in Ontario, largely because of the impact that our nuclear fleet has had on helping us clean up the air.

But there's also the medical isotope piece that I think you were asking about, MPP Leardi. Certainly medical isotopes are important for treating a number of different types of cancer, and I've been part of a number of celebrations when it comes to medical isotopes coming online.

Just a couple of weeks back I was at Bruce Power, where they introduced the production of yttrium-90, a new medical isotope, to Bruce, which will help treat liver cancer. Cobalt-60, as I mentioned in my opening remarks, sterilizes equipment, but also treats cancer. There is molybdenum-99, which is coming from our nuclear fleet—it's easier to say "moly-99," by the way—which helps treat cancer, as well. Lutetium-177 treats cancer, as well. All of these medical isotopes are being harvested at our nuclear facilities that we have here in Ontario. We are poised, in Ontario, to become a medical isotope superpower.

Many jurisdictions around the world were getting their isotopes from Russia. They don't want to rely on Russia for anything anymore, let alone medical isotopes. We're in a prime position, here in Ontario, because of our Candu fleet that we have in operation, to be supplying the medical isotopes that I've mentioned and potentially many others that are going to save lives around the world.

**The Chair (Mr. Aris Babikian):** Thank you, Minister.

Okay, now we will take a recess until 1 o'clock. We reconvene at 1 o'clock.

*The committee recessed from 1014 to 1300.*

**The Chair (Mr. Aris Babikian):** Good afternoon, everyone. We are going to resume consideration of vote 2901 of the estimates of the Ministry of Energy. There is now a total of 46 minutes remaining for the review of these estimates.

When the committee recessed this morning, the government had concluded their round of questioning. We will now go to the opposition for 20 minutes of questioning. MPP French, go ahead.

**Ms. Jennifer K. French:** Good afternoon, Minister. The Ontario Energy Board recently announced a reduction

in electricity prices for household consumers. At the same time, it also announced a reduction in the Ontario Electricity Rebate. With the rates going down, but also the rebate going down, is the monthly bill for a typical household consumer going up or is it going down?

**Hon. Todd Smith:** Thanks for the question. It's really, really important. One of the most important things that we're aimed at is providing affordable electricity rates, and rates that are reliable. For some residents, there will be a slight increase; for most residents, there will be a decrease as a result of the changes that have been made.

What we want to ensure is that rates stay well below the rate of inflation, and we've been able to do that since we took office by cancelling unneeded electricity projects that were going to continue to drive up the price of electricity, and also using tools like the OER—the Ontario Electricity Rebate—and the comprehensive electricity plan, conservation demand management programs and many, many other things.

**Ms. Jennifer K. French:** Thank you. I know that the reduction in rates for household consumers is not due to the generosity of the OEB, certainly not the reduction in overall system costs, but was the effect of a rising hourly Ontario energy price and the corresponding reduction of the global adjustment, which in turn reduces the ability of large industrial consumers to avoid electricity costs through the industrial conservation initiative.

In other words, households are paying a smaller share of total electricity costs, but industrial consumers are paying a larger share. Is that a fair way of describing the situation?

**Hon. Todd Smith:** No, I would say that electricity customers across the province as a whole are going to be paying flat electricity rates, unlike what we saw under the previous Liberal government, where we saw 6% or higher increases every single year. What we're focused on is ensuring that we're keeping the electricity rates flat. That includes industrial consumers, because it's those industrial consumers who are choosing to set up electric vehicle platforms at General Motors in Oshawa, and the reason that they're doing that is because we now have stable, reliable electricity prices across the province. We've seen this in many sectors of our economy.

We are now competitive with most neighbouring US jurisdictions when it comes to electricity, and I can tell you that four years ago, when I was the economic development minister, we were not in any way competitive with neighbouring jurisdictions. That's why we saw the manufacturing jobs, like the ones in Oshawa, fleeing.

**Ms. Jennifer K. French:** Well, I know you and I both remember that time very well, and I would say—not to sum up what you've said, but something that we all need to keep in mind is to keep a lid on total system costs, because I think when you're speaking about predictability or competitiveness, few people like surprises.

I would say that we know that someone always has to pay the system cost. Your government currently has taxpayers paying about \$6 billion to \$7 billion a year in electricity subsidies, and of the remaining costs, any reduction in costs for households means an increase in cost for



industry. Is it in the interest of the taxpayers and every class of ratepayer to make sure that we do keep a lid on these system costs?

**Hon. Todd Smith:** Absolutely. That's what we're focused on every single day at the Ministry of Energy. It's why we now have predictable energy prices in the province of Ontario, and it's why we're starting to see companies looking to invest in Ontario again. That certainly was not the case four years ago when our government took over. It is the case now.

**Ms. Jennifer K. French:** I'm going to jump in, because I have not much nice to say about the Liberals—

*Interjection.*

**Ms. Jennifer K. French:** Sorry.

**Hon. Todd Smith:** Me neither.

**Ms. Jennifer K. French:** The Liberals obviously failed to do this during their time in government, but I have no idea whether your government is doing any better, because the IESO no longer publishes long-term energy plans showing the projected total system costs over the long term. As far as we can tell, the IESO hasn't published such projected long-term costs in over five years. As a result, I would say the public has no actual real way of knowing how much taxpayers or ratepayers will be required to pay for Ontario's electricity system going forward.

So what I would ask of the minister and his team here is if you'd be willing to provide the committee with, I don't know, a graph or a chart or something that shows the current total system costs, as well as projected total system costs over the long term based on existing or planned electricity policies, broken down by generation, transmission, distribution and so on, similar to the charts that used to be published in the IESO's long-term energy plans. While I'm at it, can I also know any changes that the total system costs have had since 2017?

**Hon. Todd Smith:** Yes. So, first of all, I'll say that ADM Moore may want to touch on this or ADM Hume may want to touch on this.

The Financial Accountability Officer did a report not that long ago—probably earlier this year; maybe late last year. I can't remember the exact date. The Financial Accountability Officer compared our plan to the long-term energy plan of the previous Liberal government. What they found was that we have a much better plan—a plan that is actually keeping electricity rates flat, well below the rate of inflation, and one that will actually save Ontario electricity customers 23% compared to that Liberal long-term energy plan—23% by 2029.

So we've been taking costs out of the system. We've been doing what we can to ensure that we have that stable, reliable cost of electricity in the system. The Financial Accountability Officer's report does have a graph that we have used a number of different times just to show the difference between where the Liberals were taking our province when it came to electricity prices and where we're taking the province. I can tell you that our plan is much better than the previous Liberal plan, and it's why we're starting to see jobs coming back to Ontario and investment coming back to Ontario.

**Ms. Jennifer K. French:** Well, the IESO used to show the impacts of the system costs on household electricity bills, and it hasn't done that in a while either. So if some of your team would be willing to—what I would love to have—I have a wish list. I guess what I'm asking is, may I please have a graph that does show the current system costs, the total system costs and the breakdown that I had outlined? And while we're at it, then, a graph or a chart that shows the impacts of projected total system costs on typical household bills over the long-term?

There's public information that we would like to have. I have every faith that the ministry has its numbers, but things that used to be provided broadly for understanding we don't see anymore. So if we could have estimated prices used for planning purposes of building or contracting new generation capacity—all of these things—it would be helpful to have. So if I could ask, if I'm allowed to request that.

**Hon. Todd Smith:** Let me turn to ADM Moore, and we'll see if she wants to answer that question or pass it on to Steen.

**Ms. Karen Moore:** Thank you, Minister. I'll just make a couple of comments before I pass it over to Steen—

**The Chair (Mr. Aris Babikian):** Excuse me, can you cite your name for the record?

**Ms. Karen Moore:** Yes. Sorry, Chair. Karen Moore, assistant deputy minister for strategic network and agency policy with the Ministry of Energy.

I'll just make a couple of comments before I pass it over to my colleague ADM Steen Hume. I would just note a couple of items. With respect to your question about rates, as you probably are aware, the OEB typically adjusts rates under the regulated price plan to reflect the anticipated cost of generation. This year, all RPP prices were reduced effective November 1, due primarily to forecasted natural gas prices and a favourable variable account balance.

Effective November 1, the OER was also changed to 11.7%, ensuring the average residential bill is held well below current levels of inflation. For a typical residential consumer who uses about 700 kilowatt hours of electricity per month, the OER decreases bills by about \$14 per month.

We have a number of other rate mitigation programs that reduce bills targeted at certain consumers who are more vulnerable to price sensitivity. I won't go into the details of those, but I will ask my colleague Steen Hume to jump in if there's anything more to offer around the longer-term forecasting of rate impacts.

**Mr. Steen Hume:** Thank you, Karen. Steen Hume, assistant deputy minister, energy supply policy.

A couple of things I'd like to add to the conversation—

**Ms. Jennifer K. French:** Sorry, just a moment. You've got papers near your microphone or something. It's really—

**Mr. Steen Hume:** Sadly, I think it's my beard. Sorry about that.

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**Ms. Jennifer K. French:** Okay. Let's try again. I do want to know if I can have these graphs or charts. I'm glad to have some clarity, but I don't want to run the clock.

**Mr. Steen Hume:** I understand. Just to echo what the minister said, though, I think all efforts are being taken to ensure that we don't grow system costs. This is one of the reasons we are using IESO's resource adequacy plan, which outlines different tools to get competitive prices. That could be through a capacity auction; that could be through longer-term competitive procurements as well as targeted strategic programs.

To the point about the long-term costs of things: We have launched a number of procurements that are under way. We have not received the results of those. Obviously, we're assuming that we're going to do well with those, but that's something we are still working through. In addition, IESO is planning to report back to the minister in the coming weeks on their final instalment of what it would cost to further decarbonize our electricity grid, which takes into account a number of different factors.

**Ms. Jennifer K. French:** I'm used to a committee process where I can ask for something and either be told yes or no if I can have it, and then the Clerks follow up with anything that is committed. Assuming that's still the process, can the committee have a graph or chart that shows the current total system costs, and as I outlined, broken down by generation, transmission, distribution and so on, similar to the charts that used to be published in the IESO's long-term energy plans?

**Hon. Todd Smith:** I think the ADM just touched on the fact that we can't tell you things that haven't been procured yet.

We have a competitive process now which is far different than what we experienced under the previous government, when they were assigning sole-source contracts for 20 years that were over-market, when you could predict into the future what the market was going to look like because there was that 20-year outlook when it came to these contracts.

What we're doing now is, with the different procurements that we have—the mid-term, where we've already done one process that has resulted in a 30% savings and almost 800 megawatts of generation—we can tell you that. We also have a long-term RFP which is currently out there, and we're procuring 4,000 megawatts outside of that particular process. Another mid-term RFP will occur in two years. And then we have the yearly auction process, the competitive process for—

**Ms. Jennifer K. French:** I hear you, and I can appreciate that you can't tell me what hasn't been procured yet and all of those pieces; I get that. But this is estimates committee, so I'm asking for estimated prices that would be used for planning. Or can we have the estimated prices—here's another one—used for planning purposes of building or contracting new generation capacity for various technology options, such as wind, solar, hydro-electric, gas, nuclear and so on? Can we have that in megawatts for capital construction as well as costs per kilowatt hour payable by consumers or taxpayers over the length of the contract or project lifetime?

**Hon. Todd Smith:** Maybe what I could do is have ADM Moore answer that question, if that is available, for

items that have already been procured. But we can't do it for anything that hasn't been procured. We can tell you what the system cost is going to be to continue with these over-market contracts that were assigned by the previous Liberal government.

ADM Moore, can you pick up on that?

**Ms. Karen Moore:** Yes, we can certainly provide that information for resources that have already been contracted. As ADM Hume and the minister said, for procurements that are in progress, we can't forecast that.

I would also note that we have published forecasts related to our electricity rate mitigation programs, which reflect the cost of reducing electricity rates for certain vulnerable consumers.

**Ms. Jennifer K. French:** How am I for time, Chair?

**The Chair (Mr. Aris Babikian):** Six minutes.

**Ms. Jennifer K. French:** Okay.

Being that I'm from the Durham region and there's lots of attention on Durham—I had a chance to tour Pickering last week, and there are lots of interesting and important conversations being had—I have some specific questions around the SMRs.

OPG just received \$970 million in financing from the Canada Infrastructure Bank for its proposed small modular reactor at Darlington. The CIB describes this as an investment. Can you tell me what exactly that means? Is it a grant? Is it a loan? Is it an ownership share? OPG already has access to pretty inexpensive public financing, so I'm looking for specifics: What does CIB financing do that a plain old OPG bond doesn't do?

**Hon. Todd Smith:** What this does is actually firmly plant the Canadian flag in this project next to the Ontario flag, which was certainly something that I heard about when I was talking to European countries that are looking at procuring a small modular reactor like the BWRX-300 that's going to be built on the site at OPG.

Countries around the world were wondering—it's great that Ontario is promoting this technology. It's great that OPG and Laurentis Energy are looking at developing this project to reduce emissions around the world and provide energy security to our NATO allies that are currently dealing with an energy crisis because of the unprovoked attack by Russia in Ukraine. What they were wondering is, where is the Canadian government? Why is the Canadian government not supporting this project? Well, I'm really pleased that Minister Wilkinson and the Canada Infrastructure Bank have stepped up to the plate to support this small modular reactor so that countries around the world can now say it's not just Ontario; it's Canada as a whole.

We have the memorandum of understanding and the strategic plan for SMR development that was rolled out by the four Premiers a couple of years ago, from Saskatchewan, Alberta, New Brunswick and, of course, here in Ontario, by Premier Ford. Now we have the federal government that is a part of this as well. The Canada Infrastructure Bank money, that \$970 million, is the first time that the Canadian government has stepped up to support the small modular reactor project, which is very, very vital to the success of the project.

**Ms. Jennifer K. French:** Thank you. But specifically, is it a grant? Is it a loan? Is it an ownership share?

**Hon. Todd Smith:** I can ask one of my ADMs to talk a little bit more in detail on the actual CIB grant and what that means for this project. But it's great news, and there have been a number of collaborations that have occurred on this project, particularly with the Tennessee Valley Authority also coming on board in Saskatchewan, signing the deal to purchase four of these small modular reactors to be deployed so that they can eliminate their coal-fired generation as well.

I'll turn it over to ADM Moore.

**Ms. Jennifer K. French:** Just before you do—I'm looking forward to that; thank you—I know on the CIB website, it says, "CIB fills gaps in funding and financing on projects where public and private investment are both required." So further to what you will be answering, what will be the form of private investment in the SMR project? I guess what I'm asking is, at the end of the day, who will own this asset or the intellectual property created during the research and development?

**Hon. Todd Smith:** Just before I get to ADM Moore, I can tell you that on that front, OPG is going to be the owner of this, along with GE Hitachi. They're continuously negotiating over the IP and that, but this is going to have an enormous benefit to the supply chain.

**The Chair (Mr. Aris Babikian):** Two minutes.

**Hon. Todd Smith:** I'll pass it over to ADM Moore, who is going to introduce herself again.

**Ms. Karen Moore:** Thank you, Minister. ADM Karen Moore, strategic network agency policy.

I'll invite my colleague ADM Steen Hume to speak to the details around CIB's involvement in the SMR announcement.

**Ms. Jennifer K. French:** Thank you. And because we're running at of time, if you can throw in there who is on the hook if there are overruns. We've got the ownership. This is emerging, so this is new information for all of us.

**Mr. Steen Hume:** The CIB support is actually financing terms, which are actually quite good in comparison to what OPG could do in the private markets. But I think the key point here is the part the minister keeps flagging, which is that this demonstrates the partnership between Ontario and the federal government for small modular reactor technology. At the end of this project, OPG and Hitachi will be the owners. What CIB is bringing to the table is just the financing that are favourable terms.

The other thing I would flag is that OPG and the government of Ontario continue to lobby the federal government for grant funding through any of their transition programs to decarbonize Ontario's grid, and that's work that's going to be ongoing. To date, we continue to ask for this, but as a down payment, we've been able to receive CIB funding.

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**Ms. Jennifer K. French:** Okay, and I think I had it answered clearly about who will own it. But who will bear the cost or who will retain the benefits of the research,

development and beta testing? And who is on the hook for any overruns?

**Hon. Todd Smith:** As I mentioned, those negotiations are continuing with OPG and GE Hitachi over those exact issues. The thing that's really important about this—

**The Chair (Mr. Aris Babikian):** Thank you, Minister. The time is up.

Now we move to independent member. You have 10 minutes.

**Mr. Ted Hsu:** Thanks again to the minister for coming today. I wanted to start off with kind of a technical question to help me understand something. As the minister knows, natural gas pretty much sets the market clearing price for electricity, so it determines the hourly Ontario energy price. And because the price of natural gas has gone up recently—this past summer or late summer, the price of natural gas was so high and the price of electricity was so high, at least the hourly price, that the global adjustment went almost to zero. This affects incentives that large users have to do peak saving, to switch their loads from peak times to other times.

I'm just wondering—and this may be a question for the deputy minister—what measures have been taken or what considerations have been given to the fact that the global adjustment has gotten so low and that some of the incentives that we thought we could have in place using the global adjustment—how do we replace those incentives?

**Hon. Todd Smith:** I can take part of that, and then ADM Moore can pick it up or Steen can take part of it as well.

I think the most important thing to note here, MPP Hsu, is that when it comes to natural gas, we have it. We have the ability to use natural gas in our system, whereas many other jurisdictions around the world are in a state of crisis right now because they don't have the supply. We're very, very fortunate that the Dawn Hub in southwestern Ontario is fully stocked and that we do have the natural gas supply that we need. Sure, it creates some different issues in the system, but we're continuing to invest in conservation programs and—I know you know this—342 million additional dollars to bring to \$1 billion the energy efficiency programming over this four-year period.

But I will turn it over to ADM Moore to pick up on that.

**Ms. Karen Moore:** I will turn it over to my colleague Steen Hume in just a moment, but I will note, member, that while natural gas prices do remain volatile due to global events, the market price has declined from its peak in August 2022, and current market signals do indicate a continued decline for the winter, which we are watching. If so, natural gas rates for January may indeed be lower than the current rates charged, thereby lowering customers' bills. It is something the ministry is watching closely.

But I'll turn it over to ADM Steen Hume to jump in on the details.

**Mr. Steen Hume:** Thank you for that, Deputy.

As Karen highlighted, the price of natural gas in the longer term is going stabilize, which will then probably go back to normal patterns, where things like the ICI program, which allows for participants in that to avoid certain costs

by avoiding peaks, specifically with respect to the cost of the GA, will continue to benefit those. Also, I would add that we have the comprehensive electricity plan, which, again, provides significant rebates to industrial and commercial consumers.

What we saw a few months ago with the increase in HOEP was a bit of an anomaly. We haven't seen that in a very, very long time. We don't anticipate that that is going to persist. I would point out that although some class A consumers paid a little more than normal, it meant that, actually, class B consumers, who usually bear the bulk of cost shifts, had a little bit of a reprieve. So there's a bit of good news/bad news in that; I recognize that. But I think, for the most part, industrial consumers continue to do exceptionally well.

**Mr. Ted Hsu:** So is it fair to say that no action was taken because you expect that it's not going to happen again, that it was a very special event? Would you answer yes to that question?

**Hon. Todd Smith:** What—

**Mr. Steen Hume:** I would—go ahead, Minister.

**Mr. Ted Hsu:** No particular action was taken when the global adjustment went to zero because you're anticipating that to be a short-term event that is not going to be repeated.

**Hon. Todd Smith:** What I would say is the ICI continues to reduce the cost of electricity for customers at peak, right across Ontario. That continues to be the case. We have those programs that are in place, and the comprehensive electricity plan and the OER for farmers and residences and small businesses as well.

**Mr. Ted Hsu:** I'll switch a little bit, but staying on the point of conservation, which the minister brought up, Chair: As the minister said, we're expecting our population in Ontario to grow, and people in Ontario use electricity. I'm sure the minister would agree that conservation and efficiency could help deal with the increase in electricity demand from the higher population. I'll just confirm with the minister that he agrees with that. Yes?

**Hon. Todd Smith:** Oh, absolutely. That's why we brought them in and expanded.

**Mr. Ted Hsu:** But what I don't understand is, we've known for a long time that the population was going to continue to increase as immigration increases and various other factors. I know that immigrants proportionately come more to Ontario than other parts of Canada. So my question is, why—it seems like it was a mistake to cut conservation programs in 2019 when this government came into power. Couldn't you have seen that the population was growing back in 2019 and not cut those conservation and efficiency programs?

**Hon. Todd Smith:** Well, what I can tell you is that we reduced energy efficiency programs at a time when we had a massive oversupply of electricity—

**Mr. Ted Hsu:** But you could have looked into the future and you could have seen that the future demand wasn't going to be so low.

**Hon. Todd Smith:** Well, at the time, we had an oversupply. We also had jobs fleeing the province at a record rate. Demand was going down. Because of the work that

we've put in, particularly on this file and cleaning up the mess that was left to us by the previous Liberal government, we are now in a place where we are seeing electrification occurring in our province. Those investments that we have made because of the stability of our electricity system are going to reduce emissions right across Ontario in all sectors.

**Mr. Ted Hsu:** I think that argument doesn't work, and I'll give you a chance to answer this point, which is that conservation and efficiency are some of the lowest-hanging fruit that pays you back when you invest in it, and I don't see—

**Hon. Todd Smith:** Not when you're in oversupply.

**Mr. Ted Hsu:** You're looking at the spot supply, not the future supply and demand, and I think you should have been looking at the future supply and demand. I think you could have, because you knew—

**Hon. Todd Smith:** Boy, oh, boy.

**Mr. Ted Hsu:** You knew that the population was increasing, you knew that there were going to be other uses of electricity going forward—

**The Chair (Mr. Aris Babikian):** Please direct your questions through the Chair.

**Mr. Ted Hsu:** Okay. Let me switch to another question—

**Hon. Todd Smith:** Probably a good idea.

**Mr. Ted Hsu:** I would like to just check with the minister if he agrees with the statement that the safety review for Pickering—and I hope that Pickering passes this review; I'd like to see Pickering continue for a couple more years to provide the electricity we need. But the safety review: I hope that the minister will admit that that is the key step. It was last done in 2014 and it lasts for 10 years—

**The Chair (Mr. Aris Babikian):** Two minutes.

**Mr. Ted Hsu:** That's why the Pickering reactor was not originally scheduled to stay open past 2024. Would the minister agree that the safety review, which must be done starting from zero because the 10 years since the last safety review is up, is the key step to keeping Pickering open for a couple more years?

**Hon. Todd Smith:** Let me just correct the member's comments. The real reason why Pickering wasn't extended previously was because we had an oversupply of electricity and we saw manufacturing jobs leaving the province at a record rate. The demand was going down.

**Mr. Ted Hsu:** Again, it's because you didn't—Mr. Chair, I would just like the minister to respond to this. Why didn't the minister look ahead to 2024? Of course, for the spot supply, there may have been enough electricity, but the minister could have looked ahead to 2024 and looked at the future supply and demand. Why didn't he do that?

**Hon. Todd Smith:** We have been looking ahead to 2024. The annual adequacy report that we receive from the IESO has also flipped because of the good work that's been happening in our province and the stability that we're providing in the energy sector. Had we not flipped that script, we wouldn't be in a situation where we need to get more generation in the province. We wouldn't need these programs that the members wants.

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But I do want to touch on his initial question, which is safety. Obviously we and the Canadian Nuclear Safety Commission, which is one of the most highly respected nuclear regulators in the entire world, are not going to let a plant go forward that is unsafe. Everything that the CNSC has done so far, and what those that are working at the facility in Pickering—

**Mr. Ted Hsu:** I think the minister would agree that is—

**Hon. Todd Smith:**—have said is that this plant is working better than it has ever worked before, and more efficiently than it has ever worked before. I think it's a bit rich—

**Mr. Ted Hsu:** I think the minister would agree that that is the key question, whether the safety—

**The Chair (Mr. Aris Babikian):** Thank you very much. Time is up. I kindly ask that the committee members, when they speak, speak one at a time.

We move to the government side. MPP Smith, please go ahead.

**Mr. Dave Smith:** I'm going to take a little stroll back in memory lane, I guess. Back in the early 1990s, I worked for an organization that doesn't exist anymore; the name has changed and its structure has changed, but I worked for Ontario Hydro, in the customer energy services demand management division.

There were a number of things we did to try and manage the growth of the demand for electricity. I'm wondering, what role does conservation play now in managing the growth of the electrical demands? Are you making more options available for electricity consumers as a result of that?

**Hon. Todd Smith:** Thanks, MPP Smith, for that question. I didn't realize that you worked there before. It's good to know that, that you intimately understand the sector.

I'm proud that we've been able to expand our conservation demand management framework, our energy efficiency programs, with the additional \$342 million of funding. It brings the program's total funding up to nearly \$1 billion over the four-year framework. For many years, as I was just explaining to the member from Kingston, we had a costly oversupply. That was thanks to ideologically driven policies from the opposition that only caused bills to rise in Ontario. They locked in contracts for unreliable, intermittent sources of electricity generation for up to 10 times the going rate for power. Of course, it makes no sense whatsoever to focus on conservation of electricity when you've got an oversupply. Why would you do that?

Now, under our government, demand for electricity continues to rise as those manufacturing jobs that were originally driven out by the Liberal government return to our province. The Liberals never needed to worry about the additional demand for power that comes with new jobs, thanks to their job-killing policies that meant industrial producers were leaving Ontario and the demand was getting less and less and less.

With that growing demand for power that we're currently experiencing, conservation initiatives become a cost-effective way of addressing demand because they offset the need for some new generation resources. As I always

say, the cheapest form of generation is the generation that you don't have to build because of energy efficiency programs and conservation demand management programs like we're rolling out.

I'll pass it over to ADM Moore to pick up where I left off on the CDM programs.

**Ms. Karen Moore:** Thank you, Minister. Member, I will just note that in January, the IESO launched a 2021-24 CDM framework, in response to a directive from the Ministry of Energy, which had two primary objectives: (1) to help cost-effectively meet local, regional or system-wide electricity needs; and (2) to help electricity consumers who are most in need to receive electricity-saving measures, focusing on small businesses and commercial, institutional, industrial, low-income and First Nations customers. The framework is forecasted to achieve 440 megawatts of peak demand savings, and 2.7 terawatt hours of electricity savings during its time frame, with a budget of \$692 million.

As the minister mentioned, further work has been done to expand energy efficiency and CDM programs. I will turn it over to acting ADM Steen Hume, who is the lead for conservation and energy efficiency within the ministry, to provide some more detail on those changes.

**Mr. Steen Hume:** Thank you. Just picking up where the deputy left off and where the minister flagged, when we expanded the CDM program recently, we identified four specific areas for expansion in terms of program delivery. One would be a residential demand response program, another would be a targeted support for greenhouses, another would be a Save on Energy retrofitting program, and then, finally, a local initiatives program.

All in, we're starting to see potential annual incremental additional savings of over 1,000 gigawatt hours, incremental provincial peak demand reductions of over 285 megawatts, and then regional peak demand savings in southwestern Ontario in particular of about 225 megawatts, which is particularly important because this allows for the alleviating of constraint within the region, because, as folks in this room know, there is quite a lot of economic activity happening in southwestern Ontario.

**Mr. Dave Smith:** Sorry, just a quick follow-up on that, because it's interesting looking at the comparison to how we're doing things now and what was being done when I worked for Ontario Hydro in customer energy services. One of the programs that we had was actually the replacing of shower heads with low-flow shower heads, and the idea behind it was that we were reducing electrical consumption, because people who had electric hot water tanks weren't going to be using as much. It was something that we could never actually put value on, how much savings there was and how we were reducing the demand at the time for it.

But it's great to hear that the programs that you're talking about now actually have tangible results as a result of what you're doing, so I want to thank you very much for putting that forward. I'm going to turn it over to one of my colleagues.

**The Chair (Mr. Aris Babikian):** MPP Leardi.

**Mr. Anthony Leardi:** I'm going to defer to my colleague Jess Dixon.

**The Chair (Mr. Aris Babikian):** MPP Dixon.

**Ms. Jess Dixon:** The government has clearly made it a priority to support Ontario's nuclear industry, and a big part of that is the nuclear refurbishment projects ongoing. Even in my region, with BWXT and Aecon, you can see the impact. Can I ask the minister to expand on the current status of the nuclear refurbishment projects happening in Ontario?

**Hon. Todd Smith:** Thanks, MPP Dixon. I know you visited Bruce at least once, and you've been making your way out to meet those incredible workers who are keeping the lights on, our power workers across the province.

You're absolutely correct: Supporting Ontario's nuclear industry and all those amazing workers and businesses that are involved in it is a key priority for our government. These ongoing refurbishments translate to nearly \$100 billion for Ontario's GDP. That's tens of thousands of jobs and another 30 years of clean, reliable and low-cost power.

Unfortunately, I know our government's support for the nuclear sector is not the case with members of the opposition, even some in this room, and the current leader of the NDP especially has been very clear and vocal in his opposition to the nuclear sector and all the workers that it employs. It's quite sad, actually, to see them say no to good-paying jobs in the skilled trades, a growing economy and reliable baseload power to maintain our province's clean-energy advantage for decades to come.

But I can tell you that the refurbishments are on time and they are on budget, and that's something that the folks at OPG and Bruce are very, very proud of. I'll turn it over to our acting deputy, Karen Moore.

**Ms. Karen Moore:** Thank you, Minister. As the minister noted, Ontario is progressing very well with refurbishments at Darlington—four units there—and the six Bruce 6 units, which will extend their operation for at least 30 years. I'll turn it over to my colleague Steen Hume to provide some more detail on the specific progress of those projects, but I will note that they are proceeding within the committed budget and schedule, despite the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Steen, I invite you to join.

**Mr. Steen Hume:** Thank you, Deputy. Steen Hume, assistant deputy minister of energy supply policy. To pick up where Karen left off, I think it is really important to acknowledge that the project is continuing to proceed, on time, on budget, in light of the headwinds that both projects experienced with COVID-19.

In terms of the status of where Darlington is at, just as a bit of background for folks, back in June 2020, OPG was able to bring unit 2 successfully into service. I think this is a pretty important milestone, even though it was the first unit, just because there wasn't really another jurisdiction globally that had been successful in their refurbishment work. So good kudos to OPG on that.

In September 2020, OPG then started unit 3 refurbishment. There was some delay in that due to COVID, but in

the end, they were able to pick up the slack and are progressing well. The—

*Interruption.*

**The Chair (Mr. Aris Babikian):** My apologies; there is a vote bell, so we have to take a recess. We will reconvene after the vote.

*The committee recessed from 1340 to 1352.*

**The Chair (Mr. Aris Babikian):** Thank you very much, everyone. The committee will resume its business.

The government side has seven minutes to continue the questioning, MPP Sarrazin.

**Mr. Stéphane Sarrazin:** I know this government has remained committed to its implementation of support programs for Ontarians to help them manage their energy costs in the face of inflation and rising energy prices. Tell us what the ministry is doing to help consumers with their electricity and natural gas costs.

**Hon. Todd Smith:** I appreciate the question. I can tell you that a key step in managing energy costs for Ontario families and businesses was toppling the previous Liberal government back in 2018. Keeping those members of the opposition out of government this past summer was a very key success as well. We know that a number of those members oppose nuclear power, which, as we've talked about over and over again, provides over 60% of our clean, emissions-free, safe, reliable, affordable electricity every day. We know they oppose natural gas in all its forms, as well, including its key roles as both the most affordable source of home heating and a flexible, adaptable and reliable source of electricity generation. If they were in power—God forbid that they were back in power—their ideologically driven policies would mean skyrocketing bills for the people of Ontario, with increases of up to \$100 a month. And that's not just me saying that; that's the Independent Electricity System Operator saying that. Not only would they drive up the cost of electricity by about \$100 a month, per person, but we would also be experiencing rolling blackouts and rolling brownouts in our province, which is a complete non-starter for us as a government, but it's also a non-starter for anybody looking to do business and invest in Ontario.

When our government was elected, we acted quickly to stabilize the cost of electricity both for our industrial consumers as well as families and small businesses. We've seen the success of our approach. Jobs are flooding back into Ontario now that they can count on affordable and predictable, reliable power.

We also have a number of support programs and initiatives that are in place to further reduce energy costs. I'll turn it over to my officials to get into those programs in detail. The acting deputy is Karen Moore, and she's going to introduce herself again.

**Ms. Karen Moore:** Thank you, Minister. ADM Karen Moore, strategic network and agency policy for the Ministry of Energy, and acting deputy.

A couple of details to provide around our cost mitigation: The government is keeping electricity costs down by providing rate relief for residential customers, small businesses and farms through the Ontario Electricity Rebate.

As I mentioned earlier, that percentage was updated effective November 1 to 11.7% to keep average residential bills held well below current levels of inflation.

There are a number of other programs as well that are targeted at certain consumers, including the Energy Affordability Program, which is delivered under the Save on Energy brand and provides free electricity-saving measures for low-income and other income-eligible households. Participants most in need qualify for a free energy assessment and energy-efficient upgrades such as appliances and installation. Other participants can qualify for free energy-saving kits for things like LED light bulbs, timers etc. That program is also available to eligible Indigenous consumers and First Nations communities.

In addition, the Low-Income Energy Assistance Program provides a grant once a year toward electricity or natural gas bills for consumers who are behind on their payments and are facing service disconnection. This is really intended for emergency situations and was developed by the Ontario Energy Board and delivered by our social assistance agencies across the province. It is confirmed through income status to confirm eligibility.

The OEB temporarily increased LEAP credit amounts and increased flexibility to provide greater support to consumers during the COVID-19 pandemic. Beginning in January of this year, the OEB has increased the LEAP amount from \$500 per customer for electricity and gas bills to \$1,000 per customer, or \$1,200 if the customer's home is electrically heated.

We also provide support through the OESP, the Home Winterproofing Program and the Clean Home Heating Initiative, all of which provide targeted supports to consumers.

I'll turn it back to the minister in case he has anything he'd like to add.

**Hon. Todd Smith:** Yes, there are just a couple of things that I wouldn't mind clearing up, if I could. I absolutely butchered a statistic earlier this morning when we were talking about emissions in our electricity system. I just want to make sure I get that on the record correctly. Emissions from the electricity sector make up 3% of the emissions across the province. As I mentioned earlier, our system is 94% emissions-free and emissions from the electricity sector make up only 3%.

Some of the members opposite like to talk about natural gas generation like it's an optional thing. The Independent Electricity System Operator has said that without new generation contracted until 2040, they would be reliant on emergency actions like conservation appeals and rolling blackouts, which I've said numerous times is a non-starter.

I think it's really important to quote from the IESO report on the need for natural gas:

"Without a limited amount of new natural gas in the near term, the IESO would be reliant on emergency actions such as conservation appeals and rotating blackouts to stabilize the grid....

"Based on expected usage of gas as a peaking resource, incremental carbon emissions" are "not expected to significantly increase emissions from the system—with overall emissions still remaining far below pre-2005 levels.

"Moreover, this expansion will contribute to the electrification of technologies across all sectors, particularly transportation, manufacturing and industry, and contribute to emissions reductions in the broader economy."

Our plan is actually driving down emissions by five megatons across the province and there is the potential for much more emission reduction.

**The Chair (Mr. Aris Babikian):** Thank you, Minister. Time is up. This concludes the committee's consideration of estimates of the Ministry of Energy. Standing order 69 requires that the Chair put, without further amendment or debate, every question necessary to dispose of the estimates.

Are the members ready to vote? Shall vote 2901, ministry administration program, carry? All in favour? All opposed? The vote carried.

Shall vote 2902, energy development and management, carry? All in favour, raise your hand. All opposed? Vote carried.

Shall vote 2905, electricity price mitigation, carry? All in favour, please raise your hand. All those opposed, raise your hand. Carried.

Shall the 2022-23 estimates of the Ministry of Energy carry? All in favour, please raise your hand. All those opposed, raise your hand. The vote carried.

Shall the Chair report the 2022-23 estimates of the Ministry of Energy to the House? All those in favour, please raise your hand. All those opposed, please raise your hand. Vote carried.

Thank you. We will now have a 10-minute recess.

*The committee recessed from 1401 to 1410.*

## MINISTRY OF NORTHERN DEVELOPMENT

### MINISTRY OF MINES

### MINISTRY OF NATURAL RESOURCES AND FORESTRY

**The Chair (Mr. Aris Babikian):** Good afternoon. The committee is about to begin consideration of the estimates of the Ministry of Northern Development, Mines, Natural Resources and Forestry for a total of two hours. Are there any questions for members before we start? No questions.

I am now required to call vote 2101, which sets the review process in motion. We will begin with statements of not more than 20 minutes from the Minister of Northern Development, the Minister of Mines, and the Minister of Natural Resources and Forestry.

The remaining time will be allotted for questions and answers in rotations of 20 minutes for the official opposition members of the committee, 10 minutes for the independent members of the committee and 20 minutes for the government members of the committee for the remainder of the allotted time.

Ministers, the floor is yours.

**Hon. Greg Rickford:** Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thank you, colleagues, for this opportunity. I'm delighted and relieved to be joined by my two colleagues Minister Smith and Minister Pirie—it's hard to believe that all of these

were bundled together as one portfolio at some point in time—because it's great for the help.

I appreciate the opportunity to talk a little bit more at length, if you will, about the opportunities that we have here with the Ministry of Northern Development. It's a key opportunity, colleagues, because across northern Ontario, of course, in the prior four years, we had opened up or moved more mining projects across critical milestones than had been done in a decade and a half previous. It begged us all, irrespective of our political stripe, to rally around the opportunities that would help us and help municipalities and Indigenous communities make decisions about a variety of things—on what a mining project, for example, would look like, and what a forestry project would look like, not just in economic terms, but in terms of the ability to actually support it in places like Gogama, Dubreuilville, Red Lake and other parts. The critical decision, I think, George, was going to be whether we had mining camps or we had sustainable towns with real infrastructure and that we would focus our efforts on providing them with the kind of support that we ought to, as a provincial government. That's precisely how the mandate evolved. As we passed through the election on June 2, we would refocus and redouble our efforts on that.

But as a precursor, and for the purposes of estimates, we reflect back on a couple of years, but particularly an important year, the year prior, on what some of those priorities were.

No question about it; the Northern Ontario Heritage Fund, for us from the north, lies at the heart and soul of the kind of program that would make a difference in communities—a tactile experience, if you will—for small businesses, start-ups, business expansion. And as the new Northern Ontario Heritage Fund would be designed, revisiting but reinvigorating the ability of municipalities of all sizes, not just our big cities, those big-city Timmins folks and whatnot—I'm kidding you, George—but seriously small towns and smaller Indigenous communities—and we would place a particular priority on, the smaller the population, the more the investment that we could make. Wow, not only was it one of the most well-attended consultations—

**The Chair (Mr. Aris Babikian):** Minister?

**Hon. Greg Rickford:** Yes?

**The Chair (Mr. Aris Babikian):** My apologies for the interruption. Can you move the mike a little bit closer to your face? Because it's not quite clear.

**Hon. Greg Rickford:** I can talk like this if you want.

**The Chair (Mr. Aris Babikian):** Yes, thank you.

**Hon. Greg Rickford:** We would create an extraordinary opportunity for those communities to revisit essential infrastructure, place a particular value on the quality of life of those small towns and those Indigenous communities, and ensure, moving forward, that they had the tools they needed to seize the opportunities ahead of them.

Of course, we're fresh off of COVID, and we had the Northern Ontario Recovery Program, born from the resources available to us in the Northern Ontario Heritage Fund. These would help, ultimately, small and medium-sized businesses, not just with the essential components of

supporting your business during COVID but potentially, and in many cases, providing legacy infrastructure for them in a post-COVID world.

No discussion, of course, around northern Ontario over the past year or more was as important as energy requirements. Obviously, we saw Watay Power onboarding, and we're excited about the communities that, one by one, are becoming electrified, our isolated communities. The Northern Energy Advantage Program, operating for a five-year term, is supporting our largest industrial electricity consumers with competitive, stable electricity pricing, but also as an enabler for the sake of the environment—a top priority for this government, obviously—creating an opportunity for Algoma Steel, for example, to convert to an electric arc furnace. My ministry is expanding NEAP on an annual basis, from \$120 million per year to over \$176 million. As well, it includes new entrants. There will be a broader electricity user available to that program to support mining, forestry and, hopefully, other processing capacities as they become a reality in northern Ontario.

The northern highways program is making strategic investments to ensure safe passage, but also with new industries and new mining and forestry sector opportunities for supporting the kind of transportation requirements there. Our ongoing commitment to winter roads—which, obviously, I spent a fair amount of time on back in the day. These investments provide for 32 First Nations and the town of Moosonee to be linked to our provincial highway network. As time marches on, hopefully they will form part of the corridor to prosperity in the central part of northern Ontario.

Colleagues, there are a number of other things that I'd like to review, but hopefully the questions will bear those opportunities out. I'll stand down and turn it over to my colleagues. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

**The Chair (Mr. Aris Babikian):** MPP Pirie or Smith.

**Hon. Graydon Smith:** I'll go, if you wish. Good afternoon, everybody, Mr. Chair, members of the committee. It's wonderful to be here today. Thanks for the opportunity to speak to the Standing Committee on the Interior as we look at the Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry's many accomplishments and answer questions from the committee about our work.

As I begin today, I want to start by thanking my ministry for the exceptional amount of work they've done before the appearance before the committee today, and take a moment to introduce ministry officials who are here with me today, either in person or virtually, to assist in answering any questions. My deputy minister, Monique Rolf von den Baumen-Clark, is here in person. The rest, I believe, are joining online: Assistant Deputy Minister Craig Brown, who's the ADM of the policy division; Amanda Holmes, the chief administrative officer and assistant deputy minister of the corporate management and information division; Sean Maguire, assistant deputy minister of the forest industry division; Tracey Mill, ADM of regional operations; Marty Blake, ADM of the modernization and business improvement office; and Rocco Passero, the chief information officer. As you can tell, we have a lot of people working on a lot



of things every single day to make my ministry operate the very best it can, and again, I want to thank all of these officials for joining me.

1420

Before we get into your questions, I also want to tell you more about the great work being done at the Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry. As you know, my ministry is responsible for the management and stewardship of Ontario's natural resources, and these include crown lands, water, forests, fish, wildlife and aggregate minerals like stone, sand and gravel.

Through my ministry's oversight of aggregates, we're building Ontario, with an ambitious slate of infrastructure projects. Ontario's aggregate industry generates approximately \$1.6 billion in revenue and supports more than 26,000 direct and indirect jobs in communities across the province. We're supporting the government's initiative to build 1.5 million new homes over the next 10 years, and we're investing an additional \$1 billion over the next five years in critical road, bridge and water projects in communities across Ontario.

All of this infrastructure—every square inch of asphalt, every block of concrete, each new monument on the skyline, each new roadway on the map, all of it—requires the stone, sand and gravel produced right here in Ontario. In a very real sense, Ontario's future prosperity will be built on a foundation of aggregates.

My ministry is also charged with preserving Ontario's tremendous biodiversity, which includes protecting our lands and waters from invasive species. The Ontario Invasive Species Strategic Plan summarizes threats to Ontario and existing activities, and provides a provincial management framework and action plan to better address threats posed by invasive species. For example, we've made significant progress on preventing invasive wild pigs from establishing themselves in Ontario by regulating them under the Invasive Species Act and creating a wild pig strategy.

Because we know invasive species don't respect borders, we work collaboratively with organizations and experts dedicated to protecting our province against harmful invaders. Again, another example: The fight against phragmites has involved participation from all levels of government, academia and more than 25 conservation organizations. And since invasive species do not recognize those international or provincial borders, my ministry continues to work closely with our Canadian and US federal, provincial, territorial and state counterparts to address these threats to our shared waters and natural environment.

My ministry regulates outdoor recreational opportunities for Ontarians, including hunting and fishing—favourite pastimes here in the province and sources of significant employment and economic activity—providing client services to two million anglers and hunters each year, including issuing licences and providing the big game allocation process. The work my ministry does will ensure that recreational hunting and fishing opportunities will be valued by future generations.

In 2022, my ministry has sold 728,000 recreational fishing licences and 395,000 hunting licences. It generated

\$42 million in revenue in the 2022 fiscal year to date. These hunters and anglers also spend millions of dollars each year in Ontario to support jobs in many rural and northern communities. It's incredibly important to our economy.

We stock approximately eight million fish in 1,200 water bodies, including the Great Lakes, each and every year. Our nine provincial fish culture stations produce 11 species of fish to support fisheries management, including species rehabilitation, which is 50% of the stocking, and put-grow-take fisheries to enhance the fishing opportunities.

We've taken steps to improve the hunting experience, while protecting wildlife. For instance, we moved to a points-based allocation process for moose hunting that gives preference to applicants who have applied but were unsuccessful in getting a tag for the greatest number of years. That system has received feedback—around the Thanksgiving table at my house, it received feedback. It was an interesting conversation, but it ended by a relative of mine saying, "But it works." It was the right thing to do. To support moose population sustainability, we put further restrictions on calf hunting, so more calves have a better chance at reaching adulthood.

My ministry is also responsible for protecting people and property from the natural hazards of wildland fires and flooding. We saw a challenging year for fires in 2021. Severe drought and dry weather conditions contributed to one of the worst fire seasons on record.

Ontario is an internationally recognized leader in wildland fire management, and I'm so proud of the work our fire rangers did to protect our natural resources and at-risk communities, people and businesses.

My ministry also supports municipalities and the public in wildland fire prevention and mitigation through community wildland fire protection planning as part of the FireSmart program and potential funding opportunities through the Ontario FireSmart Communities transfer payment grant program. My ministry adopted the FireSmart program to engage property owners, businesses, municipalities and industry in reducing property loss or damage in the event of a wildland fire. It outlines steps property owners can take to reduce the risk of losses due to wildland fires.

Floods are the costliest natural hazard in terms of property damage in Ontario. They can happen at any time of year in urban and rural areas. And I'd just say, on a personal note, I'm more than aware of how flooding can impact communities.

My ministry continues to make steady progress towards implementing Ontario's Flooding Strategy. The strategy outlines a comprehensive all-of-government approach to helping Ontarians prepare for flooding and for reducing risks to communities all across the province.

As an example, the flooding strategy commits the province to enhancing flood mapping in Ontario. Identifying flood hazard areas through the creation or updating of flood mapping helps reduce risks to people and property, and we've made significant strides in that area. We're

investing in flood risk reduction by working with the federal government to invest more than \$5.5 million into eligible flood mapping projects over the next year and a half. This funding is being made available to Indigenous communities, conservation authorities and municipalities. More accurate maps will better prepare the people of Ontario for future flooding and reduce long-term disaster assistance costs for the province.

And with that, I think I'll turn it over to Minister Pirie.

**Hon. George Pirie:** Thank you very much, Minister Smith. Before I start, I just want to acknowledge the people on the committee that spoke on Sunday. I valued your input. It was chaired by MPP Smith, and I wanted to point out the fact that Anthony did a great job in that committee. Thank you very much for your input—great job.

Thanks again, Minister Smith.

Yes, you're quite right. We've got three people standing in front of you where in fact there was one before. But you will recognize, over the last 15 years or more—not the last, but the 15 years prior to the PC government—the population in northern Ontario had been in decline. Our decline in population had been close to 15% in that period of time. So if there's one real reason that there's three people here standing in front of you rather than one, it's to reverse that. Collectively, that's our job.

Ontario has everything that it needs, and it has everything that the globe wants, so we should be prosperous. It's going to take the collective efforts of everybody here to ensure that we prosper together, because, first, it's just simply right.

Good afternoon. I'm here to represent our great province as the Minister of Mines. It's an honour to address the Standing Committee on the Interior for the first time alongside my cabinet colleagues Minister Rickford and Minister Smith. Once again, thank you very much gentlemen.

**The Chair (Mr. Aris Babikian):** Two minutes left.

**Hon. George Pirie:** Two minutes left? Seriously? Is that it? Two minutes. Well, that's going to be interesting. This will be interesting. Okay.

I'd also like to thank the staff at my ministry for their work preparing for today and thank my senior officials for joining me at this committee. I'm looking forward to discussing the mines portfolio and to answering questions from the committee about our initiatives.

Our government recognizes the importance of mining to this province, and that's why we have a stand-alone Minister of Mines for the first time in over 50 years.

1430

I guess we're down to a minute now, are we?

**The Chair (Mr. Aris Babikian):** Yes.

**Hon. George Pirie:** Okay.

As a former miner, I'm passionate about the industry and the essential role it plays in Ontario's economic prosperity, especially in the north. We have a collective goal to make Ontario a top producer of critical minerals and the number one mining jurisdiction in the world. Ontario is one of Canada's best mineral producers already and is in the top 10 jurisdictions for mineral exploration spending globally: \$878 million was invested in this province for

mineral exploration in 2021, which accounted for 24% of all mineral exploration expenditures in Canada and a 55% increase from 2020.

In 2021, Ontario generated \$11.1 billion worth of minerals, including \$5.8 billion in gold and \$3.1 billion in critical minerals. Ontario's mineral mining industry supports over 75,000 direct and indirect jobs and has the highest proportion of Indigenous workers of all industries across the province, accounting for 11% of direct mining jobs.

Any time left?

**Mr. Stéphane Sarrazin:** Two seconds.

**Hon. George Pirie:** Okay.

**The Chair (Mr. Aris Babikian):** Eight seconds.

**Hon. George Pirie:** These are promising numbers, but I believe we can do better as a province.

See that? You've got extra.

**The Chair (Mr. Aris Babikian):** Thank you very much, Minister.

Now we will move to the questioning. Before I give the opportunity to the official opposition to start their questioning, a couple of house rules: Please identify yourself and your title before you speak for the record, direct your questions through the Chair, and please don't speak over each other—one at a time. Thank you very much.

Now it's the official opposition's time to start the questioning: 20 minutes. MPP Mamakwa.

**Mr. Sol Mamakwa:** Meegwetch. *Remarks in Oji-Cree.*

It's a good day. Thank you, Chair. I think it's my second time in the estimates, but, certainly in person, it's a big difference from doing the online Zoom calls.

As a First Nations person, I feel, with the government on that side—they're not Indigenous—I feel alone. I say that because, over the past couple of weeks, every now and then, I'll watch these westerns and all these cowboys and Indians. I'm just sharing this because, as a kid, I grew up watching westerns and I used to always root for the cowboys because they were good. I didn't know I was an Indian. So I sort of feel like that, looking around the table.

Anyway, it's amazing the words that are being spun around. We talk about "reconciliation," "economic prosperity" and "a great province"—I see it different. Obviously, you haven't seen the backyard of Ontario, you haven't seen the backyard of Canada, and what happens in the First Nations I represent, where you have going on 28 years of boil-water advisories.

I'm going to ask some questions with respect to some funding—if there has been any direct provincial funding for this particular First Nation that has gone on this fiscal year: Nibinamik First Nation.

**The Chair (Mr. Aris Babikian):** Any particular minister, or in general—your question.

**Mr. Sol Mamakwa:** It could be Indigenous services. It could be anyone.

**Hon. Greg Rickford:** Well, we're convening today for the purposes of the Ministry of Northern Development, not Indigenous affairs.

**Mr. Sol Mamakwa:** Okay, so northern development and mines and natural resources: Has there been any provincial funding with Nibinamik First Nation?

**Hon. George Pirie:** Do you want specific numbers for one community?

**Mr. Sol Mamakwa:** Yes.

**Hon. George Pirie:** Okay, then I'll have to turn to my advisers here to see if there's a specific number for that particular community.

**Ms. Monique Rolf von den Baumen-Clark:** Hello. Monique Rolf von den Baumen-Clark, Deputy Minister of the Ministry of Mines and the Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry.

I'm going to ask for each ministry for the chief administrative officers to respond to the question in terms of if there are any specifics on that. Certainly, if we don't have the exact information at this point in time, we are happy to come back and provide that information.

I'll ask Scott Mantle first, our chief administrative officer from the Ministry of Mines. Do we have any specific information on financials for that particular Indigenous community?

**Mr. Scott Mantle:** Scott Mantle, chief administrative officer for northern development and mines. We will be able to collect the specifics on payments that have been made to a specific community. It's not something we would have ready for today, but we would be able to pull that together and respond to the committee's question.

**Ms. Monique Rolf von den Baumen-Clark:** For the Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry, Amanda Holmes, who is our chief administrative officer.

**Ms. Amanda Holmes:** Good afternoon. Thank you, Deputy. Amanda Holmes, the chief administrative officer for the Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry. I would echo my colleague Scott Mantle in terms of the ability for us to take that away and to pull the information from our internal systems. We can report back to the committee on that number.

**Hon. Greg Rickford:** Chair, I can certainly appreciate the member's question, what underpins it. Certainly, for the Ministry of Northern Development there is no question that, rather unfortunately, especially the isolated Indigenous communities have simply, for a variety of reasons, not been able to put applications forward in the Northern Ontario Heritage Fund. We have endeavoured over the past couple of years to change that significantly.

I can mention a few communities that you would be aware of, but the primary challenge for the Ministry of Northern Development, especially with the Northern Ontario Heritage Fund, centres around the capacity to fill out the applications. As a ministry, we've really focused on our resources within the ministry to help support those. In fact, I was just talking to my deputy moments ago on this very subject matter and looking at the opportunities around the Ministry of Indigenous Affairs helping those communities.

I can report to you with confidence today that there are a number of Indigenous communities, particularly the isolated ones, Sol, that have come forward with this kind of support, and in the last few business quarters from the new NOHFC we've seen a sharp increase in the number of Indigenous communities that are getting support on project-specific proposals. We have an expectation that that will continue to improve.

**Mr. Sol Mamakwa:** What about anything under mines, for funding for them? Or will that be the same thing, you will find that out later, or—

**Hon. George Pirie:** Well, if you want specific information on specific communities, we'd have to go back. I'm sure I can ask Monique again on that. But obviously in the communities that I have visited so far there's been very direct evidence that there's been significant expenditures in those communities, including health clinics. There are new security force offices. There are new schools. I think there is an outstanding ask in one of the communities for a rink, but again, obviously the communities have benefited from the provincial funding.

I think what's lacking is the federal funding in those communities because that's the responsibility for the federal government and obviously there is some lack of funding from the federal government in those communities that I've seen.

I don't know if you would echo that, Minister Rickford, or not.

**Mr. Sol Mamakwa:** Perhaps, maybe just to expedite, I have a list of First Nations where I'm wondering the same question—specifically, in mining: Neskantaga First Nation, Long Lake #58, Ginoogaming First Nation, Eabametoong First Nation, Constance Lake First Nation, Aroland First Nation. Would you have any numbers for those First Nations?

1440

**Hon. George Pirie:** We can certainly get them for you.

**Hon. Greg Rickford:** The provincial support and the numbers that go with it, Sol, will ultimately depend on ministry-specific activities. I can tell you that for many of the activities with respect to the communities you just mentioned, funding comes from a couple of different sources, provincially. I assume you're talking about the resource sector more broadly.

**Mr. Sol Mamakwa:** Yes.

**Hon. Greg Rickford:** They would come from the Ministry of Indigenous Affairs for capacity funding. We do this routinely, in an effort to ensure they have all the tools that they need to participate in the various processes, including and especially the environmental assessment processes that occur for a variety of different projects, none the least of which, since you mentioned it, the central northern communities—in the case of Aroland First Nation and Long Lake #58, of course, the incredible opportunity with Greenstone Gold and the transformation that's occurring there, which will also serve as the baseline for a lot of the infrastructure that will flow into the isolated and remote communities like Eabametoong, Summer Beaver-Nibinamik, Webequie, Marten Falls.

So I'm sure those specific numbers are available for each community. But more broadly speaking, the exercise has always been to ensure that whatever opportunity presents itself, whether it's an obligation of the crown or not, capacity funding lies at the heart and soul of the resources that those communities get so that they can ably and rightly participate, and in some cases, take a lead in those processes.

**Mr. Sol Mamakwa:** What about Marten Falls and Webequie? Do you know those numbers?

**Hon. Greg Rickford:** Again, if you're talking about the resources for a specific activity from a specific ministry, they can be provided. But resources, obviously, to assist those communities that took up a leadership role in the environmental assessment processes for parts of the corridor that will ultimately link those communities—these are important social, health and economic levers that the government believes we should support and that, I should say, has received broad support from the communities, the Matawa communities in particular, around those. They offer an opportunity to improve the health and social and economic fortunes of those communities—including some non-merchantable wood that would be available, should some of those corridors be opened that the communities would be able to use. So resources don't just come in the form of money. We have great teams in all of our ministries, but I know, for our part, in northern development and Indigenous affairs—a laser focus on economic prosperity, a passion that you and I share, for the benefit of those.

**Mr. Sol Mamakwa:** So what I'm hearing is that there's limited agreement with the two Matawa First Nations—those two First Nations—by the Ring of Fire development. That's my understanding.

**Hon. Greg Rickford:** I'm not sure what you mean by "limited agreement."

**Mr. Sol Mamakwa:** Rather than talking to everyone—rather than talking to the nine First Nations from Matawa. What is the criteria for funding these two communities?

**Hon. Greg Rickford:** For those two communities?

**Mr. Sol Mamakwa:** Yes, especially specific to mining.

**Hon. George Pirie:** The government has put a billion dollars to support the planning and construction of legacy infrastructure in the Ring of Fire region. The government fully supports the duty to consult. We're open to talking to every single community in the whole area, and in the whole province, quite frankly. I speak as the Minister of Mines, but I know that's shared with the Minister of Natural Resources and the Minister of Indigenous Affairs and Northern Development. If that's what I'm hearing from you, there's no interest to exclude anybody. There's an open invite right now, to everyone, for me to talk to them. We're open to talk to anybody.

**Mr. Sol Mamakwa:** What about Neskantaga First Nation? Have you talked to them?

**Hon. George Pirie:** There's an open invitation from me to talk to them. They got an invitation.

**Hon. Greg Rickford:** And I can confirm, Sol, that we had a very productive conversation with Nibinamik's leadership, an extraordinary opportunity to look at common interests, particularly focused on infrastructure and on a couple of key projects in their community that go to the quality of life—some of the Northern Ontario Heritage Fund resources we've mobilized very quickly.

As I said, in the case of some other communities, when and where necessary, the Ministry of Indigenous Affairs would provide resources to help carry the pen, if you will, on ensuring that the applications and the capacity to look at those potential projects are completed.

So yes, we've had an opportunity to meet, quite recently, with Neskantaga.

**Mr. Sol Mamakwa:** So you've met with Neskantaga?

**Hon. Greg Rickford:** Yes, sir, I have. I think it was a week or two weeks ago, I want to say.

**Mr. Sol Mamakwa:** So you spoke about the engagement piece of the Ring of Fire project, or was it just more of a general discussion?

**Hon. Greg Rickford:** We did not speak about the Ring of Fire; we spoke about the opportunities that exist within my ministries to support some projects of interest to them. As I said before, it was a very productive conversation.

**Mr. Sol Mamakwa:** What about provincial funding that has flowed to Noront, also know as Ring of Fire Metals? Has there been any funding to them?

**Hon. George Pirie:** Not directly to those mining companies. But again, you understand what the government's role here is: It's to set the table so that development will happen.

**Mr. Sol Mamakwa:** One of the things, being from up north, growing up in far northern Ontario—I grew up on the land. I call it a way of life. The identity comes from the land. The language comes from the land. All the things that we do—hunting, fishing—is all part of the way of life. If that way of life is impacted, how much do you think that is worth? If Webequie or Neskantaga or Marten Falls are impacted in their way of life forever, how much do you think that is worth? What is it worth to you?

**Hon. Greg Rickford:** Well, in fairness, Sol, we've had conversations beyond the two communities that took up leadership for the corridor. As I said before, this is more than just about mining. I've lived and worked in those isolated communities. I can tell you that, whether it's an energy corridor or a corridor that provides road access, it's the leadership of those communities, almost with unanimity, that are asking for them, not us. Our responsibility is to—

**Mr. Sol Mamakwa:** I can appreciate that you worked there. I can appreciate that, but I don't think you grew up there.

**Hon. Greg Rickford:** The discussion is not about whether I grew up there. The discussion is about what the leadership of those communities is asking for us to do in the context of economic development, and the social and economic levers that we can pull to support communities, as they endeavour to do. The formal processes by Webequie and Marten Falls is a shout-out to their leadership and a desire to have their communities accessible by road, have broadband—

**Mr. Sol Mamakwa:** Back to the way of life: What do you think that is worth? That's my question.

**Hon. Greg Rickford:** Well, I guess—

**Mr. Sol Mamakwa:** No, I'm asking the Minister of Mines.

**Hon. George Pirie:** In my conversations with those individuals, it's the chiefs who want to see development. They want to see their communities grow. They want to see their children healthy. They want to see their children—

**The Chair (Mr. Aris Babikian):** Two minutes.

**Hon. George Pirie:** —come back and thrive in those communities. It's the chiefs who are seeking this.

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**Mr. Sol Mamakwa:** I'm just asking—

**Hon. George Pirie:** They're leading this, sir.

**Mr. Sol Mamakwa:** I know that's who you reach out to.

**Hon. George Pirie:** Sir, they are leading this charge.

**Mr. Sol Mamakwa:** But what do you think is the cost to the way of life? If I grew up sturgeon fishing, if I lose that forever, what does that cost? How much is the province willing to pay?

**Hon. George Pirie:** I don't even think that's a relevant question, is it? We're talking to the chiefs who want to see this development. There is no information that says that this—

**Mr. Sol Mamakwa:** So you're not willing to talk about—

**Hon. George Pirie:** Let me finish, let me finish—that there will be any sturgeon affected. The sturgeon still run on the Mattagami; they still run on the Groundhog River. There's sturgeon fishing, and we've been existing, we've been mining in northern Ontario for well over 100 years, and those environments are safe. There's nothing we are doing that will threaten the environment in northern Ontario because of the development in northwestern Ontario.

**Hon. Greg Rickford:** It's an interesting question, Sol, given the position you've taken in the Legislature. I would ask you, what is the cost of not doing some of this? We recognize that one of the key indicators of the quality of life in isolated communities is the traditions of hunting and fishing, but it's also for young people to have meaningful employment. Would you dispute that? This is what we hear from leadership constantly. We have to move beyond an education authority and the nursing station as the sole source of employment for those community members. Surely to goodness it wouldn't be that you wouldn't advocate for more economic activity than what currently exists in some of those isolated communities. So the cost is—

**Mr. Sol Mamakwa:** I was just asking, though, what you would pay. That's all I'm saying.

**Hon. Greg Rickford:** The cost is—

**The Chair (Mr. Aris Babikian):** Thank you very much, gentlemen. The time is up.

Now we move to the independent members. You have 10 minutes. MPP Hsu.

**Mr. Ted Hsu:** My first question is for the Minister of Mines, and it's about—well, it's a pretty particular question. How much money has been spent in your ministry to look at how to attract mining students, and in particular mining students from diverse backgrounds? Do you know that number?

**Hon. George Pirie:** I think we've got a number here that says it's about \$2.9 million that has been invested in Indigenous people, just in relation to the Aroland community, and that's with the development there and just outside of there. But I can get you exactly the figure.

But one of the pillars within the Critical Minerals Strategy is to attract employment from the Indigenous sector. As you know, the mining sector is already the biggest—they employ 11%. The Indigenous participation in the mining community is the highest than in any other sector.

**Mr. Ted Hsu:** Has there been money spent to look at how to attract mining students from other diverse backgrounds besides Indigenous Canadians?

**Hon. George Pirie:** If you're asking a question about how much has been done specifically from an educational point of view, then I think that would be better referred to Monique, and I also think it would probably be a question that needs to be answered from the Minister of Education, and maybe the Minister of Colleges and Universities as well. But for a specific number, I don't have a specific number right here.

**Mr. Ted Hsu:** Has the Ministry of Colleges and Universities been doing things in collaboration with your ministry to encourage students to go into the mining field, that you know of?

**Hon. George Pirie:** Certainly.

**Mr. Ted Hsu:** And can you elaborate on what they've done, that you know of?

**Hon. George Pirie:** I think you must recognize, of course, that I sat on the board of Northern College. I was the chairman of the board for Northern College for two years. We were a big part of the development of the micro-credentials that allowed Indigenous people—specifically for the Indigenous—to participate in the trades, because, as you know, to get a trade, you have to have a grade 12 education, and very few people, very few of those kids in those communities have a grade 12 education. Those programs were developed specifically in the college sector—and I know Cambrian did the same thing, and I think Lakehead college did as well. But you must remember, I was chairman of that board, so we did that with the Minister of Labour—

**The Chair (Mr. Aris Babikian):** The floor is for MPP Hsu. Go ahead, please.

**Mr. Ted Hsu:** Minister, you could probably answer this question: Do you think the Ministry of Colleges and Universities is doing enough to help with the efforts to—

**Hon. George Pirie:** Again, that's a very subjective question—

**Mr. Dave Smith:** Point of order.

**The Chair (Mr. Aris Babikian):** Point of order, MPP Smith.

**Mr. Dave Smith:** Thank you, Chair. We are discussing the estimates for the Ministries of Mines, Northern Development, and Natural Resources and Forestry, not the Ministry of Colleges and Universities. I would respectfully ask that the member refine his questions to the ministry that we are actually dealing with.

**The Chair (Mr. Aris Babikian):** I would ask that the members focus their questions on the ministries that are here to testify today and formulate your questions in that regard. Thank you.

**Mr. Ted Hsu:** Okay. Let me put it this way, then: Is it fair to say that the funds spent to encourage students to go into mining are in the Ministry of Colleges and Universities and not in the estimates of the mining ministry?

**Hon. George Pirie:** Could you phrase that question again? Because I didn't hear.

**Mr. Ted Hsu:** Is it fair to say that the mining ministry's estimates—the amounts spent by your ministry, Minister—do not cover programs that encourage students to go

into mining? That's the responsibility of another ministry, namely colleges and universities: Is that a fair statement?

**Hon. George Pirie:** From an economic point of view, from a line on a budget, it would be somebody else's line, not ours.

**Mr. Ted Hsu:** All right.

**Hon. Greg Rickford:** I can also say that the Ministry of Northern Development, through the ministry's Northern Ontario Heritage Fund, is, from time to time—but, I would say, fairly consistently—involved in supporting programs to raise awareness around mining and specific educational activities. They are not solely geared just towards Indigenous students, although we have separated that out in an effort to create internship opportunities for Indigenous youth, with a fairly regular uptake from mining companies. The focus, beyond colleges and universities, of course, is to get real experience in these opportunities and create a pathway that could lead to a college or a university with a specific bent on mining.

Further to that, there have been resources allocated to faculties over the course of time at universities that have dedicated faculties and specialties in these areas.

**Mr. Ted Hsu:** Thank you.

Another question for the Minister of Mines: Has your ministry been spending any resources on streamlining approvals processes?

**Hon. George Pirie:** We will be. We haven't spent any yet.

**Mr. Ted Hsu:** You haven't spent any yet? Have you been streamlining approvals in the last few years, or—

**Hon. George Pirie:** There's a policy—again, it's part of the Critical Minerals Strategy—of eliminating red tape.

**Mr. Ted Hsu:** Have you had any pushback in terms of people who are worried about water quality—that you might not be spending enough resources on approvals?

**Hon. George Pirie:** You know, that's very interesting—

**Mr. Ted Hsu:** —just to be careful about the water resources?

**Hon. George Pirie:** I think that's a great question, because every miner knows that our discharge water is cleaner than the intake water, and that's a fact.

**Mr. Ted Hsu:** Okay. So I guess that means that you never have to worry about it? Is that fair to say?

**Hon. George Pirie:** It means whatever you want it to mean. That's the truth.

**Mr. John Yakabuski:** He's just stating that on the record.

**Mr. Ted Hsu:** Okay. Let's move over to—how many minutes do I have left, Chair?

**The Chair (Mr. Aris Babikian):** Three minutes.

**Mr. Ted Hsu:** A question for Minister Smith, which is: You spoke a lot about fires and floods and adaptation and about trying to reduce long-term disaster assistance costs. I am wondering if you have any estimates on what your ministry will be spending in future years on disaster assistance and the costs of disasters. Have you tried to estimate how those costs will change over time in the next few years? From all causes: fires, floods, storms. We've suffered from a lot of those in the last year or two.

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**Hon. Graydon Smith:** Thank you for the question. We are subject to the whims of Mother Nature on a lot of this, but at the same time I think there's a lot of preparedness work that can be done and has been done. I referenced the FireSmart program in my introductory comments. There's a lot of variability from year to year. In 2021, it was a significantly difficult year for fires in Ontario. In 2022, it was not.

That is an opportunity, obviously, to learn and make sure that we're making investments, working with the public and educating the public, and taking a look at the infrastructure we have in place, whether that's fire, whether that's flooding. We developed a flooding strategy, and then we're working with municipalities and other stakeholders. We developed, again, the FireSmart program to continue to work with different communities, municipalities and First Nations communities and with the forestry industry to make sure that—

**Mr. Ted Hsu:** I'm just wondering if your ministry has tried to attach any dollar amounts to the expected future costs of the—

**Hon. Graydon Smith:** Specific dollar amounts?

**Mr. Ted Hsu:** You know, like some ranges. I'm sure insurance companies have tried to do that.

**Hon. Graydon Smith:** I'm happy to turn that over to the deputy minister to talk about specific dollars amounts.

*Interjections.*

**Ms. Monique Rolf von den Baumen-Clark:** Minister, I can ask Tracey Mill to speak to how we do our budgeting around forest fires, and she can speak a little bit in terms of how we forecast and anticipate costs.

Tracey, over to you.

**Ms. Tracey Mill:** Good afternoon and thank you. It's Tracey Mill. I'm the assistant deputy minister for provincial services division in the Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry.

As the minister and the deputy alluded to, we do a number of planning and preparedness—

**The Chair (Mr. Aris Babikian):** Time up. Thank you.

Now we move to the government side. You have 20 minutes, MPP Yakabuski.

**Mr. John Yakabuski:** I want to thank the ministers and their staff for being here this afternoon as well and providing us with this information.

I'm going to start with the Minister of Mines, if I may. Of course, Minister, you've heard, like the rest of us have, Minister of Energy Smith here this morning talk about the electrification of our energy system with regard to electric vehicles, electric arc furnaces and that kind of thing, but on the issue of vehicles and these tremendous investments that are being made, Stellantis and LG down in the Windsor-Essex area building the largest electric vehicle battery plant anywhere in North America, of course, critical minerals in our mining sector is a huge part of that, ensuring that we can supply that manufacturing process.

My question for you, sir, is, how important is our government's current focus on critical minerals and how will

it affect the mining sector moving forward, with a designated Minister of Mines concentrating on ensuring that we can provide that?

**Hon. George Pirie:** I want to thank you very much for that question, Minister Yakabuski—

*Laughter.*

**Mr. John Yakabuski:** I mess it up, too. Don't worry about it.

**Hon. George Pirie:** Better said, thanks for the question, John. As you know, the government has a huge initiative to decarbonize the economy. What we're doing with the Critical Minerals Strategy is the perfect marriage of the minerals that are found in Ontario, specifically northern Ontario, with the manufacturing might in southern Ontario. These battery minerals will, of course, be required. You can get those elements anywhere in the world, but unfortunately a large percentage of them sit in Russia and China, so a huge part of what we're trying to do right now, of course, is secure the supply chain of these minerals from northern Ontario that will be used to manufacture the batteries that will provide the EVs that will be required to decarbonize our economy. So it's a perfect strategy to see that this happens.

Of course, with that you'll see the benefits that are incumbent with the increase in economic development across northern Ontario and other mining sites. It's a huge part of what the government is doing, and that's a big part of what the Ministry of Mines is doing to secure the future of the economy of Ontario.

**Mr. John Yakabuski:** If I could, just by way of a small supplemental, sir: With the estimates of what we have in critical minerals here in the province of Ontario, are you confident that we can supply our manufacturing sector in that regard for the foreseeable future?

**Hon. George Pirie:** Yes, there is absolutely no doubt. You saw the recent announcements from Sudbury with Vale. That's \$900 million, and they mine nickel and cobalt, both critical minerals—cobalt is a by-product. They're going to be spending another \$900 million in Creighton mine—again, nickel and cobalt, all essential minerals.

The Ring of Fire initially will be about nickel. We're going to need more nickel. Lithium, especially in northwestern Ontario—the Frontier deposit in northwestern Ontario is huge, high grade; that will transform the supply of lithium out of Ontario. There are other investments, other finds, that are in northern Ontario as well that are lithium.

But yes, we're transforming the supply of minerals from northern Ontario on the back of a very aggressive exploration program that I think earmarks about \$29 million towards that fund. So yes, it's coming together very well. We've got niobium that's just south of James Bay. We've got rare earths 20 miles east of Otter Rapids, and lithium there as well. We've got cesium, which is another critical mineral, about 80 kilometres east of Cochrane, north of Lake Abitibi. We've got numerous lithium deposits, again, in and around Thunder Bay in northwestern Ontario.

So the whole of northern Ontario is going to be affected because we are changing our—basically, we've been looking for gold and base metals, but because of the globe's requirement to find those rare earths and critical minerals, the exploration bits are turned to different areas, and we will find them in northern Ontario. Our regional geologist in Porcupine, for the first time, is focusing on rare earths and critical minerals.

On the back of that, I look at a number of people here that I can see on the screen. We've got a tremendous team that's leading that charge within the Ministry of Mines here, in Thunder Bay, in Kenora and in Porcupine, all focusing on this task.

**Mr. John Yakabuski:** Thank you very much, Minister. I will pass it on to my colleague.

**The Chair (Mr. Aris Babikian):** MPP Bresee.

**Mr. Ric Bresee:** Mr. Chair, I was planning on asking the Minister of Natural Resources and Forestry a question about the wonderful fire services and the preparation that we have, but as Mr. Hsu has already targeted that area and the response that our services are internationally recognized in our wildlife fire management, I will move over to question and ask the minister if he could update us on the forest sector strategy and the Forest Biomass Action Plan.

**Hon. Graydon Smith:** Yes, thanks for the question. I was unable in my opening comments to talk about the forestry industry, just because I didn't want to run Minister Pirie completely out of time, although I did my very, very best to get close, and I apologize for that.

We know that the forest sector in Ontario is obviously enormous, and the forest sector strategy is going to play a hugely important role over the next 10 years. We're talking about \$18 billion in revenue from manufactured goods and services in 2020. The industry is supporting 148,000 direct and indirect jobs, using 2021 numbers. So obviously forestry operations are a vital source of good jobs, particularly in those rural and northern communities which we've talked a lot about today already, where they may well be the main source of employment.

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Ontario's Forest Sector Strategy, as I mentioned, is our government's 10-year plan to unlock the full potential of that sector. It will continue Ontario's strong history of sustainable development and position the province as a world leader in making and selling forest products from renewable, sustainable and—I really want to underline this point—responsibly managed forests. It creates opportunities to further economic prosperity, and not only in the communities in the north where the actual direct forestry is happening, but, again, through all the spinoffs that come from that and the high-quality jobs that it promotes throughout the province. It supports Indigenous, rural and northern communities that rely on that sector, but it also supports lots of communities in southern Ontario, as well.

The strategy has four pillars: promoting stewardship and sustainability; putting more wood to work; improving our cost competitiveness; and fostering innovation, markets and talent. In April 2021, we created a 14-member forest sector strategy committee of municipal, Indigenous and industry

representatives who are continuing to assist the ministry with implementing this strategy.

To date, we've seen progress on many fronts. We've upheld our commitment to greater collaboration by establishing a local forest management corporation to manage the Temagami forest, bringing together local municipalities, Indigenous communities and forest industry representatives, in partnership with the Ministry of Labour, Immigration, Training and Skills Development. We've collaborated on training projects for forestry and wood manufacturing. We've also completed several projects with Indigenous groups and First Nations to increase their participation in the forest sector, promoting forestry career pathways and providing training for Indigenous businesses and workers and encouraging the use of mass timber in construction. I think that is a really, really exciting opportunity. We've developed technical guidelines and research and amended the Ontario building Code to allow for mass timber buildings of up to 12 storeys.

This year we completed a milestone commitment with the release of our Forest Biomass Action Plan. You had asked about that as well. I just want to talk about that for a moment. It includes trees and above-ground tree parts that aren't used in conventional forest products, as well as sawmill by-products like bark, sawdust and wood shavings, and can be used as a sustainable fuel source or as an alternative to single-use plastics. When you see those straws now that we use every day, those are paper straws coming from our forests. It can replace petroleum-based chemicals and fossil fuels; it has got emerging uses in medicines and pharmaceuticals, plastics and polymers, textiles, 3D printing—we talked to a member of the forestry industry about wooden satellites at one point—battery energy storage and green hydrogen. It can even be used as a component in jet fuel. So there is an incredible opportunity before us.

The plan is for Ontario to be a leader in the biomass industry, and the action plan has got five objectives:

- identify those pathways and markets for forest biomass;
- support demand for forest bioenergy and by-products;
- improve the business and regulatory environments for forest biomass;
- support holistic, culturally relevant pathways for Indigenous community involvement in forest biomass value chains and to support reconciliation between Indigenous communities and the crown; and
- communicate, collaborate and inform on forest biomass opportunities.

Using biomass can support both the province's forest management and environmental objectives, helping us to use more mill residues, reduce waste and landfilling, reduce demand for fossil fuels and provide clean energy and greenhouse gas emission reduction potential.

There's everything you wanted to know about forest biomass but were afraid to ask.

**Mr. Ric Bresee:** I need more.

*Laughter.*

**The Chair (Mr. Aris Babikian):** MPP Flack, go ahead.

**Mr. Rob Flack:** Mr. Chair, through you, I would ask the Minister of Northern Development and Indigenous Affairs a couple of questions. First of all, I want to say, being a student of history, I remember reading about Diefenbaker's election in 1957 and 1958. He had a vision; it was of the north. And I look here and I think we are well represented in terms of the passion and vision the three of you gentlemen share for northern Ontario.

Minister, one of the tools this government created to support investment and resource development—this is my first question—is the Northern Ontario Resource Development Support Fund. How will this initiative continue to help northern Ontario?

My second question, if I may, Mr. Chair: Can you talk about the development of agri-food, the potential of expanded land use, better fertility and better food production to help feed Ontario as we continue to get a bigger population? So a two-part question.

**Hon. Greg Rickford:** Thank you and thanks for joining me at the Royal Winter Fair to talk about the exciting opportunities for agriculture in northern Ontario.

It just occurred to me that I may have referred to NORP instead of NORDS. I never did like these acronyms, and I had always remained committed to talking them out rather than as they're represented by letters.

The Northern Ontario Resource Development Support Fund, Rob, is really a breakthrough program—a top-up, a stackable amount of money that communities can use to target a specific piece of infrastructure that they would say has been more impacted than other priorities that they may have as a result of resource activities. George, as a former mayor, would have thought about that a lot. I know in Sudbury, there was a particular road that was taking a beating. It's those kinds of projects that are enabling the communities to identify what they are and stack them on provincial or other federal programs. It's delivering \$15 million worth of infrastructure a year. As I said, it has really given, especially the smaller—I'm always going to target the smaller communities, the Red Lakes, Cochenours, Balmertowns of the world, where various kinds of water infrastructure, waste water infrastructure has pressure on it from a resource activity, and this gives them an opportunity. It's a way of thanking them for the contributions that the resources we extract in and around those communities—have an opportunity to keep on top of infrastructure. Of course, this should never be confused with the resource revenue-sharing program, which is a tool we use with our Indigenous communities for direct benefits as a result of mining royalties and stumpage. It is a breakthrough program that we introduced for communities, and it checks the box on a pretty big campaign promise made back in the day.

As for agriculture—do I have a little bit more time, Chair?

**The Chair (Mr. Aris Babikian):** Five minutes.

**Hon. Greg Rickford:** Five minutes? Oh, well, let me tell you, there's a lot of discussion about food security—and you're an expert, so cut me off if I get in too deep here. You had an opportunity to understand and are going to help us—my parliamentary assistant, Dave Smith—in our efforts to see what more we can do around agriculture.



Of course, the three largest agriculture opportunities in the province of Ontario are in Timiskaming–Cochrane, Thunder Bay–Superior North and Kenora–Rainy River. There are farms in between, for sure, but writ large, northern Ontario offers an incredible opportunity for arable land, and as you well know, a precursor for that is going to be tile drainage; we absolutely have to have it. Tens of millions of dollars, through the Northern Ontario Heritage Fund, have gone out. Timiskaming–Cochrane has been a tremendous benefactor of that.

Moving beyond that, we're working with companies in agri-tech that are interested in supplying Indigenous communities with fresh produce. In fact, we're supporting an Indigenous community mentioned by one of the opposition members earlier in their efforts to develop a small but important piece of agricultural land in their community. Anything is on the table, from tractors to state-of-the-art technologies.

As you know, some of our supply chain is a little weak on grain and seed distribution, but we're building that capacity, especially out in northwestern Ontario.

Automation, which, of course, has always been where southern Ontario has the hand up on us, is seeing significant improvements, particularly around dairy and other kinds of livestock. Lamb is coming from northern Ontario more increasingly, and we don't think it's a baa-d idea to support those opportunities.

**Interjection:** That's an old one.

**Hon. Greg Rickford:** You didn't like that one?

So it's really exciting, and we think that there is lots more to come.

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**Mr. Rob Flack:** Thank you.

**The Chair (Mr. Aris Babikian):** MPP Leardi?

**Mr. Anthony Leardi:** My question is for the Minister of Mines.

There's something called the Critical Minerals Innovation Fund. Can the minister please explain the importance of the Critical Minerals Innovation Fund as it relates to the Critical Minerals Strategy?

**Hon. George Pirie:** Thank you very much for that question.

**The Chair (Mr. Aris Babikian):** Two minutes.

**Hon. George Pirie:** Two minutes? Okay.

Our government's Critical Minerals Strategy is backed by strategic investments like the \$29-million fund to find the mines of the future and create more exploration jobs in the north.

We are investing \$5 million in the Critical Minerals Innovation Fund to support new technologies for mining and processing capabilities in the province. I have been overseeing the development of this program that is targeted to help the private sector advance new technologies that support critical minerals. This includes developing new processing technologies and new mining techniques. It also includes developing technologies to recover critical minerals from legacy mine tailings and waste sites. We look forward to seeing what Ontario's world-class mineral

exploration and development sector can accomplish by leveraging this new program.

I think I've got a couple minutes there. I've got a little bit of time left?

**The Chair (Mr. Aris Babikian):** One minute.

**Hon. George Pirie:** Okay. This is really an exciting thing, when you're talking about reprocessing legacy mine tailings, because tellurium is typically a waste product from polymetallic mines. There's research done in British Columbia that's looking at these, and this would be an anode for a battery. It would probably help replace cobalt.

The Kidd Creek tailings facility has an abundance of that material as well. So it is an exceedingly exciting opportunity, that we'll reprocess materials that had been historically waste and help ourselves in the decarbonization of the economy.

Was that a minute?

**The Chair (Mr. Aris Babikian):** You have 22 seconds.

**Hon. George Pirie:** Oh, jeez. I left myself some time.

**The Chair (Mr. Aris Babikian):** Down to 17 seconds.

**Hon. George Pirie:** Okay.

**Interjection:** Time's up.

**The Chair (Mr. Aris Babikian):** Time's up.

We've finished the first round of questioning. We will go to the second round, and this time we will start with the official opposition. You have 20 minutes. MPP Bourgouin.

**Mr. Guy Bourgouin:** Thank you, Ministers. I've got a question for each minister.

I'll start with Minister Smith—forestry. I come from forestry, so of course it's dear to my heart. But I had the chance to go to a tree-grower in Hearst, la Maison Verte. There used to be—and correct me; I might be wrong on my numbers—approximately 30-some tree-growers. Now, I believe, we're at eight that grow trees in Ontario. But we're noticing that maybe we're not planting as much as we used to, that the companies are not planting as they used to. It could be also that maybe it's not true, but there's speculation, or people believe, that we are planting less trees because we are more efficient at harvesting, because technology has brought us to where we are today and we're harvesting a lot more.

But are we planting the same or the amount of trees that we should be? Or are we down from past years and planting less trees, even though we're harvesting more? That's my first question.

**Hon. Graydon Smith:** Thank you for the question. As I noted in my comments before, I think the goal for forestry in Ontario, or certainly one of the goals, is to have a sustainable operation, and so obviously harvesting and planting go quite hand in hand.

In terms of actual numbers, I'm going to turn it over to the deputy minister to talk a little bit more about the specifics of what industry and MNR are doing. So if the deputy could just join us at the table for a moment, that would be beneficial, and we can get you the answer to that question.

**Ms. Monique Rolf von den Baumen-Clark:** I can ask Craig Brown, who is our assistant deputy minister for

policy division, who can give us a sense of how many trees we plant on average, to respond to that question. Craig?

**Mr. Craig Brown:** Good afternoon and thank you for the question. I'm the assistant deputy minister for policy at the Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry, Craig Brown.

The forest industry plants, on average, about 68 million trees across the province every year, and this is to fulfill the commitment to sustainable forest management, as well as our licensing obligations. Some other numbers for you: Since 2005, the industry has planted more than a billion trees across the province to fulfill their obligations under the licences.

**Mr. Guy Bourgouin:** So are the numbers down from previous years? Let's say from five years, 10 years back? Are we down in the number, or are we planting more trees?

**Mr. Craig Brown:** I don't have that information, but we will be able to get those numbers for you.

**Mr. Guy Bourgouin:** Yes, the numbers are important because the industry has to be renewable because northern communities do depend on it. Yes, I'd like to have these numbers.

Forestry used to do cutting for moose habitat, marten habitat and now we're seeing a little bit more clear-cut cutting. Are we still doing that type of harvesting in the industry, doing more for moose habitat, marten habitat or we're just doing one big pass, clear-cutting? I just came back from deer hunting and I saw big cuts, more than in the Thunder Bay area, but it could be region. So my question to you is, is it region-specific or we're just doing one big pass, a swoop pass, and then we're tree planting and we're not doing the typical or what used to be done in the past? There would be blocks that would be cut, there would be blocks left for moose and martens. Is that still going on or not?

**Hon. Graydon Smith:** Thanks for the question again. In terms of anything that may have changed, I'll ask the deputy minister to take a crack at that. Thank you.

**Ms. Monique Rolf von den Baumen-Clark:** Thank you, Minister. Certainly we can provide some additional information for you. A lot of our forest management plans will have details around how harvesting occurs. I can hand it over to Sean Maguire, who can speak a little bit about the types of forest management activities that do occur, and he can give you a little bit of that background.

Sean Maguire is our ADM for the forest industry division. So, Sean?

**Mr. Sean Maguire:** Thank you, Deputy. Just for the record, I'll introduce myself. I'm Sean Maguire, ADM of the forest industry division with the Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry.

Specific to your question about the amount of clear-cutting that happens, it's all designated in the forest management planning system where we look at the proper prescription to basically harvest and replenish the forest in a natural way, and it's designed to create permanent stability. So I wouldn't say that there's a number on more or less clear-cutting in the province; it depends on where you're harvesting within a forest, within a specific forest

management plan, and that's designated by the needs of both the industry, as well as the communities that are affected and the economics, the social fabric and climate. So it's not designed specifically—

**Mr. Guy Bourgouin:** So the five-year, the 10-year and the 20-year plans are still going on.

**Mr. Sean Maguire:** Yes.

**Mr. Guy Bourgouin:** I guess I was wondering—because Thunder Bay is a different terrain than back home in Kapuskasing, where it's more clay belt and different, and it's only winter accessible, so there's different criteria. That's why I was asking. Do we still have the plan that is specific to a region based on the forest management plan that they developed?

**Mr. Sean Maguire:** Absolutely. The forest is broken into 40 management units roughly, and each management unit is basically treated for its own specific environment, and there's a forest management plan done for each unit that's customized to the terrain and the vegetation and the species—

**Mr. Guy Bourgouin:** And the habitat.

**Mr. Sean Maguire:** Habitat, yes.

**Mr. Guy Bourgouin:** Thank you.

My next question is to the Ministry of Mines. Thank you, Minister and associates. My colleague asked you about provincial funding from your ministry: Did it go to Noront, or Ring of Fire Metals I think is the name of the company now? You mentioned not directly to Noront, or Ring of Fire Metals, so to whom, then? To which company? Did they go to different companies? Is there any provincial funding that came from your ministry that went to other places for the Ring of Fire?

1530

**Hon. George Pirie:** If you're talking about the province investing directly in companies, you would be referring to mainly exploration companies, through flow-through structure. As far as a direct investment to mining companies, that would happen through tax policy, through accelerated depreciation mechanisms and things like that—accelerated capital cost programs. That wouldn't come directly from the ministry.

The investments from the ministry are in the form of, again, as I said, a billion dollars to assist with the—

**Mr. Guy Bourgouin:** Prospecting.

**Hon. George Pirie:** Well, the billion dollars with the critical initiative, expanding broadband and setting the table.

**Mr. Guy Bourgouin:** What about the company Wyloo? Did any funding come from your—

**Hon. George Pirie:** No. As you know, Wyloo is a private company—

**Mr. Guy Bourgouin:** Okay, so what about Eagle's Nest mining site?

**Hon. George Pirie:** Pardon me?

**Mr. Guy Bourgouin:** What about the Eagle's Nest site?

**Hon. George Pirie:** No, the Eagle's Nest is one site in that package of land.

**Mr. Guy Bourgouin:** So no funding from your ministry.

**Hon. George Pirie:** Not that I'm aware of.

**Mr. Guy Bourgouin:** Okay. Thank you.

Just another thing: You also mentioned and my colleague asked you about discussion with other First Nations communities regarding the Ring of Fire development. I know that some of the mining communities that I represent—Kash and Fort Albany—made a moratorium on their traditional territories. Have you had discussions with these two communities?

**Hon. George Pirie:** As I said, there's an offer to have a conversation from the Ministry of Mines to every single community.

**Mr. Guy Bourgouin:** So if these two communities ask for a meeting with you, you will meet with them?

**Hon. George Pirie:** Certainly.

**Mr. Guy Bourgouin:** Okay. Thank you, because they've been reaching out, apparently, but maybe I'm misinformed.

**Hon. Greg Rickford:** They have, under Treaty 9, and we are planning another discussion with Treaty 9 communities in the new year.

**Mr. Guy Bourgouin:** Good. Thank you, Minister. They've been reaching out, and they've been telling me that they haven't—so I'll be reaching out on their behalf also and asking for meetings from both of your ministries so that these two communities can discuss the Ring of Fire with you.

**Hon. George Pirie:** On Thursday, I had a discussion with Chief Linklater.

**Mr. Guy Bourgouin:** Okay. Thank you.

Minister Rickford, you mentioned it, but you were very brief, and I'd like to give you—

**Hon. Greg Rickford:** Wait, I was brief?

**Mr. Guy Bourgouin:** Yes, on one topic, just one topic. You mentioned camps versus communities—the big mines that we have in some communities—but you didn't elaborate, and I'd like to hear from you. I know what camps versus community means, but I was born and raised in Dubreuilville, and I know there are two mines and there are huge camps there. We know about the labour shortage, but we're seeing communities dying because there needs to be more done. I'd like to hear on your end, because you did mention camp versus community, and I'd like to hear you elaborate more on these subjects.

**Hon. Greg Rickford:** I'm happy to elaborate, Guy, providing that we get your support for the initiatives that we're offering these communities. That hasn't been there in the past. But what we've been focused on, especially with communities like Dubreuilville, is creating opportunities for them, especially around infrastructure, municipal infrastructure, the essentials to run a town. Look at Greenstone. Of course, Geraldton, as it's known historically, is going to triple in size within a couple of years, and the question that the chief administrative officer has at all times is, "How can we grow this?" So we're investing in health care; the capacity there has increased.

The mining companies ultimately—George would know more about this—make decisions around what the limits of a community's real expansion can be. That's particularly true for northern towns, as you know, building out on the Canadian Shield. And so in some instances, a mining camp

has been the solution. They're more often in the far, more isolated places.

There are hybrids, of course. You see in Red Lake—Placer Dome elected back in the day, George, to build just north of Pickle Lake, and Pickle Lake was just not a community that could sustain the kind and scale of growth.

But when and where possible, I'll tell you, those investments are going to be there. That's why we introduced the northern Ontario resource development program, right? You'll remember it. You voted against it, but it was in an effort to make sure that those—

**Mr. Guy Bourgouin:** But Minister, in that small community, there are two mines—

**Hon. Greg Rickford:** There are two huge mines; I've been there.

**Mr. Guy Bourgouin:** Absolutely. But wouldn't it make sense to have people live in that community, pay more taxes, have kids in schools? That is not happening at this point.

**Hon. Greg Rickford:** There's a number of structural factors; there's no question about it. The preference would be to support those. So in the case of Dubreuilville—

**Mr. Guy Bourgouin:** But you have the power to insist on this stuff, also.

**Hon. Greg Rickford:** Well, you don't have the power to insist on it. Some of the structural challenges that you face—this is not like the forestry operation in Kapuskasing, for example. The facility there is central to that community and that region. These mines were built fast, and the number of people, increasingly, who actually want to move and take up full-time residence—

**Mr. Guy Bourgouin:** That's how northern Ontario was developed. You're not reinventing the wheel. Northern Ontario was developed based on bringing people to the communities.

**Hon. Greg Rickford:** No question about it; that's how those towns were built—the speed at which they were built, obviously, at the speed of business.

I can say our government has moved as quickly as possible to ensure that those communities—

**Mr. Guy Bourgouin:** Thank you, Minister. I'll pass it to my colleague.

**The Chair (Mr. Aris Babikian):** MPP Mamakwa.

**Mr. Sol Mamakwa:** Meegwetch. Back in July 2020, during the forest fires, there were a lot of evacuations from different First Nations. There was an incident that happened in Cat Lake. They had to get evacuated because of a forest fire, smoke, whatnot. I was talking to the leadership of Cat Lake, and I know they had 37 trained firefighters, and they could not help. That's not part of the agreement, or whatever the process is, to get the firefighters from the north. They were coming from different areas.

So I'm asking the Minister of Natural Resources, what's the plan to utilize First Nations in the north to fight—should there be forest fires next summer?

**Hon. Graydon Smith:** There's always an opportunity to learn from every situation that occurs and to continue conversations with everybody who's involved to try to make systems better.

We referenced a couple of times today the FireSmart program, where we're working with communities throughout the north—individuals and municipalities and First Nations—to ensure that people and property are as safe as can be.

I'm incredibly proud of the work that gets done by all the men and women who are contributing to putting out wildfires.

If there is an opportunity to expand what and how we do—using our Indigenous communities and the people within, then let's have a conversation about how we do that and how it best works. I think it's always a matter of ongoing communication. Again, if it was perceived that something did not work well, how can we make it better? If there's an opportunity to do it better, how can we implement that? It's certainly a conversation that we'd be happy to follow up on and see where those opportunities are.

**Mr. Sol Mamakwa:** To the Minister of Mines: What is the projected provincial share to get the Ring of Fire development shovel-ready or operational?

**Hon. George Pirie:** Well, the provincial share—right now, we're talking about getting the roads ready, if that's what you're talking about. That's fully funded by both the province and the federal government, although—correct me if I'm wrong—the federal government hasn't pitched in yet for their portion of that. So whatever that number is, it will be fully funded by both levels of government. But the province has already earmarked, as I said, over a billion dollars toward that process.

**Mr. Sol Mamakwa:** How long does the ministry project until the Ring of Fire is operational?

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**Hon. George Pirie:** That will depend on how long the consultation takes. It's the Indigenous communities that are undertaking the consultation with the environmental assessment process. I expect that that will be done—I don't really have a firm number for you, but I know they are working very diligently. They are in discussions with the other communities on a regular basis.

**Mr. Sol Mamakwa:** So who is leading this engagement that—

**Hon. George Pirie:** Webequie and Marten Falls.

**Mr. Sol Mamakwa:** Thank you, Minister.

**The Chair (Mr. Aris Babikian):** Two minutes.

**Mr. Sol Mamakwa:** What preconditions would there be for funding to flow, that infrastructure to flow, to be built in these communities, like the roads that you're talking about? Are there any conditions that—

**Hon. George Pirie:** The preconditions?

**Mr. Sol Mamakwa:** Yes.

**Hon. George Pirie:** Well, obviously, a successful environmental assessment process.

**Mr. Sol Mamakwa:** I was asking about the impacts on the ways of life. When you do the environmental assessment, is that going to be part of it?

**Hon. George Pirie:** The consultations with all communities is in all facets.

**Mr. Sol Mamakwa:** Do you know if that environmental assessment is—are they talking to other First Nations?

**Hon. George Pirie:** Yes, they are.

**Mr. Sol Mamakwa:** How much time do I have?

**The Chair (Mr. Aris Babikian):** Less than one minute.

**Mr. Sol Mamakwa:** Okay. So, very quickly, what role is the province playing in the trilateral or multilateral talks amongst the province, the federal government, the impacted First Nations and the mineral sector with stakes in the Ring of Fire development?

**Hon. George Pirie:** Well, I know that from the Minister of Mines' point of view, and I believe with the Minister of Indigenous Affairs as well, that we signed off on the bilateral agreement with the federal government that was announced a couple weeks ago. I don't know if any dates for that consultation have happened yet, but we're definitely in consultation.

**The Chair (Mr. Aris Babikian):** Thank you, Minister.

Now we move to the independent member. You have 10 minutes.

**Mr. Mike Schreiner:** Thank you to the three ministers for being here with us today. I'm hoping to ask questions to all three of you, but I'm going to start with the Minister of Natural Resources and Forestry.

I appreciated in your opening remarks that you talked about the importance of updating flood mapping and the role the ministry is playing in that regard. I want to start with a yes/no question: Has the ministry presented any data around the financial implications and the financial risk, especially related to flooding, to the changes proposed to the wetland evaluation system, the reduction in the ability of conservation authorities to do their work, and the proposal to open the greenbelt up for development?

**Hon. Graydon Smith:** Thanks for the question. It's not a yes or no answer, unfortunately, so you're not going to get that from me. What I will say is, we are at the beginning of a process where we're asking for consultation on a proposal. The proposals surrounding conservation authorities and wetland evaluation I'll speak to specifically. I'm not going to speak to the greenbelt. We'll save that for another minister for another day.

I think what's important is to be asking questions about what we can do better than we do today, how we can achieve, ultimately, the goal of building homes in Ontario and how all of the different tools that we have at our availability can allow us to do that.

**The Chair (Mr. Aris Babikian):** MPP Schreiner, go ahead.

**Mr. Mike Schreiner:** Excuse me, Minister. Thank you for that.

Given the fact the Insurance Bureau of Canada has put out significant warnings about flood risks that Ontarians have already experienced and will likely experience; the fact that Hurricane Hazel tragically—81 people died, hundreds of millions of dollars of damage, thousands of homes lost—the things like the wetland evaluation system and the conservation authorities were strengthened and brought in to prevent that kind of risk in the future. So don't you think it would be incumbent upon the ministry

to do some sort of risk analysis of what the financial risks to people and property are in the province from flooding?

**Hon. Graydon Smith:** I think what you talk about specifically with conservation authorities is something that we very much want them to be laser-focused on. There have been incidents throughout the years, beginning back with Hurricane Hazel, as you referenced in your comments, where flooding and the protection of people and property obviously was not sufficient. Conservation authorities got established. They had a core mandate to ensure the safety of people and property in flood-prone areas and in hazard lands. As we continue to consult on this and look at the proposed bill, we're asking for a laser focus on that. We're asking for a laser focus from CAs to be focused on those—

**Mr. Mike Schreiner:** I appreciate that, Minister.

**Hon. Graydon Smith:** —that conservation authorities were created for.

**Mr. Mike Schreiner:** I appreciate that. I think it just would be incumbent—I think it's an appropriate conversation during the estimates that the ministry would have done some sort of risk analysis and a financial risk analysis. I would encourage you to do that moving forward.

I'd like to take a moment to ask about the modernization of the Aggregate Resources Act. I'm curious: Has the ministry done any analysis that would look at the amount of supply and demand that already exists, so how much supply of aggregate has already been approved for extraction versus the annual demand that we need in Ontario? Has the ministry done any analysis in that regard?

**Hon. Graydon Smith:** I'll turn it over to the deputy minister momentarily to talk about specific numbers, but I think the one thing that is obvious is that in our province, as we continue to grow—again, we need to supply housing, we need to build municipal infrastructure, we need to have infrastructure that can meet the demands of the population of the future, and we need a robust aggregate supply to make that happen. So the ministry has been focused on making sure, to build that critical infrastructure, whether that's schools, whether it's hospitals or subway tunnels, that we have an appropriate supply of aggregate—

**Mr. Mike Schreiner:** Thank you, Minister.

**Hon. Graydon Smith:** I'll turn it over to the deputy—well, you asked the question. I'm happy to turn it over to the deputy minister to give you the numbers.

**Mr. Mike Schreiner:** As the deputy minister comes up to answer, could we incorporate into that answer—

**The Chair (Mr. Aris Babikian):** One at a time, please.

**Mr. Mike Schreiner:** No. I want to ask something related to it just in the interest of time: Can you incorporate the supply if we would increase the amount of recycled aggregate as well as virgin aggregate, which would be an opportunity for Ontarians to save money and address demand needs, in providing an answer to that question? Could you incorporate opportunities for recycled aggregate as well?

**Hon. Graydon Smith:** I appreciate the clarification of the question, and I'll turn it over to the deputy minister for some more information.

**Ms. Monique Rolf von den Baumen-Clark:** Thank you, Minister.

To answer your question about supply, yes, we do regularly go through updates to look at that, so I'll ask Craig Brown—he's our assistant deputy minister for policy division—to speak a little bit about what we've been done in the past and what we are doing on that.

Craig, over to you.

**Mr. Craig Brown:** Thank you for the question. We did conduct an extensive study back in 2010 that looked at supply and demand for aggregate in the province. We're currently in the process of updating that study now, and we should have results on that later in the calendar year.

**Mr. Mike Schreiner:** Great. I appreciate that and look forward to the results of that study. I would encourage you to incorporate opportunities around recycled aggregate into that.

As part of the modernization of the Aggregate Resources Act, when Bill 132 was in front of the Legislature back in 2019, municipalities raised significant concerns about the changes to their ability to regulate below-the-water-table aggregate extraction. As a matter of fact, AMO came here and said you need to indemnify municipalities—as a matter of fact, the minister may have been the president of AMO at the time or coming into that role—the need to indemnify a municipality's legal obligation to protect water because of the changes that were being proposed and optimally made in Bill 132. Has there been anything to address those concerns from municipalities in the modernization of the Aggregate Resources Act?

**Hon. Graydon Smith:** Again, thanks for the question. As the conversation goes on, I will reflect back on my time with AMO. There were many conversations with the minister at the time on things that were within that act, and it was a pleasure to be able to comment on them. I know that since I've been minister, there has been an opportunity to ensure, as with previous ministers, that licences were looked at very thoroughly from a number of different angles.

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I'll certainly turn it over to the deputy minister to elaborate further on anything that she may wish to add.

**Ms. Monique Rolf von den Baumen-Clark:** Thank you, Minister. Again, I will ask Craig Brown, who is our assistant deputy minister of policy division, to provide some more details on the work that was done at that time previously, with respect to your question.

**Mr. Mike Schreiner:** Thank you.

**Mr. Craig Brown:** A couple of points: If an operator wishes to build below the water table, the operator will need to complete studies that examine what the implications will be and how they would mitigate any effects. Also, if an existing quarry wishes to extend their operations below the water table, changes were put in place back in 2019 that would require them to seek a new application instead of simply extending their operations.

**Mr. Mike Schreiner:** I appreciate that. It doesn't sound like the concerns were addressed, but I appreciate your answer.

I'm going to just shift gears, because I'm almost out of time. Ministry of Mines: We all know that we need critical minerals to have a successful green economy; no doubt about it. I'm curious if you can provide the committee with information on if the current mining royalty resource rates are sufficient for Ontario to capture the financial resources we need to build out the Ring of Fire and to support the infrastructure needed for mining in the north.

**Hon. George Pirie:** Actually, in large part, the mining royalties right now are tied up with the revenue-sharing agreements that we've initiated. I think we've got 41 agreements. I think it's \$96 million that has been distributed to the Indigenous communities. Obviously, that's done to ensure that the capacities are built within those communities. I have no fear that the province has the funds to execute on their strategy on critical minerals.

**Mr. Mike Schreiner:** I certainly support revenue-sharing, especially with Indigenous communities and municipalities, but I think it would be fiscally prudent for the ministry to do an analysis of whether those—

**The Chair (Mr. Aris Babikian):** Thank you, MPP Schreiner. The time is up.

Now we move to the government side. MPP Sarrazin, go ahead.

**Mr. Stéphane Sarrazin:** My question is for the Minister of Mines. I know that working on any major project requires participation from all parties involved. Can you tell me more about how Indigenous communities are involved in the mining industry and how strong partnerships are creating economic prosperity for Indigenous communities across Ontario?

**Hon. George Pirie:** Thank you very much for that question. You're quite right: Nothing is going to happen without the involvement or the partnership with Indigenous people. One great example of direct benefits for mining is a resource revenue-sharing agreement with 41 First Nation communities across the province. Ontario has shared approximately \$94 million—I said \$96 million; it's \$94 million—with Indigenous partners since the three RRS agreements were signed in 2018.

We must also recognize how beneficial mining projects can be when there are strong partnerships between Indigenous communities and the industry. The mining industry is the largest private sector employer of Indigenous peoples in Ontario, with 11% of direct mining jobs filled by Indigenous peoples.

This is the figure that you are asking about, Sol: Our government has invested \$3.6 million to help 150 Indigenous people receive training to start careers building and running the new Greenstone gold mine in Geraldton—a \$3.6-million investment to help 150 Indigenous people.

TTN and Canada Nickel have one of the most progressive equity partnerships that make TTN owners of the Crawford nickel-cobalt project.

How much time do I have?

**The Chair (Mr. Aris Babikian):** Eighteen minutes.

**Hon. George Pirie:** Oh, 18 minutes? Great. There we go. Okay.

**The Chair (Mr. Aris Babikian):** For the entire government side.

**Hon. George Pirie:** Okay. Well, then, here we go. I won't take the whole time.

You must understand that the largest single growing percentage of the population is Indigenous peoples. A key platform in the Critical Minerals Strategy is, of course, to ensure that the Indigenous people participate fully in the opportunities through that development. Again, we talked about the initiatives with Minister McNaughton and what they're doing across the board to ensure that the Indigenous people, from a training point of view, have and will participate in the mining development.

We know that the Ring of Fire development and the duty to consult is being led by the Indigenous people. You've got Indigenous people running this process within their traditional territory, and that is right; that is the way it should happen. So it's a full partnership that's led by the Indigenous people.

I'll leave it at that because we've got time that's available for the other ministers.

**The Chair (Mr. Aris Babikian):** MPP Smith.

**Mr. Dave Smith:** I'm going to preface something here first. I'm in the riding of Peterborough—Kawartha, and I'm in an interesting position, because anyone who lives south of the 401 refers to going “up north” to Peterborough, but anyone who lives north of the French River realizes that I'm in southern Ontario. So it's an interesting dynamic.

One of the things that I think people in southern Ontario truly don't understand is the challenges that are faced in a lot of the northern communities.

The Ministry of Northern Development recently made a change to NOHFC, the Northern Ontario Heritage Fund Corp. They changed how the fund was going to be administered; there was a revamping done to it.

Peterborough is a community of about 85,000. It's about the size of what's considered a large community in northern Ontario—although I recognize that I'm in southern Ontario.

My question to the Minister of Northern Development is, can you describe why we revamped NOHFC and what the advantage is to revamping it?

**Hon. Greg Rickford:** Well, there are a couple of key parts. First of all, the four programs represented by the new-look Northern Ontario Heritage Fund are the Community Enhancement Program, the Cultural Supports Program, the Invest North Program and the People and Talent Program. They were put in place, Dave, to focus on capacity within a community.

In the Community Enhancement Program—a lot of time being spent by Indigenous communities in smaller municipalities, especially those under 1,000, where the tax base is so small. Take a look at the municipality of Greenstone. It's the largest municipality in the province, and it has the smallest population. So when we're trying to build, quantitatively and qualitatively, one of the biggest and best new open-pit gold mines out there, we want to make sure that they have the tools.

As Phil Vinet, the former mayor of Red Lake, used to say, “If there’s a gold boom, somebody should tell me about it.” That was because workers were flying in and out of the communities, and there were clear shortages in some kinds of infrastructure that many communities take for granted in southern Ontario, simple little things like a splash park or tennis courts or a multi-purpose facility—in some of the Indigenous communities, this has become all the rage.

Supporting businesses to complete the supply chain—George talked earlier, and we know that we don’t actually just want to mine in northern Ontario. We see a processing capacity coming live, potentially, with lithium and cobalt in particular, in the Ring of Fire, eventually, on a much larger scale, so we’re talking about huge infrastructure requirements and the people to go with it.

1600

We’ve paid particular attention to folks where college and university have not been immediately available to them for various reasons. So the modern workforce creates a pathway to various skills and development, particularly around welders and heavy machinery operators. And it’s for very good reason. Many of the projects that are going on in northern Ontario right now aren’t just about the actual resource project itself, but the legacy infrastructure that’s required to support it.

So we feel that this has put us in a better position than we have historically, that refocus, and it’s also brought about or brought to bear some additional opportunities.

The Cultural Supports Program takes a real sharp look at what is happening in parts of northern Ontario around the film and television industry, particularly in Sault Ste. Marie, Sudbury and North Bay. Large-scale film companies are now setting up shop permanently, and they’re doing that because we’ve made strategic investments in places like Canadore College, and now, you can get the kinds of diplomas and degrees that support working in those industries. So it isn’t just about the money, as you know, Dave; it’s how the money is actually spent. We think that these targeted programs work really well.

I’ll finish by saying this, because a member from the opposition was hopefully making an inquiry about it indirectly, and that was that these communities that are under 1,000 people, in the Community Enhancement Program, we cover 90% of the project. I’ll say that again so that the member from Kiiwetinoong can hear it: 90% of the project. That’s something you’d want to rally around. We’re talking to a number of communities in his riding right now who have multi-purpose facilities they want built, youth centres, powwow grounds. For 90 cents on the dollar, we can build them, and we’ve got a great team ready to help.

So I hope you’ll help spread the word. Your question has given me an extraordinary platform to spread that good news. And given that we have more than 40 communities alone in the riding of Kiiwetinoong with populations under 1,000, I think we’re in a good position to support them. Similarly, in Kenora–Rainy River, we have a number not

just of Indigenous communities but municipalities with those kinds of populations.

Even if you titrate up to the next category, under 15,000, we’re covering 75%, and then 50% for the next category. That’s money that, if coupled with programs federally and stacked, like FedNor, these projects get built with smart money from the taxpayers. They appreciate it, because they contribute a lot to what happens down here on Bay Street, especially in the resource sector.

**Mr. Dave Smith:** So it would be fair to say, then, that when one of the opposition members was talking about investing in communities and what were we doing for some of these small communities, this is putting that legacy infrastructure in place when the community comes forward and says this is what their need is. We’re not going to them and saying, “Here’s what you should have.” We’re saying, “Here’s a pot of money. What would you like to get built and we’ll help you build it?” Is that fair to say?

**Hon. Greg Rickford:** Yes. I think northern Ontario heritage is an important label because it does draw on the experiences and the traditions, both in economic terms and in cultural terms etc. But this is really about northern prosperity, and we’ve increased our investments in programs like this—I talked about northern Ontario resource development and we talked about the northern energy assistance program. These are all programs that are designed to scale up the capacity, in real terms, of large forestry operations, large mining operations, large steel processing capacity and the like, and get right down on the ground, in the weeds, to ensure that programs that make the difference for quality of life for those community members are sufficiently and perhaps more than adequately supported. I can’t figure out why you’d vote against that kind of thing.

**Mr. Dave Smith:** Thank you, Minister. I’m going to defer to one of my colleagues.

**The Chair (Mr. Aris Babikian):** MPP Dixon, go ahead.

**Ms. Jess Dixon:** I’m from southern Ontario, and I think, like many Ontarians, I did not understand much about the importance of winter roads in northern communities. I’ve learned a lot more about it since preparing for this, but I wonder if the minister could expand further on the importance of these roads and the province’s work to support and expand them?

**Hon. Greg Rickford:** Thank you for the question. Squarely in the context of estimates, this is a \$641-million commitment to these vital links. Look, between the northern highways program for the rehabilitation and expansion of the highway networks across what we call the southern part of northern Ontario, twinning and lane expansion occurring, the winter roads program has—and there are other important reasons, but two critical ones in my mind, as somebody who’s lived in those isolated communities—during the winter they’re a vital link. They relieve us from some of the kinds of transportation in terms of the method and their impact.

For example, in the Ring of Fire region, those communities are still on diesel generation. We’re hopeful that with the economic opportunity for the Ring of Fire—I’ve talked about the corridor to prosperity. The corridor to prosperity,

in many respects, and other routes that tie the communities together have the potential, in some cases, to actually be highways or alternative roads for the province to build out.

This brings communities together, so there's an important social aspect. But critically, we bring a lot of supplies into our isolated and remote communities with these roads. Frankly, essential goods and services remain a challenge, but when you get a good winter, you've got to have the resources there to support their construction and their maintenance. That's why we've increased the funding as a matter of record for that specific program and have included—I believe it's to the tune of \$496 million to rehabilitate some of the highways and, as I said earlier, \$145 million, if I recall correctly, for expansion projects, and there's more to be done.

**Ms. Jess Dixon:** Thank you, Minister.

**The Chair (Mr. Aris Babikian):** Two minutes. MPP Leardi.

**Mr. Anthony Leardi:** Thank you, Chair. As a matter of interest, I'm from the riding of Essex and Minister Pirie is from the riding of Timmins, and Minister Rickford is from the riding of Kenora–Rainy River. Geographically in our caucus, you can't get farther apart. We are the farthest apart from each other—in our caucus, anyway.

*Interjections.*

**Mr. Anthony Leardi:** In any event, as I remind my—  
*Interjection.*

**Hon. Greg Rickford:** Sol lives closer to Toronto than I do, just saying.

**Mr. Anthony Leardi:** As I remind my children, every drop of water that falls into Lake Superior actually eventually flows past our house.

My question to the Minister of Mines is not about water but it's about access to critical minerals. What investments has the government made to access the critical minerals development potential in the Ring of Fire?

**The Chair (Mr. Aris Babikian):** One minute.

**Hon. George Pirie:** The biggest investment that we've done, of course, is the billion dollars invested to build the infrastructure. Because this isn't just about accessing metals. It's about building broadband. It's building transmission lines. It's building roads, of course. So this is community building.

We all know that we're going to be impacted by, have been and are being impacted by climate change. The only way to get up to some of those communities in the winter-time, of course, is the use of the winter road. The winter road is used to transport all the supplies into those communities very, very economically, but of course those winter roads are failing. There might be only, perhaps, four weeks that we'll be able to use these roads. So the billion dollars is actually building communities. It's the most important investment that we have.

**The Chair (Mr. Aris Babikian):** This concludes the committee's consideration of the estimates of the Ministry of Northern Development, Mines, Natural Resources and Forestry.

Standing order 69 requires that the Chair put, without further amendment or debate, every question necessary to dispose of the estimates.

Shall vote 2101, ministry administration program, carry? All in favour, please raise your hand. All opposed, please raise your hand. Carried.

Shall vote 2103, natural resource management program, carry? All in favour, please raise your hand. All opposed? Carried.

Shall vote 2104, public protection, carry? All in favour, please raise your hand. All opposed, please raise your hand. Carried.

Shall vote 2105, land and resources information and information technology cluster program, carry? All in favour, please raise your hand. All opposed? I see none. Carried.

Shall vote 2106, northern development program, carry? All in favour, please raise your hand. All opposed? I see none. Carried.

Shall vote 2107, mines and minerals, carry? All in favour, please raise your hand. All opposed, raise your hand. I see none. Carried.

Shall the 2022-23 estimates of the Ministry of Northern Development, Mines, Natural Resources and Forestry carry? All in favour, please raise your hand. All opposed? I see none. Carried.

Shall the Chair report the 2022-23 estimates of the Ministry of Northern Development, Mines, Natural Resources and Forestry to the House? All in favour, please raise your hand. All opposed? I see none. Carried.

Thank you very much.

We will have a recess for 10 minutes.

*The committee recessed from 1612 to 1621.*

#### MINISTRY OF THE ENVIRONMENT, CONSERVATION AND PARKS

**The Chair (Mr. Aris Babikian):** Well, it should be “good evening” instead of “good afternoon.”

The committee is about to begin consideration of the estimates of the Ministry of the Environment, Conservation and Parks for a total of two hours.

I am now required to call vote 1101, which sets the review process in motion. We will begin with a statement of not more than 20 minutes from the parliamentary assistant for the Minister of the Environment, Conservation and Parks. The remaining time will be allotted for questions and answers in a rotation of 20 minutes for the official members of the committee, 10 minutes for the independent members of the committee and 20 minutes for the government members of the committee.

Now, we will start with the ministerial statement. MPP Yakabuski, go ahead.

**Mr. John Yakabuski:** Thank you very much, Chair. I want to start by thanking the members of the committee here today and also all of the support staff who are providing support for this initiative.

The expenditure estimates process plays an important role in ensuring that Ontarians have insight into the operating and capital spending requirements of the Ontario government's programs. The Ford government is committed to sustainability, transparency and accountability in serving the people of Ontario.



I am happy to be here today to represent Minister Piccini and discuss the 2022-23 spending plan for the Ministry of the Environment, Conservation and Parks. This year is a special one, as we celebrate 50 years since the late Premier Bill Davis created Ontario's first Ministry of the Environment, in 1972. Premier Davis wanted to make sure that future generations of Ontarians had access to the same extraordinary natural beauty that he enjoyed. Today, we are proud to continue the vision of Premier Davis.

Of course, in the ensuring years, the Ministry of the Environment, Conservation and Parks has evolved. Today, we are guided by our key principles of creating healthier communities and economic prosperity through protecting Ontario's air, land and water. We are doing this by addressing several priorities. First, we are addressing climate change. We are accomplishing this by taking meaningful action to help communities prepare for the impacts of climate change and lower greenhouse gas emissions to meet our 2030 target.

We are working with our industry partners and the federal government to create the Ontario-made Emissions Performance Standards Program for the 2023-30 period. It's a program that encourages businesses to invest in innovation, infrastructure, technology and people while also reducing emissions to meet our 2030 target.

We are completing Ontario's first-ever provincial-level, multi-sector climate change impact assessment to identify where the province is vulnerable to climate change, and we are continuing to look at ways we can support the clean technology sector as part of our broader economic growth and recovery efforts.

We are reducing the amount of waste that goes into landfills, to keep our neighbourhoods, parks and waterways clean and free of litter and waste. We are achieving this through several programs and policies.

We are transitioning the Blue Box Program to producer responsibility, which will make recycling easier for Ontarians. It will put in place some of the highest diversion rate targets in North America and create a framework that will give producers control to innovate and find efficiencies that will improve recycling outcomes. We have also put in place producer responsibility regulations for tires, batteries, electrical and electronic equipment, and household special waste. We are continuing to promote and educate, through the day of action on litter and Waste Reduction Week, about the impacts of litter and waste on our natural environment.

Keeping our water safe and clean is another priority for this government. We are ensuring our drinking water is safe to drink and that our lakes and waterways are protected. We are achieving this through several actions. We will continue implementing the Canada-Ontario Agreement on Great Lakes Water Quality and Ecosystem Health, 2021. There's a particular focus on building climate resilience, managing nutrients, reducing plastic pollution and excess road salt, improving waste water and stormwater management, strengthening First Nations and Métis engagement in implementation, and completing all environmental cleanup actions in six degraded areas of concern.

We are launching projects under the Great Lakes Program and the integrated work plan that meet commitments outlined in the Canada-Ontario agreement on Great Lakes, Ontario's Great Lakes Strategy and the Great Lakes Protection Act, 2015.

We are completing the review and update of Ontario's Great Lakes Strategy with input from members of the Great Lakes community. Our government is facilitating and co-chairing the seventh Great Lakes Guardians' Council meeting to encourage collaboration among Great Lakes partners and identify priorities for actions, share information and develop initiatives.

We are finalizing the results of the 10-year review of the Lake Simcoe Protection Plan and will determine if the plan needs to be amended as we continue to protect and restore the lake. We are supporting the work to develop and complete the implementation plan to remediate contaminated sediments in the St. Clair River.

The ministry continues to provide in-kind technical support to on-reserve First Nation communities to help resolve long-term drinking water advisories in collaboration with the Walkerton Clean Water Centre and the Ontario Clean Water Agency and to promote the long-term sustainability of water and waste water systems.

The COVID-19 Wastewater Surveillance Initiative continues waste water tests and samples in communities across the province.

We are protecting our air and maintaining strong environmental standards in a number of ways. We continue our work with the public, municipalities, Indigenous communities, environmental groups and industry to drive strategies that better protect air quality and address unique challenges in communities by creating tailored solutions. And we are investing in state-of-the-art air monitoring equipment that will improve local air monitoring and inform compliance efforts.

This government is protecting natural spaces and species. We are undertaking this by supporting conservation efforts and preserving Ontario's rich biodiversity. Some of the things we are doing this year to support this are:

—exploring the creation of the first new operating provincial park in 40 years—the new park would provide visitors with more camping and other overnight accommodations, as well as a variety of improved recreational opportunities;

—partnering with the private sector to find innovative ideas for new recreation experiences at provincial parks, while enhancing existing programs and services to improve Ontario parks for all visitors;

—providing up to \$4.5 million in funding through the species at risk stewardship program to support non-profit organizations, Indigenous communities and stakeholder groups who are working to help protect and recover species at risk and their habitat through local projects;

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—developing an online system to speed up and digitize the Endangered Species Act, 2007, permit applications and authorization process;

—supporting additional wetland enhancement and restoration projects in priority areas of Ontario through the Wetlands Conservation Partner Program with new partners as part of a \$30-million investment over five years;

—continuing to invest in Ontario's land conservation efforts by providing partially matched funding to land trusts for the purchase of new, privately owned protected areas and their management and restoration as part of a \$20-million investment over four years; and

—contributing \$4 million to the Nature Conservancy of Canada's Hastings Wildlife Junction project to protect 8,000 hectares of land in Hastings.

Another priority of our ministry is holding polluters accountable. We are working to strengthen the province's compliance and enforcement tools to hold polluters accountable and ensure compliance with environmental laws. We are continuing to carry out compliance promotion, inspections, audits, investigations and prosecutions, and we continue to work on compliance initiatives, including a proposed odour guideline, the proposed expansion of administrative penalties and proposed updates to the ministry's compliance policy.

Finally, the ministry is supporting infrastructure development while ensuring environmental protection. Our government is balancing strong environmental oversight with modernizing review processes, ensuring priority projects are built faster. It's a tremendous amount of work, and we are grateful to the dedicated staff of the Ministry of the Environment, Conservation and Parks who are responsible for implementing these initiatives.

I'll just briefly touch upon the organizational structure of our ministry. The climate change and resiliency division is leading our ministry's efforts to take meaningful actions to address climate change. This includes lowering our greenhouse gas emissions to meet our target of reducing our GHG emissions to 30% below our 2005 levels by the year 2030, and helping communities prepare for the impacts of climate change.

The land and water division protects the diversity of resources in Ontario. They are responsible for the oversight and leadership of species at risk, provincial parks and conservation reserves, conservation authorities, protection of Ontario's source water and the ecological health of the Great Lakes and inland waters. The land and water division is also responsible for a number of branches, including Ontario Parks. Ontario Parks manages and operates more than 335 provincial parks across the province. Last year they received more than 12.4 million visits—6.7 million overnight visits and 5.7 million day visits—took more than 800,000 reservations and brought in more than \$126 million in revenue.

The area of the provincial parks system is over eight million hectares—greater than New Brunswick and Prince Edward Island combined. They are also responsible for conservation reserves. They protect significant natural and cultural features, while providing opportunities for a variety of compatible activities like fishing, hunting and trapping. Regulated under the Provincial Parks and Conservation

Reserves Act, they are also important for scientific research and environmental monitoring.

The drinking water and environmental compliance division is responsible for protecting and supporting clean air, land and water, including safe drinking water, through provincial oversight and the delivery of compliance and enforcement programs.

The environmental assessment and permissions division leads the transformation of Ontario's environmental permissions using a risk-based, client-centred electronic service delivery model. They provide the single point of access for customer service and environmental permissions management in the ministry. They also lead the engineering and technical review of all permissions applications to enable sound decision-making that supports compliance and ensures the protection of the environment and human health.

The environmental sciences and standards division monitors air, water and land throughout Ontario. They lead fieldwork using specialized equipment, including real-time monitoring equipment, to identify, monitor, analyze and report data for pollutants, providing the best information and tools to protect human and environmental health. They operate a full-service environmental laboratory that provides comprehensive testing for over 1,500 parameters. They develop up-to-date science-based standards and guidelines to help industry and others to take action to protect human and environmental health, and they provide information from their world-class monitoring and scientific analysis to guide and support policy development, environmental compliance and program reviews.

The environmental policy division leads the development of policy that protects the environment, including operational policy and program development and implementation.

I hope that gives you a bit of insight into who we are. I'd now like to speak to our ambitious agenda for 2022-23 and the values that we are providing to Ontario taxpayers within the framework laid out in the 2022 Ontario budget.

The 2022 budget is a prudent and flexible plan that builds on the government's record of responsible fiscal management over the course of the pandemic and recognizes an elevated degree of economic uncertainty. The Ford government is carrying out its plan to seize opportunities in critical minerals, clean steel, batteries and electric vehicle manufacturing, help deliver better jobs, help keep costs down for families and get shovels in the ground for highways, transit, hospitals and other key infrastructure.

Within the Ministry of the Environment, Conservation and Parks, we are continuing to build a smarter, more sustainable ministry by finding efficiencies that leverage technology and streamline processes while maintaining strong environmental protections and driving green and clean policies that support economic recovery.

The ministry's 2022-23 spending plan also builds upon transformation and innovation and further expands those initiatives that create a clean and green environment while supporting economic growth for the people of Ontario.

The ministry's 2022-23 allocation is \$736.6 million, which is a net increase of \$50.2 million, or 7.3%, from \$686.4 million in the restated 2021-22 estimates.

I'll now take a few moments to explain some of the changes for 2022-23. Compared to last year, we are allocating an additional \$17.4 million to support a new and innovative waste water and stormwater program, including funding to support the development of a COVID-19 Wastewater Surveillance Initiative to continue testing of waste water samples in communities across the province. As the COVID-19 pandemic continues to evolve, our investment will sustain the waste water surveillance network for the remainder of the fiscal year to track COVID-19 trends in communities while exploring how the system could be used to detect other diseases of concern and ensure readiness for future public health emergencies.

We have allocated \$17.4 million to support parks and conservation efforts, such as important upgrades at Ontario Parks. We should all view this as good news as getting outdoors and spending time in nature can have many positive benefits to our health and wellness.

This \$17.4 million also includes a \$4 million contribution to the Nature Conservancy of Canada's Ontario Hastings Wildlife Junction project, which will protect 8,000 hectares of significant forests and wetlands south of Bancroft, Ontario. This project will play a critical role in lessening the impacts of climate change and biodiversity loss.

We are projecting an increase of \$14.1 million for the delivery of water and waste water services by the Ontario Clean Water Agency as it continues to provide training and operational support to municipalities, First Nation communities, institutions and private sector companies.

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There's \$500,000 in funding for state-of-the-art air monitoring equipment that will improve local air monitoring and inform compliance efforts. And we've built in \$1 million for the development of an online system to speed up and digitize the Endangered Species Act permit applications and authorization process.

The Ministry of the Environment, Conservation and Parks is proud of our ongoing work towards building healthier communities and economic prosperity through protecting Ontario's air, land and water. We are proud of our accomplishments to date and the value we have provided to Ontario taxpayers. We are confident that this record of accomplishments, achieved in a fiscally prudent manner, will continue in 2022-23 and beyond.

I thank you for listening to this brief introduction, and I'm happy to answer any questions the committee may have.

**The Chair (Mr. Aris Babikian):** Thank you, MPP Yakabuski.

Now we will move to the first round of questioning. We will start with the official opposition. MPP Tabuns.

**Mr. Peter Tabuns:** Thank you very much, Chair. I appreciate that.

My thanks to the parliamentary assistant for the lead-in. I appreciate this opportunity to ask questions. I'm going

to start with page 4 of the estimates briefing book. The book refers to the efforts of the ministry: "We will support the plan to build Ontario in a responsible and sustainable way that will continue to ensure Ontario's strong environmental protections are maintained and improved."

Is that the Made-in-Ontario Environment Plan you're talking about, or is there another plan you're talking about?

**Mr. John Yakabuski:** Can you just repeat that, please, MPP Tabuns?

**Mr. Peter Tabuns:** When you talk about delivering on the plan, are we talking about the Made-in-Ontario Environment Plan that was put forward in 2018, or is there another plan that you're referring to?

**Mr. John Yakabuski:** Well, I can tell you about the commitment.

**Mr. Peter Tabuns:** No. I'd like to know—if you're referring to a plan, which plan are we talking about? Do you have another plan, or is this your environment plan?

**Mr. John Yakabuski:** The plan that you have in front of you—I can't speak word for word to what's in the document, sir. But I can tell you that our commitment to protecting the environment is ironclad. I've articulated that and indicated that in my address.

We're also making sure that while we protect Ontario's environment in every aspect—land, air, water—we're also ensuring our commitment to the people of Ontario to build Ontario and to streamline the processes that need to be streamlined so that we can actually get things done and get things built, such as our commitment to highways, to hospitals, to schools and other infrastructure. It's one that we can follow through on by ensuring that our processes are streamlined—

**The Chair (Mr. Aris Babikian):** MPP Tabuns, the floor is yours.

**Mr. Peter Tabuns:** Thank you.

Could I ask an undertaking that the ministry tell us if this is your plan? And if it is not your plan, could you provide the plan to this committee so that we can see which plan you're referring to? Because you refer to the plan a number of times in your document. Now, I'm assuming this is it, but if you don't know that it is, I think I need to know if there's another plan out there.

**Mr. John Yakabuski:** We certainly can, MPP Tabuns, and I appreciate your raising that. As everyone knows, the ministry, as we said from the very first statement, in the 50 years it has existed, has continued to evolve with the times, and we also recognize the changing times that we're going through now. We're constantly ensuring that our plans and processes are updated to reflect that.

**Mr. Peter Tabuns:** Okay. Well, I look forward to finding out whether or not this is the plan or if there's another plan out there.

**Mr. John Yakabuski:** And we'll endeavour to get that answer for you as well.

**Mr. Peter Tabuns:** That would be great.

In this plan—which I understood was your plan, but now I'll find out one way or the other—on page 12—this is your filing in court in defence of the action as to why you aren't acting on climate change. You reported that you

would review and update Ontario's Great Lakes Strategy to continue to protect fish, parks, beaches, coastal wetlands and water by reducing plastic litter, excess algae etc.

Can you tell me the status of your review and update of Ontario's Great Lakes Strategy?

**Mr. John Yakabuski:** I will ask Deputy Serge Imbrogno to elaborate on that and ask the appropriate ADM for that.

**Mr. Serge Imbrogno:** I'm Serge Imbrogno, deputy minister, MECP. I'm going to ask Chloe Stuart, the ADM of the land and water division, to come up.

Just on your last question, MPP Tabuns: Yes, that is our environment plan. It's still our environment plan.

**Mr. Peter Tabuns:** This is still valid?

**Mr. Serge Imbrogno:** It is still valid.

**Mr. Peter Tabuns:** And it's the basis for your planning in your ministry?

**Mr. Serge Imbrogno:** It is the basis. Also, when we refer to the plan, it could be the estimates plan as well that we've outlined here, so I think it's broader than what you're referring to. But that is still our plan.

I'm going to ask Chloe to talk about the work we're doing on the Great Lakes.

**The Chair (Mr. Aris Babikian):** Go ahead.

**Ms. Chloe Stuart:** I'm Chloe Stuart, assistant deputy minister for the land and water division.

In terms of the Great Lakes strategy, we have just completed negotiating the Canada-Ontario agreement with Canada, and that sets out more than 300 actions they'll be doing collaboratively with the government of Ontario, and from that we'll flow our review of the Great Lakes strategy in Ontario.

**Mr. Peter Tabuns:** So you're telling me that it's currently under review and it has not yet been updated?

**Ms. Chloe Stuart:** That's correct.

**Mr. Peter Tabuns:** I'll just note, this was your plan in 2018, and now it's four years later. Is there a reason it has taken four years to review and update?

**Ms. Chloe Stuart:** Certainly, we've been focusing on the negotiation with Canada for the Canada-Ontario agreement. That lays out more than 300 actions for the province, and the Great Lakes strategy will flow from there.

**Mr. Peter Tabuns:** While you're here—sorry. If you have expertise in water, I think it's very handy to have you here, if the parliamentary assistant and the ADM don't mind.

**Mr. John Yakabuski:** Give us a question, and then we'll let you know.

**Mr. Peter Tabuns:** Okay.

Through you, Chair: On page 13 of this same environmental plan, there's reference to ensuring cleanup of the remaining mercury-contaminated sediments located in three areas downstream of the former Dow Chemical site on the St. Clair River. Can you tell us the status of that cleanup at this point?

**Mr. John Yakabuski:** I will direct that to Deputy Minister Imbrogno, and he will direct it to the appropriate ADM.

**Mr. Serge Imbrogno:** It's a different ADM. It's Steven Carrasco, our ADM of the drinking water and environmental compliance division.

**Mr. Steven Carrasco:** My name is Steven Carrasco. I'm the ADM of our drinking water and environmental compliance division.

You've asked the question, in terms of our cleanups—and you're asking about the work at the St. Clair River?

**Mr. Peter Tabuns:** Yes.

**Mr. Steven Carrasco:** We have begun our assessment of the cleanups and are working with contractors and consultants to identify the extent of the cleanup that we have to put in place. The ministry is invested in ensuring that the sediments where the contamination has been done do get cleaned up.

**Mr. Peter Tabuns:** Through you, Chair: Can you tell me what the budget is for this cleanup and how it's being financed?

**Mr. Steven Carrasco:** I do not know at this time.

**Mr. Peter Tabuns:** Could I ask for an undertaking to provide the committee with the cost of the cleanup?

**Mr. John Yakabuski:** We'll endeavor to provide you what we have, what we can.

**Mr. Peter Tabuns:** That would be good. I'm assuming that if you're planning to do this very large-scale remediation, you've developed a budget so you know whether you can afford it or not.

**Mr. Serge Imbrogno:** I'll just say we've made significant investment already. We can tell you what we've already—

**Mr. Peter Tabuns:** That would be great. You're committed to cleaning it up. Do you have a sense of your budget going forward?

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**Mr. Serge Imbrogno:** We'll have probably a preliminary sense of what we have going forward, but I think we've done a lot of work already.

**Mr. Peter Tabuns:** That's good.

**Mr. Serge Imbrogno:** So we'll get you that information.

**Mr. Peter Tabuns:** Okay. And then the second question, same page: There is a report that you'll be working with Indigenous communities participating in the work of the English and Wabigoon Rivers Remediation Panel to fund remediation activities from a trust that was established with \$85 million under the English and Wabigoon Rivers Remediation Funding Act, 2017. Can you tell me the status of that remediation, what's been spent and what you expect to spend in this year's budget?

**Mr. John Yakabuski:** We'll give that back to Deputy Imbrogno.

**Mr. Serge Imbrogno:** As you know, there's an \$85-million trust. We can give you a sense of how much of that has been allocated already to the Indigenous communities that are part of the trust.

I don't know, Steven, if you have that handy or not, but—

**Mr. Steven Carrasco:** Yes. MPP Tabuns, we've spent about \$8 million to date, and we are now working with the communities to identify how they want to move forward with the next stage of cleanup and identifying the group that will actually begin identifying the areas that are going

to be cleaned up and how that will be done over the next year.

**Mr. Peter Tabuns:** And again, through the Chair, if you've spent \$8 million, I'm assuming that's primarily on studies and assessments and development of specs rather than actual cleanup. Is that correct, though, my assumption?

**Mr. Steven Carrasco:** That is correct, MPP Tabuns. Part of this is ensuring that we are consulting with the communities in the way we're doing our delineation. It is ensuring that the company Domtar is doing its due diligence in the work that it has done, is taking its reports to each of the communities as we're doing these assessments in place and identifying the priority of the places that are to be cleaned up based on those Indigenous communities' requests.

**Mr. Peter Tabuns:** Okay. Through the Chair, have you done a projection on what the total cost will be for cleanup in this river system?

**Mr. Steven Carrasco:** We are undertaking that. We have not completed that assessment.

**Mr. Peter Tabuns:** And do you have a sense as to when that budget or projection will be available for public viewing?

**Mr. Steven Carrasco:** I do not. But once we have that done, we will be happy to share that.

**Mr. Peter Tabuns:** Okay. Could I ask, through the Chair, if we could have an undertaking to provide the committee with that information?

**Mr. Serge Imbrogno:** But just to be clear, we don't have an assessment at this point.

**Mr. Peter Tabuns:** I'm asking, when you do have it, if you could make it available.

**Mr. John Yakabuski:** Well, I think we can provide an estimate, but we can't tell you exactly what it's going to cost when things are done.

**Mr. Peter Tabuns:** Oh, no, no. But the estimate would be good. I remember, I'll just say, that I had some differences with former Liberal members who sat where you're sitting, and I was very curious as to the basis for their approach. I'm curious as to what you will find in terms of the estimated cost of the cleanup.

**Mr. John Yakabuski:** What we can provide, we will provide.

**Mr. Peter Tabuns:** That would be good. I'm very pleased. Thank you.

So I will move on to other items. In the climate plan, page 19, you have actions that you're committed to: "Improve our understanding of how climate change will impact Ontario." And one of these items is, "Undertake a provincial impact assessment to identify where and how climate change is likely to impact Ontario's communities." I understand that that report was going to come out this fall, and I understand as well it's been delayed until spring of next year. Can you tell us how much this report will cost?

**Mr. John Yakabuski:** I'll pass it to the deputy. It's all money questions.

**Mr. Serge Imbrogno:** You'll probably have more questions on the report as well, so I'll have Alex look them up as well.

**Mr. Peter Tabuns:** Yes, I have a few in this area.

**Mr. Serge Imbrogno:** There is an allocation. I think it's in the \$3-million range, but, Alex, you could answer it more precisely.

**Mr. Alex Wood:** Alex Wood, assistant deputy minister for the climate change and resiliency division.

MPP Tabuns, to your question: Yes, the allocation we received was for \$3 million for that study.

**Mr. Peter Tabuns:** Okay. And the report, when it comes forward, will it have an assessment of costs to respond to the adaptation challenges? Will it have an assessment of the liabilities that exist out there that will be a problem for us if we don't adapt?

**Mr. Alex Wood:** The structure of this report is focused on risk as opposed to financial costs of those risks. So it's designed to identify sectorally and regionally where the greatest risks exist to the province. But the current analysis won't provide a financial estimate as to what those costs are or what those risks look like.

**Mr. Peter Tabuns:** So it won't provide a financial assessment of the risks themselves?

**Mr. Alex Wood:** No.

**Mr. Peter Tabuns:** Okay. In your plan, you also committed to undertaking impact and vulnerability assessments for key sectors such as transportation, water, agriculture and energy distribution, which I think is definitely an important step to take. What is the status of those assessments?

**Mr. Alex Wood:** Well, those assessments are being undertaken under that provincial climate change assessment. Infrastructure is one of the sectors that is being focused on through that analysis—infrastructure of different kinds, including the ones that you cited there.

**Mr. Peter Tabuns:** Okay. It's interesting; in the plan, it was separated out. But you're saying they've been put together into one package?

**Mr. Alex Wood:** Correct.

**Mr. Peter Tabuns:** Okay. Fair enough.

And then the next action point was to develop a user-friendly online tool that makes practical climate change impact information available for the public and private sectors. Can you tell me the status of that and, if it's been done, what the web address is?

**Mr. Alex Wood:** We are continuing to work on that design. Part of the work involved in that is making sure that the data that we have available and make available through the online tools that we've talked about, obviously, constitute the best available information. Some of that information will come to us through the impact assessment itself. It is designed to be a source of some foundational data for the province on those risks, as I was saying earlier.

We've also contracted with York University for the provision of regional climate data. The development of that, as I said, is predicated on the availability of that data, the quality of that data. Right now, we're in the design stage of what it would be, that online tool that you referred to in your question.

**Mr. Peter Tabuns:** I'll note it has been four years. What's your projected date on when it will be available to people?

**Mr. Alex Wood:** I don't think we have a date yet. There are a number of iterations that we need to go through, because, again, making that information available presupposes that we've done the quality control and assessment of the data to make sure that it's available. As I said, a lot of that will be data that is actually made available through the impact assessment, which, as you noted, is now expected in probably the first quarter of the next calendar year.

**Mr. Peter Tabuns:** So do you expect to have it done within this four-year term of government?

**Mr. Alex Wood:** That would be my hope, yes.

**Mr. Peter Tabuns:** Okay. One of the actions you committed to was to support communities by demonstrating how climate science can be applied in decision-making to improve resilience. Can you give us two or three examples of where this has been done?

**Mr. Alex Wood:** Well, again, there's a degree to which the impact assessment is the information that we need to engage. So there has been, again, in the impact assessment, a deliberate focus on municipalities and communities. One of the elements of that impact assessment will be a number of tools to be made available to those committees to help them assess the risks in their particular spheres of control. So those tools will be part of the package of materials that is part of the impact assessment.

**Mr. Peter Tabuns:** So it's all waiting for that impact assessment to be done, and then the rest of those commitments would be rolled out?

**Mr. Alex Wood:** It's a big piece of work.

**Mr. Peter Tabuns:** Okay.

On the next page, there's a commitment to modernize the building code to better equip homes and buildings to better be able to withstand extreme weather events. Can you tell me the status of that initiative?

**Mr. Alex Wood:** Sorry, I didn't—

**Mr. Peter Tabuns:** In "update government policies and build partnerships to improve local climate resilience," point 1 was, "modernize the building code to better equip homes and buildings to be better able to withstand extreme weather events." Can you tell me the status of that?

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**Mr. Alex Wood:** Well, as you probably know, the building code is the responsibility of our Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing—

**Mr. Serge Imbrogno:** I'd just add to that, MPP Tabuns, that this is an all-of-government strategy; it's not just MECP. So you'll see a lot of initiatives that are addressed by other ministries. We'd have to give you an update from MMAH on what they're doing related to building codes.

**Mr. Peter Tabuns:** I appreciate that. Who is overseeing this all-of-government strategy? Is there any one body that says, "Okay, we're expecting this from that ministry, that from that ministry"—

**Mr. Dave Smith:** Point of order.

**The Chair (Mr. Aris Babikian):** MPP Smith, go ahead.

**Mr. Dave Smith:** We're discussing the estimates of MECP. If it doesn't affect MECP, it's not something that these individuals can answer. So if it's not MECP that's leading it, they can't give an answer to it, because they're not involved with it.

**The Chair (Mr. Aris Babikian):** MPP Smith, the scope for the general estimates is quite large, so it falls within that scope.

**Mr. Dave Smith:** Chair, are we not in the estimates of the Ministry of the Environment, Conservation and Parks?

**The Chair (Mr. Aris Babikian):** Yes, we are.

**Mr. Dave Smith:** Then the questions should be about the environment, conservation and parks. If it's not something that the Ministry of the Environment, Conservation and Parks directly deals with, then they don't have the ability to answer it.

**The Chair (Mr. Aris Babikian):** Can you reframe your question within the ministry's scope?

**Mr. Peter Tabuns:** Sure. Is there anyone in your ministry that is overseeing this all-of-government initiative to actually deliver on climate action? Where in your budget is the person or persons who are actually seeing that this plan is being delivered?

**The Chair (Mr. Aris Babikian):** Thank you very much. Unfortunately, the time is up.

Now we will move to the independent members, and you have 10 minutes. Mr. Schreiner, the floor is yours.

**Mr. Mike Schreiner:** Thank you, Chair, and thank you to the minister and staff for being here today. I had to step out for a minute, so if I ask a few repetitive questions I'll apologize ahead of time.

In your presentation—to the parliamentary assistant—you talked about the government's climate change impact assessment. I've heard the minister talk about it a number of times over the last four years. Do you know when we're actually going to see this climate impact assessment?

**Mr. John Yakabuski:** Thank you for the question, MPP Schreiner, and we'll ask Deputy Imbrogno to answer that question.

**Mr. Serge Imbrogno:** We have Alex who is leading that initiative, MPP Schreiner. So go ahead, Alex.

**Mr. Alex Wood:** Right. So the initial plan had been to release it late this year, but we are working with a consultant right now to finalize a date probably in the first quarter of 2023 for the finalization of that project.

**Mr. Mike Schreiner:** Okay. I would assume we've had a lot of climate impacts over the last few years. Anybody who has lived in Ottawa or Muskoka or a whole host of places—up in northern Ontario, the communities that were evacuated due to flooding and forest fires—we've seen a lot of impacts over the last four years. In the interim of developing this assessment tool, has the government taken any actions to address the impacts that we're already experiencing due to the climate crisis?

**Mr. John Yakabuski:** Well, I think it's fair to say that, in many instances, part of our actions are what we've done to mitigate the damage as the crisis is ongoing, whether

it's flooding or forest fires or anything such as that. That's part of how we respond to that natural disaster, whether they're climate change-related or not—which everything pretty much is anyway.

That's what you do. You deal with the disaster as it comes on. And, of course, everything as it happens is being evaluated as to how it can be addressed and future issues can be dealt with more effectively and efficiently. You'll see that not just in this ministry, but every single ministry that deals with natural resources, such as MNRF as well.

**Mr. Mike Schreiner:** Related to that, the government has made some infrastructure decisions that are likely going to have some significant climate impacts; I would say the two major highway proposals in the budget for the Bradford Bypass and Highway 413.

Has any of the work on the climate impact assessment been brought to bear on the decisions around that type of infrastructure that at least a lot of outside experts have talked about will have significant negative climate impacts?

**Mr. John Yakabuski:** Well, let's begin by being clear that we ran on the basis—

**Mr. Mike Schreiner:** I'm not talking about the election; I'm just talking about climate impact—

**Mr. John Yakabuski:** Well, you're asking about those two particular projects in general and how we've come to—if you want to call it, how we can move ahead with them. We're moving ahead with them because they are absolutely vital, and as we said in our—

**Mr. Mike Schreiner:** That's not the question I asked, with all due respect. I asked if the climate impact assessment had put a lens on that—

**Mr. John Yakabuski:** That is completely part of—any time you make a decision such as that, and I say that respectfully, MPP Schreiner, before you make that decision, you can't possibly get there without considering those impacts. That has been done in each and every one of these instances, including with the Ministry of the Environment, the Ministry of Natural Resources, the Ministry of Transportation. With every single project, before you would ever approve it or sign on the dotted line, you're going to go through all of those considerations to ensure, as we've said right in—and our absolute commitment. We're building Ontario, we're building the infrastructure necessary to support the growth in population. At the same time, we are protecting air, land and water.

**The Chair (Mr. Aris Babikian):** MPP Schreiner, the floor is yours.

**Mr. Mike Schreiner:** I appreciate that. Can we get a commitment that that information will be transparently shared with the people of Ontario when the climate impact assessment is released, I guess sometime early next year?

**Mr. John Yakabuski:** As I said, we're completely open in everything we've stated about these particular projects. I know that those projects are ones that you have been very active on—you opposed them as vociferously as we proposed them during the 2022 campaign.

**Mr. Mike Schreiner:** That is true.

**Mr. John Yakabuski:** And the people of Ontario had their opportunity to pass judgment. I'll accept that the people are never wrong, as they say.

**Mr. Mike Schreiner:** Let's just hope that it will be a part of the assessments, so at least we know what the cost and risk implications are.

**Mr. John Yakabuski:** It's part of what we do. Transparency and accountability are the watchwords of this government and have been since we were elected in 2018—were what we ran on in 2018, and we continue to respect that.

**Mr. Mike Schreiner:** Well, I would say, just regardless of what your position is on the highways, it's pretty clear my opposition—I appreciate the PA noting the rigorous nature of it. But I think it would be fiscally prudent for the province and the people of this province to know what the financial risk and the climate impact of those decisions are, even if they go forward, just so we can plan accordingly as a province. And so I'm hoping they'll be part of the assessment when it's released to the public.

**Mr. John Yakabuski:** I'll ask Deputy Imbrogno to elaborate.

**Mr. Serge Imbrogno:** I think, just to clarify, the impact assessment would inform how to build infrastructure, what additional steps you need to take to reinforce it. It's not an assessment of whether you should build X highway or another highway. It's more, when you're building infrastructure in the future, here are the things you need to take into account. That's the kind of impact assessment that it would be. It wouldn't be, "Should we build a highway or not?"

**Mr. Mike Schreiner:** So it's more limited in scope than I thought it would be, but I appreciate you sharing that with us. I'm going to move on—

**Mr. John Yakabuski:** But if the decision is to build those highways, that is taken into consideration.

**Mr. Mike Schreiner:** Okay, I appreciate that.

I'm going to move on. You had talked about the province's climate change plan and the fact that you're committed to meeting the 2030 targets. I know when the Auditor General evaluated the plan a couple of years ago, the Auditor General said there was no credible pathway to achieving the targets in this current plan. I know the minister at the time said that the plan is evolving and it will evolve over time. And I'm just curious if you have an update for all of us of how the plan has evolved, what changes have been made to address the Auditor General's concerns, and if the ministry has budgeted the financial resources to be able to answer the concerns brought forward by the Auditor General.

**Mr. John Yakabuski:** Thank you very much for that question, MPP Schreiner. I think—not think, I know—one thing we can be very clear on is some of the things that have happened since then, and that is the expansion and the electrification of Ontario's transportation system—not the infrastructure, but the vehicles that drive on it. The promotion—and we're going to be an electric vehicle leader worldwide. If we look at what we did with the arc electric furnaces in Sault Ste. Marie and Hamilton, taking

the equivalent, some people say, of as many as six million cars off the road—there's different estimates in that regard.

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With all due respect to the auditor, some things that we've done since then will also have major impacts in the amount of emissions we're producing. We're comfortable that we are getting closer and closer, and we're on target to meet our 2030 goal of a 30% reduction from 2005 emissions. We've been lauded by them, and I'm very happy to say that our minister is over at the climate conference right now. We have our made-in-Ontario plan, and we're very comfortable with it.

**Mr. Mike Schreiner:** It's great that the minister is over at COP; I appreciate that.

"Lauded"—I don't know; maybe "criticized." I don't know if "lauded" would be the right word for the plan.

I understand that you've taken some steps around greening steel and things like that; I don't think anybody would argue with that. But I'm just wondering, will there be another plan put forward of this "evolving plan," as the last minister called it, that will address the real concerns that the Auditor General raised about the government's inability to meet its 2030 commitments? Will we have an updated plan that will show a pathway to reaching those commitments?

**Mr. John Yakubuski:** Well, we are continuing to state clearly that we're on target for those commitments. We're going to make those commitments. As far as anything new, you'll have to stay tuned because we can't announce it before it actually gets announced.

**Mr. Mike Schreiner:** Okay.

**Mr. John Yakubuski:** But whatever happens, you'll be one of the first to know. We know that our commitment to the environment, while ensuring that we can build the kind of Ontario that provides the jobs for people, the homes for people—

**Mr. Mike Schreiner:** Do you mind if I just interject?

**Mr. John Yakubuski:** Yes, go ahead.

**Mr. Mike Schreiner:** So I know we'll get a plan. You've committed that there will be a plan at some point. I'm happy to know that. I'm happy to know I'm going to be one of the first to learn about it.

One of the parts of your previous plan, and you brought it up again today, was the day of action on litter. I'm just wondering, can you tell us how many greenhouse gas reductions—

**The Chair (Mr. Aris Babikian):** Time is over. Thank you, Mr. Schreiner. Your time is up.

We move now to the government side. MPP Leardi, go ahead.

**Mr. Anthony Leardi:** Thank you, Chair. Experts are predicting that Ontario's population is going to grow. It's expected to increase by maybe two million, or even—

**Mr. John Yakubuski:** Can you speak up, Mr. Leardi, and get closer?

**Mr. Anthony Leardi:** Sure. Experts are projecting that Ontario's population is expected to increase by two million or maybe even six million over the next 20 years. As many

newcomers arrive in Ontario, the York region—and this is what my question is going to be about, the York region—is viewed as a favourable jurisdiction to settle down in, to raise a family in and to own a home. To meet the future needs of this growing population, the government must ensure that environmentally sustainable growth is possible for the people of York region.

Under the previous Liberal government, I don't think they had that kind of environmentally sustainable growth project. I think they neglected it. I don't think they had proper environmental planning and housing development for that region.

My question today is, can we hear what the Ministry of the Environment, Conservation and Parks and the government are doing for housing development in York region?

**Mr. John Yakubuski:** Well, thank you very much, Leardi. Now that I have the issue in front of me, that is very, very helpful.

Our province's population is growing. Every day, people are coming to Ontario to enjoy our high quality of life, to fill the new jobs that are being created and, of course, to enjoy our beautiful natural environment. The latest projection report by Statistics Canada estimates that our province will grow by an additional 4.2 million people in the next two decades. That's almost as much as the entire population of Alberta today.

We need to ensure that we have the proper housing and infrastructure to support this growth. This includes waste water facilities. That is why the province is taking action to accommodate population growth and housing development in the province by proposing new legislation that, if passed, would ensure expansion of crucial waste water treatment services for York region.

Expansion of York region's waste water capacity is needed now after years of talk, planning and proposals but no action. The purpose of this bill is to set out a process to move forward with a waste water servicing solution that best optimizes existing infrastructure while protecting the environment, and it would do so in a way that respects taxpayers while ensuring that we maintain strong environmental protections for the people of Durham and for all Ontarians.

Following almost a year of consultation, a panel established to advise the government on how to best meet waste water needs in York region recommended an approach that ultimately discharges treated water to Lake Ontario and would save more than \$800 million for York and Durham regions and their ratepayers compared to other options analysed, including the Lake Simcoe solution.

This approach will meet the timing needs for projected growth and maintain strong projections for vital water resources. This option, which is mandated by this proposed legislation, would also cut the project's greenhouse gas emissions in half compared to the Lake Simcoe option and prevent additional phosphorus loads to Lake Simcoe while ensuring phosphorus discharges to Lake Ontario would be well within protective limits.

To further protect Lake Simcoe from increased phosphorus and runoff, Ontario is also investing \$24 million



over three years in a new phosphorus reduction facility. This new facility aims to reduce over five tonnes of phosphorus from entering Lake Simcoe on an annual basis. We will work closely with York and Durham regions, municipalities and Indigenous communities to plan and implement this important work while protecting our vital water resources.

**The Chair (Mr. Aris Babikian):** MPP Dixon, go ahead.

**Ms. Jess Dixon:** I met recently with major energy consumers of Ontario, and some of them were producers of steel. It's no secret that manufacturing creates greenhouse emissions, but manufacturing is still a very important part of Ontario's economy.

I know the people I spoke to were very eager to talk about the new term "green steel." Can you expand on what the government is doing to work with the manufacturing sector in order to get them to adopt these important greener technologies and reduce emissions? I'm particularly interested in green steel.

**Mr. John Yakabuski:** Thank you very much, MPP Dixon, for that question. That's something that you've heard various ministers in our government talk about because it's important. You've heard our minister talk about it. You've heard the Minister of Economic Development, Job Creation and Trade. You've heard the energy minister talk about it. You've heard the Premier talk about it. You've heard the finance minister. This is huge.

We welcome the investments in our green steel sector, including ones that would fundamentally reduce the environmental impact of steelmaking and deliver low-carbon materials throughout Ontario's automotive and manufacturing supply chain. These investments will significantly reduce the province's greenhouse gas emissions, helping move the province towards its 2030 target. The province is working with industries to cut their greenhouse gas emissions by reducing and phasing out the use of coal in their operations.

The Ontario government has announced that it is supporting two steel facilities to replace their use of coal: ArcelorMittal Dofasco in Hamilton and Algoma in Sault Ste. Marie.

Ontario has also taken action to provide clean, reliable and affordable electricity to secure a landmark investment from Algoma to transform from coal to all-new low-emission electric arc furnaces in their Sault Ste. Marie steel facility. This will result in significant greenhouse gas emission reductions: about three million tonnes per year per facility. That's about the same as taking two million cars off the road when combining the two projects.

This is a prime example of how we are cutting emissions by investing in technology to help industries like auto and steel get cleaner and greener. The most significant action Ontario has taken to date on climate change and to move away from fossil fuels was eliminating coal-fired electricity. It was the biggest greenhouse gas reduction initiative in Canadian history, leading to over 90% of Ontario's electricity now being generated emissions-

free—and you heard the Minister of Energy, earlier today, repeat it more than a few times: 94%.

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We will continue working hard to ensure Ontario continues to attract these transformative green investments and support the use of alternative low-carbon fuels that reduce greenhouse gas emissions in industry, while laying the foundation for long-term competitiveness, economic prosperity and well-paying jobs in rural communities and all across Ontario.

**The Chair (Mr. Aris Babikian):** MPP Bresee.

**Mr. Ric Bresee:** Mr. Yakabuski, as you're aware, my background is in municipal governance, of course, down on the shores of Lake Ontario. The Lake Ontario basin is the most populated area in all of Ontario and, as a result, the most impacted by those municipal waste water and stormwater discharges across the Great Lakes. Recently, the FAO report on costing the impacts of extreme weather on water infrastructure stated that there's much work to be done in order to protect this important infrastructure and protect our towns and cities from the impacts of climate change.

What investments has this government made to improve municipal waste water and stormwater management in communities across Ontario, and specifically in communities like mine located on the shore of Lake Ontario?

**Mr. John Yakabuski:** Thank you very much, MPP Bresee, for that question. I know you must be very excited about the Hastings project—8,000 hectares protected in your neck of the woods, as they say. It's making MPP Smith jealous, because he thinks he's the only one who lives in God's country.

*Interjection.*

**Mr. Ric Bresee:** It is truly God's country.

**Mr. John Yakabuski:** I say to you, MPP Bresee, that Ontario is committed to protecting our lakes, rivers and groundwater supply now and for future generations. Without taking action, population growth, rapid and expanded urban development and aging infrastructure can threaten lakes, rivers and other water bodies in the province through pollution and loss of natural heritage.

Ontario's population is projected to grow by 30.3% over the next two decades—30.3%—to approximately 18.2 million by 2041. While western Lake Ontario is affected by population growth the most, many other communities across the province are also experiencing growth.

In Ontario, oversight of waste water and stormwater management is based on environmental compliance approvals required under the Ontario Water Resources Act for the establishment, alteration and operation of sewage works, including waste water and stormwater facilities and systems.

Good management of waste water and stormwater is key to ensuring Ontario has clean water for drinking, swimming, fishing and other recreational activities, now and into the future. That is why we have invested \$15 million to improve sewage and stormwater discharges into Lake Ontario. Projects under this funding program are

under way, such as upgrading pumping stations, retrofitting stormwater ponds, implementing low-impact development projects, and replacing leaky pipes. We have also invested almost \$10 million to increase transparency around monitoring and public reporting of bypasses and overflows from municipal sewage systems.

I hope that helps answer your question, MPP Bresee.

**The Chair (Mr. Aris Babikian):** MPP Smith.

**Mr. Dave Smith:** Since PA Yakabuski brought my name up, I thought it was prudent that I jump in on this.

Water is one of those really important resources in Ontario. For most of Ontario, we're blessed with the fact that we turn on the tap and clean drinking water comes out. We use it to bathe. We use it to wash our clothes. We use it for a lot of different things. And we know that water impacts our health. But there are some communities in Ontario where that's not the case. When we take a look at some of the First Nations communities in northern Ontario in particular, there have been some real struggles. Indigenous Services Canada has said that this past year alone, there are 22 First Nations communities that had boil-water advisories.

Now, I do recognize that this typically falls under the federal jurisdiction, and the federal government was actually sued by a number of First Nations to ensure that there's clean drinking water. That lawsuit has been settled out of court. They are going to start building some of these water facilities for them. But what I'd like to know is—Ontario does play a role in this. In particular, what is your ministry doing to help end boil-water advisories for First Nations communities in northern Ontario?

**Mr. John Yakabuski:** Well, thank you very much, MPP Smith, for that question. I'm pleased that you were able to point out in the context of the question the role the federal government actually owns when it comes to First Nations and water quality in First Nations communities.

At the same time, often the province is the one that gets thrown into the mix when there's a crisis. Of course, we are never going to walk away from a crisis, but we do want to make sure that it is clearly understood that the responsibility to First Nations first and foremost falls with the federal government when it comes to the quality of water and those, I believe you mentioned, 26 drinking water advisories.

Some communities have been under a drinking water advisory for over two decades. So there is obviously a lot of work to be done, and our government certainly recognizes that and is certainly prepared to ensure that we do that work, whatever falls under our responsibility, and continue to work with the federal government and continue to press the federal government to follow through on their commitments on First Nations as well.

Ontario is working collaboratively, in partnership with its agencies, First Nations and the federal government, through Indigenous Services Canada, to provide the resolution to long-term drinking water advisories in First Nations communities and the long-term sustainability of each community's water infrastructure. Since 2016, we have worked with provincial-territorial organizations, tribal

councils and First Nations communities to provide provincial expertise in the design, construction, operation and maintenance of drinking water systems and supporting initiatives that promote sustainability for future community needs.

In 2021, a First Nations advisory circle was created that reports to the Ontario Clean Water Agency's board of directors and provides advice and recommendations on how the Ontario Clean Water Agency can enhance its partnerships with First Nations communities and better support their water and waste water needs and concerns. The First Nations advisory circle may also advise on the integration of First Nations perspectives into Ontario Clean Water Agency strategies.

The agency is committed to strengthening its existing partnership with First Nations and developing new partnerships based on mutual trust, respect and collaboration. As of September 2022, the circle had met four times. It is hoped that the First Nations advisory circle will add tremendous value to the path forward for safe drinking water and waste water systems in First Nation communities, and it is encouraging to see these collaborative efforts.

**The Chair (Mr. Aris Babikian):** MPP Flack.

**Mr. Rob Flack:** Chair, I think we all know that we live in the Garden of Eden in southwestern Ontario. We're surrounded by great land with important bodies of water. When you think of Ontario—or at least when I do—Ontario is synonymous with water; they go hand in hand. I'm fortunate in my riding; I've got close to 200 kilometres of Lake Erie. There are certain concerns and opportunities that present themselves along these wonderful Great Lakes that are so treasured and that are an integral part of the health and well-being of millions of Canadians.

In May of last year, the government of Ontario and the federal government signed the Canada-Ontario Agreement on Great Lakes Water Quality and Ecosystem Health. We talked about it earlier. Can you please share with the committee, MPP Yakabuski, some initiatives the ministry is undertaking to keep the Great Lakes healthy and thriving for future generations?

And I might add, I have some land in the same riding as the parliamentary assistant, in the Ottawa Valley, and if you ever fly over it, I think you'll agree, Mr. Yakabuski, that there's as much water as there is land. It's a wonderful part of the ecosystem of Ontario—

**Mr. John Yakabuski:** Up in Renfrew county?

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**Mr. Rob Flack:** That's what I'm saying.

**Mr. John Yakabuski:** Yes, it's trees and water and farmland, and just great people. We enjoy your visits, as well, and the fact that you're a significant property owner in the riding—

**Mr. Rob Flack:** And a taxpayer.

**Mr. John Yakabuski:** And a taxpayer.

I want to thank MPP Flack for the question. I've had the opportunity to share some Lake Erie perch with you down in your riding, and man, that was some good, as they say.

**The Chair (Mr. Aris Babikian):** Two minutes.

**Mr. John Yakabuski:** Well, we may have to come back to this one, MPP Flack, but I do want to thank you for the work that you're doing with respect to the Great Lakes and Lake Erie, and welcome to the Legislature, as well. As the MPP said, we kind of share that riding up in Renfrew county and have a lot of mutual interests, and protecting water in the Great Lakes is one that you as the local MPP and someone who has lived down there for many, many years understands and knows well. Our government is very much committed to that.

I'm thinking that because this is a significant question, I may want to finish that up in the next round of questioning, because I don't want to get cut off and lose my train of thought. But I do want to thank you for bringing it forward, and we're going to elaborate on it in the next round of questioning, because I do believe, Chair, that we're running out of time, and there's a lot to pack into this issue with regard to Great Lakes water quality. I want to thank MPP Flack for bringing it forward.

How much time have we got left?

**The Chair (Mr. Aris Babikian):** Forty seconds.

**Mr. John Yakabuski:** Forty seconds? Well, how much more praise do you think I can put on the man?

**The Chair (Mr. Aris Babikian):** That's up to you.

**Mr. John Yakabuski:** We're good, Chair. We can pass on to the next section.

**The Chair (Mr. Aris Babikian):** Okay. Thank you, MPP Yakabuski.

Now we will move to the official opposition. MPP Tabuns, you have the floor.

**Mr. Peter Tabuns:** Thank you very much, Chair. I appreciate the opportunity to go back to this.

Unfortunately, I wasn't able to get an answer to the question I asked before the bell rang. Who is assigned in the ministry to keep track of cross-ministry initiatives to take on climate change?

**Mr. John Yakabuski:** Thank you for that question, MPP Tabuns. As you know, in government there are all kinds of programs that involve cross-ministries. It happens all the time, and the climate change action plan would be no exception. I mean, there's almost nothing you can do that does not have an impact on the environment, right? No matter what we do—when you get into your car and drive here in the morning, you've had an impact on the environment, so all of our ministries are involved in that and deeply committed to that.

But I'm going to turn that question over to Deputy Imbrogno, to see if we can at least satisfy you. We may not be able to give you what you're looking for, but we'll try our best.

**Mr. Peter Tabuns:** Well, is anybody coordinating it?

**Mr. Serge Imbrogno:** Thank you, MPP Yakabuski. So it is an all-of-government approach. There are a number of initiatives happening: for example, MTO public transit initiatives; MNRF has initiatives; housing has initiatives; energy has initiatives. What we do through Alex Wood's shop is pull all of that together in terms of the modelling and the projections, as you pull together what's happening

on natural gas, what's happening on transit—what are their contributions to GHG reductions.

So we are the central repository for that modelling work, but each ministry is able to go forward with their own initiatives, and we pull them together in terms of what is the impact on our forecast for GHG reductions and how it helps our target.

**Mr. Peter Tabuns:** That's interesting. So every initiative that's taken in the other ministries that affects the climate change projects that this government is engaged in—all of that is modelled by your ministry?

**Mr. John Yakabuski:** It's what by our ministry?

**Mr. Peter Tabuns:** It's modelled by your ministry. So if the Ministry of Transportation was doing something, you would be informed of it and you would be the ones responsible for doing the assessment and the modelling to say whether or not it was actually reducing greenhouse gas emissions?

**Mr. Serge Imbrogno:** It would be part of the integration. We wouldn't do it in advance. They would have their initiatives, if they're doing a public transit initiative or if energy is doing a natural gas initiative on conservation, then we would take that information and we would feed that into the model.

I don't know if, Alex, you want to elaborate on that, but our role is to make sure we're on target for 2030 and incorporate everything into the model. Because part of the criticism from the Auditor General initially was that our model wasn't integrated, and Alex and his team—I think that was one of your questions, MPP Schreiner: What do we do differently? One of the things we've done is we have integrated models now. We have Navvia as a third party, so we have that integrated model, and we build in what other ministries are doing.

Alex, I don't know if you want to elaborate on that.

**Mr. Peter Tabuns:** Just before that: You may not have the authority to direct other ministries, but you do have the responsibility for tracking whether or not their initiatives will actually deliver the goods in terms of GHG emissions reductions. Am I correct in that?

**Mr. Serge Imbrogno:** Well, we would undertake the modelling to ensure there's no double-counting, for example. When you have an initiative, you want to make sure that it's reflected and it's carried through the model in a very precise way. So that would be our job, or Alex's job and his team to do that.

**Mr. Peter Tabuns:** That inspires another question, though: Have you done the modelling on the impact of expanding the natural gas fleet in our electricity system? Have you done the modelling on what impact that will have on total GHG emissions in Ontario?

**Mr. Serge Imbrogno:** Our modelling is based on what the IESO projections are, so when the IESO updates their projections, we would update our modelling. So our modelling would be up to date as of the last IESO projection.

**Mr. Peter Tabuns:** So your model is up to date as of the last IESO projection. So am I to understand that you

actually just take their numbers and plug them into what you've got? You don't do an independent assessment?

**Mr. Serge Imbrogno:** Alex, go ahead.

**Mr. Alex Wood:** Yes, we're not energy system experts. What we do is take a number of inputs from different sources—energy, IESO, their Ontario outlook. We take, for example, population growth estimates, GDP growth estimates from the Ministry of Finance. We take a lot of information from federal sources. The federal national inventory report, for example, is a big input into our integrated model.

As the deputy is suggesting, we take all of that and run models in an integrated fashion, because, as the deputy is saying, one of the things that can happen is that you can count a bunch of reductions here and a bunch of reductions there, and very often when you bring some of those two policies together in an integrated fashion, one plus one does not equal two. It may add up to 1.8 or something—

**Mr. Peter Tabuns:** Yes, there are overlaps.

**Mr. Alex Wood:** So our job is to make sure that the estimates of the reductions are as accurate as possible, using that integrated model.

**Mr. Peter Tabuns:** But in this case, it will be an estimate of an increase. Can you tell us what the estimated increase in GHG emissions is going to be from the electricity system with the increased number of gas-fired power plants?

**Mr. Serge Imbrogno:** Once the IESO updates their forecasts, we would incorporate that. We don't have that information, but when we do, we will incorporate it.

**Mr. Peter Tabuns:** Ah, so it hasn't been released to you at this point.

**Mr. Serge Imbrogno:** I don't think they've updated their forecast, so—

**Mr. Peter Tabuns:** So we're making a decision without knowing what impact it will have on our GHG targeting. You're in the dark at the moment, because you don't have the numbers.

**Mr. Serge Imbrogno:** I wouldn't say we're in the dark. I think we have a sense of what natural gas generation contributes right now, so I don't think we're in the dark. I think it's probably within a bound, but I don't know what that bound is. But officially, we wait until the IESO updates their Ontario provincial forecast.

**Mr. Peter Tabuns:** Okay. Well, that's very interesting to me.

In the original plan, there was something called the Ontario Carbon Trust, an emission reduction fund. Is that project in existence?

**Mr. Serge Imbrogno:** Well, there was a commitment—

**Mr. Peter Tabuns:** That's why I'm asking. There was a commitment. They were talking about \$350 million. Does this show up in your budget?

**Mr. Serge Imbrogno:** Well, we have been working on our EPS—and Alex, maybe you can talk about EPS.

**Mr. Alex Wood:** Sure.

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**Mr. Serge Imbrogno:** And there will be proceeds that will be used for equivalent to what the carbon trust would have done. So we can talk to you about the EPS program.

**Mr. Alex Wood:** As you may know, MPP Tabuns, the EPS, or emissions performance standard, is something that we developed back in 2019. The federal government only gave us recognition of that program in 2021, with an effective date of January 1, 2022, so we've only had our program in place for a year.

The proceeds from that program—decisions are being made right now about where those proceeds may go, and part of the consideration is that initial commitment. Whether it ends up being called the Ontario Carbon Trust—I think we actually started referring to it as an emission reduction fund of some kind.

**Mr. Peter Tabuns:** So how much money do you expect to have come from that in this year's budget?

**Mr. Alex Wood:** In this year's budget? The emissions performance standard cycle is that, even though we're in compliance year 2022 right now, we would not be receiving compliance payments from industry until well into 2023. And so there won't be—we have an estimate of what that might be, but I don't think we want to book that because it's just an estimate.

**Mr. Peter Tabuns:** Okay. So the \$400-million Ontario Carbon Trust that was committed to in 2018—we still don't have any money in the kitty for actually doing that. You're telling me the equivalent, under the new name, is something that will come forward in 2023. Do I understand correctly?

**Mr. Alex Wood:** Well, the emissions performance standard regulation that we have will—if we receive a positive assessment from the federal government for the future version of that, as you may have been following, we would have, essentially, a seven-year program, with proceeds continuing to come in through that period, not just the 2022 year.

**Mr. Peter Tabuns:** Yes, but the \$400 million was never set aside. Is that correct?

**Mr. Serge Imbrogno:** I'd say that's correct. I think the EPS would be equivalent to what the carbon trust would have provided.

**Mr. Peter Tabuns:** Right. And the funds from the EPS will start flowing in 2023, if I understand correctly.

**Mr. Serge Imbrogno:** That's correct.

**Mr. Peter Tabuns:** All right.

There was also a commitment to a \$50-million program which was going to look for innovative programs to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. Did that ever actually get off the ground?

**Mr. Alex Wood:** I think you're referring here, MPP Tabuns, to what we referred to at the time as a reverse auction for—

**Mr. Peter Tabuns:** Yes, that's it exactly. It is the reverse auction.

**Mr. Alex Wood:** I remember it well.

**Mr. Peter Tabuns:** Is it in your budget?

**Mr. Alex Wood:** It is not in our budget. Upon second consideration and further analysis that we undertook, the decision was to not proceed with that program.

**Mr. Peter Tabuns:** Okay, so that one's done.

One of the actions was making climate change a cross-government priority, something that had come up before. One initiative was to “improve our ability to consider climate change when we make decisions about government policies and operations by developing a climate change governance framework.” I’m assuming that as the Ministry of the Environment, you would have been part of that. Is that in existence?

**Mr. Serge Imbrogno:** We have a number of groups or committees within the public service that help coordinate that kind of work and share best practices among public servants along those lines, yes.

**Mr. Peter Tabuns:** So this climate change governance framework never actually happened. Is that correct?

**Mr. Alex Wood:** We have some structure inside of government to help disseminate best practices and to help share ideas about what different parts of government might want to do around climate change, so I wouldn’t say it hasn’t happened completely.

**Mr. Peter Tabuns:** Well, I’ll go down through some of the things it was supposed to do: “Establish clear responsibilities and requirements for ministries to track and report on climate change measures.” Does that exist?

**Mr. Alex Wood:** Well, the reporting happens through the kinds of reports that the government puts out through the estimates process that we’re engaged in right now, for example.

**Mr. Peter Tabuns:** Can you show me where in the estimates that is? We’ve got the documents here. What page?

**Mr. Serge Imbrogno:** I’d say it’s more informal than a formal process. I think—

**Mr. Peter Tabuns:** Ah, it’s ad hoc.

**Mr. Serge Imbrogno:**—there’s a directors’ group that provides advice to ministries about how to do those calculations. Like we’ve said, it’s an all-of-government approach. Each ministry moves forward their initiatives, and this group provides advice on how you measure GHGs, what you look for.

**Mr. Peter Tabuns:** I have to say, it doesn’t sound like a climate change governance framework, which has got a nice ring to it.

One of the things that was going to happen was, “Consider climate change when we purchase goods and services across government, where it is cost-effective.” Could we have a copy of that policy? Does this exist? Is this actually being done now?

**Mr. Alex Wood:** There has been a lot of work with our colleagues in different ministries around procurement questions, so I think there’s an ongoing commitment to do so. I don’t think we’ve developed a policy yet in that respect, though.

**Mr. Peter Tabuns:** So there is not a policy. Okay.

There was also a commitment by the government to update statements of environmental values to reflect Ontario’s environmental plan. Is that something that’s available to the public, to legislators?

**Mr. Alex Wood:** I believe that work was done. If I recall the 2019 audit that was undertaken, that was one of

the issues raised by the auditor and it was addressed, but I’ll confirm that for you.

**Mr. Peter Tabuns:** If you could, I would appreciate that. Thank you.

There were a lot of commitments on this one. It was pretty thorough. I had a lot of criticisms of the plan, but there was some good stuff here.

Since you’re sort of the guardians of this climate plan—“Undertake a review of government office space, with an eye to optimizing our physical and carbon footprint. Ontario will reduce its per employee real estate footprint to reduce energy costs and emissions, as recommended in the Auditor General’s 2017 report.” Can you tell us the status of that?

**Mr. Alex Wood:** There are a number of plans related. As you know, the Macdonald Block reconstruction project was certainly a project that was undertaken to maximize—and I think it was designed to achieve LEED gold certification for that purpose. But obviously, with COVID having put us at home—I think one of the questions with us coming back to work is going to be around just how to achieve those kinds of objectives.

**Mr. Peter Tabuns:** I would appreciate, given that big construction project going there at Bay and Wellesley, that something would have done—but was there a larger review done of government-owned real estate as to its energy performance and the opportunity to reduce carbon emissions?

**Mr. Serge Imbrogno:** A lot of that work was under way, MPP Tabuns. I think the government was looking for efficiencies. There was already work in ministries to reduce the footprint. So those initiatives already started, and I think with COVID, it has probably accelerated. We don’t own the real estate. It would be another ministry that owns the real estate, and they would do that analysis. Either Infrastructure Ontario or public business services would have that information.

**Mr. Peter Tabuns:** I understand that. I go back to your earlier commentary: You’re the ministry that models the reductions in greenhouse gas emissions, so when it comes to gas-fired power plants, you’ll get numbers from IESO showing increases in greenhouse gas emissions. Did you get any projections from the bodies that are responsible for real estate in Ontario on their greenhouse gas emission reductions from what they’ve done with Ontario-owned real estate? You’re the custodians of this.

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**Mr. Serge Imbrogno:** We have not incorporated that. It’s a moving target as Macdonald Block comes back. I’m not sure how large those emissions would be relative to the economy as a whole and whether they might be captured in our general analysis of what’s happening in other buildings. I think it’s a question we’ll have to take back.

**The Chair (Mr. Aris Babikian):** Less than two minutes.

**Mr. Peter Tabuns:** If you could make an undertaking to get back to us with the projections on the GHG emission reductions.

**Mr. Serge Imbrogno:** I wasn’t going to say GHG projections. It’s just more how it incorporates into our model,

whether there are formal projections or whether it's captured in our overall buildings across all of Ontario.

**Mr. Peter Tabuns:** Well, what you can provide us with would be useful. The Ontario government is one of the big real estate holders in this province. When I've studied the federal government before and the Ontario government, you're major owners and leasers, so you have an opportunity to actually change a lot of the emissions in Ontario. I'd be interested to see if you were ever given numbers to show any reductions. I look forward to your report on that.

I'm looking at this Ontario emissions scenario as of March 25, 2022. There was an assessment done by Navius. This is something that your minister brought into the House. When I look at the projection, the emissions forecast as of March 25, 2022, seems to assume that the drop in emissions during COVID is not going to bounce back. Most recently, Canada has reported a substantial bounce-back in its overall emissions. Given that Alberta and Ontario are the two most substantial GHG-emitting jurisdictions, do you still stand by this projection?

**Mr. Serge Imbrogno:** Yes, absolutely.

**Mr. Alex Wood:** We did model and, as you may know, for some of the big numbers we rely on the federal national inventory report, for example, which does show a considerable drop, obviously, in 2020.

**Mr. Peter Tabuns:** Yes, I know. COVID had a big impact.

**Mr. Alex Wood:** But the federal forecast also projects a substantial rebound—

**The Chair (Mr. Aris Babikian):** Thank you very much. The time is up.

We move now to the independent members. You have 10 minutes. I don't know if we will be able to finish your 10 minutes before the end of the day, but go ahead.

**Mr. Mike Schreiner:** Pardon, Chair? We'll get started now?

**The Chair (Mr. Aris Babikian):** Yes.

**Mr. Mike Schreiner:** Okay. Thank you, Chair.

I just wanted to follow up on a question that Mr. Tabuns asked. Do you still stand by the emission projections that were released in March? If you want to finish your answer. You were cut off.

**Mr. Alex Wood:** Yes, we do. This forecasting was done knowing that the 2020 emissions would have reduced. But, as I was explaining to MPP Tabuns, there is an expected rebound, which we obviously have seen. Our assessment was that the overall baseline—that is the top line in that graph—was likely to revert back to the norm that we had had pre-COVID. We do stand by this assessment.

**Mr. Mike Schreiner:** There will be a rebound, right?

**Mr. Alex Wood:** There will be a rebound. There is a rebound already.

**Mr. Mike Schreiner:** Yes, I was going to say, it's already there.

I wanted to go back to the question that I asked that was cut off. The action day on litter has been a big part of the

government's plan. It was a big part of the PA's presentation. Do we know how many greenhouse gas reductions we got out of that particular action?

**Mr. John Yakabuski:** Thank you very much, MPP Schreiner, for the question. We're going to turn it over shortly to the deputy. Litter is a huge focus not only of this government but, I can tell you, of me personally. It's one of the things that irritates me more than just about anything. I don't know how somebody can carry a full cup of coffee but can't carry an empty one to a waste can. I don't know how somebody can carry a full container of something and then throw the container of the food or whatever out the window of their vehicle along the road. It's something that upsets me a great deal.

I don't have the numbers with regard to the emissions reductions and I'm not sure what the deputy may be able to provide, but I do know how this government feels about litter and waste and diversion, the blue boxes etc.

**Mr. Mike Schreiner:** Maybe we can get the GHG number. Thank you.

**Mr. John Yakabuski:** I will turn this over to Deputy Imbrogno.

**Mr. Serge Imbrogno:** I'll say we haven't calculated a GHG number. Part of the issue we have is, with COVID, a lot of the actual hands-on collection was delayed. So we had one year of physical collection and a couple of years where it wasn't permitted or it was reduced. But I think the bigger part of that day of action on litter is more to change people's mindset and understand the importance—but we haven't done a GHG calculation.

**Mr. Mike Schreiner:** My next question is built a bit on some questions MPP Tabuns had asked about.

So you integrate data from across ministries into the GHG reduction model. Am I correct about that? There may be certain things you don't know, like you're still waiting on IESO when it comes to gas plants. I'm curious: Do you do any modelling on the GHG impact of government decisions? For example, building Highway 413—some people have done GHG emissions modelling on that. Has the ministry done that and incorporated it into the model that's guiding the province as it reaches for its 2030 goals?

**Mr. John Yakabuski:** Well, I'd like to touch on that if I may. Thank you very much, MPP Schreiner.

When the highway is built, if we are successful in implementing the electrification of Ontario's fleet, so to speak, the GHG impacts, other than the construction of that project, will be significantly different than if it was open today with the percentage of vehicles that are electric or not electric. So as we—

**Mr. Mike Schreiner:** That wasn't my question. My question was, was there any modelling that's been done? That's all I'm asking.

**Mr. John Yakabuski:** I'm going to get to that, but I think it's important to note that, as we move to build that infrastructure, we're also moving with equal zeal to ensure that the vehicles that are running on our highways are substantially emissions-free.

But I will turn the question over to Deputy Imbrogno on the modelling.

**Mr. Serge Imbrogno:** MPP Schreiner, we haven't done any GHG forecast of changes in highway use or building highways.

**Mr. Mike Schreiner:** Okay. Thank you for that. I appreciate that.

**Mr. Serge Imbrogno:** It would have been more public transit, those kinds of investments by government.

**Mr. Mike Schreiner:** Well, certainly you can do modelling on public transit and how that reduces GHG.

Part of what's driving the question is—I've heard the PA today say this, I've heard the minister say this a number of times, that the province is on track to meet its 2030 target. I've heard that loud and clear many times, but I'm seeing an absence of information being plugged into the model. So I'm just curious where the confidence is in making that public statement if we're flying blind on gas plants, highways—a whole host of things that would likely have a significant impact on emissions.

**Mr. John Yakabuski:** Thank you for the question, MPP Schreiner. The commitment is 30% below 2005 levels by 2030. In 2005, there was a substantial amount of power being produced in the province from coal. That was a—

**Mr. Mike Schreiner:** Let's not go back that far. Let's look at between now and 2030, please.

**Mr. John Yakabuski:** I get that, but that's why we're on track—some of the things are on track to meet our goals.

If you take that out of the equation—if you want the answer, I've got to be able to build it. So you take the coal-fired power out of the equation, and then you add, for example, the electric arc furnaces that are replacing 6,000 megatons at Sault Ste. Marie and Hamilton. You start to

build on those things. So we have an energy system that, as Minister Smith said, is 94% emission-free. You can see why we're on target and gaining on that target every single day with the initiatives that we're bringing forward.

**Mr. Mike Schreiner:** I appreciate that—

**Mr. John Yakabuski:** You may see that it doesn't look like we're getting there, but we see how we are getting there.

**Mr. Mike Schreiner:** With all due respect—and I'm going to move to a separate question—it doesn't seem to be in the model from what we've heard today, with all due respect.

So the next point I want to ask about is, there's a lot of conversation about protecting Lake Simcoe, the 10-year Lake Simcoe Protection Plan review. Has there been any analysis of the impact the Bradford Bypass will have on Lake Simcoe, especially when it comes to something like road salt, which you specifically referred to in the estimates?

**Mr. John Yakabuski:** Well, the environmental impacts would be part of any process to approve—

**Mr. Mike Schreiner:** But the environmental assessment is from 1997, so that was before the Lake Simcoe Protection Act even existed. Has any analysis been done on the impact on Lake Simcoe itself?

**Mr. John Yakabuski:** I'll turn that over to—

**The Chair (Mr. Aris Babikian):** Thank you very much. Because it is 6 o'clock, I have to interrupt the session. We will resume our deliberations tomorrow morning at 9 o'clock. MPP Schreiner, you have two minutes left on your time. You can resume the questioning tomorrow, and after that we will move to the government side.

I would like to adjourn the meeting for today. Thank you very much.

*The committee adjourned at 1800.*

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