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of Ontario



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Mardi
28 novembre 2023

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Président : L'honorable Ted Arnott
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ORDERS OF THE DAY / ORDRE DU JOUR

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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

Tuesday 28 November 2023

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

Mardi 28 novembre 2023

*Report continued from volume A.
The House recessed from 1147 to 1500.*

REPORTS BY COMMITTEES

STANDING COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC ACCOUNTS

Mr. Tom Rakocevic: I beg leave to present a report on Criminal Court System, chapter 3, 2019 Annual Report of the Office of the Auditor General of Ontario, volume 3, from the Standing Committee on Public Accounts and move the adoption of its recommendations.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Mr. Rakocevic presents the committee's report and moves the adoption of its recommendations.

Does the member wish to make a brief statement?

Mr. Tom Rakocevic: Yes, I do, Speaker, thank you.

As Chair of the Standing Committee on Public Accounts, I am pleased to table the committee's report today on Criminal Court System, chapter 3 of volume 3 of the 2019 Annual Report of the Office of the Auditor General of Ontario.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank the permanent membership of the committee and substitute members who participated in the public hearings and report-writing process. The committee extends its appreciation to officials from the Ministry of the Attorney General.

The committee also acknowledges the assistance provided by the Office of the Auditor General, the Clerk of the Committee and legislative research.

With that, I move adjournment of the debate.

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

Debate adjourned.

PETITIONS

NURSES

Mr. Tom Rakocevic: I'm presenting this petition entitled "For Fair and Equitable Compensation for Nurses.

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the government has a responsibility to ensure safe and healthy workplaces and workloads for nurses by enhancing nurse staffing and supports across all sectors of the health system;

"Whereas the RN-to-population ratio in Ontario is the lowest in Canada and Ontario would need 24,000 RNs to catch up with the rest of the country;

"Whereas there are over 10,000 registered nurse vacancies in Ontario;

"Whereas nurses are experiencing very high levels of burnout;

"Whereas registered nurses have experienced real wage losses of about 10% over the last decade;

"Whereas the government of Ontario needs to retain and recruit nurses across all sectors of the system to provide quality care for Ontarians;

"Whereas the Ontario government needs to retain and recruit RNs to meet their legislative commitment of four hours of daily direct care for long-term-care (LTC) residents;

"Whereas wage inequities across the health system make it particularly difficult to retain and recruit RNs to community care sectors, such as long-term care and home care;

"Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to implement evidence-based recommendations to retain and recruit nurses, including fair and equitable compensation that is competitive with other jurisdictions in Canada and the United States."

I certainly support this petition, will be signing my name to it and giving it to page Emma.

BROADBAND INFRASTRUCTURE

M^{me} France Gélinas: I would like to thank Emily Savignac from Hanmer in my riding for this petition.

"Improving Broadband in Northern Ontario....

"Whereas people and businesses in northern Ontario need reliable and affordable broadband Internet now to work, learn and connect with friends and family; and

"Whereas too many people can only access unreliable Internet and cellular or don't have any connectivity at all especially in northern Ontario; and

"Whereas the current provincial Broadband and Cellular Action Plan has failed to provide northern Ontario "communities with the same opportunities for economic growth, recovery and participation;"

They petition the Legislative Assembly as follows:

"To call on the Ford government to immediately provide a plan with dates and actions to be taken for every area of northern Ontario to have access to reliable and affordable broadband Internet."

I fully support this petition, will affix my name to it and ask page Alina to bring it to the Clerk.

TRANSPORTATION INFRASTRUCTURE

Mr. Graham McGregor: I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas the city of Toronto is a regionally, provincially, and nationally significant area for job creation and economic growth, as seen through the facilitation of domestic and international trade which significantly drives the country’s gross domestic production (GDP) and is critical to the success of the province and the country; and

“Whereas Toronto is a key tourism destination, attracting millions of visitors each year through its various attractions, live music scene, culinary experiences, professional sports teams, and vibrant cultures. Those travelling to and from Toronto every day contribute economically and rely on accessible and safe transit, reliable toll-free highways;

“Whereas maintaining and expanding operations of Toronto’s key infrastructure, such as the Eglinton Crosstown LRT and the Finch West LRT, the Gardiner Expressway, the Don Valley Parkway, will be crucial to ensure the connectivity of commuters and commerce from the greater Toronto area; and

“Whereas transit safety is an area of concern for many Ontarians who utilize transit systems each and every day. By increasing funding, the city of Toronto can increase police or safety officers, continue to increase cellular data services and emergency reporting tools to ensure riders’ safety while using all transit systems; and

“Whereas the government is currently tackling the housing crisis seen throughout the province. By identifying provincially owned lands within the city of Toronto which can be used to build homes on, the government can continue to build affordable and obtainable homes for future generations; and

“Whereas continuing to sustain the long-term growth of Toronto as an economic driver is beneficial to all levels of government. By agreeing upon partnerships with the province of Ontario and the city of Toronto, the government is ensuring that the city continues to deliver as a tourist destination, a place to live, a place to work and a place to do business;

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

“To urge all members of the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to continue to advance the New Deal for Toronto Act, 2023, to ensure the growth of key infrastructure, transportation, and economic prosperity for Toronto, the entirety of the province and the country.”

I agree wholeheartedly. I’ll affix my signature and hand it to page Scarlett.

FRONT-LINE WORKERS

M^{me} France Gélinas: I would like to thank Elizabeth Rainville from Blezard Valley in my riding for this petition, “Make PSW a Career.”

“Whereas there has been a shortage of personal support workers (PSWs) in long-term care and home care in Ontario for many years;

“Whereas Ontario’s personal support workers are overworked, underpaid and underappreciated, leading to many of them leaving the profession;

“Whereas the lack of PSWs has created a crisis in” long-term care, “a broken home care system, and poor-quality care for” long-term-care “home residents and home care clients;”

They petition the Legislative Assembly as follows:

“Tell Premier Ford to act now to make PSW ... a career, with” permanent “full-time employment, good wages, paid sick days, benefits, a pension plan and a manageable workload in order to respect the important work of PSWs and improve patient care.”

I fully support this petition, will affix my name to it and ask page Mustafa to bring it to the Clerk.

TRANSPORTATION INFRASTRUCTURE

Mr. Andrew Dowie: This petition is to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas the city of Toronto is a regionally, provincially, and nationally significant area for job creation and economic growth, as seen through the facilitation of domestic and international trade which significantly drives the country’s gross domestic production (GDP) and is critical to the success of the province and the country; and

“Whereas Toronto is a key tourism destination, attracting millions of visitors each year through its various attractions, live music scene, culinary experiences, professional sports teams, and vibrant cultures. Those travelling to and from Toronto every day contribute economically and rely on accessible and safe transit, reliable toll-free highways;

“Whereas maintaining and expanding operations of Toronto’s key infrastructure, such as the Eglinton Crosstown LRT and the Finch West LRT, the Gardiner Expressway, the Don Valley Parkway, will be crucial to ensure the connectivity of commuters and commerce from the greater Toronto area; and

1510

“Whereas transit safety is an area of concern for many Ontarians who utilize transit systems each and every day. By increasing funding, the city of Toronto can increase police or safety officers, continue to increase cellular data services and emergency reporting tools to ensure riders’ safety while using all transit systems; and

“Whereas the government is currently tackling the housing crisis seen throughout the province. By identifying provincially owned lands within the city of Toronto which can be used to build homes on, the government can continue to build affordable and obtainable homes for future generations; and

“Whereas continuing to sustain the long-term growth of Toronto as an economic driver is beneficial to all levels of government. By agreeing upon partnerships with the province of Ontario and the city of Toronto, the government is ensuring that the city continues to deliver as a tourist destination, a place to live, a place to work and a place to do business;

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

“To urge all members of the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to continue to advance the New Deal for Toronto Act, 2023, to ensure the growth of key infrastructure, transportation, and economic prosperity for Toronto, the entirety of the province and the country.”

This petition was provided by Jenna. I will affix my name and provide it to page Henry.

ONTARIO PLACE

Ms. Doly Begum: “Save Ontario Place.

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas Ontario Place has been a cherished public space for over 50 years, providing joy, recreation and cultural experiences for Ontarians and tourists alike and holds cultural and historical significance as a landmark that symbolizes Ontario’s commitment to innovation, sustainability and public engagement;

“Whereas redevelopment that includes a private, profit-driven venture by an Austrian spa company prioritizes commercial interests over the needs and desires of the people of Ontario, and it is estimated that the cost to prepare the grounds for redevelopment and build a 2,000-car underground garage will cost approximately \$650 million;

“Whereas there are concerns of cronyism by Therme Group Canada’s vice-president of communications and external relations, who was previously the Premier’s deputy chief of staff;

“Whereas meaningful public consultations with diverse stakeholders have not been adequately conducted and the official opposition has sent a letter of support for a public request to begin an investigation into a value-for-money and compliance audit with respect to proposed redevelopment of Ontario Place;

“Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to halt any further development plans for Ontario Place, engage in meaningful and transparent public consultations to gather input and ideas for the future of Ontario Place, develop a comprehensive and sustainable plan for the revitalization of Ontario Place that prioritizes environmental sustainability, accessibility and inclusivity, and ensure that any future development of Ontario Place is carried out in a transparent and accountable manner, with proper oversight, public input and adherence to democratic processes.”

I fully support this petition. I will affix my signature to it and give it to page Shahan to give to the Clerks.

EMERGENCY SERVICES

M^{me} France Gélinas: I would like to thank Julie Chrétien from Val Caron in my riding for these petitions.

“911 Everywhere in Ontario.

“Whereas when we face an emergency we all know to dial 911 for help;

“Whereas access to emergency services through 911 is not available in all regions of Ontario but most Ontarians believe that it is;

“Whereas many Ontarians have discovered that 911 was not available while they faced an emergency;

“Whereas all Ontarians expect and deserve access to 911 service, throughout our province;”

They petition the Legislative Assembly as follows:

“To provide 911 emergency response everywhere in Ontario by land line or cellphone.”

I fully support this petition, will affix my name to it and ask Angela to bring it to the Clerk.

TRANSPORTATION INFRASTRUCTURE

Ms. Christine Hogarth: “To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas the city of Toronto is a regionally, provincially, and nationally significant area for job creation and economic growth, as seen through the facilitation of domestic and international trade which significantly drives the country’s gross domestic production (GDP) and is critical to the success of the province and the country; and

“Whereas Toronto is a key tourism destination, attracting millions of visitors each year through its various attractions, live music scene, culinary experiences, professional sports teams, and vibrant cultures. Those travelling to and from Toronto every day contribute economically and rely on accessible and safe transit, reliable toll-free highways;

“Whereas maintaining and expanding operations of Toronto’s key infrastructure, such as the Eglinton Cross-town LRT and the Finch West LRT, the Gardiner Expressway, the Don Valley Parkway, will be crucial to ensure the connectivity of commuters and commerce from the greater Toronto area; and

“Whereas transit safety is an area of concern for many Ontarians who utilize transit systems each and every day. By increasing funding, the city of Toronto can increase police or safety officers, continue to increase cellular data services and emergency reporting tools to ensure riders’ safety while using all transit systems; and

“Whereas the government is currently tackling the housing crisis seen throughout the province. By identifying provincially owned lands within the city of Toronto which can be used to build homes on, the government can continue to build affordable and obtainable homes for future generations; and

“Whereas continuing to sustain the long-term growth of Toronto as an economic driver is beneficial to all levels of government. By agreeing upon partnerships with the province of Ontario and the city of Toronto, the government is ensuring that the city continues to deliver as a tourist destination, a place to live, a place to work and a place to do business;

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

“To urge all members of the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to continue to advance the New Deal for Toronto Act, 2023, to ensure the growth of key infrastructure, trans-

portation, and economic prosperity for Toronto, the entirety of the province and the country.”

This is great news for the city of Toronto, and I’m pleased to sign it and give it to Peter.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

BUILDING A STRONG ONTARIO TOGETHER ACT (BUDGET MEASURES), 2023 LOI DE 2023 VISANT À BÂTIR UN ONTARIO FORT ENSEMBLE (MESURES BUDGÉTAIRES)

Mr. Bethlenfalvy moved third reading of the following bill:

Bill 146, An Act to implement Budget measures and to enact and amend various statutes / Projet de loi 146, Loi visant à mettre en oeuvre les mesures budgétaires et à édicter et à modifier diverses lois.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Would the minister care to lead off the debate? I recognize the Minister of Finance.

Hon. Peter Bethlenfalvy: Thank you. Very gracious, Mr. Speaker. I want to state that I will be sharing my time with my parliamentary assistant the member for Oakville and my parliamentary assistant for the riding of Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound.

I rise to speak to the third reading of the fall bill, the Building a Strong Ontario Together Act (Budget Measures), 2023. In this bill are measures that continue our responsible, targeted approach to navigate the uncertainties of today and to help build Ontario. It’s an approach that will build critical infrastructure in communities right across the province, while also laying a strong fiscal foundation for future generations.

Madam Speaker, Ontario is seeing significant growth. Last year, nearly 500,000 more people called Ontario home, and today there are 4,400 more businesses operating in our province than there were last year. Our population is rising, jobs are being created and more and more companies are setting up shop here.

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Now, this is good news, but it cannot be taken for granted. Global uncertainty, economic and geopolitical uncertainty, is also on the rise. It is more important than ever for us to remain fiscally disciplined, to remain responsible and flexible so that once we navigate these global uncertainties, we can emerge stronger than ever before. We must continue with our plan to build a strong Ontario, and we must build a strong Ontario together.

Nous devons poursuivre notre plan de bâtir un Ontario fort, et nous devons le faire ensemble.

Madam Speaker, we are doing so by building Ontario and working for you, the people of Ontario—the two key pillars that guide our plan: building Ontario and working for you.

Underscoring these pillars is our government’s prudent and responsible fiscal plan. We are focused on responsibly eliminating Ontario’s deficit while delivering on the priorities—the priorities set out for us by and for the people and businesses of this province.

Our government is now projecting a \$5.6-billion deficit in 2023-24 due to a slowing economy impacting our revenues and increasing the need for flexibility to respond to risks. Following a projected \$5.3-billion deficit in 2024-25, our government is forecasting a surplus of half a billion dollars the following year, in 2025-26.

Madam Speaker, we will continue to be transparent with the people of this province about the fiscal outlook for Ontario. I’m proud to speak to the people of Ontario every 90 days to provide them with an update on the state of the province’s—their—finances. This is a responsibility I take seriously.

Since 2018, Ontario’s government has received six good opinions by the Auditor General—six straight clean, unqualified audit opinions. And as I said a moment ago, our government is focused on responsibly eliminating the deficit while delivering on our priorities, even in this time of uncertainty.

Now, as we deal with the uncertainty ahead, we will never have a moment’s hesitation and will always do what is necessary to support the people, the workers and the businesses of Ontario, and we will build a stronger Ontario together—bâtir un Ontario fort ensemble.

Together, we are building the critical infrastructure growing communities across the province need. Together, we are building hospitals and long-term-care homes and schools, and we’re building child care spaces, building highways, building roads and building transit right across this great province.

Madam Speaker, our population is now over 15.6 million people. Hundreds of thousands of people are coming to Ontario here every year to set up their homes, set up their businesses—to have a better quality of life. Many members in this chamber have stories of coming from other places. We have an obligation in this House to make sure that we continue to provide all that is essential to those who are here and those who want to call Ontario home. Together, we are making sure that their quality of life will be the best that we possibly can provide, and we welcome them here. We need to come here to help grow our economy and fill many needed jobs.

I think about the member from Scarborough that I’m looking at right now, the Minister for Seniors and Accessibility, who came from the great country of South Korea, who came here with nothing, who built his family, his home, and dedicated his life to public service. That’s the Ontario dream. That’s what we’ve got to preserve. I thank the member for his great public service over the many years.

We have to accommodate and welcome and grow the infrastructure necessary to welcome people from right around the world. That’s why we are delivering on the most ambitious capital plan in the province’s history—\$185 billion over the next 10 years—and it’s called our

plan to build. This is a historic plan to fill a historic infrastructure deficit.

The reality is, our growing towns and cities and the highways and transit that connect them are aging and under strain. It is not enough for us to just replace this aging and strained infrastructure; we need to build to support expansion. Shouldering the costs cannot fall on the Ontario taxpayer alone. We have launched the Ontario Infrastructure Bank to help spread the cost burden more effectively.

The Ontario Infrastructure Bank is modelled on similar institutions found in jurisdictions around the world, and it will attract pension plans and other trusted institutional investors to help finance the essential infrastructure that otherwise would not get built. Large-scale infrastructure projects will be its focus, including long-term-care homes, affordable homes, major infrastructure in our communities and in our municipalities, as well as investments in energy and transportation sectors.

Canada is home to world-class pension funds, including the famed Maple Eight—and I'd love for IMCO, the Investment Management Corp. of Ontario, to be included in that club, and call it the Maple Mind, because we have some of the brightest minds and institutions right across this great planet right here in Ontario. They and other trusted institutional investors will have the opportunity to invest workers' savings right here in Ontario.

Madam Speaker, a strong Ontario also needs a strong, productive economy, and our government is building just that, and it starts in the north.

For too long, despite the value these minerals can bring to this great province, Ontario's critical minerals opportunity was not always capitalized on. Unlocking northern Ontario's critical minerals is key to building the economy of the future. Unlocking these minerals will help bring business investments to Ontario and bring our workforce better jobs with bigger paycheques.

This is why our government is committing close to \$1 billion to support the Far North's critical legacy infrastructure—and by infrastructure, I mean all the essential elements needed to keep us moving forward on one of the most promising mineral deposits on the planet, in the Ring of Fire. We're going to bring all-season roads, broadband connectivity and community supports. The Ring of Fire mineral deposits will play a critical role in batteries, in electric vehicles and in clean technology. All of the building blocks of tomorrow are right here in Ontario. This is why our government amended the Mining Act to help ensure Ontario has a modern, competitive regime for mineral exploration and development, and it's why we are proposing with this bill's amendments to enhance the Ontario Focused Flow-Through Share Tax Credit.

By connecting our critical mineral resources in the north with our world-class manufacturing sector in the south, we are creating an integrated Ontario-made supply chain. We must continually grow the province's manufacturing sector and continuously create conditions that attract new investments.

This government has attracted billions of dollars in automotive and clean steel manufacturing investments—

more than \$26 billion in electric vehicle and battery manufacturing-related industries in three years alone, benefiting regions across the province, from Algoma to Durham, from St. Thomas to Brampton, and all parts of Ontario.

Madam Speaker, while the Liberals drove manufacturing jobs out of the province, we're bringing these good jobs and these good paycheques back to Ontario. Our government knows that the road to prosperity should be clear of red tape and burdensome costs. We're cutting red tape and now saving businesses \$567 million annually—that's annually—in regulatory compliance costs. We're not an island here in Ontario. We have to always think about how we can put the conditions in place for businesses to succeed, and businesses are the ones who hire the workers, who have the paycheques, who keep this economy going.

1530

Madam Speaker, we are capitalizing on the opportunities of the global economic transformation, continuing to strengthen Ontario's competitiveness and building on our work to make Ontario a global manufacturing centre. Importantly, we are attracting these investments while also continuing to maintain Ontario regulations that protect people's health and safety, and the environment.

And while progress has been made, there is still much more to do.

Bien que des progrès aient été accomplis, il reste encore beaucoup à faire.

That's why we have implemented the Ontario Made Manufacturing Investment Tax Credit. This is a new credit aimed at helping local manufacturing companies to invest and expand. We're creating the right conditions for good jobs and bigger paycheques, because we must continually find ways to make Ontario more competitive. This is why our government is working with partners to have shovel-ready sites available for new, large manufacturing projects, and we're leveraging our advantages—like our clean energy grid.

Madam Speaker, companies in a variety of sectors are looking today to invest in places that can help them achieve their goals as they relate to environmental, social and governance measures, also known as ESG. To help these companies achieve their ESG goals and to boost our competitiveness, we launched a voluntary clean energy credit registry. I am very proud to say to this House that we're also supporting the Pickering Nuclear Generating Station's continuous safe operation. And we're leading in record battery procurements, with the largest Canadian battery storage project going up right here in Ontario. It's happening, folks—right here in Ontario. The Oneida Energy Storage Project located in Jarvis, is really a success story.

We are, at the same time, keeping electricity costs down for businesses to help create jobs and economic growth. We're strengthening our competitiveness and making Ontario the best place in the world to do business, and I'm sure the MPP for Mississauga–Lakeshore would agree, because I see him nodding his head up and down. The people of Ontario can be confident in knowing we are

working for them. We're working to give them the opportunity to get a better job and a bigger paycheque.

As we help create jobs across the province, we know that some key sectors, such as health care and construction, continue to experience recruitment challenges. That's why we've invested over \$600 million in our successful Skills Development Fund since its launch in 2021. Let me tell you: I did the budget consultation in Windsor last Friday, and that town is benefiting like they've never seen before, investing in workers and the training centres and the young folks now who have a bright future.

It starts with the Minister of Education, who has created programs and opportunities for skilled trades starting in secondary school: the Dual Credit Program, the apprenticeship program, curriculum changes, investing in the future of this province—our youth. I know that by investing in them we're going to get a great return for the people of Ontario, and they're going to be able to get great jobs and much bigger paycheques and job security. Because, you know what, we've just started building in Ontario. This is going to go on for decades. And all of them, as they graduate, as they participate in building Ontario, are going to be able to say to their family and friends, "I helped build Ontario. I built that building. I built that road. I built that school. I built that hospital. I built that condo. I built those affordable units. I built that long-term-care facility." What a vision for the people of Ontario, for our youth of Ontario.

Thank you to the Minister of Education for investing so heavily in our youth and the curriculum changes too, so that the spark and the passion that might light a career path for our youth are open to them.

Interjection.

Hon. Peter Bethlenfalvy: I heard that, you know. I'm right here.

It's why, through the 2023 budget, we provided an additional \$224 million to leverage private-sector expertise and expand training centres and union-led training halls, two of which I visited in Windsor on Friday—totally successful. I think my partner, my MPP from Essex who joined me for those visits, and the MPP for Windsor—Tecumseh—Madam Speaker, he was hiding over there in the corner, but I found him. He can run, but he can't hide.

The two great MPPs for Windsor showed me around town, took me to all the training halls and the union-led training halls and the facilities, the great advanced research facility that's being built by Windsor university and Stellantis, in partnership—an advanced research facility going up right in front of our eyes, front page of the Windsor paper, thanks to these two fellows who are championing all things in Windsor.

People are getting confidence. The hospital in Windsor, Highway 3 and twinning that highway, the Lauzon exchange—there are things happening in this province, and doesn't it feel good? Infrastructure, workers, the economy, jobs—let's keep going.

Mr. John Yakabuski: Got some money coming my way?

Hon. Peter Bethlenfalvy: I think I heard something back there, but I'm not going to comment.

We're working for workers and standing behind the hard-working women and men who are helping to build Ontario. And I want to say a few things about women, because the Premier and I were at St. Mary Catholic Secondary School for a budget announcement this year, and we went to a grade 11 welding class to show us what they're learning and how they're doing it. Twelve students in the grade 11 class, and do you know how many were women? Eight out of 12 were women. And the two people that showed us how to do the welding, gave us the demonstration—to the Premier and I and, actually, the Minister of Education and the Minister of Labour—were two women.

I have to confess that I didn't do a very good job. The Premier did a lot better. He was able to punch out his plate. But you know what? If that doesn't give us hope that it's all hands on deck that are going to work to build this great province—and that, Madam Speaker, should make us all feel good in this House.

But at the same time, Madam Speaker, we know that household budgets are under pressure from the Bank of Canada's rapid interest rate increases and inflation—in fact, getting to 5%, and 10 increases, the fastest rise in the history of the Bank of Canada. When we all started to see the cost of living begin to rise and that pain start to hit, our government quickly took action. For the people of Ontario, we acted early to keep costs down. We eliminated the licence plate renewal fees and the licence plate stickers, and we refunded two years of eligible fees for vehicles. And do you know what? This saved the average household over \$600 so far. That's \$600 that can go to put food on the table, clothes, pay the rent, pay the mortgage. Every bit helps.

But we didn't stop there, and I know the Associate Minister of Transportation is really going to be listening carefully as I say this. We eliminated double fares for commuters transferring from GO Transit to most local transit systems in the greater Toronto area, saving transit riders up to \$1,600 a year. He's smiling, Madam Speaker. There, I saw a smile. This is important work that we're doing to help people in this environment where the costs have been going up and many people are hurting.

But we also increased the minimum wage. In fact, it went up on October 1 by 6.8%. So low-income workers can keep more money in their pockets, we launched the low-income individuals tax credit so that Ontarians have some of the lowest personal income tax rates in the land, so that you can have more money in your pocket when you work hard. You can keep some of that money. What a concept: If you're going to work hard, you deserve to have more.

And this year, we're helping over 200,000 low- to moderate-income senior families with eligible medical expenses through the Ontario Seniors Care at Home Tax Credit.

Interjection.

Hon. Peter Bethlenfalvy: The Minister for Seniors and Accessibility, he really likes it. But it's through his advocacy that we did programs like that, because he's got the

backs of seniors in this province. That help adds up to about \$115 million. That's real help for many of our seniors so they can age at home more comfortably.

As part of our plan to help keep costs down for Ontario families and businesses, our government extended the gas and fuel tax rate cuts until December 31, 2023, saving Ontario households \$195, on average, between July 1, 2022, and December 31, 2023. This is helping many with the cost of the high impact of gasoline and fuel prices, to allow people of Ontario to have more money in their pockets.

1540

I know that this is very important, for example, to the many commuters in Brampton. If you've been to Brampton lately, you know that there's a lot of cars there and there's a lot of gridlock. That's why, Madam Speaker, we're investing in the 413, building Highway 413 so that more commuters can get their kids to school, can get to work and can get goods to market.

Passing this bill—and this is important—would therefore extend the gas and fuel tax rate cuts to help people in Brampton and right across Ontario to June 30, 2024. This would amount to savings to households of \$260, on average, since the tax rate cuts were first introduced—more money for people's pockets.

Madam Speaker, I will conclude by saying this: I'm confident in the future of Ontario. Whether you're in the great riding of Etobicoke–Lakeshore, whether you're in Chatham or you're up in the north in Thunder Bay, or Oakville, or Renfrew, or Scarborough, or Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound—

Interjections.

Hon. Peter Bethlenfalvy: —and Huron–Bruce and Windsor–Tecumseh, Brampton and Barrie, Barry's Bay—right across the province—in Waterloo and Kitchener, in northern Toronto, in Timiskaming and right across this great province—in Nickel Belt. Right across this great province, we're working together to build a stronger province together.

And, Madam Speaker, I'm confident in that future, because I know when we work together, it's the economy, it's our workers, it's our people, it's our businesses that succeed in the face of world uncertainty. Because when we come together, the people of this province can accomplish remarkable things, and we're seeing that happen in front of us. Working together, we can overcome any obstacle. We've proved that, and we're going to continue to prove it. By passing this bill, the members of this House can help us build a stronger Ontario together.

Thank you for your time. Thank you to this House. I will now share my time with the great member from Oakville.

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): I recognize the member for Oakville.

Mr. Stephen Crawford: Thank you to the minister for sharing his time with myself and the member from Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound. It's an honour to be able to work with him and work on the fall economic statement.

Speaker, it's with great pleasure that I rise here today to speak on Bill 146, Building a Strong Ontario Together

Act, 2023. Let me begin by saying I'm very confident in our government's vision for the future of Ontario and the Ontario economy. Today, the world is rife with geopolitical and economic uncertainties, yet the Ontario economy and our communities continue to demonstrate an incredible resiliency. Uncertainty can cause indecision. When things are uncertain, the urge can be great to let things settle down before making a decision; to follow, not to lead.

I'm here to say that this is not our government's way. In the face of uncertainty, we are building a strong Ontario together. With our plan, we are putting in place the infrastructure—the roads, the bridges, the highways, the schools, the health facilities and so on—to support the growth in Ontario's economy and our communities.

With our plan, we are also building a strong Ontario for our labour force by creating the skilled workforce for the jobs of today and tomorrow. We're building a strong Ontario together by helping those who are in need during these most difficult and uncertain times. We are building a strong Ontario together by connecting the people and families of Ontario with the health care and the child care they need, when they need it and where they need it.

Our plan features key themes to help drive the strategy home, Speaker. Among the top is Better Services for You. Our government is improving public services and making it convenient and faster for the people of Ontario to access them. This is a point we have driven home and shown, time and time again.

Today in Ontario, thanks to our leadership, accessing driver's licences, health cards, birth certificates and many other services is faster and more convenient for the people of Ontario and for the businesses of Ontario. This means less time interacting with government and more time getting on with your life or your time for business.

Our leadership extends to health care as well. When it comes to health care, our government is connecting the people of Ontario to the care that is convenient, closer to home, and covered by their OHIP card and never through their credit card.

Thanks to our government's plan and leadership, the wait-list for surgeries has been reduced by more than 250,000, from a peak seen in March 2022.

Today in Ontario, treatments for 19 common ailments can now be prescribed by pharmacists across the province of Ontario, freeing up times for our medical professionals. Expanding the scope of practice of pharmacists to prescribe over-the-counter medication for common ailments has been an incredible success.

Speaker, our work on making services better for you is tireless. Through last year's budget, our government is investing \$1 billion over three years to get more people connected to care in their home and community, where they are most comfortable. Today, we are accelerating home care investments to bring funding for 2023-24 up to \$569 million. This includes supporting home and community care workers, to the tune of more than \$370 million, for rate increases and investments to hire more care workers. Expanding home care services and improving the quality of care is part of it.

We are also expanding access to breast cancer screening for women aged 40 to 49. This expansion beginning in the fall of 2024 will help more women detect and get treatment for breast cancer sooner. It is a fact that early detection and increased access to care saves lives. By expanding the Ontario Breast Screening Program, we will increase access for more than 305,000 additional people to connect to the services they need to ensure timely diagnosis and access to treatment as early as possible.

Better services for you also relates to mental health and addiction services. Here, we are providing additional funding, to the tune of over \$425 million over three years. This includes a 5% increase in the base funding for community-based mental health and addictions services provided by the Ministry of Health, again, with the objective of making it easier and faster to connect people to care.

Speaker, as we make health care more convenient, we know we must also invest in growing and retaining the health care workforce if we are to make services better for the people of Ontario. Since 2018, over 60,000 new nurses and nearly 8,000 new physicians have begun to practise right here in Ontario. These are facts we can all be proud of. But we know the status quo is still not enough, and that's why an additional \$80-million investment over three years is being provided to further expand nursing program enrolment. To address immediate health care personnel shortages and to expand the workforce for years to come, we are investing \$200 million this year.

We understand it is challenging for medical students to find residency spots right here at home in Ontario. So, to support these graduates, we're adding 154 postgraduate medical training seats to prioritize Ontario residents trained at home and abroad, beginning in 2024 and going forward. Speaker, 100 medical undergraduate seats are also being added, and Ontario students will continue to be prioritized for these spots.

Affording a place to call home today is a struggle for many. Many of those struggling are some of the most at-risk people in our communities. That is why Ontario supportive housing and homelessness programs are now receiving an additional \$202 million each year. With this investment, our government will help people experiencing or at risk of homelessness, or those who are escaping intimate partner violence. It will support the valuable community organizations that deliver housing to them.

1550

Youth leaving the child welfare system in Ontario are among the most vulnerable. They are known to be at higher risk of being trafficked or experiencing homelessness. In short, they continue to need support from our government. That's why we are providing \$170 million over three years to the Youth Leaving Care program, to help set these young people up for success. Speaker, there's a key detail I do want to note: We are expanding the program so those up to 23 years of age are also supported. Previously, eligibility ended at 21 years of age. We are now ensuring that more of our young people are getting the support that they need.

As was noted earlier, the 2023 fall economic statement drives our plan further in regard to how our government is

continuing to do its utmost to build Ontario and work for the people of Ontario.

The statutory changes contained in this bill can be seen as where the rubber hits the road, in our efforts to build a strong Ontario.

Rubber is hitting the road when it comes to protecting our communities and unlocking new housing opportunities, with \$200 million over three years being invested in a new Housing-Enabling Water Systems Fund. This will fund repair, rehabilitation, and the expansion of various and important municipal water infrastructure projects that our province needs. These are projects that impact and improve the systems we use in our day-to-day lives, day in and day out.

With our additional \$100-million investment in the Invest Ontario Fund, we are further supporting stronger Ontario infrastructure. This total of \$500 million will enable Invest Ontario to help attract more leading companies to locations right across the province of Ontario, further support businesses that are already here, and create great-paying jobs in communities across the province.

We are also supporting Ontario businesses with the Ontario Made Manufacturing Investment Tax Credit. This credit announced in the March budget will help Ontario's manufacturers lower their costs, innovate, and become more competitive. In sum, it offers an estimated \$780 million in income tax support over three years. This is just one of the many reasons why Ontario today is experiencing a manufacturing renaissance.

Rubber is also hitting the road in regard to how we are strengthening Ontario's position as a global leader across the supply chain of electric vehicles, or EVs. As the Minister of Economic Development has pointed out, we have attracted over \$26 billion in the last three years in transformative automotive and EV battery-related investments from global automakers, parts suppliers and EV battery and materials manufacturers.

Ontario is also a leader in the critical minerals space, and we are strengthening Ontario's position to be a global leader in mining as well. Mining, unfortunately, was forgotten in no man's land by the previous government. With this bill, we are now proposing to enhance the Ontario Focused Flow-Through Share Tax Credit eligibility to help stimulate the critical mineral exploration and improve access to capital for small exploration companies. If passed, the change would start with the 2023 tax year and add \$12 million per year in tax credit support to Ontario's critical minerals mining industry.

Rubber is also hitting the road when it comes to our work to literally build Ontario. Speaker, we are building, and we are building a lot. For example, we are making investments that are supporting more than 50 hospital projects and adding 3,000 new beds by the time this is done, moving the needle on improving access to reliable, quality care.

Health infrastructure is not the only place we are investing. Totalling an historic \$6.4 billion since 2019, this is our planned investment to build 30,000 new long-term-

care beds and upgrade more than 28,000 existing beds across the province by 2028.

We are also investing in schools and child care. We are building new schools and adding child care spaces and modernizing school infrastructure—investments to the tune of \$22 billion over 10 years. A total of 21 new schools and additions have been opened this school year alone, equalling 7,000 new student spaces and six French-language school projects. Our investments are demonstrating progress towards our goal of creating 86,000 new, high-quality, affordable child care spaces by 2026. Our investments will yield over 23,000 newly created spaces, including over 1,500 new licensed child care spaces in schools, by the end of 2023.

Our government is also taking action when it comes to helping the people of Ontario to find and afford a place to live. Speaker, on this point, I can discuss how we are encouraging builders to construct more rental units. We are encouraging construction of new purpose-built rental housing by taking steps to remove the full 8% provincial portion of the HST on qualifying projects. Together with federal actions, this would remove the full 13% HST on qualifying new purpose-built rental housing and ensure it's easier to build more houses for the people of Ontario looking for a place to call home. We are also using targeted municipal investments and other levers to help build at least 1.5 million homes by 2031. The tools we are using in this regard include the Building Faster Fund, strong-mayor powers and the Streamline Development Approval Fund. To facilitate all this building work going on, we are supporting skills development and training, with more than \$1 billion invested over three years in Ontario's Skilled Trades Strategy, as well as investing \$860 million in the training stream and \$224 million in the capital stream of the Skills Development Fund.

Speaker, I know it has been said as part of the debate on this bill: Ontario's population and jobs markets are on a growth trajectory. The foundation for our economy here in Ontario is extremely strong. As part of helping and welcoming more skilled immigrants to Ontario, we are investing \$25 million over three years in the Ontario Immigrant Nominee Program and expanding the Ontario bridge training program with an additional \$3 million in 2023-24. Speaker, the objective here is to ensure skilled newcomers start working in their trained fields faster. Importantly, we are removing Canadian work experience requirements for certain regulated professions to make it easier for newcomers to work in the professions that they trained for.

With our plan, we are also supporting growth of Ontario's economy and communities in other, more short-term and direct ways, for things as simple and as ordinary as getting from point A to point B safer and quicker. For example, we are supporting people who are on the go, providing transit riders with more options and convenient ways to pay. This is on top of eliminating double fares at most local transit facilities when using GO Transit services, and on top of increasing Presto discounts for youth and post-secondary students. Speaker, when it

comes to fees, we are reducing them. We are making life more affordable for travellers as well as the people of Ontario.

1600

Speaker, let me conclude by saying our government's plan is helping build critical infrastructure in growing Ontario communities—all this while laying a strong fiscal foundation for future generations. This bill, Bill 146, and its measures support our plan. It provides a responsible, targeted approach that delivers the flexibility Ontario needs to help address the ongoing economic uncertainty. It provides supports to those who need it, while also leading to a path to balance the budget. I encourage all members to vote in favour of Bill 146, Building a Strong Ontario Together Act, 2023.

And, with that, I would like to pass my time over to my good friend and colleague the member from Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound.

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): I recognize the member from Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound.

Mr. Rick Byers: I thank the member for Oakville for his great remarks and, before him, the minister for his remarks on this important bill. Once again, it's my great pleasure to speak on this great bill, Bill 146.

So, today, I rise in support of the third reading of the fall bill, Building a Strong Ontario Together Act (Budget Measures), 2023. As with my earlier bill comments, today I will focus on specific statutory aspects of the bill and how they support our government's plan.

Many of the notable measures relate to the financial services sector and Ontario's capital markets. With this bill, we are fostering economic growth, strengthening competition and increased investment across our province. Our government is looking to modernize Ontario's capital markets, while continuing to enhance investor protections. Now more than ever, Ontario's economy and capital markets are undergoing constant evolution and change. Recent events, ongoing economic uncertainty and new technological developments, such as digital assets, have reinforced the importance of capital formation and investor protection, and how enhancing Ontario's competitiveness is imperative when fostering economic growth and jobs in our province. If approved, the proposed legislative changes in the bill will encourage market innovation and greater retail investor access to investment opportunities, right here in Ontario, and it will do this while enhancing investor protection.

Speaker, the province's financial sector is very large, especially here in the city of Toronto. Direct jobs in the industry are very substantial, forming a broad economic base, and its financial sector output is a catalyst for investment. These bill measures would not only support the industry, but also strengthen its regulation and enhance investor redress. These are very important measures and, if approved, the government will continue to work with the capital market sector, the Ontario Securities Commission—the OSC—and other stakeholders to ensure the new legislative framework protects investors and consumers, while supporting Ontario businesses.

Among the bill items are proposed amendments to provide the OSC with the regulatory authority to permit eligible public companies with an established record of appropriate financial disclosure in Ontario to file a streamlined prospectus. These measures would streamline the access to capital for regular market-accessing companies, known in the industry as well-known seasoned issuers. Because of their active role, measures that reduce regulatory burden for well-known seasoned issuers would make it more efficient for them to raise capital and foster economic development in the province.

Speaker, a similar rationale underpins the proposed amendments to the Securities Act and Commodity Futures Act, addressing automatic and streamlined reciprocal regulatory orders. These proposed amendments are to provide that orders and settlements made by Canadian securities regulators outside of Ontario apply automatically in Ontario, as if made by the OSC. The amendments would also permit the OSC to reciprocate orders and settlements made by comparable authorities, such as courts, foreign regulators, self-regulatory organizations and exchanges, in a streamlined manner. These measures would serve to support enforcement of securities laws, protect Ontario investors in a timelier manner, and build confidence in our markets, while reducing regulatory burden. They're an important step in growing market protections and building a successful Ontario.

Other changes proposed to the Securities Act and the Commodity Futures Act are aimed at strengthening notable safeguards for investors and for consumers. With these proposed amendments, our government is protecting those who would come forward to do the right thing. These changes would not only amend the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act to protect the identity of whistle-blowers in the event of an access-to-information request, but would also amend the Securities Act and the Commodity Futures Act to protect other individuals against reprisals and provide immunity from legal proceedings to extend statutory protection to whistle-blowers. You see, Speaker, the OSC Whistleblower Program and other whistleblower programs encourage and rely on individuals in the capital markets sector to disclose information of misconduct and wrongdoings that might otherwise go undetected and cause harm. Our programs encourage and rely on individuals in the capital market sector to disclose information of misconduct and wrongdoing that might otherwise go undetected and cause harm. These changes are expected to strengthen enforcement and provide further investor protection by increasing the number of individuals who report misconduct and wrongdoings to the OSC and other organizations. These are very good measures, because when market participants know these provisions are out there, they will ensure they behave in line with the rules, and this awareness will be an important factor in their operations and building a fairer Ontario. This improved accountability and transparency would not only be good for capital markets, but it will help foster wider economic growth by boosting confidence in Ontario as a place to do business and a destination of

choice for investment. And Mr. Speaker, you know and others know what a priority that is for our government—and as has been noted, 700,000 jobs in Ontario now that weren't there before. Electric vehicles will be built here in our province, and other measures like the manufacturing tax credit will spur economic development all over the province and in each of our communities—so important.

Next, amendments are proposed to a variety of statutes having to do with the distribution of disgorged amounts. In summary, these amendments would prescribe a statutory framework that would make the distribution of disgorged funds to harmed investors more predictable, timely and efficient. Disgorged funds may be used to compensate investors when they have suffered financial losses due to a person or a company's non-compliance with the Securities Act or Commodity Futures Act. A clear and transparent distribution process would not only benefit people who may be due money following a finding of non-compliance with the Securities Act or Commodity Futures Act, but it would also create more effective and predictable operational processes for the OSC.

Speaker, the bill also contains measures related to the management of broader public, institutional investments. These measures, if approved, would benefit Ontario municipalities and, by extension, the people and businesses that call them home. These measures focus on the Investment Management Corporation of Ontario Act and municipal investment boards.

1610

Proposed changes would allow municipal funds, which are maintained under the authority of an investment board or joint investment board, to be invested with the Investment Management Corp. of Ontario, also known as IMCO. Speaker, this change will provide clarity and address a current discrepancy for our municipal partners that wish to invest with IMCO. This proposal is aimed at enabling, though not requiring, investment boards and joint investment boards established under the Municipal Act, and investment boards established under the City of Toronto Act, to become members of IMCO. This would clear the way to allowing municipal funds to be invested with the Investment Management Corp. of Ontario.

An independent investment management organization, IMCO is designed to serve broader public sector clients of Ontario. IMCO has over \$73 billion in assets under management and is one of the largest institutional investment managers in Canada. Our government recognizes the importance of efficient and prudent management of assets across the Ontario broader public sector. IMCO provides pooled asset management for Ontario's broader public sector.

IMCO can offer smaller public-sector funds benefits such as improved access to alternative investments that private or larger funds typically enjoy through scale. I would add, as noted by the minister, Ontario has an excellent track record of similar pooled investment funds and pension plans. OMERS pension plan, for example, is an amalgamation of all the municipal pension plans in the province of Ontario under one roof, and it's a very

effective model. I saw that first-hand when I was there. And compared to other international jurisdictions, Ontario municipalities have a more effective investment approach than they do, so we're very fortunate to have the folks back in the 1960s think of this approach and implement it here in Ontario.

IMCO aims to provide broader public sector pension and investment funds with access to an end-to-end solution that includes asset mix advice and implementation, a range of investment strategies, risk management and reporting. Thus, our government thinks it makes a lot of sense to facilitate municipalities in more centrally managing and administering their funds where relevant.

As the minister said, in this bill are measures that continue our responsible, targeted approach that is designed to help Ontario get through the uncertainties of today—all a part of our plan to build a strong Ontario together, a plan and approach that includes a heavy emphasis on health care. Mental health, addiction treatment and addiction recovery are essential facets of health care. Contained in the bill are legislative amendments that will strengthen Ontario's participation in ongoing opioid cost-recovery litigation.

Ontarians have paid an enormous price due to the opioid crisis, Madam Speaker. That's why Ontario is an active participant in national litigation that is aimed at holding pharmaceutical manufacturers, wholesalers and their marketing consultants accountable for damages caused by the opioid crisis. These proposed legislative amendments would help hold the pharmaceutical industry accountable for damages caused by the opioid crisis and the impact on the Ontario health care system. These amendments would bring Ontario's legislation into alignment with recent changes to BC's equivalent legislation.

In every community, we have all seen the direct impact the opioid crisis is having on our most vulnerable citizens. More needs to be done and our government continues to take action on this front, and with this proposal, would continue that work. Any proceeds from these lawsuits would be invested into front-line mental health and addictions services.

Additionally, this bill contains proposed new legislation that would ratify Ontario's decision to join the coordinated vaping product taxation agreement with the federal government in order to help reduce youth vaping and the associated health risks. Speaker, this change, if approved, would allow the federal government to levy an additional provincial excise duty on vaping products intended for sale in Ontario at the same rate as the existing federal excise duty. Youth vaping continues to pose health risks. Ontario is working to reduce youth vaping and will continue to closely monitor the use of vapour products and assess options to prevent and reduce youth vaping in the future. This is yet another important step in our plan.

Speaker, our plan also focuses a lot on infrastructure spending, as you've heard, and job creation, especially in sectors such as construction and skilled trades, which are so crucial to taking our plan down the road to the finish line.

Contained in the documents on page 18 are the amounts that we project to spend over the next 10 years in the major sectors of infrastructure. I give the government great credit. Normally, governments are only looking out as far as potentially the next election. This government is looking out 10 years. In transit, that means \$70 billion; provincial highways, \$28 billion; hospitals, \$48 billion; education, \$22 billion. These are huge numbers and they crystallize and summarize the commitment our government has to long-term thinking and long-term investment in infrastructure. It's so important, not only for us today but for future generations for their health care, for their education and for their housing. I'm so very pleased and proud to be part of a government with that long-term focus.

On a related point are proposed amendments in the bill related to the Construction Act. They have to do with the financing aspects of some construction projects. Specifically, the amendments are aimed at authorizing the Lieutenant Governor in Council to make regulations allowing the minimum surety bonding requirements for large, non-P3 public infrastructure projects to be adjusted, as appropriate. These proposals, if approved, would allow for lower minimum bonding requirements for large projects that do not involve private financing. If passed, this would help attract more contractors to bid on capital projects, fostering and diversifying market competition.

This is another important part of the bill, as well as the priorities noted. You heard the minister earlier talking about our government's priorities, and those are included in the spending priorities: health, \$81 billion proposed to be spent this year; education, \$34.7 billion; post-secondary education, \$12 billion—huge amounts of spending for the priorities of this government. But as the minister noted, with fiscal discipline, we can ensure it's us paying the bills, not the next generation.

Speaker, the proposed legislative initiatives in the bill under discussion today are so important. They support our plan in so many ways; some direct and obvious, some less direct and less obvious. But seen as a whole, they all support our plan and all fit together. The measures in this bill continue our responsible, targeted approach that is designed to help get Ontario through the uncertainties of today, and it's such an important part of our framework as well.

I'm happy to continue to support and hope members vote for this bill because it's an approach that will build critical infrastructure in communities right across the province while also laying a strong fiscal foundation for future generations.

In closing, let me just say that I encourage all members to vote in support of the fall bill, Building a Strong Ontario Together Act (Budget Measures), 2023.

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

MPP Jamie West: Thank you to the members opposite for their debate. This bill is called the Building a Strong Ontario Together Act. Several times they talked about how great things would be when we come together, but I'm not seeing us come together.

All of us have read the Feed Ontario Hunger Report that was put on each and every one of our desks. There has been a 41% increase in food bank use. One in six people are employed, using food banks. That's an 82% increase since the Conservative government was elected. That is a 37% increase since last year. Eleven per cent of our children are using food banks on a regular basis. This isn't Ontario coming together; this is a government that has left people behind in despair with the highest use of food banks ever.

1620

Speaker, with \$5.4 billion in a slush fund for an emergency, is it time for the Conservative government to finally admit that we're in an emergency when it comes to feeding the people of Ontario?

Mr. Stephen Crawford: First, let me say I have an issue with your language. Slush fund—Speaker, perhaps you could clarify this, but if you look at the wording of that, it means putting money aside for illicit purposes. So I think you're implying something with that. Let me start off by saying that. Speaker, I encourage you to keep the rules here in Parliament at a high level of standards.

With that, let me say what the fall economic statement—

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): Order, please. We need to listen to the answer.

Mr. Stephen Crawford: I'm trying to give an answer to the question, but I'm being heckled here by the opposition.

However, what we are doing to support the people of Ontario is beyond what your government did, beyond what the Liberal-NDP coalition did. We've increased the ODSP rates significantly. We've indexed them. We've increased the minimum wage to the highest level ever. We've brought in a LIFT tax credit, which is the lowest tax rates for working people in Ontario. We're also talking about the carbon tax, which the opposition doesn't want to talk about, which will reduce the cost of food and everything that we buy. So join us. Join us—

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): Thank you. We need to move to the next question.

Mr. Will Bouma: I was super interested to hear about this new infrastructure bank announced by my colleague the Minister of Finance. I know that we hear it all the time from so many of our great colleagues, that more needs to be built. We've heard the Premier say it. We've heard our ministers say it. Most importantly, we've heard it from the people of Ontario.

That is why I was so interested in this new announcement of the Ontario Infrastructure Bank and would appreciate hearing in more detail what this bank will do, because, quite frankly, I don't know exactly what it will do, and I look forward to hearing from one of my colleagues across the way, one of the parliamentary assistants, on what this will do.

Could one of the members please explain how this will assist in building infrastructure—just to kind of fight back

on some of the narratives that we hear over on this side of the House, from my left and from my right here?

Mr. Rick Byers: I thank the member very much for the question. I know he has to fend off comments from the left and the right. It's a tough challenge, but I appreciate his weathering it.

I am pleased to talk about the Ontario Infrastructure Bank. The member is right; it's a very important part of the fall economic statement and a very important new organization that will be an investment partner here in Ontario.

During my remarks, you heard me talk about OMERS pension plan, but also the Ontario Teachers' Pension Plan, Healthcare of Ontario Pension Plan and other large capital partners that invest collaboratively in public infrastructure investments. So this Ontario investment bank will be investing with those types and other partners on important infrastructure here in Ontario. Whether it's long-term care, whether it's education or municipal infrastructure, this will be a powerful investment partner for the future of Ontario. Thank you.

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

Mr. Tom Rakocevic: With food bank usage rising 38% and with 800,000 additional new Ontarians using food banks, it really shows that this budget is not working for everybody equally.

Will the government members who have spoken to this bill acknowledge that this budget is not helping the most vulnerable in our province? What are they willing to do to help fight this problem, with so many Ontarians now being forced to food banks, even working families? It's just unbelievable—children and more.

Mr. Stephen Crawford: I think this budget bill is doing a lot for the people of Ontario. Now, that's not to take away—there are those in need in the province. We acknowledge that; of course there are. When you have 800,000 people come to your province in one year, there are going to be some people that are going to need food bank usage. We acknowledge that. That's why we support it with additional funding to organizations that are sponsoring food banks and whatnot. Now, that's the one side of it.

The other side of it is having a job is what is going to make the people of Ontario in the best position that they could be in. We are creating the right environment here in Ontario to create jobs, with investments in this province that are unprecedented: \$26 billion in the automotive sector with the EV manufacturing. That is going to create good-paying jobs for the people of Ontario, rather than have the cheap service jobs that the Liberal-NDP coalition wanted and actually stated on the record; they thought that's where the future was. We're creating good, manufacturing jobs right here in Ontario.

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

Mr. Deepak Anand: First of all, I want to thank the wonderful members for their remarks. We all know that prosperity needs infrastructure, roads, hospitals. And

when we have people, they need houses. What I want to talk about is—I actually want to concentrate on another topic, which is the critical minerals—critical to the province's economic prosperity and the growth of northern Ontario, which has been not taken care of by the previous government.

So my question to both the members is: Could you please explain how this government is stepping up and supporting northern Ontario?

Mr. Stephen Crawford: That is a phenomenal question from the member from Mississauga–Malton, I will say, and I'll tell you why: because we never get those questions from the opposition. Critical minerals and mining are such a critical part of Ontario, yet we never get questions on that topic. They play an important role in creating good jobs, building northern communities, Indigenous communities and shaping the future of the electric vehicle manufacturing.

So what are we doing? We are encouraging and building the development of mining in Ontario. We're encouraging it through the flow-through tax credit which we're putting in place, which will give small investors investing in small Ontario-based companies that are exploring for critical minerals right here in Ontario. That is going to have a flow-through effect that is a multiplier that we couldn't even imagine. And that's right here in Ontario. We're encouraging investment and that investment is not only helping northern Ontario, it's part of why a lot of these foreign companies are coming to Ontario to manufacture. They want access to the critical minerals right here in Ontario.

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

M^{me} France Gélinas: I was happy to hear the member from Oakville talk about the breast screening that will now be available to younger women. It will save lives. But we already know that all of the breast screening clinics that exist in our public hospitals have long wait-lists. They are not able to meet the one-to-two month delay to provide the care.

Are we going to see what we are seeing more and more of in health-care by this government: preferential treatment being given to new, for-profit clinics, most of them owned by Clearpoint corporations to handle the backlogs, when every single public hospital is telling us that they could see a whole lot more women a whole lot faster if only this government would invest into the existing public site for breast screening?

Mr. Rick Byers: I thank the member for her question in this regard. I know she cares and is very knowledgeable about health care, and also, I'm pleased that she acknowledged the important change that we are making on breast screening and that important announcement from the Minister of Health recently—that will be an important evolution in our health care investment. I just want to emphasize the priority this government has on health care, both from an operational spending point of view, where this year we're spending over \$80 billion, over \$81 billion, growing to \$87 billion by 2025-26—and on the

infrastructure side where investments in hospitals over the next 10 years will be \$48 billion.

So we will be continuing to invest in health care in this province, and we're seeing results through expansion in service we've seen for cataracts, hips and knees, in the evolution of the service provision this government has provided. We want to continue that to give greater access to health care for Ontarians.

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): Further debate? The member for Waterloo.

Ms. Catherine Fife: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker—

Interjections.

Ms. Catherine Fife: Thanks. Let's wake this place up. Let's wake this place up because we have some serious issues in this province. I always say when I stand in my place that it's a pleasure, a privilege, an honour to speak to the Legislature. Primarily, that is a very true statement. But sometimes, I must tell you, that I look at a piece of legislation that the government has brought forward, and I think to myself, what the hell? Because there are so many issues right now in the province of Ontario that this particular piece of legislation is supposed to answer to.

1630

You've heard me say this in this House before, that budgets are moral documents. They speak to the priorities of the people we are elected to serve. And I like to think that we all enter public service for very similar reasons. We come to this place—we put our name forward on a ballot in our communities. Some of us have served at the municipal or school board level. Some of us have even served at the federal level and now we're at the provincial level, but all with the intention, I hope, of making things better, of improving the quality of life for the people that we're elected to serve.

I heard the finance minister say the "quality of life." Well, let me tell you something: It is really hard in this province to maintain a standard quality of life right now in Ontario for so many people. In my opening at the second reading—this is third reading of this particular piece of legislation, Bill 146, the fall economic statement—I mentioned that this piece of legislation missed the moment. I still maintain that.

We supported it at second reading because we are the official opposition. Our job is to come here and try to make legislation better, try to reflect the true needs of the people we see in our communities.

This morning in question period I talked about the Feed Ontario report. I talked about how things are not getting better. I don't know if the government truly hears it. I don't know if they really see it. I don't know if you're so insulated in your own Conservative world that you don't see the guy that's sleeping on the street just outside of Queen's Park. I don't know if you see the guy that's sleeping in a tent just north of Queen's Park. I don't know if you see the encampments and the poverty and the pain in your own communities, because Bill 146 largely ignores those people.

So budgets are about choices; I believe this firmly. When I've gone through this entire budgetary process,

with every single year that this Progressive Conservative government—and I use the “progressive” part very loosely, I want to say. When I watch this process, I have seen the demise of our democracy, without exaggeration.

For instance, with this piece of legislation, no Ministry of Finance briefing was offered, so no explanation. The finance committee was called the afternoon after the debate ended on this piece of legislation; we were called to finance committee. We set less than 24 hours for the people of this province to come here and speak to this piece of legislation—less than 24 hours. So there’s a reason why only 15 delegations out of the entire province were able to appear before us. And I want to say, seven of those were written submissions, Madam Speaker. We had scheduled three full days of hearings; we got one day and one morning.

If the level of engagement in the public is not permitted or allowed to participate in their own democracy, you are going to get a flawed piece of legislation, which is what Bill 146 is. It misses the moment on health care, on education, on the environment and, yes, on housing. Housing—which is the number one issue that we are facing in all of our ridings: affordability and housing, and they are definitely connected.

What I will say to this government is that the fact that the delegations that were able to come—and it did appear that at least one of the delegations had the heads-up to come before the committee, Madam Speaker. They knew that this was going to be happening. We reached out to every not-for-profit. Of course Women’s Crisis Services of Waterloo Region would want to come to Queen’s Park and talk about their three-year wait-list. Of course they would, because there’s no additional funding in this budget for that. Of course the Ontario Coalition for Better Child Care would like to have come in person; they were only able to submit a written submission, because you will never get to \$10-a-day child care in the province of Ontario, which is an economic driver for particularly women in Ontario—you’ll never get to that place without the ECEs, who deserve to be respected and paid appropriately. Of course, they wanted to come. Of course, the Ontario Nurses’ Association would like to come as well and speak to the fact that they’re still waiting for N95s. I’m sure that they would want to talk about the budget—the impact of the spring budget, where you removed COVID funding, which is now falling again on local hospitals as numbers rise. Numbers are rising right here in this Legislature, Madam Speaker. People are getting sick, right? But there was no funding allocated in the fall economic statement to recognize those cost pressures. I’m sure Jasmine and John Vanthof over there have got a couple of questions on that particular issue as well. All of our communities are facing a health human-resources crisis. Is there additional funding here? No, there’s not.

I want to start off in a very unusual place on this particular budget, because I want to talk about how—because the government will say, “Oh it’s just that you want more money, more money.” No, it’s about the

accountability and the transparency of where the funding is going.

One perfect example of how broken the health care system is in the province of Ontario is the closure of the emergency room in Minden. I’m going to go through some of the finances, because that was a community that fought for their emergency room, because do you know what happens to communities that don’t have health care? They die. Businesses don’t go there, tourists don’t go there, families don’t go there, because they want access to health care. The social infrastructure investment, through the health care dollars, has a return on investment in the economy, in the vibrancy, in the health and the well-being of a community. And when you close their emergency room, those people are scared. The emergency room in Minden, for instance, experienced just in the year prior to their sudden closure—their forced closure, I will say, and this was with the Haliburton Highlands Health Services. The province, the Ministry of Health was late with \$1.75 million. Now in a small community, that’s a lot of money. Those are a lot of dollars. They point to the fact that Bill 124 obviously had a cooling effect on retaining and recruiting nurses. You can’t open an operating room without a nurse. We know this. And this caused the high cost of agency nurses—up to \$300,000 a month.

So the province participated in the decline and the diminishment of those health care human resources, and then they failed to flow the money to address those needs in that community.

In one report, and this is from the former CEO; I believe she’s on leave. There was a quote that says, “Pressures and scarcities of recruits to fill vacancies has led to continued staff replacement through use of staffing agencies.” She added that there are increased accommodation costs in acute care and the same pressures across the entire system. And then she says, “These pressures, along with rising costs of utilities..., raw food, and supplies, are contributing to an ongoing deficit.” But it goes on to say that the deficit, which at that time was only \$220,000—they were running a deficit of \$220,200. This was actually looking better than reality because they had done everything that they could: They had disposed of some property. They had tried to build up their reserves. They tried to stay alive. They were fighting for their very existence. But, it was sad to say, they were “trending very high ... throughout the year in spite of all of the different risk management that the organization” put “in place to deal with that.”

So this is a community that was stretching those dollars as far as they could, looking to leadership from the Ministry of Health and from the Haliburton Highlands Health Services.

Then, at the end—and I’m still quoting the CEO—she noted that they were also waiting for cash to flow from the Ministry of Health, “and this has been for some months now.” At this point, in then-2021, they were owed \$820,000 for their last fiscal year and \$928,000 in their current fiscal year.

So the Ministry of Health, who—and this is continuing a pattern, and this is an example of how mismanaged funds

are right now. You have the minister making announcements, and you have allocations within budgets, and then we have the Financial Accountability Officer who is saying very clearly that this money is not getting out to the communities that are in need. And where is it going?

1640

Currently, Ontario has a \$5.4-billion contingency fund. In this fall economic statement, six months into the budget year, with all the funding pressures that we know exist in the province of Ontario, the finance minister dropped \$2.5 billion into that fund. This is why I started these comments off by talking about priorities. If you have \$2.5 billion that clearly has not flowed to communities for whatever reason—we even saw \$78.1 million come back on home care. And the return on investment for home care, alleviating those ER pressures, long-term-care pressures—the fact that that money is getting sent back to the Ministry of Health because it was unspent is indicative of a structural issue in the Ministry of Health. And the Ministry of Health is the largest budget line office.

I want to finish off this Minden part:

“The \$1.75 million in overdue funds are for incremental COVID-19 expenditures, long-term-care funding, COVID assessment centre, wage enhancement funding, and nursing retention bonuses....

“However, we will continue to communicate” the “deficit position and continued operating pressures to Ontario Health East for further support.”

Even when they had done everything that they could and there was this pact with the provincial government—ironically, a lot of those dollars that we’re talking about were actually from the federal government. It was this provincial government, in the height of the 2021 year, that was getting transfer payments to deal with COVID from the federal government. Those dollars were reallocated as provincial dollars, but, clearly, many communities never saw those dollars. Where did those dollars go? I would suggest to you that they’re sitting in an unallocated contingency fund, when people need those dollars, when they need those investments in their communities.

So here in the Minden community—no emergency room, barely have a health care system to call their own. And make no mistake about it, this community continues to fight. We continue to support the Minden community, because when health care dies in a community, those communities die too, and that is an unacceptable state of affairs in the province of Ontario. If you value rural communities, which this government pretends to do, then you don’t let a hospital suffer like that.

We’ve had record emergency closures in the province. How many, France, so far?

M^{me} France Gélinas: Close to 40.

Ms. Catherine Fife: Close to 40 just this year?

M^{me} France Gélinas: Emergency room closures.

Ms. Catherine Fife: Emergency room closures. That’s an emergency. One would say that that would be an emergency, right?

So, in this budget, a minuscule amount of additional funding for health care—but I’m going to get to that,

because where those dollars are going is very interesting. This government has created a parallel system of health care—private. You may not always have to pay with your credit card—although, increasingly, we are hearing that this is happening—but the taxpayer, at the end of the day, is paying three times as much for the same procedure. If you think that’s a good investment, you are not reading the room right. It’s actually costing the province of Ontario—in fact, I have your new slogan: “Less for More.” That’s your new slogan. It used to be “For the People.” It used to be “Open for Business.” Now it’s “Less for More,” in the province of Ontario. And make no mistake about it, this is impacting the health and well-being of the people of this province.

There are so many good not-for-profits in this province. They do their due diligence. Hunger Report 2023: Why Ontarians Can’t Get Ahead should be a wake-up call. You shouldn’t be able to even speak in your message box any longer.

In my community, Kitchener-Waterloo, one in 10 households struggle to afford to put food on their table and now go to the food bank, and that number is up from one in 14 households last year; the year prior, it was one in 20. So you see this trend is that more and more people are relying on food banks, and the food bank system is at a breaking point.

The largest demographic for food banks are seniors in Ontario, because at the same time you’re talking about EV factories and highways to the cottage—meanwhile, you removed rent control in 2018, and we are seeing record evictions, record demovictions, and seniors on fixed incomes that have nowhere to go. They have nowhere to turn.

One lady in my office—she told me I could tell this story. Her name is Beatrice. She’s 82. Her friend Janice, who is 79, drove her to get some food. This is the first time she ever had to go to the food bank. And she said, “I can’t eat all that. I can’t eat this kind of food.” It’s a culture shock. Why would this ever be acceptable to us as legislators, that when you’re in your eighties, you have to take your first trip to a food bank or you have to start looking for a roommate? I can tell you right now, when I’m 79 or 80, I’m not going to be looking for a roommate, Madam Speaker. Housing insecurity, food insecurity: These are all very real in the province of Ontario.

I will say that Feed Ontario—they’re not fundamentally asking to throw money at the problem. No, they’re saying to fix the structural issues that have led people to use a food bank. Their pathway to poverty is shockingly simple.

These are their recommendations—and I just would like to have your undivided attention for the one minute: increasing provincial social assistance rates and reducing clawbacks on earned income and government benefits—a great idea.

Investing in building and maintaining social housing and improving tenant protections: You can do this. You can bring back some sort of tenant protections that we had in 2018, because the affordable housing stock is old. The wait-list is 10 years in Waterloo region, and they’re desperately trying to create more stock, but they can’t

without a funding partner. And you can't build that affordable housing off the local tax base. It's just not doable, and nor is it their job. Housing is a provincial responsibility. It falls under our responsibility as a provincial Legislature to ensure that housing options are invested in.

That is why we brought forward the Ontario housing plan, homes for everybody: because the government must go back into the business of non-market housing. When the banks are supporting us in this regard, you should take a look at it. Because at the end of the day, the private developers and contractors are in the business to build some homes and create some profit. That is their job, and some of them do a very good job of it. But I will tell you that they're not in the business of revenue-neutral projects. They're not just looking to break even and then they build housing.

We have proposed this to the government in a housing crisis. I would respectfully suggest to you that in a housing crisis, keeping people who are already precariously housed housed is a good start. Kicking them out of their homes is not helping the housing crisis, nor is carving out the greenbelt to the tune of \$8.3 billion for some developer friends. It's good that the government had to walk that back. It's good that they said sorry, but apologies should only be accepted when it really is a mistake. This was intentional. You intentionally disregarded your own Housing Affordability Task Force, which said that you don't need the greenbelt plan to address the supply issue in the province of Ontario. Did you listen to your own Housing Affordability Task Force? No, you did not, and so you've had to walk it back, and we have a criminal investigation by the RCMP into this government and how those decisions were made.

Because, yes, I have issues with how little interaction or participation with the people and the citizens of the province with this particular bill—but this has got nothing on brown paper envelopes and USB keys and deleted government emails. The last time we saw deleted government emails in this place was under the McGuinty-Wynne government, and people went to jail. They did.

1650

I just want to send my best wishes out to the RCMP. I hope you have the full co-operation. This was the big announcement last week. The Premier said, "Oh, we're going to fully co-operate." This is a headline? As if you have any choice. And get those burner phones, because he's given out the numbers to several people over the last five years. The numbers change every few months. Please, please—a lot of trust is really being invested into this investigation. And hopefully, at the end of this investigation, aside from people being held to account—because I believe we all think that people should be held to account in our democracy; I don't know, it's a pretty low ball—but also that measures are put into place so that this doesn't happen again because it set us back a whole year on the housing front.

Housing starts are down, Madam Speaker. The obstacles for purpose-built rentals right now in the

province—I just met with OREA. Those obstacles are real, and without a true funding partner in the provincial government, getting that stock back up and running is not going to happen.

Now, I will give some credit where credit is due, though. The federal government's housing acceleration—what is it called? The accelerating homes program, where the funding is bypassing the provincial government altogether and going right down into communities—the latest community was, last week, Vaughan. They received millions of dollars to accelerate and streamline housing. What does the Premier have to say about that? "Don't do that. I want to come to the announcements. I want to come to the ribbon cuttings."

You know what? Trust is an issue. When the biggest complaint that the Premier of Ontario has with the federal government actually honouring one of their promises—which, let me say, it should be news. When that happens, his only complaint is that he's not getting invited to the announcement. It truly is not leadership; it really isn't.

So just to finish up with Feed Ontario: "Reducing the precarity of the labour market through improving labour laws and reducing barriers to unionization." Just last Monday, you voted down anti-scab legislation. The Minister of Labour stood in his place and voted against ensuring that worker rights are protected in the province of Ontario. I mean, it's almost as bad as the former labour minister, who voted for Bill 28, which overrode collective bargaining rights. Make no mistake about it—which apparently is my new saying.

People in this province fought hard for those rights. There's a reason why we have weekends, why we don't have child labour, why we have health and safety standards, and that is because of unions in this province and in this country. The fact that this government now will allow people to bypass those workers on a picket line, which actually delays the strike—it lengthens the strike. I mean, you can have legislation called Working for Workers, but you've got to read the fine print with this government, I tell you that much.

Finally, the last recommendation from Feed Ontario is, "Reforming employment insurance and improving access to tax benefits through automatic tax filing." It just makes me—you know, I have these moments where I really think when certain people in this government stand up and say, "People are going to be able to save this on their taxes," do you know how few people actually file their taxes in the province of Ontario? I can tell you that the 130 people who are living in the encampment, in tents in Waterloo, one of the richest, wealthiest areas of this province, they are not worried about their carbon tax, they are not worried about filing their taxes. They are solely focused on surviving.

So, it didn't resonate this morning, when I talked about how many people now are so dependent on food banks, but I did say this morning—and we all know this—that the food bank model was fundamentally designed to respond to an emergency need, but emergencies are supposed to end. They're supposed to have a completion. And what's

happening right now, because this government is working against those core affordability issues like shelter and food, is things are getting worse.

We just really want the government to even acknowledge that the problem exists. I mean, I think that's one of the first steps to recovery is to admit that you have a problem. This government definitely has a problem.

Bill 146 also has this new fancy bauble in it called the infrastructure bank.

Mr. Will Bouma: Hear, hear.

Ms. Catherine Fife: Yes, my friend here from Brantford—Brant says “Hear, hear.” This is what I have to say about the infrastructure bank. Your federal cousins, Mr. Pierre—what's his name?

Interjection: Poilievre.

Ms. Catherine Fife: Poilievre—I have another name but it's unparliamentary.

I will say that the infrastructure bank—this is \$3 billion of taxpayer money. It's a taxpayer-funded bank, even though, I have to say, you have \$5.4 billion in a contingency fund.

The Ontario sewer association came to committee, and you've got some serious sewage problems. Kingston—I know, it's an awkward segue, but it's where I ended up. The city of Kingston has two open sewage lagoons. When you think of lagoons, you think of other crystal clear blue water—

Interjection: A luxury spa.

Ms. Catherine Fife: A luxury spa: Yes, maybe there will be, one day, at Ontario Place.

But when the infrastructure deficit in this province is so severe, and the Kingston sewage lagoons, the two of them, are very close to being a health and safety human tragedy. I mean, it's so close to the St. Lawrence River. The mayor came to AMO and told the government about this and said that we cannot make up for a 20-year infrastructure deficit off the local tax base—it simply is not possible—but it's worth investing in now to prevent a higher cost of a cleanup later on. I mean, it really does make sense.

But this is what your federal cousins say about the infrastructure bank, and this is just recently: “Another Massive Canada Infrastructure Bank Project Dead in the Water.” The federal government started this back in 2016—\$35 billion. By all accounts, it's not doing very well, nope.

This is what the shadow minister of infrastructure and communities said in the following statement, that it was discovered that “a \$1.7-billion Canada Infrastructure Bank has failed” again. “Trudeau's bank invested \$655 million in a \$1.7-billion project to build an underwater electricity cable that is now dead in the water due to financial volatility and inflation. The Lake Erie Connector Project is yet another failure for the Canada Infrastructure Bank” and it “has not completed one project in almost six years.”

“At a time when Canadians are struggling to put food on the table, this government keeps wasting taxpayer dollars.”

“One and a half years ago, the Liberals were gushing about this new partnership”—this was with Fortis, the Fort

Erie company—but this is “a private company that rakes in billions in revenue every year, promising tons of low-carbon energy, billions in GDP and hundreds of Canadian jobs.” This sounds familiar. “Conservatives warned from the beginning that this was a risky and inappropriate use of taxpayer dollars”—inappropriate, right?

The risk is still there. The government cannot hide from the risk by creating a bank. It wasn't actually in the legislation; it's just in the regulation. I remember being questioned about this in the media studio, because you have this pattern of just putting your friends and family on these boards. So, who's going to be on this infrastructure bank board of directors? Is it somebody who attended a wedding or a birthday party? I don't know. We don't know, right?

1700

It goes on to say, “What's worse is that there has been no transparency”—and this is a government that has a real issue with transparency. “Only when Conservatives demanded answers last week in Parliament did the government or the bank provide any update on a massive project that was quietly cancelled back in July. We also still don't know the details of the Fortis agreement or where the cost overruns were.” They say, “That's unacceptable for a taxpayer-funded bank.” We agree.

They go on to say how great they are, which of course I'm not going to read, and they “will continue to call on this government to respect the only recommendation from the Standing Committee on Transport, Infrastructure and Communities.” The only recommendation that the standing committee had for the federal Liberal government was “that this \$35-billion boondoggle be abolished. It has failed to attract the promised private investment, it lacks transparency, and it can't get a project built. This drain on taxpayer dollars must end.”

I do want to say, one of the delegations that found out about Bill 146 and got in in less than 24 hours—was able to register—had concerns. The Canadian Taxpayers Federation has concerns about the infrastructure bank, and so—now this is the second time I've said this—we agree with the Canadian Taxpayers Federation on this particular issue. But I think it speaks to why this government is really holding this shiny bauble over here—“Look!”—because the infrastructure file is not going so well these days in Ontario. We have an infrastructure minister who signed a 95-year lease with Therme, a European company, and made a special deal that none of the other contractors or bidders were able to access, which was the full cost of paying for the parking lot, which in total is \$450 million—imagine.

I'm countering with children: one in four food bank users in Ontario are children, and they are struggling. One third of food banks are solely kept above water by volunteers, Madam Speaker, and yet this government and this Minister of Infrastructure thinks that it is appropriate—in what ethical world, I have no idea—that she signs off on a total of \$650 million to a private company for a parking lot. And the 95-year lease? I mean, if she's so proud of the deal, if the deal is so good for people, open the books and show us the lease.

And there are all sorts of deals being made right now, because there is this saying: “When your enemies are making mistakes, don’t get in their way.” But the stakes are high here, and the municipalities in Ontario are really hurting.

There was a big announcement yesterday. Mayor Olivia Chow and the Premier sat down. They came up with a deal for the Gardiner Expressway and the DVP, because highways used to be the responsibility of the provincial government. Mike Harris downloaded it. This is an upload of these two highways, but it has had a ripple effect in the province of Ontario with our municipalities.

In fact, I just got this letter today from the regional chair of Waterloo region. It’s from Karen Redman, and she says this: “In light of the recently announced new deal with the city of Toronto, I am asking that the region of Waterloo, along with other municipalities across Ontario, be provided with a similar framework for achieving long-term financial stability and sustainability. Our 650,000 residents deserve the same respect for their tax dollars and an equal opportunity to thrive in Ontario.

“Growing communities like the region of Waterloo are at the forefront of Ontario’s economic prosperity. Growth is vital to our communities, but it also comes with a cost.”

So this is a government that, with Bill 23, which was brought in about a year ago—I think it was October 2022—removed a really key piece of getting those infrastructure projects done, because the infrastructure projects, if they’re not funded, then the housing doesn’t follow. It’s a key piece of getting housing built in the province of Ontario. Flushing your toilet, as the Canadian sewage association told me and the entire committee—people want clean water and they want to be able to flush their toilets. The bar is pretty damn low around here.

This is what they go on to say—and this extends to the Association of Municipalities of Ontario. That’s 444 municipalities in Ontario who have seen the deal—it’s setting a really interesting precedent, I would have to say—and they are asking for provincial action on this issue and that all levels of government work together to ensure the long-term stability and sustainability of municipal finances.

They have a really good motion that they passed. They’ve asked all local members—so right now that is all the Conservatives and me—and we’re supposed to all meet together and have this open discussion. I’m game. I want to be at the meeting. I want to be part of the conversation for sure. I want to be part of the solution, Madam Speaker.

A new funding revenue tool for municipalities—long overdue, right? Especially as this government has removed, through Bill 23, those development charges that were key to infrastructure funding. One of the key pieces of the motion that came forward, though:

“Whereas property taxation and existing outdated revenue tools are inadequate to fund both the social supports and critical infrastructure needed to accommodate the growth; and

“Whereas the residents and businesses in the region of Waterloo now contribute \$150 million in property taxes

annually to fund the services that should be financed from provincial and federal revenues”—we agree;

“Whereas Canadian municipalities own and manage over 60% of all public infrastructure in the country; and

“Whereas the expectations of municipal governments are misaligned with municipalities’ ability to generate revenue to pay for the services....”

We just heard this morning from the member from Timiskaming–Cochrane, who was talking about Highway 11, right? I think the stats are pretty astounding with Highway 11. For the 11 years that I’ve been here, we’ve been talking about Highway 11. I think there’s one fatality every week on that highway, is that correct?

M^{me} France Gélinas: Very likely.

Ms. Catherine Fife: Yes.

They’ve been asking for that same investment. Those municipalities can’t fund the maintenance and the development of new highways. This is really interesting—and then it’s also supported by AMO—that they’re asking for social and economic prosperity reviews.

So here you have these 444 municipalities across this great province who want to be part of the solution, but who have been very honest about the barriers they face with regard to the infrastructure. Then the AMO letter—and this is just from October 17, 2023. They have calculated how much of the provincial bill they’ve been paying. It goes on to say, “In 2022, municipalities spent \$3.8 billion more than they received in areas of provincial responsibility, like social housing, long-term care, land ambulance, social services and child care as a result of current cost-sharing agreements. Municipalities cannot continue to subsidize the provincial government in the face of mounting pressures.”

We agree. It is time for some provincial leadership. It is time for this provincial government to come to the table in true partnership with our cities to address the housing and the social infrastructure deficit and to effect and support the physical infrastructure that is needed to make sure that they can meet their housing starts that the government has asked them to complete. So the government has used a stick and the government has tried the carrot approach, but at the end of the day municipalities face these barriers, especially when they’ve been funding provincial directives, provincial responsibilities to the tune of \$3.8 billion in one year. That’s a lot of money on the local tax base, and I can tell you that people can’t afford it; they absolutely cannot.

1710

I’m running out of time, which is so unfortunate because, clearly, I’m having a good time, but the fall update—

Interjection.

Ms. Catherine Fife: I know. I can’t wait for the questions.

“Fall Update: Ontario’s Projected Deficit Is an Accounting Fiction”—and this is from Sheila Block and Randy Robinson, who I have a great deal of respect for, from the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives. They’ve done a very good job of tracking the pattern of how this

government allocates budgets, and then how you don't spend the budget that you've allocated, essentially. It goes on to say:

"By now most Ontario budget-watchers have learned to take provincial budget projections with a handful of salt. The deficit forecast, for starters, is pure accounting fiction.

"The current government typically spends less than what it earmarks in its budgets and finance minister ... loves to pad his budgets with large 'contingency funds' that aren't earmarked for anything in particular."

Every member in this House should have a serious issue with that because we actually have a fiduciary responsibility to have oversight over those dollars. When they get squirreled away into this contingency fund, we don't have that oversight. There isn't accountability.

It says, "Case in point—back in March, the 2023-24 budget included \$4 billion in contingency funds. Two thirds of the way through" last year, you did a little withdrawal from the contingency fund to the tune of \$336 million, and then it went down to \$3.7 billion—still a lot of money, right? A lot of money—billions used to be a lot of money around here.

And then "the minister published his annual economic outlook ... 'the fall update.'" And then "the minister added ... \$2.5 billion to the contingency fund." After certain smallish spending—and "this is separate from the \$1 billion 'reserve'" that you have that most "finance ministers ... traditionally set aside to handle the unexpected." So, I mean, there are some things that are unexpected, right? Pandemics are unexpected.

But when people don't have housing, you can expect that they will be a greater drain on the health care system. You may expect that the justice file, which has seen a 2% reduction—justice ministry—you will expect that those costs are going to go up. You will also see an impact on the education system, and we know this from Legal Aid Ontario. The more that families are displaced, the less well children do in the education system. This is not rocket science, Speaker.

"This means that the provincial deficit" which was "pegged at \$5.6 billion for 2023-24—is" now "an accounting fiction" because you actually have the money. You have the money, but you're not going to address the deficit, because later on in the show, you're going to do a ta-dah moment and it's going to disappear, and you're going to say, "Look, we're so fiscally responsible," right? Even though this contingency fund has come from the backs of the people of this province when you didn't fund those services.

"For the moment though, it's pretty clear that Ontario's budget balance isn't a major concern.... The deficit, the debt-to-GDP ratio, and the percentage of revenues going to interest payments are all near 10-year lows."

So you have an urgent situation with people hungry, with people sick, with people on wait-lists in the health care system who are getting sicker, which actually costs the system more money. You had an intentional piece of legislation which intentionally starved the health care system of its workers so that you could create a parallel

system through private operators. And they are getting licences like you wouldn't believe, Speaker, particularly—and this is really topical to Bill 146 because, at first glance, lowering the age of a referral for breast cancer screening is a really good idea, right? We believe that early diagnostics actually save lives. We are big believers in early intervention and prevention, on this side. This is why we actually believe the social determinants of health.

But when the announcement was made last January around Bill 60—you'll remember that terrible piece of legislation. As soon as that was announced, private, for-profit operators started applying for licences to do diagnostics. They're receiving their licences to go into this new business of doing diagnostics and ultrasounds, particularly on the breast screening. In that entire term, the wait-list in the public system has grown to six to eight months—I brought a particular story right to the floor of this Legislature. So the public system is being starved. The licences are now flowing for these businesses, for diagnostics and ultrasounds and the breast cancer screening. What has this government done? You have actually created a customer base in the province of Ontario by starving the public system. Now those private operators are ready to go, they're ready to make their money—three times as much for a breast screening in the private clinic versus the public clinic. You can say, "Oh, but you don't have to use your credit card," but at the end of the day, we all pay for that fiscal mismanagement. That's about choices. And there's no doubt that it's intentional.

So if you go back to this entire budget cycle—and this is, as I said, from the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives:

"Given the pressing needs of so many Ontarians today, now is a time to" invest. That's not what's happening.

In fact, if you look at the money, "we've seen a clear pattern in how the current government—through three finance ministers—views spending on public services and income supports."

The program spending in Ontario over the last five years by major sector: "The changes are adjusted for inflation and population growth...." It would be good if this government actually acknowledged inflationary pressures. The Conservatives used to understand the impact of inflationary pressures on budgets—

Mr. Graham McGregor: You're doing great—only 12 minutes left.

Ms. Catherine Fife: I'm glad you're counting.

The program spending in Ontario over the last five years by major sector: These are changes, as I mentioned, that "are adjusted for inflation and population growth, showing 'real per capita' spending: how much the government is spending per person in Ontario in constant dollars in 2023-24, compared to 2018"—when this government was first elected, which feels like a very long time ago.

"The results are astonishing. Real per capita spending on post-secondary education has dropped by 11% since 2018. In children's and social services, it is down 12%; in

education, it is down 11%; and, in the justice sector it is down by just over 2%.”

This is the landscape for the government to actually look at where the flooding is happening, who is in most need, and then prioritizing those needs.

We all know that the return on investment in education is well-documented, regardless of what research you’re quoting—for every dollar, it’s almost an \$8 return on investment.

In child care, which—it seems like child care is a moving target in the province of Ontario. For every dollar you invest in child care—early learning and care—the return on investment to the economy is \$7. I would add that gender equality is wrapped into that and productivity is wrapped into that.

So when you look at these numbers, you think of the lost potential that your government has overseen, instead of actually meeting the people where they are and meeting their needs in Ontario.

Finally, they end their article on the fall economic statement by saying, “In health and in all sectors, the slow suffocation of public services has gone on for too long. It is time for government spending to catch up with the needs of Ontarians—spending that invests in the public services that all of us rely on.

“Instead, this government seems intent to hide behind dire fiscal projections rather than face the music on badly needed public service improvements.”

We would offer, in addition to that commentary, that at the end of the day, it’s going to cost you more money by pushing those problems down the line.

1720

The justice file in particular really hits home, because I did bring the story of Emily to the floor of this Legislature. Emily, who was sexually assaulted now 20 months ago, and her alleged rapist who—the crown said to her, and it’s documented, “I believe you were raped.” The 18-month time span for this fellow was exceeded and he was set free, and there’s a cost to that. I would say there’s an ethical cost, a moral cost. But the emotional labour of that for Emily is huge, and also for society as well. The government is really fond of saying that justice delayed is justice denied. Well, then, fund the justice system so that justice is not denied. It’s a very salient comment in this particular moment.

Ontario public school boards were here yesterday. We had very good conversations with them. The inflationary cost pressures around operational cost points are very real on all fronts. Just this morning in my office in Waterloo, we got a call from a mom whose high-needs son, who is on the autism spectrum—she got a call this morning saying, “We have no staff for your son to come to school today and keep them safe.”

On every front—on the justice front, on the education front, on the health care front—people are hurting. As the Minden ER story tells you, it’s hard not to believe that when the government owes, in payments, this particular hospital almost a million dollars one year and a million dollars the other year—when that money doesn’t flow, that

emergency room closes. But the question is, why didn’t it flow? Somebody somewhere is making some pretty drastic and, I would say, dangerous decisions about which projects deserve the attention and which projects do not, and that clearly is very problematic for us as a whole.

Just to circle back now to where the money is going and what the lack of accountability is, particularly on the infrastructure bank: There’s a CBC article that I quoted last time which talks about, “What is the problem that the infrastructure bank is solving?” Is it just another arm’s-length organization so that you can remove the accountability of the government, so that you can abdicate your responsibility as a government? Is this ultimately the goal? Because this has proven to be very successful for the Liberals and the Conservatives.

The Liberals really doubled down on Infrastructure Ontario. This government is proposing an infrastructure bank. Metrolinx can do no wrong because nobody is in charge. I remember distinctly the Minister of Transportation being in this House and saying, “I just got the press release.” How is that possible? Ultimately, it is one taxpayer, and so it’s astounding that this lack of fiscal oversight continues in Ontario, because we don’t have unlimited funds. What we do require is strategic investment and the appropriate oversight on where that money is going. That, for us, means that you invest in the public system. You don’t starve the public system in order to grow a private system, not at the expense of the health and well-being of the people of this province.

Finally, by the time this piece of legislation went through four days, maybe, tops, of discussion—in one of them, the whole afternoon session was cancelled—we did try to strike out schedule 8 of Bill 146 in its entirety, because we think that university students in Ontario have been through enough. But this is what it does: Currently, when a borrower defaults on their student loan or medical resident loan, the ministry requires that notice be provided to the borrower setting out information related to enhanced collection tools, but the borrower may require the minister to review the notice.

This bill removes the notice and review requirements. Why? Why wouldn’t we give a student who is defaulting some leeway? It’s interesting, because Canada at the federal level recently eliminated the interest on the federal portion of student loans; however, Ontario begins adding interest at the prime rate of plus 1% on the provincial portion straight away. So you’re making money off students in the university and college sector. How is that an affordability measure? This, again, is a perfect example of the fall economic statement missing the moment.

It goes on to say, “Student loan debt is a major barrier to home ownership for young Ontarians.” So this government is talking about the housing crisis—making it worse, not making it better—and then for some reason still trying to make money off of university student loans—not just a basic interest; interest plus 1%. They’re trying to profit off of student loans in Ontario. This is a shameful state of affairs, I just want to say.

I just met with the Ontario Real Estate Association, and they shared this: The latest poll from OREA showed that

over half of post-secondary graduates have incurred student debt and half of them are still engaged in repayment. So when the Minister of Municipal Affairs gets in his place and says, “We want to get our children out of the basement”—well stop putting barriers right in their way. They’re essentially putting a lock on the door in my estimation, Madam Speaker. So we tried to get this struck down but, of course, were not successful in that regard.

The last point I do want to make is around the surgery wait-lists, because these stories are coming into my office fast and furious. I know, my colleagues in the north, those lists just are stalled. They’re not moving at all. I have a really good friend who has just been fighting breast cancer. She commented: She was down here at Mount Sinai, and it was a Wednesday at 3:30. She had her surgery. Then everything shut down for the whole day. Our operating rooms are shutting down at 4 o’clock, and yet the government is saying, “But we have to create these other surgical units to address these wait-lists.” What about investing in the public health care system that we already have before us, that was excellent, that was well staffed, that was well funded? What about that option?

I do want to say, this latest story though—“Government Paying For-Profit Clinic More Than Hospitals for OHIP-Covered Surgeries,” and documents demonstrate this. This actually had to be FOIed, because this government is not transparent about where the health care dollars are going. It says that they’re giving for-profit clinics “more funding to perform certain OHIP-covered surgeries than it gives to Ontario’s public hospitals to perform the same...”

Well, you talk about adding insult to injury, right? The doctors and nurses that we’ve been able to retain—and that’s why I read out the RNAO petition each and every time—they’re looking up here at Queen’s Park, because it’s university row right down here. They’re looking at us, and they’re looking at this government to prioritize, for instance, that highway to the cottage, Madam Speaker, or giving tax breaks to the richest people and encouraging those profits, those grocery stores that continue to gouge the people in Ontario and who don’t even pay the people in their stores a half-decent living wage. It’s a sad state of affairs.

The official opposition will not be supporting Bill 146. It does not meet the moment, and the people of this province deserve so much better.

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): We’re going to move to questions.

Mr. Rick Byers: I appreciate the member’s remarks on Bill 146, and I was intrigued by her comments on infrastructure. I think I heard her say we support infrastructure or the member supports infrastructure investment. The infrastructure bank was mentioned.

1730

I want to outline perhaps how the numbers on this will work. A \$3-billion investment by the province of Ontario: That will be partnered with other institutional investors, maybe one or two of them, so that will be another \$3 billion or \$6 billion of equity. Then these kinds of projects

can get debt financing for at least 50%. On \$3 billion of investment, we’ll get likely \$20 billion of infrastructure investment in Ontario.

My question to the member is, how would her party fund that \$20 billion? Would you increase taxes for Ontarians? Or why don’t we just agree that the infrastructure bank is an effective way to make these investments?

Ms. Catherine Fife: I like the member from Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound. We serve on the finance committee together. We definitely disagree on this. This is why: This is what the research and the evidence have shown on the federal infrastructure bank. The pension funds won’t touch it, because the opportunities are few or too small, and they’re wary of politics. The risk for them to enter into a partnership, particularly around infrastructure and particularly with a government that is being investigated by the RCMP, does not instill a lot of hope or trust. This is a classic example, I think, of really believing your own press release in this regard. You need to read the room on this new Ontario Infrastructure Bank. I don’t think anybody is going to go near this particular funding mechanism with a 10-foot pole.

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

Ms. Sandy Shaw: I’m glad the member enjoyed herself. I enjoyed listening to you, as usual. On the theme of infrastructure, the province of Ontario has an infrastructure backlog of repairs of about \$64 billion, and that’s from 2020.

The FAO has released a number of reports saying that adding to that infrastructure deficit, extreme rainfall will add \$6.2 billion to Ontario’s waste water infrastructure, and climate change will add \$14 billion to Ontario’s transportation infrastructure. Recently, the budget: Impacts of hazards of climate will add another \$4.1 billion per year. This Ontario infrastructure is largely, 70% of it, owned by municipalities who are dealing with failing infrastructure and with reduced revenues because of this government.

Can you talk about why this government is talking about building new infrastructure, putting this burden on taxpayers when they do not even maintain in good order the infrastructure that they’re already responsible for?

Ms. Catherine Fife: Thank you for the question. I remember very clearly being in this House when the city of Toronto was considering closing down their social housing units because the funding for maintenance had not kept pace. It’s the same example. That had been when the cost, maintenance and operational costs were downloaded further to municipalities. So I take the letter from AMO at heart, the fact that AMO has indicated that last year, municipalities spent \$3.8 billion more than they received in the areas of provincial responsibility, like social housing, long-term care, land ambulance, social services and child care as a result of current cost-sharing agreements.

When they say municipalities cannot continue to subsidize the provincial government in the face of mounting pressures, we should believe them. So come to the table in partnership with those cities.

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

Hon. Michael S. Kerzner: The member opposite made a comment I want to draw back to. She said that our debt-carrying interest costs are the lowest that they have been in 10 years, and yet we have the highest sub-sovereign debt, I think, in the universe. The debt that we've accumulated, one day, has to be paid. So my children and their children, and perhaps your children and their children as well, one day, will have to write the cheque. I'm very concerned with the debt. That's why our government, as part of this bill, has reacted progressively on it, so that we treat people fairly, but we respect the taxpayers' dollars.

My question is, do you think that the debt should go higher so that we can have higher interest costs on the debt?

Ms. Catherine Fife: I appreciate this question from the Solicitor General. I think you missed the first part, where I was talking about priorities. Children not having food should be a priority.

I just want to remind the Solicitor General that the province's method of borrowing is significantly different from the average person who borrows money to buy a home. Ontario issues bonds that provide a long-term return for the investors who purchase them. Presumably, that means that the bank is going to have to offer a return that's a little bit, if not more than a little bit, higher than what the government already offers investors. That money has to come from somewhere. So when Infrastructure Ontario, for instance, is entering into these—the infrastructure bank—at the end of the day, it's actually going to cost us more.

So I'm just as worried about your children and my children bearing the cost of this debt, but why use a mechanism which is actually going to add more debt to their debt load?

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

MPP Jamie West: Thank you to the member from Waterloo for her debate on this.

The fall economic statement's subtitle is Building a Stronger Ontario Together.

An article by Laura Stradiotto from today's Sudbury Star says, "Need for Food Banks in Sudbury 'Doesn't Ever Seem to Be Going Down'".

"More Sudburians who have jobs and are working are turning to food banks."

We know from the Feed Ontario hunger report that there has been an 82% increase in working people using food banks under the Conservative government—a 37% increase since last year.

In the member's opinion, does this feel like the Conservative government is actually building a stronger Ontario together?

Ms. Catherine Fife: I want to thank the member from Sudbury. As a community MPP, he's out there; he talks to all levels of people who are experiencing pain in his community.

When the finance minister was talking about quality of life—I think perhaps we need to give some definition to

that quality of life. We include quality of life as having access to appropriate medical treatment. We associate that with having access to an education system that doesn't close its doors because they can't have enough employees to actually service vulnerable people. And we most certainly consider a quality of life with having the appropriate nutritional food sustenance to exist, and this is especially true for children in Ontario.

So, no, I think the government is making very selective choices about who they are improving the quality of life for.

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

Mr. Rudy Cuzzetto: Earlier on in her debate, the member brought up development charges. As the member is aware, we just removed development charges on affordable or purpose-built rentals, as well as removed the HST. On 100,000 homes—5% are affordable homes, so 95,000 homes will have development charges; that's \$9.5 billion.

Do you think we should increase development charges or remove development charges?

Ms. Catherine Fife: I think that if the government is asking municipalities to meet certain housing targets, they had better come to the table with some funding, because it's not going to happen otherwise. Municipalities are already covering the costs of \$3.8 billion of your responsibility—so where in the Conservative playbook does that mean that they're going to be able to meet housing targets?

If you really do believe there is a housing crisis in the province of Ontario, then I would urge you to at least do some tenant protection support, so that in a housing crisis we're not evicting the most vulnerable people in Ontario.

You're making it worse. That is 100% true. You are making housing precariousness worse in the province of Ontario.

I urge you to listen to AMO and the region of Waterloo on this.

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): Further debate?

Mr. Trevor Jones: I'm honoured to rise in the House today to speak to Bill 146, the budget measures act, 2023. I would like to first thank our Minister of Finance and his parliamentary assistants for their commitment to this groundbreaking legislation.

1740

Just over three weeks ago, my colleague the Minister of Finance rose in this House and delivered the 2023 fall economic statement. In the minister's address, he emphasized our government's responsible and targeted approach to build a strong Ontario, despite the genuine geopolitical uncertainty we face: high inflation and rapid interest rate increases. The 2023 fall economic statement provides our government with the pliability needed to address the impacts of a slowing global economy, while laying a strong financial foundation for future generations.

In order to support our growing communities, our government has introduced new measures to build critical

infrastructure, stimulate economic growth and enact affordability—a measure for all of Ontario. Ontario's population is growing rapidly, straining existing infrastructure and demonstrating the need for more roads, affordable housing and long-term-care homes. Despite our government's historic \$185-billion capital plan, Ontario must build even more.

Ontario taxpayers should not have to bear the costs of critical infrastructure alone, which is why our government is introducing the Ontario Infrastructure Bank, designed to attract investors to finance vital infrastructure that wouldn't otherwise be built. The projects financed through this new agency will be focused on long-term-care homes, energy infrastructure, affordable housing, municipal and community infrastructure, and transportation.

In addition to the new infrastructure bank, our government has also announced a number of new affordability measures to put more money back in the pockets of hard-working families. Most recently, our government announced the extension of the gasoline and fuel tax cut rates for an additional six months, to June 2024. It's the real deal. The proposed extension to this gasoline and fuel tax rate cuts and builds on the early actions of our government to keep costs down for all people in Ontario, including saving vehicle owners—all of us—\$1.1 billion per year, totalling \$3.3 billion since March 2020, by refunding licence plate renewal fees and stickers paid since March 2020; and eliminating local transit fares for most local transit agencies in the greater Golden Horseshoe for riders connecting to and from GO Transit, making it more affordable and convenient for families and workers to commute from their homes to work everyday. This provides an estimated \$150 million through the Ontario Seniors Care at Home Tax Credit this year to over 200,000 low- to moderate-income senior families with eligible medical expenses. These are families and people we know—our neighbours in our communities. We also increased minimum wage by 6.8% in October 2023.

Our government truly understands the financial pressures Ontarians are facing, which is why we're dedicated to introducing measures to lessen the burden on taxpayers while continuing to provide all our essential services—essential services like efficient and convenient access to health care, which is why we recently announced extended breast cancer screening for women aged 40 to 49, starting in June 2024. By extending this service, we are connecting more than 305,000 additional people to services they need—to timely diagnosis and access to treatment. This critical investment builds on previous health care announcements I took part in only a few months ago in my home riding of Chatham-Kent-Leamington.

In June, I was ecstatic to stand beside my friend the honourable Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing and break ground on a new long-term-care home in Chatham boasting 160 new state-of-the-art beds. This long-term-care home will ensure we're providing care at the right time and the right place. This new care home will

provide essential services and beds for people in our communities.

In September, my neighbour the member from Essex and I were happy to announce \$7.2 million in funding at Erie Shores HealthCare for an additional 14 additional hospital care beds. This investment in our public health care system ensures care closer to home and more convenient for our constituents. I'm proud to be part of a government who cares, values and invests in our health care system to ensure the best care across the province.

Another highlight from the fall economic statement is the removal of HST from purpose-built rental buildings. To help stimulate construction for purpose-built rental housing, our government is removing the HST on qualifying purpose-built rental housing. This includes apartment buildings, student housing, dorms and similar structures and senior residences with long-term-care capabilities. For a two-bedroom rental unit valued at \$500,000, the full provincial portion of the HST rebated would save taxpayers and these builders \$40,000.

This rebate applies to all housing built on or after September 14 of this year, and on or before December 31, 2030, with construction complete by December 31, 2035, creating a nice wide window with realistic expectations. Our government understands the need for more housing and more purpose-built rentals, which is why we're incentivizing companies to build more to meet Ontario's housing demands. Relieving the housing crisis in Ontario will increase the number of affordable homes for all hard-working families across Ontario.

Further, this bill addresses critical municipal water infrastructure projects through the Housing-Enabling Water Systems Fund. Our government is allocating \$200 million over three years to repair, rehabilitate and expand critical water systems. This investment will foster much-needed development in my riding of Chatham-Kent-Leamington because municipal water infrastructure projects are crucial to the construction of housing, which is groundbreaking across the announcement. This is also a welcome and critical announcement for food producers and processors throughout Chatham-Kent-Leamington and positions all of southwestern Ontario to continue to be a global leader in the production of safe, nutritious food year-round, further strengthening our economy and our food sovereignty.

Under the leadership of our Premier and the members of this government, our party is building Ontario for generations to come. The fall economic statement proves our government's unwavering commitment to tackling affordability issues while continuing to invest in critical infrastructure.

We're laying the groundwork for a stronger, more fiscally responsible and sustainable future for all of Ontario. In closing, I want to re-emphasize my gratitude to the honourable minister and our colleagues for their diligent work that went into this bill—thoughtful, careful consideration, listening to Ontario's communities and informed by Ontario's communities.

This is a bill which all members of this House can support: a bill which lays the foundation to build a stronger

Ontario; a bill that invests in critical infrastructure and waste water management; a bill that tackles affordability measures.

Speaker, I thank you for the opportunity, and I enthusiastically support Bill 146.

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): We're going to move to questions.

Mr. Guy Bourgoïn: I was listening intensely to your comments. It's funny, just today I was speaking to one of my friends, who is a successful businessman, and he's in Kapuskasing, but he does quite a bit in the north. He was asking me, he says, "Guy, what the government says and what it does are two different things. I can't find employees. I can find employees but, if I do, I have nowhere to put them. There are no houses. There are no homes. There is no affordable housing. There is no supportive housing." There's none. In my area, there's none.

We have two developers that own most of the apartments, and they have three-year waiting lists. There are no apartments left. So what I want to hear—the government has a good talk. You talk well, but reality, on the ground—not there.

I'd like to hear your part. How are you going to fix that problem for northern Ontario, for my friend who is—

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): Thank you. The member for Chatham-Kent–Leamington to answer.

Mr. Trevor Jones: Thank you to my friend from across the aisle. I've been to that beautiful community in Kapuskasing and had the opportunity to serve up there. I know that housing pressures are exacerbated everywhere because every community has very unique needs. But this bill provides the infrastructure and the potential to serve those unique needs in your community and mine.

1750

In my community, housing pressures are exacerbated by the many farm workers we have from around the world taking up existing housing stock from, potentially, single families—apartments, condominiums. But this bill and the infrastructure bank provide municipalities with the latitude and the potential to borrow, reinvest and build that infrastructure to build the housing. One can't come before the other, neither in Kapuskasing nor in Chatham-Kent–Leamington.

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

Mr. Will Bouma: I appreciated the speech from the member from Chatham-Kent–Leamington. I'm very excited about some of the new initiatives that are coming out of the fall economic statement of 2023. One of the things I was most interested in, especially from an affordability perspective, is the fact that we are extending the gas tax cut, because when I talk to people in Brantford, I often hear about the harms that they feel because of the negative impacts of the federal carbon tax. It's punitive, and the fact is, people need relief. We're stepping up to the plate.

I can speak for myself: Every time I'm at the pumps, I appreciate the savings that our government is providing to

my family and all those driving to work and school etc. I know that this is news the people from back home are happy to hear. I was wondering if the member could further highlight how this will assist my constituents in Brantford–Brant.

Mr. Trevor Jones: I appreciate the question from the member opposite the aisle. I started my career, actually, as a transportation enforcement officer with the Ministry of Transportation, and I got to know, respect, trust and learn from professional truckers from across Ontario and across North America. When you think about the carbon tax component on fuel, it's pain at the pumps for all of Ontario. Think about our passenger vehicles—efficient passenger vehicles like the one I drive, like the one my friend drives. Think about professional truck drivers and the fuel they have to put in their tanks to earn a living for their families—an honest living.

And in conversation, back in the year 2000, when I was a much younger man with darker hair and the energy and enthusiasm to crawl under trucks and learn from those people, I would hear their stories. I would hear the concerns at the pumps then. I can't imagine in 2023 the pain at the pumps that takes that margin compression, that little money they have left over to bring back to their families, and that's the same across for your drivers in Brantford–Brant and mine in Chatham-Kent–Leamington.

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): We don't have time for a further round of questions and answers.

We're going to move to further debate.

Ms. Bhutla Karpoche: As always, it's an honour to rise in this House to speak to different legislations on behalf of my constituents in Parkdale–High Park and, this evening, to the fall economic statement, the budget measures act.

Speaker, as the official opposition critic the member from Waterloo has said in this House, the fall economic statement missed the moment—missed the moment on affordability and supporting struggling public services that people rely on. The economic update doesn't even mention the word "affordability." It doesn't mention a whole list of words that are important to the people of Ontario. For example, it doesn't mention francophone affairs, autism, First Nations, climate change, farming, agriculture. So it tells us a lot about the government's priorities.

But before I go into the details of this legislation more specifically in terms of what is missing in this bill that the people of Ontario had hoped and wanted to see the government take action on, I want to take a moment to talk about the committee process for this bill. This bill was brought forward for second reading, and as all bills go through, after second reading vote, it went to committee. At committee, the Conservatives denied our request to engage in this committee process meaningfully. They set amendment deadlines just two hours after the written submission deadline. The government only gave 24 hours' notice for members of the public to apply to speak before the committee. Apart from this government's previous pattern of completely skipping committee hearings or having very select folks present at committees, this type of action really says the government is not interested in

hearing from the public, that the government is not interested in knowing what the people of Ontario would like their government to do. So because of these concerns, we put forward a motion to extend the timeline, which this government rejected. Clearly, it doesn't seem like the government is listening or is in touch with the realities of Ontarians. Had the hearings been held, the government would have heard that people are worried, people are struggling with the increasing cost of living. That brings me back to the lack of meaningful action on the cost-of-living crisis and how this fall economic statement doesn't even mention the word "affordability."

Just a few days ago, Feed Ontario released their hunger report; we've already raised this in this House, the NDP. But what Feed Ontario shared was not news to us. We had already been hearing about it. We had already been witnessing what is happening outside of food banks, the very long lines, more and more constituents writing to us about the issue of the cost-of-living crisis, which includes food insecurity, housing issues, all other expenses.

But very specifically with this report from Feed Ontario, according to the report, food bank use in Ontario has been increasing for the last seven years. Of course, this is due to factors of a weakening economic foundation, cuts to social programs, a rise in precarious work, a failure to invest in affordable housing—and that includes removing rent control by this government. So Ontarians have been going to the food bank in increasing numbers. It's a 40-year high in terms of food bank usage, and there is no sign of slowing down.

The number of Ontarians who used food banks last year was larger than the entire population of Mississauga. Let's sit with that for a moment. Imagine the entire city of Mississauga population—I think it's about 800,000 people—everybody using the food bank. In the last fiscal year, April 31, 2022, to March 31 of this year, there were nearly six million visits, and that is an increase of 38% over the previous year. In fact, it's the largest single-year increase ever recorded in Ontario's food bank history. As I've raised in this House myself, nearly a third of the people relying on food banks were younger than 17 years old. We're talking about children here—320,000 children going hungry in Ontario.

So what is the root of food insecurity? It's things like affordable housing. Affordable housing is one of the key causes. I want to quote the chief executive officer of Feed Ontario who said, "It used to be that having a job meant that you would not need to access a food bank. This is no longer the case. Working Ontarians are having trouble earning enough to afford today's cost of living, even when working multiple jobs or trying to cut expenses."

Increasingly, these are working people accessing a food bank. In this report, we have seen that almost a quarter of the people who have accessed the food bank have spent all of their income—

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): I apologize to the member. There's a few orders of business that I need to take care of.

Third reading debate deemed adjourned.

1800

CONSIDERATION OF BILL PR32

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): I beg to inform the House that, pursuant to standing order 89(a), the Clerk has received a written request that Bill Pr32, An Act to revive Allied Contractors (Kitchener) Limited, be referred to the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs.

The order for second reading of the bill is therefore discharged and the bill is deemed referred to the committee.

CONSIDERATION OF BILL PR36

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): I also beg to inform the House that, pursuant to standing order 89(a), the Clerk has received a written notice that Bill Pr36, An Act to revive Eastern Children of Israel Congregation, be referred to the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs.

The order for second reading of the bill is therefore discharged and the bill is deemed referred to the committee.

It is now time for private members' public business.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' PUBLIC BUSINESS

The Clerk-at-the-Table (Ms. Meghan Stenson): Ballot item number 76, order M147, second reading of Bill 147, An Act to provide for updates to training requirements with respect to Black, Indigenous, racialized, natural and textured hair styles in the film and television and live entertainment industries. MPP Andrew.

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): Ballot item 76 was not moved. Therefore, it is now time for the late show.

The late show being a no-show, I will now call for orders of the day.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

BUILDING A STRONG ONTARIO TOGETHER ACT (BUDGET MEASURES), 2023

LOI DE 2023 VISANT À BÂTIR UN ONTARIO FORT ENSEMBLE (MESURES BUDGÉTAIRES)

Resuming the debate adjourned on November 28, 2023, on the motion for third reading of the following bill:

Bill 146, An Act to implement Budget measures and to enact and amend various statutes / Projet de loi 146, Loi

visant à mettre en oeuvre les mesures budgétaires et à édicter et à modifier diverses lois.

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): The member for Parkdale–High Park had the floor. I will ask her to continue her debate.

Ms. Bhutla Karpoche: As I was saying, increasingly, workers are turning to food banks in greater numbers than we have seen. In fact, one in six visitors cited employment as their primary source of income. And so what does that tell us? That wages have stayed stagnant while cost of living has increased significantly. In fact, in Toronto, workers now need to make at least \$25.05 per hour, which is \$8.50 more than the current minimum wage. That’s how big the gap is. And we know even earning minimum wage, that living wage, is not enough to survive because housing costs keep increasing. There are more and more social supports that the government is cutting, which means people are having to pay out-of-pocket. Everywhere, this government has failed to address the realities in terms of the cost-of-living increases for people.

Speaker, as I said earlier, it’s working people who have made the largest increase of food bank users. But social assistance remains the significant driver of food bank use, with the absolute number of people relying on Ontario Works or the Ontario Disability Support Program increasing by 17% over the last year. We know that Ontario Works for individuals is only \$733. That doesn’t even cover a room. And if somebody is on the Ontario Disability Support Program, that is just around \$1,200. That barely covers a room. And so it is no surprise that, increasingly, the main driver of food bank use is low social assistance rates.

Affordable housing is absolutely key. One of the things that the NDP in this House has pushed time and time again is to bring back rent control laws. In 2018, when the Ford Conservatives came to power, one of the first actions they took was to remove rent control laws that had existed. And so now in Ontario, if someone lives in a unit or a building that was built after 2018, their unit is not covered under rent control, which means that year after year their rent can increase by any amount, and it’s perfectly legal. And that’s unacceptable. Where is the predictability for tenants in terms of planning their housing needs if they don’t know how much rent is going to increase by? In my riding of High Park, tenants who are part of the Livmore buildings owned by Great-West Life Realty have seen an increase of as high as 17% annually. That is completely unaffordable.

The other thing, Speaker, is that we have to remember, when people are struggling to make ends meet, they will often turn to friends and family first before they go to use food banks. This is really a last resort for people. That means they’ve exhausted relying on neighbours, on friends and family. And Speaker, the crisis is such a level that even the food banks themselves are struggling to keep up with this demand. The majority of the food banks are worried about meeting the need in their community, with 69% of food banks concerned about having enough food and 53% indicating that they are worried they do not have enough funding to adequately sustain services. Do you see

what’s happening? Food banks are insecure about being able to provide food. Speaker, the impact that this has on their ability to serve people is significant, because 24% have indicated that they will need to either pause or reduce services due to the demand exceeding their capacity and their resource limitations.

So what do we do about this? Well, don’t take it from me; take it directly from Feed Ontario. First, they recommend increasing provincial social assistance rates and reducing clawbacks to earned income and government benefits—I’m going to talk a little bit more about this later after I go through the recommendations—second, investing in building and maintaining social housing and improving tenant protections, and third, reducing the precarity of the labour market through improvements to labour laws and reducing barriers to unionization. Speaker, these are recommendations from Feed Ontario. They mirror the motions and the bills that the NDP has tabled numerous times over the years. We have constantly raised this in the House. And these are the motions and bills that this Conservative government has repeatedly voted down.

I want to read a letter from a constituent. His name is Tom, and he writes to me:

“I urge you to double the ODSP rates and lift all ODSP recipients out of poverty. ODSP benefits have lost nearly 33% of their value over the last three decades and over 10% of their value since last increased in 2018.

“Many on ODSP can’t afford both to keep a roof over their heads and to eat.” The single rate for ODSP “is almost entirely swallowed up by the average rate for a bachelor apartment in Ontario.... In Toronto, the average rent for a bachelor apartment ... exceeds the ODSP rate for a single person.

“Ontario’s ODSP rates force people with disabilities into precarious housing or homelessness, malnutrition, poor health and desperation. This is profoundly cruel and unfair in a province as rich as Ontario. It leads to loss of dignity and poor health outcomes for Ontarians and their families. It needs to change, immediately.”

That’s what Tom has written to me, and I agree with every single word that he has said.

This is not only about keeping a roof over your head. It’s not only about being able to feed yourself enough. That’s the bare, bare minimum. People actually have to be able to live in good homes, homes that are accessible, that are clean, that are spacious enough, that are well maintained. People have to be able to access good, nutritious food, not just the kind of food that is most commonly offered at food banks. They need fresh vegetables. They need proteins. It is so important that we have to remember this is also about the quality of life, the dignity that each person is able to live with.

1810

Speaker, in this House, repeatedly we’ve urged the government to double ODSP rates. It seems like the Canadian federal disability benefit will soon be making its way. We are very concerned, especially given the recent developments in terms of the Ford government’s view that

this federal disability benefit is a way to mitigate costs for the province—absolutely not. The federal benefit was always intended to be a top-up, not a replacement. So this cannot—must not—be an excuse for the Conservatives to make more cuts, to claw back from ODSP. In fact, it's actually quite alarming that the government is looking to cut costs, when in fact they should be doubling ODSP immediately.

One of the things that we hear often from the government is that, under them, ODSP has had the largest increase in the last 15 to 20 years. And unfortunately, when they make that statement, it's kind of true. That's because for 15 to 20 years, under the Liberals, under successive Liberal majorities, we have not seen a meaningful increase in ODSP rates. And because the Liberal record was so bad in terms of increasing the rates that when the Conservatives increased it by 3%—it's hardly an increase. But when the Conservatives increased it by 3%, they could make these big statements. That just tells you that successive governments, both Liberal and Conservative, have failed people on social assistance.

We in the NDP are calling for a doubling of social assistance rates. In fact, we've learned from the CERB program during the pandemic that the federal government deemed \$2,000 per month to be the absolute minimum that a person needs to survive. And given the cost-of-living increases, given the inflation rates, it's certainly more than that now. So at a minimum, it needs to be doubled, not reduced.

I do not have much time, but I just want to spend my last two minutes talking about take-home cancer drugs. Speaker, this is an issue that the Conservatives supported when they were in opposition. After they formed government, when the NDP brought forward motions to cover take-home cancer drugs, they voted it down. And after a lot of advocacy and a lot of work thanks to our NDP health critic, the member from Nickel Belt, for her years and years of work on this, the government finally promised action on it. But what they committed to was forming an advisory table—this was in April 2022—to explore improvements to access to take-home cancer drugs.

Let me just say, since 2014, which is under the previous Liberal government, that a lot of the consultations, the studies, all of that was already done, together with cancer experts, the doctors, with all of the organizations that do the work, with a lot of cancer patients themselves. All of that work was done, and it was, in fact, co-presented in this House by the NDP and the Conservatives, which the Conservatives conveniently forgot once they formed government and got power.

But still, now this government has promised an advisory table. We have heard nothing about it. I would like to see action on it. It is completely unfair that cancer patients have to pay out of pocket for their treatment. Actually, it's beyond unfair. It's devastating for people.

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: Life and death.

Ms. Bhutla Karpoche: It is a life-and-death situation. Thank you, Speaker.

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): We'll now turn our minds to questions.

Mr. Will Bouma: I appreciated the speech from the member from—

Mr. Sol Mamakwa: The minister?

Mr. Will Bouma: Minister? No, that was her predecessor; that's where I was going—from Parkdale–High Park. It's interesting, because we're the only government in the last while—and she made mention of that—that has done anything with ODSP at all.

I was curious, because I know of her relationship with the former member who was here when the NDP supported the Liberal government at the time when they were in a minority position, if this was such a strong issue for the NDP going all the way back—because she made mention that it was the Liberal and Conservative governments that hadn't done anything before, but our government actually increased ODSP rates. I believe you worked for the member too—what was the reason that the NDP at the time, from 2011 to 2014, didn't bring down the Liberal government over ODSP rates?

Ms. Bhutla Karpoche: I'd like to thank the member for his question, although I can tell the intent behind his question was, I perhaps think, not necessarily wanting to know what happened during the time of a minority government, because if the member recalls, it was the Conservatives who sat as part of the official opposition.

The NDP advocated, and has always advocated, for increases to social assistance rates. In fact, it was the official opposition, the Conservatives, who did nothing—who, despite having the position or the status of the official opposition then, did absolutely nothing. The NDP put forward motions, bills, raised questions in the House and was constantly pushing for an increase to social assistance rates.

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

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: The financial economic statement doesn't mention the word “affordability” anywhere. The member spoke about the Hunger Report 2023, and I look to page 38, and one of the things they're recommending is to “invest in the costed plan of the Ontario Non-Profit Housing Association and Co-operative Housing Federation of Canada.” They're saying in the next 10 years, we need to build at least 69,000 affordable rental units, deliver income support to 311,000 Ontarian households, extend the life of 260,000 community-owned rental homes and create 30,000 new supportive housing units for individuals with mental health and addiction issues, and end chronic homelessness.

How would these recommendations affect the people in your riding who are facing a housing and health care crisis?

Ms. Bhutla Karpoche: Thank you to the member from London–Fanshawe for her question. She's absolutely right: Addressing hunger means you have to address housing issues, particularly the deeply affordable housing that is so desperately needed. When we invest in not-for-profit housing, in co-op housing, in supportive housing—all of these are the kinds of housing that the most vulnerable people in our communities need and deserve. Feed

Ontario has made the exact recommendations that we have been proposing in this House.

When you think about, say, somebody who is experiencing addiction or a mental health issue, you can't even begin to address the challenges that the person is experiencing without first addressing their housing needs. It's called the Housing First policy. Because when you try to do that and you don't provide housing, that will not help the person for very long. You need to address housing first.

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

Mr. Deepak Anand: Madam Speaker, I would like to acknowledge that I've heard many, many times the member talking about affordability, and I'm glad to hear that we share similar concerns. When I speak to many of my residents in Mississauga–Malton, I hear about how the price of gas is so high.

With that in mind, I would like to ask the member opposite, would you please advise or suggest if you would be supporting our government's decision to extend the gas tax cut by supporting Bill 146?

1820

Ms. Bhutla Karpoche: I can share with the member from Mississauga–Malton what I hear from my constituents. In Parkdale–High Park, a very typical Toronto riding, a lot of people in my community rely on transit, and due to severe underfunding of transit, the services are not reliable and they're not frequent enough. So people can't get to work; people can't get to school. People can't get to wherever it is they need to get to.

If you really think about how many people rely on transit and how many people transit actually takes from point A to point B, you can understand how critical that infrastructure is, how important it is that that service, particularly the operations of it, is well funded. And under this government, like the previous Liberal government, transit funding, particularly operational funding, has not received enough.

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

Ms. Sandy Shaw: I want to just again focus on the number of people that are using food banks and how this is the canary in the coal mine. That is the alarm bells ringing when people cannot feed themselves.

I have to say, I'm stunned to hear—maybe none of the Conservative MPPs have food banks in their ridings, or maybe everyone in the riding is well fed. Maybe all the kids go to school with full bellies, which is not the case in our communities because we hear about it. In Hamilton, people's use of emergency food banks has almost doubled. In fact, 33,000 people a month are fed through our emergency food system in Hamilton alone, and we know that almost half of that are kids.

Can you explain to me why we hear crickets from the government on the other side when it comes to people going hungry in our province?

Ms. Bhutla Karpoche: Thank you to the member for her question. I could try and guess. The thing is this:

People going to food banks is the outcome, is the symptom of the problem, of more, sort of, root problems. And because this government's lack of action on affordable housing—for example, as I mentioned, they removed rent control laws. They have done nothing to prevent rents from skyrocketing, despite numerous bills that we've brought forward and they've voted down. Social supports, social assistance rates, for example, have not kept up. So on a number of different drivers of food bank use, the government has failed to take action, or, in fact, has taken actions that have led to more people relying on food banks. So I would assume, and I wish to tell the member, that it's probably because—

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

Mr. Will Bouma: I've enjoyed our interaction this evening with the member from Parkdale–High Park.

I was curious. The member from Waterloo had mentioned that the NDP had supported this bill on second reading, so obviously there were no—what they term—poison pills in the legislation. Again, as normal, when the NDP can't say anything negative about something, they just talk about something else, or that we're not going far enough, which is fair. That's fine, because we have consecutive bills, and we keep doing better for people all the time.

I guess my question is, despite the criticisms—and even what we've heard about the infrastructure bank, that if no one signs up to put their money into it, then I guess the member from Waterloo would be correct that it's not a great idea. But in the meantime, we need to build infrastructure.

To the member: What I'm wondering is, will the NDP be supporting this bill on third reading?

Ms. Bhutla Karpoche: Thank you to the member for his question. The member knows very well what the process is for any bill before becoming law. One of the places where a bill is very closely examined, where amendments can be made, portions that are not very good can be removed, certainly amendments can be moved to strengthen the bill—that's certainly one thing that we wanted to do with this bill. And most importantly, it allows for public consultation. The public are able to give feedback to the government on what their thoughts are about this bill. This government, with this bill at committee, did not allow for that. They made it very inaccessible. So I have to question why the government didn't want to hear from the people of Ontario.

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): That's all the time for questions.

We're going to move to further debate.

Ms. Stephanie Bowman: I rise today to speak to Bill 146, An Act to implement Budget measures and to enact and amend various statutes. Speaker, I have spoken to this bill before, and I will just repeat what I said there to start off. A look at the budget in the fall is a chance for the government to take stock, to look at what is going on in our province and in the world around us and to see how the people of our province are doing. If this government

was serious about that and if they had actually looked around, they would see that one in 10 people in the biggest city in the province—here in my hometown of Toronto, one in 10 people are lining up at food banks. We have people who are working going to food banks, and what we have is a government that has doubled down on making investments in things like Austrian spas, water parks or parking lots, instead of doubling down on actually helping the people of Ontario.

Speaker, we know that legislation is meant to go through a process. One of those processes is that we are able to offer amendments to make the bill better at committee. I took that opportunity, and I made a couple of amendments. The government has talked a lot—the government is continuing to blame the federal government for any woes here for the people of Ontario when, in fact, they have the ability to remove taxes today. They have that ability today. One of the amendments that I moved was to remove the harmonized sales tax on fuels and inputs for home heating. If the government was really that concerned and committed to helping the people of Ontario with their home heating costs, instead of simply writing a letter to a higher level of government, they could take accountability, here in Ontario, for their own inaction. They could remove the HST on fuels and inputs. They could have taken my amendment and included that. They could have done that on their own, but that amendment was not included in this new version of the bill.

Speaker, they also could have kept their promise. They made a promise in 2018; it is now 2,028 days ago that they made a promise to reduce taxes on middle-income families. That would put up to \$1,600 back in the bank accounts of middle-income earners. That is real money that would help those people now. Instead of, again, writing a letter to a higher level of government asking for them to take action, they could take action now.

We have a very large contingency fund—record contingency funds—under this government. They could use some of that money to help the people of Ontario now.

Let's talk about other missed opportunities in this fall budget. They continue to double down on their appeal of Bill 124. They could offer better wages to nurses now, instead of the paltry 1% that they have been restricted to in the last four years. They could have offered better wages for early education workers now. They have made a move on that, so that's helpful; they could have done that sooner than waiting to this point so that those workers had that money in their pockets four, three, two or one year ago, when they have been experiencing high inflation due to things like the supply chain pressures we have been all facing due to the pandemic.

1830

They could have done some matching on affordable housing projects in the province now to match the federal housing accelerator. That funding is set to surpass \$1 billion in Ontario. They could be helping with that now. In fact, they could look to their neighbours to the east, where the province of Quebec made a deal with the federal government to match funding of \$900 million for a total

of \$1.8 billion, allowing that province to have a stake in that program. They could have taken that step now.

They also could have responded to farmers across the province from all sectors of farming, whether it's beef farmers, grain farmers, sheep farmers, the Ontario Federation of Agriculture, or the produce producers who are here today and very generously brought the bounty of their harvest to share with us today. The farmers are asking for \$100 million of an increased investment in the Risk Management Program—and that's not a handout; that's an investment. That's the kind of money that can keep family farmers interested and invested in their family farms, to mitigate risks that they face around climate change.

We know there was a hailstorm in September that damaged crops. We know that flooding damaged crops in the Windsor area this summer. That \$100 million would go a long way to helping farmers. In the same way that this government is very excited about investing in the EV sector—and, again, that is part of our energy transition, so that certainly could be a logical investment and a helpful investment. They have been ignoring the farmers' pleas for this \$100 million. It's a small amount to pay to make sure that our agriculture and our food supply is in good hands and in safe hands for the short term as well as the long term. That is just one fifth of the money that this government is about to spend on a parking lot, and whether it is an underground one or one that is moved, we know it will be a big investment—a big expenditure, anyway; maybe not an investment, but a big expenditure that this government will be making in partnership with Therme, which is an organization that we don't know a lot about. I can talk more about that, as well, in a couple of moments.

The Ontario libraries requested just \$15 million to establish a province-wide digital library. That money would enable live, online tutoring for students from kindergarten to grade 12. It would enable equal access to library materials in smaller communities that are not as well served as those of us who live in larger municipalities. That would have been money, again, that was invested in programs that would make a real difference in those children's lives and those families' lives—those working families who are struggling to make sure that their kids have access to the learning supports they need, especially as our classrooms get bigger and our resources are shrinking.

There was also no additional funding announced in this bill to address the rise in anti-Semitism and Islamophobia. We've had a significant rise in those attacks in recent weeks, and Toronto police released a report just recently showing a dramatic increase in those attacks. And some additional money, not just for safety, protection—that's important—but also to actually address some of those root causes, to make sure that there is education happening to prevent these kinds of attacks, and to help people understand the damage that does.

Speaker, I want to come back to the amendments that I proposed.

I also proposed an amendment to ensure that there was sufficient funding for breast cancer screening. So the

government announced a new program, which we applaud, to expand the age when breast cancer screening can begin, and yet there was no new money announced for that program. It's hard to imagine how a program where there is already a long wait-list will be effective for younger women if there is no new money attached to that.

I also made an amendment related to the manufacturing tax credit. Again, that's a measure that helps to incentivize productivity in our economy. It helps to drive innovation. Currently, it's restricted to what are called CCPCs, or Canadian-controlled private corporations, under the tax act. I proposed that those credits be extended to publicly traded companies. Publicly traded companies are a very important part of our economy, as well, and while they may have a head office outside of this country, they are employing people here in Ontario, as we know. That would be a smart move to encourage those companies, as well, to make investments.

It's productivity that actually improves our quality of life. That is what has served us very well for generations. And yet, under this government, our productivity has fallen. We are now at the same level as the state of Alabama. So we have a long way to go to get back to where we were. That does take things like encouraging people and companies and businesses—small, medium and large—to invest and make sure that they are improving their overall productivity, which does benefit us all.

Those were some amendments that could have, I think, really helped. Again, they could have removed the HST on fuels instead of writing a letter. They could have made good on their promise to reduce taxes for middle-income families, yet that was not there. They could have increased funding for farmers to protect our food supply—not there. They could have matched funding for the federal housing accelerator—also not there.

Speaker, I also want to talk a little bit about our fiscal position. The projected deficit has quadrupled from \$1.3 billion to \$5.6 billion, and the path back to a balanced budget does depend on higher growth than this government has delivered. They were elected on a platform of balancing budgets and fiscal restraint, yet under this government we have increased spending at a faster rate and added more debt than the previous government. According to the Fraser Institute, had spending per capita been maintained at the Premier-Wynne-era levels, the budget would be balanced. Let me repeat that, Speaker: The budget would be balanced. Alternatively, the average taxpayer could save \$880 a year—

Mr. Will Bouma: How about COVID? Come on. That's ridiculous. COVID happened.

Mr. Adil Shamji: Excuses. You got tons of money from the feds.

Ms. Stephanie Bowman: Yes, and COVID was actually basically funded by the federal government—spent lots of transfers.

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): Order, please. The member has the floor.

Ms. Stephanie Bowman: The Fraser Institute also suggests that the debt would be nearly \$30 billion—with a B—lower under the fiscal plan outlined by the previous government.

Interjection.

Ms. Stephanie Bowman: Speaker, this is the Fraser Institute, I'll just remind the member who is getting a chuckle out of this over here.

The government is projected to add another \$48.7 billion to provincial debt between 2023 and 2026. The debt-to-GDP ratio is expected to increase, and yet that ratio declined under the Premier Wynne government, I just wanted to point out.

The other thing is revenue from personal income taxes is expected to increase under this government 12% this year, at an annual rate of 7.1% per year to 2026. The province receives \$35.1 billion in transfers from the federal government, compared to \$25.7 billion when it took office. That's an increase of approximately 36%, Speaker. That was certainly more than enough to cover COVID expenses. We know that that's something that people are quite curious about. We also know that this government is shifting the fiscal burden away from corporations and onto local taxpayers and the federal government.

Despite soaring revenues, the government still claims it has no money for nurses, early childhood educators, child care educators, personal support workers and teachers, while they increase the deficit. Speaker, this government seems to have mastered the art of spending more while delivering less. We know that wait times in hospitals continue to increase. We know that deaths from delayed surgeries have increased. So we know that people are not better off under this government; they are, indeed, worse off.

Speaker, let me turn for a moment, to the Ontario Infrastructure Bank. I've spoken about this before. I will just say it again: It's \$3 billion of taxpayer money. It only works when you can deliver a return that is greater than that that you get on debt, and you get that by privatizing services. Just like we know a previous Conservative government privatized long-term care—they had the worst deaths from COVID of any long-term-care homes—that is where this government is heading in order to make its infrastructure bank work.

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): We have questions for the member for Don Valley West.

1840

Mr. Will Bouma: One quick, easy question for the member from Don Valley West: The other day, I think we were all quite shocked to hear the member from Kanata-Carleton say that Ontarians are better off because of the carbon tax. So what I want to know from the member from Don Valley West is, does she believe that Ontarians—in disagreement with the Bank of Canada, I think, and with the Parliamentary Budget Officer—are better off with a carbon tax? Yes or no?

Ms. Stephanie Bowman: Speaker, I can answer the way I choose, and I will answer that question by saying

that the Bank of Canada has stated that the carbon pricing has contributed 0.15% to inflation. They did adjust that number to say if it was eliminated, yes, it would go to 0.6%, but that's a one-time adjustment. That's very clear.

So I would actually challenge the government: As I've said, if they want to reduce home heating costs for Ontarians, they can remove the tax that is under their control today and offer no HST on home heating fuels and inputs. They can do that today, Speaker. They can lower income taxes for middle-income families like they promised. I will be counting the days as that broken promise continues to increase.

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

M^{me} France Gélinas: I was interested in the member's sharing a bit of her worries about the expansion of the breast cancer screening. Breast screening is good, but there is no new money in the budget to do this. Many people see this as a strategy by the Conservative government to create such long wait-lists that they will "innovate" and bring private clinics to provide this screening that could be offered in our hospitals—if our hospitals were getting the support that they need, the money that they need to be able to stay open longer, to decrease the wait-lists that are already months-long in many parts of our province.

Does the member share this worry about this government's intentions to privatize this service?

Ms. Stephanie Bowman: Thank you to the member from Nickel Belt for that question. Yes, I absolutely do worry about that. I think the Ontario Liberal caucus has been very clear about our concern about privatization. My colleague from Don Valley East has spoken about that at length—the risks, the higher cost to the overall economy. So absolutely, I worry about that, and I do believe that's where the government is heading and they just won't fess up to it yet.

It currently takes six months to get an appointment for a mammogram, so how will making an announcement without giving new funding address the 305,000 additional individuals who are waiting when we know that Bill 124 and other things contribute to a labour shortage and that those patients are waiting today? So absolutely, I'm concerned about that. Thank you for the question.

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

Mr. Adil Shamji: My question is to the member from Don Valley West. Why do you think that government members like the one we just heard from a short while ago have a preoccupation with writing letters to other levels of government instead of dealing with the issues that are impacting Ontarians?

Ms. Stephanie Bowman: Thank you to the member from Don Valley East for the question. I think that it's an inability to admit that they have accountability. This government has accountability for the province of Ontario. This government has accountability for the taxes that are levied on the people in the province of Ontario. They could take action today, and yet they're not talking about that.

They're talking about spending time and wasting hours in this House, about whether or not we should support writing a letter instead of taking action today to remove a tax on home heating inputs and fuels. That is in their power today, and I would ask them to do that.

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

Ms. Natalia Kusendova-Bashta: I don't know why the Liberal Party of Ontario keeps voting no to things, but on this side of the House, we're very proud of all the investments that we've done, particularly in infrastructure: \$168 billion over the next 10 years, including to build 50 hospitals across the province of Ontario. This is unprecedented investment.

Even throughout the pandemic, we've added 3,500 more acute-care beds. Almost every community in Ontario is either getting a new hospital or a redeveloped hospital. We're asking the Liberal Party of Ontario to support this government and vote yes for investments in our communities, in your community.

Yesterday, a historical deal was signed between the city of Toronto and Ontario. We would like to have the same partnership as we have at that level with the Liberal Party of Ontario—a partnership of support.

Ms. Stephanie Bowman: I didn't really hear a question there. I guess the question is what we say yes to. We say yes to protecting the greenbelt. This government had to reverse course and get back to protecting the greenbelt only when they were caught with an \$8.3-billion scandal and a criminal investigation by the RCMP.

This is the government that has had a record number of ER closures. We can talk about building hospitals, and absolutely those are important investments that need to be made. But let's talk about what people are facing right now. They are facing closed ERs when they get there. Minden ER has been closed. That's a community that is suffering because of that decision. We have had other communities around our province who are experiencing ER closures—nothing that any of us want to see when we're facing a health crisis. We have ER doctors telling us that they are treating things that absolutely could be treated by a family doctor or a nurse practitioner if this government would make sure that we had the health care professionals that we need. So investments are wise, but so is supporting our patients today.

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

Ms. Sandy Shaw: I want to focus back on the information you brought to this House, which is very relevant: that this government has ballooned the debt and the deficit. They have the highest debt-to-GDP I think ever in the province. They have the highest debt in the country, actually, at the same time as they're sitting on a contingency fund that's about \$5 billion-plus, and at the same time as they're forcing municipalities to cover the cost of what is a provincial responsibility.

AMO wrote to this government, saying, "Municipalities spent \$3.8 billion more than they received in areas of provincial responsibility like social housing, long-term

care....” In addition, municipalities are responsible for the infrastructure deficit that’s in the tens of billions for infrastructure that already exists.

Why does this government keep talking about building infrastructure when they can’t even maintain the infrastructure that we already have in the province?

Ms. Stephanie Bowman: Thank you to the member for the question. It’s very interesting. Again, in my riding, we have an infrastructure project that, under this government, is three years late, at least \$1 billion over budget, with no plan in place or announced to finish it. It’s called the Eglinton Crosstown, and it’s caused disruptions for I think it’s 12 years now, Speaker.

Absolutely, we need to be making sure that our cities are functioning well. We know that when the government removed development charges—which, again, might make sense absolutely on affordable homes, co-op projects and other things like that that help us build affordable housing. And yet we now know that municipalities are short about \$5 billion to create the infrastructure we need.

We have residents in my building who have been told by their landlords that they need to buy pumps to get water pressure to where it needs to be in these 35-storey complexes because the water pressure is not sufficient.

Infrastructure is critical, and this government needs to make cities—

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): Thank you. We’ll need to move to the next question.

Mr. Ted Hsu: The member for Don Valley West is completely right, that it’s productivity that, in the long term, is what we need for prosperity. I’m really disappointed to hear the derisive heckles from the government members when we got into productivity and detailed discussions about the debt-to-GDP ratio, because I know that they are not the economic managers they claim to be.

My question to the member for Don Valley West is, what’s one example of something that we could do to improve productivity here in Ontario that wasn’t in the fall economic statement?

Ms. Stephanie Bowman: Thank you to the member from Kingston and the Islands for that very good question.

I’ve spoken before about daycare. Making sure that families have spots for daycare improves productivity. It does that by helping both parents, if they choose to, to work—to work out of the home and earn an income. Speaker, that program that the federal government has invested in is way behind being implemented here, and that is actually detracting from our productivity. We have people in my riding who come to me and say, “I’ve been told I will be waiting a year for daycare, so I can’t go back to work.” That means that mom is not collecting her income, not paying taxes, and that hurts our productivity.

This government could have made sure that they were spending the money they needed to on that daycare program, to make sure ECE workers are filling those spots instead of just building buildings.

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): That’s time.

Further debate?

Ms. Natalia Kusendova-Bashta: Before I begin my speech this evening, I’d like to welcome a special delegation from Poland.

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We have Romi Jaszczynski representing the Polish Investment and Trade Agency. We have Michal Kucharczyk, also from Polish Investment and Trade Agency; Michael Dembek, Polish Investment and Trade Agency; Mike Kustra, who is an engineer from the city of Mississauga; as well as Agata Dadej and Michal Kokot, representing a company, XPLUS. They are here for the largest construction trade show in Canada, just down the street at the Toronto metro centre. There are over 30 Polish companies represented that are looking to expand their business, so we welcome your business, and we welcome you here in the province of Ontario.

Interjections.

Ms. Natalia Kusendova-Bashta: Thank you. And we’re certainly looking to grow our bilateral relationship of trade.

I want to thank the Minister of Finance and our government for their diligent work in improving the lives of Ontarians with this bill, Building a Strong Ontario Together Act. Ontario’s population is growing rapidly, with job growth on the rise and new investments from key industries. However, unstable geopolitical events, high inflation and high interest rate hikes affect the day-to-day lives of Ontarians. There will be many obstacles ahead, but there is no doubt we can work together to build a strong Ontario.

With any growing population, more infrastructure is always in demand, and our taxpayers cannot always shoulder the cost alone. That is why our government is launching the Ontario Infrastructure Bank to attract institutional investors to help finance the essential projects our province so desperately needs.

When I talk about infrastructure, I mean the hospitals, the schools, the roads, the highways—lots of infrastructure projects, to the tune of a \$168-billion investment over the next 10 years. This bank will leverage investment by public sector pension plans and other trusted investors to fund projects such as long-term-care homes, energy infrastructure, affordable housing, municipal and community infrastructure, and transportation.

Many of these projects are very close to me. In my role as parliamentary assistant, I travelled across the province, visiting long-term-care homes that are built for franco-phone Ontarians, who have the right to receive health care services and live in a home that respects one of Canada’s official languages.

Madame la Présidente, beaucoup de ces projets me sont très proches. En tant qu’adjointe parlementaire, j’ai parcouru la province pour visiter les maisons de soins de longue durée construites pour les Franco-Ontariens et les Franco-Ontariennes, qui ont le droit de recevoir des services de santé et de vivre dans une maison, un foyer, qui respecte l’une des langues officielles du Canada—bien

sûr, je parle de la belle langue de Molière, la cinquième langue la plus parlée au monde.

Speaking of long-term-care homes, just this summer, a new home named Wellbrook Place opened up in Mississauga to meet the demands of our aging population, with a capacity of over 600 beds—or 600 homes, as our Minister of Long-Term Care likes to call them, because they are homes. This home will address the capacity issues facing our long-term-care system while providing a modern, comfortable and safe place for our seniors to call home. Thanks to our government's accelerated build pilot program, this home only required three years of construction. Madam Speaker, it was phenomenal. The shovels were in the ground, back in, I believe it was, 2019, and 32 months later, we were cutting the ribbon on a brand new state-of-the-art facility. It was quite phenomenal, first of its kind, and I hope to see more accelerated builds across Ontario.

En ce qui concerne les foyers de soins de longue durée, un nouveau foyer a ouvert ses portes cet été à Mississauga pour répondre à la demande de notre population vieillissante, sous le nom de Wellbrook Place. D'une capacité de 600 lits, ce foyer répondra aux problèmes de capacité auxquels est confronté notre système de soins de longue durée, tout en offrant à nos aînés un endroit moderne, confortable et sûr qu'ils pourront appeler leur foyer. Grâce au programme pilote de construction accélérée de notre gouvernement, la construction de cette maison n'a duré que trois ans.

With regard to affordable housing, Ontarians should know that we are working day and night to bring them affordable housing, especially for the most vulnerable, such as victims of human trafficking and persons living with disabilities. We are also sending a message to Ontarians that at this vulnerable time of inflation and interest rate hikes, our government is still cutting costs for you and your family, and we are doing all that we can to combat the enormous expenses imposed on us by the federal government.

Madam Speaker, Ontarians are fed up with the policies of the federal Liberals—the rise in grocery prices, the rise in gas prices. Their poll numbers are free-falling, and that should be no surprise. Their inaction in working for Canadians to make life more affordable has been unacceptable. Whether it's their performance on the grocery price file or the housing file—Canadians as well as Ontarians are not happy. They are upset when they're seeing, at the gas pumps, the cost go up every week. They don't see a federal government that is working in their favour or doing anything remotely to make life more affordable.

That is why our government was elected with a mandate to serve the people of Ontario and repair a government left in shambles after 15 years of Liberal rule. We promised to make life more affordable and to fight the federal carbon tax with every tool in our power.

As we know, the carbon tax is essentially a tax on everything. It's the reason why grocery prices are rising and why Ontarians are paying more at the pump.

That is why Bill 146 will be extending the tax cut on gasoline and fuel until June 2024, saving Ontarians hundreds of dollars annually. Those who drive long or short distances to work each day will be saving nine cents per litre at the pump, thanks to our government's measures.

We told Ontarians we are for the people, and we meant it, and our actions prove it.

Madam Speaker, the number of affordability-related actions we have accomplished since forming government is outstanding. Just this past month, we raised the minimum wage by \$1, giving Ontarians the boost they need to deal with inflation. We raised ODSP and ACSD payments to the current level of inflation. And earlier this year, we allowed ODSP recipients to make \$1,000 a month of income on top of their benefit payments, so those who are willing and able to work can contribute to our economy and possibly fill labour shortages. After all, Ontario is open for business.

Speaker, 15 years of Liberal rule was spent sitting on their hands, charging Ontarians exorbitant and unnecessary fees that should never have been in place.

Our government finally ended licence plate renewal fees for vehicles, and those expensive stickers on licence plates are gone for good.

We ended road tolls on Highways 412 and 418, because Ontarians should not have to be charged extra to get to work on time.

For students and commuters, we got rid of double fares between GO Transit and municipal transit systems, because choosing the greener option of public transit should be significantly less expensive than driving.

We should be rewarding Ontarians for choosing public transit, because the last thing we need is more cars on the road, which equals more congestion. I know, for many members in this House, driving to Queen's Park every morning can be a perilous journey. So the less cars we have on the road, the more we invest in transit—and it is a fact that for every dollar we invest in highways and roads, we are investing \$3 into public transit, and so we will continue doing that.

In fact, our Associate Minister of Transportation and Minister of Transportation are working towards eliminating double fares altogether, which will greatly benefit Mississaugans who take the MiWay and TTC to work. This should have been done a long time ago, but finally our government is doing it and getting it done.

Speaking of Mississauga, I must not forget to mention the amazing projects coming soon to my city, all because of the tremendous hard work of our government, our municipalities, and our partners.

Just this past week, I visited the maintenance facility for the Hurontario LRT in Brampton, where my colleagues and I witnessed first-hand the progress made towards this \$5.6-billion transit project. For the first time, residents in Peel will have access to rapid transit, conveniently connecting them from Port Credit to Brampton, with GO station stops along the way. Of course, we are naming it after the matriarch of Mississauga, Hazel McCallion. This

will be the Hazel McCallion Line. I cannot wait to ride the very first LRT train once we open.

Let's not forget the Peter Gilgan hospital in Mississauga, which is expected to begin construction in two years.

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The reason why I went into politics was because I wanted to end hallway health care. As a nurse, I saw firsthand the devastation caused by Liberal policies and actions. We've come so far as a government in health care reform, whether it's easing our surgical backlogs by allowing Ontarians to have procedures at private clinics free of charge—of course, paid by the OHIP card, not with their credit card—or expanding breast cancer screenings to women ages 40 to 49. The list goes on.

With that said, I thank the Minister of Finance and our government for the great work that's being done in our province. Let us work towards a stronger Ontario together. Thank you and merci.

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

M^{me} France Gélinas: J'aimerais demander à la députée si elle peut partager avec nous des choses qui pourraient calmer un peu l'anxiété des gens qui sont bien contents qu'on pourra avoir des tests dépistages du cancer du sein pour les femmes de 40 à 49 ans—mais on a déjà de longues listes d'attente dans tous nos hôpitaux qui offrent ce service. S'il n'y a pas de fonds supplémentaires, est-ce que tout ce qu'on va faire c'est de créer des listes d'attente encore plus longues, quand on sait très bien que pour s'assurer que l'on détecte les cancers du sein à temps tu ne peux pas attendre? Beaucoup plus que deux ans—on te donne deux mois. Si tu n'as pas le test dépistage en dedans de deux mois, tu mets toutes ces femmes-là à risque. Où sont les ressources pour s'assurer que ces femmes-là pourront avoir un accès en temps opportun?

Ms. Natalia Kusendova-Bashta: Thank you so much. I thank the member for her question. I will respond in English because, after a certain time, my French brain turns off.

Lowering the age of eligibility for breast cancer screenings to 40 years old is a huge win for the women of Ontario. What we have seen is that, because of the pandemic, we are diagnosing cancers of all types at later stages—stage 3 or 4—which is devastating for those patients who received that late stage diagnosis. So by allowing women at 40 to self-refer without actually having to go see their family doctor or their physician—they can self-refer directly to the Ontario Breast Screening Program. This is a huge win, and it will help save lives. So I'm very positive about this announcement.

Now, it's our job, as MPPs, to raise awareness and let women know that you can refer starting at the age of 40. I hope the opposition joins us in really raising the awareness on this issue.

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

Mr. Will Bouma: I really appreciated the speech from the member for Mississauga Centre.

I'm looking here at the actual statistics. It appears that our debt-to-GDP ratio is lower now than the province of Ontario has had in 10 years. That amazes me, because we are spending now \$202 billion a year, and it was only \$150 billion when we took office, which means we have increased the budget by 33%, all while decreasing the debt-to-GDP—and we went through COVID. So I'm blown away by that.

But what I want to ask the member about—because that was just in response to the member from Hamilton West—Ancaster—Dundas—is just some of the investments that we have made in health care that I know are very, very personal to her: how many nurses we've got, how many doctors we've got, how many hospitals we're building, and how many new medical schools we are opening up.

Ms. Natalia Kusendova-Bashta: Thank you so much for that question. Yes, health care is my favourite subject to speak about.

We have made unprecedented investments in recruiting and retaining our health care workers. Last year, we had a record number of 30,000 nursing students enrol at our colleges and universities—yes, Madam Speaker, colleges, because it is this government that has allowed colleges to have stand-alone nursing baccalaureate programs. Frankly, we need everyone—colleges and universities—on board to educate our nurses.

We are, of course, opening two medical schools. That hasn't been done in decades: one in Scarborough, a medical school at Toronto University, and one in Brampton at the Toronto Metropolitan University. We will be training and recruiting more health care professionals—nurses, doctors, PSWs—into the system. This is thanks to the foresight and unprecedented investments that our government is making into health care.

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

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: Today in committee, the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing was presenting. He talked about how hard it is for young people to save enough money to get to buy a home. And so, I noticed in schedule 8, currently, when a borrower defaults on their student loan or medical residence loan, the ministry requires that notice be provided to the borrower setting out information related to enhanced collection tools, but the borrower may require the ministry to review the notice. This bill will actually remove the notice and review requirements.

It's really important that we make sure that students have the best start in life, and when they have their loans, they should be notified of a default. Could the member explain what the reason is the government felt this was something that had to be in the fall economic statement?

Ms. Natalia Kusendova-Bashta: Thank you so much for that question. I'm proud that when we were elected back in 2018, we took some unprecedented action. I believe it was 2018 or 2019 where this government actually lowered tuition fees for all Ontario students. I believe it was about by 10% that we lowered all tuition fees to make the dream of going to university, the dream of going to college, more affordable for Ontario families.

As a result, we're seeing more and more students enrol in post-secondary education, but at the same time, we're also investing in our skilled trades because we recognize that not every single young Ontarian will want to go to college or university. We are also giving them that path to success to go into skilled trades, which are good-paying—sometimes six-figure—salaries.

And so, we are doing both: investing in our education system and into the skilled trades to ensure that Ontario has the workforce it needs and deserves to deliver on our projects, especially infrastructure projects, that are in this fall economic update.

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

M. Ted Hsu: La banque de l'infrastructure prendra du temps pour se mettre en place. Ma question, c'est : pourquoi ne pas tirer profit de la banque de l'infrastructure fédérale existante? Pourquoi ne pas collaborer avec le gouvernement fédéral?

Ms. Natalia Kusendova-Bashta: Thank you so much for that question. As hundreds of thousands of people move to Ontario each year, existing infrastructure is becoming more and more strained. That's why we're making historic investments with our \$185-billion capital plan. Ontario must build even more, and Ontario taxpayers can't shoulder the cost alone. That is why our government is launching the Ontario Infrastructure Bank. Following in the steps of many other jurisdictions around the world with similar entities, the bank will attract trusted institutional investors to help finance essential infrastructure that would not otherwise get built.

From what I understand, Madam Speaker, we have Ontario teachers' pension plans that are investing in infrastructure projects outside of Ontario and other countries, and so I think why we created this Ontario Infrastructure Bank is to allow and to attract investment to come to Ontario so that our pension plan holders can invest in the Ontario Infrastructure Bank.

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

Mr. Deepak Anand: I would like to say thank you to the member from Mississauga Centre for her remarks.

When talking to my constituents, I hear about the concerns that they have regarding paying their bills. I know many of them have concerns for the economic uncertainty. We know that there are many different global impacts that affect our economy, but there are still things we can do to make sure that the residents have the help.

Could the member please explain what the FES 2023 will do to improve the lives of Ontarians who are struggling with affordability?

Ms. Natalia Kusendova-Bashta: You know what? I think affordability is top of the mind for all Ontarians and, frankly, all Canadians. The high inflation and the Bank of Canada's rapid interest rate increases are putting pressure on household budgets across Ontario. I believe it was the Premier who actually drafted a letter to the head of the Bank of Canada to really let them know that ever-increas-

ing interest rates are really unsustainable for Canadians who have mortgages to pay, who have loans to pay.

And so, to put money back in people's pockets, the Ontario government is proposing to extend the gasoline and fuel tax rate cuts for an additional six months, to June 30, 2024, through this fall economic statement. With this extension, Madam Speaker, Ontario households, on average, will save about \$260 since this cut was first introduced.

We're introducing many affordability measures, and this extension on the fuel and gasoline tax cut will make sure that more money is kept in Ontarians' pockets.

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The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): We don't have time for another round of questions and answers.

We're going to move to further debate.

Mr. Sol Mamakwa: Meegwetch. It's always an honour to be able to stand up on behalf of the people in Kiiwetinoong. Kiiwetinoong is a very vast land that is about 295,000 square kilometres. When we talk about the fall economic statement, Bill 146, An Act to implement Budget measures and to enact and amend various statutes, I remember listening in to the fall economic statement earlier this month, and because there is a high percentage of First Nations in my riding, I started hearing about reconciliation and prosperity.

But I think I'm going to focus on health. Health is a very critical issue in our riding. I can talk about long-term care. I can talk about home care. I can talk about mental health. But when we talk about First Nation health outcomes, we know that they are poorer than the Canadian average. The underlying factors are very complex and also include historical and intergenerational trauma attributed to colonialism and attributed to discriminatory policies, as well as social determinants of health. We know, at the federal level and at the provincial level, the current legislative and policy frameworks and the gaps in the existing programs that are there.

It is also a known fact that First Nation members are more likely to have chronic conditions at a younger age. The care available in First Nation communities such as the 31 First Nations I represent in the riding of Kiiwetinoong is often limited compared to the care offered to non-Indigenous communities in urban centres. We know that, and that's the way it's been. It's not by accident. It is not because the system is broken. It's working exactly the way it's designed to, which is to take away the rights of the people who live on those lands. And when I heard the fall economic statement, I never, never heard talk about on-reserve health care.

One of the things that I always bring up as an issue is long-term care. When we talk about long-term care, when we talk about the forgotten people in the north, when we talk about the First Nations people in the north, this is the reality: If there is space for our First Nation elders in long-term-care homes far away from home, generally, they go and they come home for their funeral. How cruel.

One of the things that happened in the last three years was, the pandemic shed a light on the existing health gaps

between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples—that was very clear—and the lack of long-term-care services in or near where we live. I think COVID-19 made it even more difficult for the First Nations people in my riding to access culturally safe programming and services.

The complexity between a federal system versus a provincial system can further impede our ability to get the care we need, close to home. Sometimes we just want services closer to home. A simple thing such as dialysis services—how can you get dialysis services when you don't have clean drinking water on-reserve?

One of the excuses that I hear from this government when we talk about these issues is that it's a federal—

Interjection.

Mr. Sol Mamakwa: You're okay.

I'm always told that it's a federal responsibility. It is clear that the federal government is not mandated to provide long-term-care services to First Nations on-reserve, which has caused a patchwork of services and supports. When I listened to the fall economic statement, I never heard those words. First Nations people living on-reserve do not have access to long-term-care services, which has resulted in gaps, inequitable access to services and supports, as well as barriers to access services that will improve our life outcomes.

That's the reality.

In the short term, we have thousands of elders in the north who do not have options for long-term care close to home. Why aren't we entitled to age comfortably in our homes and our communities and to receive equitable health care regardless of where we live?

Oftentimes, I hear ministers for the government say that Ontario is the best place to live. If all of you came to Neskantaga for one month, I think you would know—you would know.

But I think there's always—I always encourage that we can continue to make things better; I always encourage this government that the biggest room in the world is the room for improvement.

Co-developing a distinctions-based, community-led, Indigenous long-term-and-continuing-care framework that prioritizes ensuring First Nations peoples can receive long-term and continuing care services in or near their own communities—and something that's culturally appropriate care and programming.

No matter where you live in urban, rural and northern areas, there are so many things that we could do. As an example, in Sioux Lookout Meno Ya Win Health Centre we have a 20-bed long-term-care facility. For a long time, we've been promised an additional 76 beds. If you live in Kiiwetinoong, you wait between four and five years for that bed. I didn't hear anything like that for northerners within the economic statement.

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I remember, just right after the election—or is it right before the election?—that there was a commitment reaffirmed by Premier Ford that we would get these beds. Sioux Lookout, Kiiwetinoong, First Nations in north-western Ontario—we are still waiting. I am beginning to

realize that there's no will from the government to get these built in Sioux Lookout. We are the forgotten people. There is a letter that was sent from Aileen Urquhart. They have a letter-writing campaign going on right now to get those beds. And I know—I think it was last week or a couple of weeks ago—I had reached out to Premier Ford, saying that people need these beds. Again, I did not hear these things in the fall economic statement.

There was a media release also that was sent to me, and it's dated October 23. It's from Sioux Lookout, and the Sioux Lookout First Nations Health Authority announced their support for Howard Meshake and Jeannie Carpenter for their awareness walk called Jeannie's Way. This walk was to bring awareness to the treaty right to health for off-reserve members, regardless of where they live. Jeannie is a patient who requires 24-hour medical help because of the complex needs that she has, brought on by a stroke in 2018. She lives at home in Sioux Lookout with Howard, who is the primary caregiver.

I'm going to quote Howard Meshake. This is what he says: "We have been completely abandoned"—abandoned—"by the Ontario home and community care system. Jeannie has not received any home care services since October 2022 and only had one hour of nursing care in total since June 2023. I will do everything in my power to prevent Jeannie from having to live in a hospital just because the home and community care system is broken. The reason for this walk is not only about how the system is failing my wife, but also to highlight that this occurs for so many others here in the north. It's time for the provincial government to recognize the lack of access to health care in northern Ontario." That's a quote from Howard Meshake. I did not hear those in the fall economic statement.

Over the last few weeks, I've gone to some First Nations where you support the community, you fly into the First Nations to support the leadership on the crisis that they have with their young people. When you go to a funeral for an 11-year-old girl who committed suicide, you see that the communities, the leadership, the friends grieve together. There are no words for me to say how to make things easier for them. The only thing I can do is be there and bring their stories to here, because I did not hear anything on how to help those youths.

What I mean by that is, it's just so impossible to convey the sense of loss felt by the families. I think it's important to draw this attention to you, to these solutions and the supports that we try to bring to you. I do not say these to embarrass anyone. I do not say these things to simply make a political point. But I plead for the sake of the youth as a matter of life and death, and that you should immediately act on some solutions.

When we talk about reconciliation, when we throw reconciliation around, sometimes we First Nations people are the ones trying to reconcile all the time. There's not enough reconciliation coming from your end, because you do nothing. I think the fall economic statement serves as a lack of action for the people of Kiiwetinoong and far-northern Ontario. It shows a lack of action. I think there's

always a season of change. There's always an opportunity for change.

I know as a First Nations person who grew up on one of those reserves that Ontario is a beneficiary of this colonialism that continues to happen today. I know as well that Ontario is a perpetrator of oppression. When we talk about the issues that we see in the First Nations communities, the fall economic statement does not acknowledge that.

I think as a matter of reconciliation, you need to listen. As a matter of reconciliation, you need to hear us. As a matter of reconciliation, you need to take action. As a matter of reconciliation, you must do better. Meegwetch.

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

Mr. Will Bouma: I always appreciate hearing from the member of Kiiwetinoong because I think he knows how much I respect the fact that he's in here and everything that means for him to be in the House also and just to show up in here. I really appreciate that.

I think the member knows how much we've been fighting against the carbon tax on the government side of the House, and it was really good to see most of the opposition stand with us in opposition to the carbon tax on home heating fuels, to bring some fairness to that with the federal government, unlike the Liberal independents who have made it a point that we should be working on the HST.

I was wondering if the member could describe how much difference removing the HST off fuel would do on Indigenous territories for the House?

Mr. Sol Mamakwa: Gas: G-A-S. What is gas? Thank you for the question. It's kind of off-topic on what I was talking about, but also it's in the bill. I know it's in the bill; I don't know which schedule, but it talks about that we don't have to pay the HST or provincial tax on gas. It doesn't mean anything to me because on-reserve, when I present my status card, I already get the GST off. So it doesn't mean anything for the First Nations people, that tax is just—you could do better.

Mr. Will Bouma: We can always do better.

Mr. Sol Mamakwa: Yes, and I think the highest price in northern Ontario, in Ontario actually, the price of gas—I went to buy 23 litres of gas and paid \$4.59 for a litre. I think you guys would complain if you paid that much, but we don't complain.

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

Mr. John Vanthof: I listened very intently to my colleague from Kiiwetinoong. We walk to work together every morning, and I've learned a lot. I think people would benefit—you've said in your remarks that we would have a different view of how great it is to live in Ontario if we lived in Neskantaga, for many of us. So could you just describe in a minute or two what it's like if we arrived in Neskantaga?

Mr. Sol Mamakwa: The first thing is the boil-water advisory. There's no way you would drink the water there.

You would have to be drinking the bottled water that is flown in by the government. I don't know if you guys would be able to take a shower even. I've travelled with different government representatives and some ministers, and we've overnighted there. There's people—you notice that they don't shower. Why? Because of the boil-water advisory. Hydro, of course, is very questionable because of the diesel generators that we have.

But I want to flip over to a good side of things. We have access to land. We have access to fishing, hunting and all that. That's the greatest thing. We're so rich in that way with the resources that we have. You'd grow on the land. The land would grow on you. Meegwetch.

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

Mr. Andrew Dowie: I want to thank the member opposite for really telling a story that we don't get to understand well in the south. I can only imagine. Your riding is so vast, and the price that exists for food, for travel could be insurmountable for many, many families. I just wanted to ask that question, whether the measures to reduce the fuel tax will have a positive impact for the people of your riding.

Mr. Sol Mamakwa: I think it's important—you know, you all want to talk about gas, and gas is essential for some people. I know it's important that we—I think that we have to fly in the fuel, right? There's a process. The fuel will come from Winnipeg, drive all the way to Pickle Lake and then we get a plane. I've actually seen the planes; they have these big tubes where they put the 45,000 litres of fuel, which is about 15,000 pounds of fuel, and then they'll fly it out.

It's probably about \$2.50 when you actually deliver it. The rest is for whoever is making that money, whether it's Northern, whether it's the airline. That's why it costs as much as \$4.59. I wish we were paying \$1.50 per litre in the reserves.

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

M^{me} France Gélinas: The member spent a lot of time talking about health care and access to health care for the people that he represents. I agree with him that there is absolutely nothing in this fall economic statement, there is nothing in this bill that will improve equity of access to the health care system that the people need.

Could you give us some examples as to the difference in access for the people you represent versus the access that is available to people who live in Toronto, let's say?

Mr. Sol Mamakwa: In my home First Nation, there's about 600 people there. We get physician access five days per month. Out of those five days, two of those are travel days, so that's three days. So we have physician access 60 days a year for the 600 people. That's just an example.

When we talk about vision care or we talk about dental care, these people come on a semi-yearly basis, or sometimes quarterly, depending on the size. You have to fly out if you want to get—there was somebody here over the weekend. I was in Toronto over the weekend. They had to come all the way to Toronto to get access to health care, which is quite a difference.

Travel costs so much to be able to access health care. It's really expensive. We need to bring services closer to home.

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

Mr. Anthony Leardi: On page 51 of the financial economic statement, there's an outline of several Indigenous transportation initiatives. The government of Ontario is continuing to support these community-driven transportation-related projects for Indigenous peoples, both in Indigenous urban, rural and reserve settings across Ontario. The government is providing up to \$484,000 to nine Indigenous organizations and communities to help support economic development, mobility and transportation safety. I would like to know if the member can support any one of those nine initiatives.

Mr. Sol Mamakwa: Certainly, I think when we talk about nine First Nations or nine organizations, there's 134 First Nations in Ontario. I know within northern Ontario, within Nishnawbe Aski Nation, there are 49 First Nations. Sure, yes, congratulations; kudos to the government. But it's very minimal.

Sometimes I see that the bare minimum is done, whereby you make it look as if you're doing something without really doing anything. I think we need to actually see real investments into the communities that I represent, not worrying about jurisdiction, not worrying about who pays for the cost.

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): Further debate?

Mr. Ted Hsu: I'd like to start my remarks by discussing the infrastructure bank because there are some questions that I have in my mind. The main one is: Why not just sign on and collaborate with the federal government and take advantage of the federal infrastructure bank? Because it takes some time to set up an infrastructure bank. It's not like you just deposit money into a bank account or something. You need to hire experts who can evaluate investments and look at how they correlate with each other in value as things fluctuate in the world. You have to build up organizational capacity. So in my mind, the question is, why don't we collaborate with the federal government and work together?

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The federal infrastructure bank had taken some time to set up—people are complaining about it, but it actually takes some time to hire good people and set up an organization so that you choose good investments and you choose a portfolio of investments that have low risk when events happen in the world.

The other question I have is—in the fall economic statement, they discussed things like funding affordable housing and long-term care. To my mind, an infrastructure bank, a structure like that, is overkill for things like affordable housing and long-term care. These are not giant complicated projects that need sophisticated analysis and access to worldwide capital. It just seems to me that it would be much easier, if we wanted to build affordable housing, to put it on the municipal or provincial balance

sheet. I think that makes a lot more sense. In fact, the federal infrastructure bank doesn't even bother with these smaller projects.

The other thing is, why are we going with an infrastructure bank and not just putting things on a provincial balance sheet? Private money, such as in a pension fund, needs to—you know, they have a fiduciary responsibility to find the largest returns, a risk-adjusted return, for people's retirements, for people who have invested money and put money into the pension fund. So it's just like any other source of capital in the world: It's looking for the best risk-adjusted return.

Affordable housing is a little bit different, because if we're providing affordable housing, there is a public good. The government can therefore demand a return on investment that's not the market rate of return. It can be below the market rate of return. An example of that is a seniors' affordable housing residence in my riding of Kingston and the Islands, which had an internal rate of return of 3%, which is too low to attract private investment. But given that when it was built, the province of Ontario could borrow money at 3%, basically it was a cash-neutral investment that was community housing. It was something that could be financed without going to the capital markets. It made sense, because the capital markets would demand a higher rate of return because it's competing against other possible investments. The government, on the other hand, is in the business not of maximizing return on capital, but of providing public service, so it doesn't need as high of a return.

Again, I would say do we really need an infrastructure bank to build affordable housing? Infrastructure banks are more appropriate for big transportation projects—for example, rail, ports, bridges, or intermodal facilities to make the economy work better—energy infrastructure or large municipal infrastructure. That's another source. That's another example of infrastructure projects that would be more appropriate for an infrastructure bank.

The second thing I want to talk about is the vaping tax, which I think is a good thing. I think we should all be worried about the fact that our young people are vaping and using it at a very high rate. In fact, the Heart and Stroke Foundation says that about one fifth of students in grades 10 to 12 report that they are currently vaping. One of the problems is that this is cheap compared to, say, tobacco. So young people are going to vaping, and this is not good for their health.

So what can we do about it? Well, one thing we can do is put a tax on it. Such a tax has worked in other jurisdictions in Europe and the United States. These taxes have resulted in a drop in sales and demand for vaping products and therefore the use of vaping products. That is something that is good in the fall economic statement.

However, the word "affordability" doesn't appear in the fall economic statement. One aspect of affordability is that 50% of Ontarians are living paycheque to paycheque. A lot of people are having trouble putting food—good nutritious food—on the table. Feed Ontario did a report recently, which revealed that 800,000 people accessed

emergency food support last year. That's the largest single-year increase ever recorded by the Ontario food bank network. We know that so many more people are using food banks now. Another statistic: 30% of food bank users are under the age of 18. So we have a lot of people in Ontario struggling with just getting enough food, being able to afford the food they need, and they're overwhelmingly—they skew towards the young population.

There was no increase in the fall economic statement to the Ontario Child Benefit, which can help families with affording expenses like food.

School meal programs are running out of money. Given that food banks are being used so much, families are trying to find every possible way of affording the food that they need. School meal programs would have been one way to help out with that, and the government has only put a small amount of money into that.

There was no new money in this budget for crucial programs like ODSP and OW. We have people sending in their household budgets to their members of provincial Parliament, explaining to them how they have no money left over to afford the basics of life, given the low levels of ODSP, which have fallen behind the rate of inflation—not only the overall rate of inflation, but inflation for food and lodging has been especially high.

There have been very modest increases, I would say, in the wages for early childhood educators. There are no pensions, like they recently decided to implement in Prince Edward Island. This is important because this is a bottleneck to our economy. The reason why we're having trouble setting up child care for everybody so they can get to work and increase the productivity of the economy is, we don't have enough early childhood educators who can work at licensed child care facilities, so we're unable to implement this promise of \$10-a-day child care across the province. It's a bottleneck for people who want to work but can't find child care.

Finally, there's nothing in this fall economic statement about the Ontario Seniors Dental Care Program. This is a program that provides dental care for low-income seniors. There's an income threshold: \$22,200 for a single person, and \$37,100 for couples. The problem here is that the federal government has raised its support payments—OAS, GIS and CPP. I have gotten many letters from constituents—and I'm sure other members of this body have received letters from their constituents—that this increase in federal support, because there's inflation, has pushed up the income of these individuals or couples so that it's higher than the threshold for the Ontario Seniors Dental Care Program. Even though their federal support has increased, they have actually lost this coverage for dental care. To put it another way, this government hasn't taken inflation into account in this numerical threshold for the Ontario Seniors Dental Care Program.

Now I'd like to turn to housing and talk about the water systems fund. It's something in the fall economic statement that only lasts three years, but I'll say that if you want to upgrade existing urban water and sewage systems, it takes a lot longer than three years; for many urban areas,

it can be a decade- or two-decades-long project. We need sustained funding for many, many years so that we can improve the infrastructure in many of our urban centres. I think we should be having a goal to preserve prime agricultural land, to stop urban sprawl, and to increase density in cities.

One of the things we have to do to increase density in many cities is to provide the infrastructure that's needed. If you're building in greenfields, which we do sometimes—we can't do too much of it because it's not sustainable—you can put that in quickly. But in many urban areas, this is a long process, because you've got to disrupt the existing activity, the existing people who are living in urban areas. This is something that municipalities need to be able to plan for many, many years, so a three-year-long project, to my mind, is not enough.

Another reason for having a long-term project is, if you're building infrastructure, a good way to minimize costs is to do it in pieces so that, year after year, you're doing the same thing over and over again, which means that, in the second and third and fourth year, you start doing things better. You've got the same people doing the same thing. You find efficiencies. You don't have any surprises in costs. Your suppliers know that they will have constant business, and they will invest in upgrades to their capacity to produce things in the supply chain for whatever infrastructure you're building. So it makes sense to try to not build a whole bunch of infrastructure at one time, but to plan ahead and spread it out over years to lower the cost and to try to be as efficient as possible.

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Another suggestion I have for the government is—because in the fall economic statement, they talk about modular housing. And one of the challenges of companies that are building modular housing, like any other company, is that they need to house their own workers. One thing that I learned from one company that they would like to do is to use their own modular housing system to build housing for their workers that they would need to staff up a plant, as they expand the capacity to build modular housing. And so for that, they need to be able to change the zoning on their industrial site to allow for residences. So that's something that the provincial government could think about, which is to encourage municipalities to allow companies building modular housing to house their own workers on their industrial sites using their own modular housing.

In fact, things like that—when you have a company that's just starting out, if you encourage them to build their own product, it's a good way, through government procurement or through government regulation, to stimulate innovation.

Finally, I want to spend the last minute and a half to talk about financing, because one of the problems that we have now is that we're facing higher interest rates. I want to complain about what this government did not do during the pandemic, when we had rock-bottom interest rates. The average maturity of government debt was not extended. There was an opportunity, Madam Speaker, for the

government of Ontario to issue very long-term debt to extend the average maturity of Ontario government bonds that the treasury was issuing. The idea is to lock in low interest rates for a long, long time, and now that interest rates have risen, as government bonds mature and have to be refinanced, they're facing having to issue bonds at much higher interest rates.

And so I think the government, a couple of years ago during the pandemic, made a mistake and should have been trying to extend the maturity of Ontario government bonds when long-term interest rates were at a historic low that we will probably never see again. I think that was a mistake.

Finally, the important thing is productivity. That's what economists say will give us long-term prosperity. There was very little in this budget that discusses productivity—except, perhaps, building highways. But there's so much more to our economy that we should be working on, and I regret that this fall economic statement did not have something more about how to improve the productivity of our economy and improve prosperity in the future.

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): We're going to start with the questions.

Mr. Will Bouma: I don't know; I spent a couple of years on municipal council and I've been intrigued by planning for a long time. I spent eight years on the committee of adjustment in the county of Brant. I've never had anyone actually suggest that we should put housing into an industrial subdivision because the biggest complaint that I get from industry is that housing is too close to that. And so, I wanted to do a reality check.

Well, and then you're also ghettoizing—the ghettoization of workers in industrial subdivisions, completely disconnected from the community that's around them—groceries and everything else. I just wanted to check: Was the member honest that he actually wants to build ghettos for workers in industrial subdivisions?

Mr. Ted Hsu: Point of order, Madam Speaker.

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): Sorry—the point of order?

Mr. Ted Hsu: Point of order: I think the member is questioning my integrity.

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): Okay, I will warn the member on their language. Again, we can't—

Mr. Will Bouma: What did I say?

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): I'm just cautioning the members, please—

Mr. Will Bouma: I asked an honest question.

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): And I'm just cautioning the member. Thank you.

I will allow the member for Kingston and the Islands to reply.

Mr. Ted Hsu: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Yes, in fact, this is a real example of a company just north of my riding building modular housing, but they need workers in order to expand their plant. The reason why they're having problems is they don't know where to house these workers, because we have a housing crisis.

This is crazy, because they're actually building housing. Why couldn't they build housing right on the plant where the workers are working, in order to expand their plant to build housing for the rest of the province?

That is where the example comes from, and I think this is an example of the out-of-the-box thinking that we need to tackle the housing crisis. It's one of the ways that we can actually treat this housing crisis like a crisis, which is what the people of Ontario want us to do.

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

Ms. Bhutla Karpoche: I thank the member from Kingston and the Islands for his presentation. I think that he would share the frustration that we, the official opposition NDP, had about the committee process of this bill because of the amendments that we tabled and were voted down.

Could you please share with the House some of the amendments that the independent Liberals brought forward that were not supported by the government or what happened with them?

Mr. Ted Hsu: I was not in committee at the time, so I couldn't tell you the amendments, but what I will say is that I have seen this government, like other Conservative governments, really not even think about amendments and give rational reasons for voting them down. It really insults the whole committee process, which is where, in this body and in other Westminster bodies, we're supposed to be thinking carefully about the details of the bill and looking at ways to improve things.

Nobody does things perfectly the first time around, and that's why we have committees that will consider amendments, and even debate them and try to get to the crux of why the bill is written one way and not another way. And so my advice to the government is to just have a discussion about amendments and be serious.

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

Mr. Anthony Leardi: In the fall economic statement, or the package that was received by every member of this assembly, on pages 67, 68 and 69, numerous affordability measures are outlined, including reducing the tax on gas by 10 cents per litre, eliminating licence plate renewal fees and stickers, supporting GO Transit co-fare discounts, increasing the minimum wage, improving the Ontario Disability Support Program, doubling Guaranteed Annual Income System payments, helping seniors through the Ontario Seniors Care at Home Tax Credit and providing affordable child care.

My question to the member is this: Among all of these affordability measures—and the list goes on—which one is his favourite?

Mr. Ted Hsu: I cannot believe that I heard this member talk about ODSP, disability support, because they have cut the ODSP support in real dollars after inflation. I cannot believe that this member has the gall to stand up and say that they've increased ODSP. I cannot believe that he is not listening to—there must be many, many people in this member's riding who are writing him and showing him

their household budgets, showing him how hard it is to pay for the essentials in life, like good, nutritious food. I cannot believe that this member has the gall to stand up and bring up ODSP as one of the areas where this government has dealt with the cost of living. He should be ashamed of himself.

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

M^{me} France Gélinas: It was interesting to listen to the member pick out the taxes that will be added to vaping products in Ontario. I can tell you that the statistics in northern Ontario are sometimes double, triple what the statistics are in southern Ontario with the number of young people—that is, under the age of 18—who vape on a regular basis.

Why? Because it's cheap. And why? Because it tastes good. Have a look at the flavours that the vaping industry is putting forward. They're not flavours that attract us; they're flavours that attract the 16- and 17-year-olds. Most of the products are boosted with nicotine, and the kids get addicted to nicotine really, really quickly.

Do you figure it's time that we look at vaping as not for kids and make sure that Ontario regulates the flavours that vaping products can be marketed in?

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Mr. Ted Hsu: One thing I learned, Madam Speaker, is that the average age that kids start vaping is about 16 years old. It's very young. You can barely drive when you're 16 years old. There are a lot of things you can't do when you're 16 years old, and yet, the average age—not the minimum age, the average age—of teenagers vaping is 16 years old. The member is completely right: It's because it's cheap and because there are these flavours that attract young people. They're being roped into an addiction that will stick with them for a long, long time.

That's why we have to do something, and one simple thing we can do is to make it more expensive. There are other things we can do. Addictions and smoking and things like that are very hard to deal with, but one thing we can do is prevent people from starting that habit and make it less cheap, and doing something about the flavours is definitely something we can do.

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

Hon. Michael S. Kerzner: I want to thank my colleague opposite from Kingston and the Islands. I listened to the beginning of his remarks and, as I think about our fiscal responsibility and how we have to be prudent managers of the taxpayers' money, I get the impression that there is no cheque that the member and his party are not prepared to write. Given the times we're in, given the unprecedented rise in interest rates that's driven in large measure by inflationary pressures like the carbon tax, I think it's important that we go back to what we're talking about in that we are fiscally responsible, we're progressively sensitive to how we have to build our economy, but we have to do it without putting debt on the backs of our children year after year. I wonder if he could talk about our concern about being fiscally responsible.

Mr. Ted Hsu: Well, Madam Speaker, this remark just shows that the Conservatives cannot be trusted to manage the economy. This member thinks that inflation is largely due to the carbon tax. That is completely false.

Let me just say here, because I'm going to say it over and over and over again in the years to come: Conservatives cannot manage the economy because they won't admit what's going on. They make up stuff. That is why you cannot trust Conservatives. You cannot trust Conservatives to actually say things that are correct every time they talk about the economy.

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): You have got to watch—again, I did ask the members to be cautious about their language, about accusations.

We're just going to move to further debate. There's no more time for questions.

Mr. Will Bouma: It's always an honour to rise here in the House on behalf of the citizens of Brantford–Brant; the good folks back home. I'm pleased to speak about Bill 146 and our continued plan for Bill 146 and the 2023 budget measures and the role that they will play in our government's unwavering commitment to building a strong Ontario.

We find ourselves today in a period of global uncertainty—geopolitical uncertainty. We find ourselves today in a time of high inflation. We've seen the Bank of Canada continue to increase interest rates, and while that's eased a bit, we have no guarantees that interest rates aren't going to be climbing higher. All of these things are weighing on our economic outlook for the remainder of this year and into next year.

Despite this, Ontario's population is rapidly growing, more well-paying jobs are being created, and we are attracting important investments from key industries. As such, the choice for the road ahead for the government is clear: We must continue our responsible and targeted approach to building a strong Ontario. That is why the 2023 fall economic statement provides the government with the flexibility needed to address the impacts of a slowing global economy while laying a strong fiscal foundation for future generations.

Speaker, it is our duty to ensure that Ontario remains a desirable place to live and work far into the future. In keeping with countless of our other policies, we are continuing to help workers save for their retirement, we are putting money back into people's pockets, and we are making public services convenient and easy to access. We also remain steadfast in our promise to build 1.5 million homes by 2031 to address the housing crisis and accommodate our expanding population. Speaker, the road ahead will not be easy, but we have seen what the people of Ontario can accomplish when working together, and our government is confident that our province will continue to flourish into the coming years.

Our government has outlined many new initiatives in the fall economic statement that will help Ontarians achieve their goals and have their dreams come true. Speaker, the fall economic statement will help facilitate our promise of building 1.5 million homes by 2031 by

launching multiple new initiatives. These new initiatives will work in harmony with previously announced investments such as the Building Faster Fund, a new three-year \$1.2-billion fund that will provide up to \$400 million per year to municipalities that meet or exceed the housing targets that they have pledged to achieve by 2031.

Our government wholeheartedly believes that municipalities should be rewarded for their good work and their commitment to the betterment of Ontario. The 29 municipalities assigned housing targets in 2022 and the 21 municipalities with newly assigned housing targets represent more than 88% of the provincial target of 1.5 million homes. By incentivizing municipal governments to achieve these goals, our government is confident that we will be one step closer to ending the housing crisis in our province.

Our government knows that municipalities want to build more homes for Ontarians, but in some specific instances housing development is blocked by infrastructure constraints. I am proud to represent a government that is prepared to assist municipalities in achieving their goals by removing these constraints through investments such as the new Housing-Enabling Water Systems Fund.

Speaker, our government is acutely aware of the importance of fresh water and its accessibility for Ontarians. That is why our government is moving forward with a \$200-million investment over the next three years, and our government is also asking the federal government to provide funding to support this new water systems fund. This investment will assist municipalities to repair, to rehabilitate and to expand critical drinking water, waste water and storm water infrastructure. Our government believes in preserving Ontario's water quality, and the province has invested in cutting-edge infrastructure and environmentally conscious practices that ensure a safe and abundant water supply.

The Housing-Enabling Water Systems Fund is a pragmatic extension of that belief, which will greatly assist municipal governments in meeting their housing targets all while guaranteeing that the quality of our water remains pure and untainted for all current and future Ontarians.

Speaker, as part of our government's staunch promise to build 1.5 million new homes by 2031, we are launching initiatives to build complementary infrastructure. One of the most significant new initiatives that works towards this end is the launch of the Ontario Infrastructure Bank. As our government moves forward with its ambitious plan to build 1.5 million homes by 2031, we understand that essential infrastructure must also be built to accommodate our burgeoning province.

The Ontario Infrastructure Bank is a critical new tool that will allow the province to attract more capital to ensure that vital infrastructure projects are adequately funded. A growing province, Speaker, is a good thing; however, more people necessitate more infrastructure to sustain them, and that is why our government is funding this new agency. The Ontario Infrastructure Bank will alleviate the strain on Ontario's existing infrastructure by securing the funding to build that new, needed infrastructure.

The Ontario Infrastructure Bank will also ensure that Ontario taxpayers are not forced to bear the cost of new infrastructure projects alone. As our government moves forward with Ontario's plan to build, we will consider new and ambitious ways to attract trusted Canadian institutional investors to help build essential infrastructure that would otherwise not get built.

Additionally, the Ontario Infrastructure Bank is a board-governed agency that will operate under a detailed memorandum of understanding and will contain a robust accountability framework. Infrastructure project investments made by the Ontario Infrastructure Bank will be selected based on an independent qualification process that takes the priority areas outlined by the government into account. The board will have the authority to select projects and project partners that will be chosen based on a detailed process that ensures there is appropriate qualification and selection of projects and partners in priority areas, based on financial and public benefit criteria.

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The Ontario Infrastructure Bank will achieve its goal of ensuring our province's infrastructure needs are met as the province grows by:

- investing in infrastructure and appropriately allocating risks among the bank and other investors;
- structuring proposals and negotiating agreements with investors in infrastructure projects;
- receiving and assessing unsolicited ideas and proposals for infrastructure projects that come from qualified institutional investors, public sector entities, governments or Indigenous communities; and
- providing advisory services with respect to financing infrastructure projects, including loan structures and areas of investment opportunity.

Speaker, as you know, our government continues to prioritize building housing and infrastructure. That being said, we are abundantly aware that steps must be taken to guarantee that the quality of living for Ontarians only increases alongside increases made to housing and to infrastructure. To that end, the fall economic statement makes important considerations in public safety.

More and more Ontarians in urban areas are becoming victims of auto theft. The majority of car theft instances are tied to organized crime. It is the responsibility of our government to crack down on the perpetrators of these crimes and ensure Ontarians can go to sleep knowing that their vehicle will still be in their driveway when they wake up.

Speaker, I am proud to represent a government that is taking action against auto theft. Our government is fighting auto theft through an investment of \$51 million in new measures to help police identify and dismantle organized crime networks, and put those responsible behind bars. This new investment also supports first-of-its-kind auto theft prosecution teams to investigate and prosecute criminal organizations that profit from stolen vehicles.

This initiative will work in tandem with the Greater Toronto Area-Greater Golden Horseshoe Investigative Fund. This investigative fund will be receiving \$1.4 mil-

lion over the next three years from our government to help put an end to the export of stolen vehicles, as well as to crack down on violent crime associated with organized criminal enterprises.

However, this is not a problem that is exclusive to Ontario, and to snuff out crimes of this nature, our government requires the assistance of the Canada Border Services Agency, the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, Montreal and Halifax port authorities, and shipping container and railway companies. We urge these organizations to join us in the fight to end auto theft.

Speaker, in addition to combatting auto theft, our government is investing \$35 million in the 2023-24 period to prevent repeat violent offenders from endangering communities. This funding will assist dedicated bail compliance teams within the Ontario Provincial Police, municipal and First Nations police services, as well as intensive serious violent criminal bail teams within the court system. It is imperative that violent offenders are not able to bail-jump, and by ensuring bail compliance teams are adequately staffed and equipped, they can better perform their duties and keep violent offenders from committing more crime.

Speaker, I am confident that the initiatives I have outlined today will bring about meaningful change in this province. I, along with our government, remain unwavering in our commitment to build Ontario.

These new investments will allow our government to fulfill our promise to the people of Ontario and build 1.5 million new homes by 2031. Additionally, they will allow our government to develop infrastructure that will facilitate these new homes and provide a high quality of life to the residents that will be living in them.

Finally, the funds our government is putting towards public safety initiatives will ensure that new and existing residents of Ontario will be safe in their communities.

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): We're going to go to questions for the member.

Ms. Sandy Shaw: I noticed that the member spent much of his time discussing the infrastructure bank, but I'd like to be perfectly clear with the member that your federal counterparts called the Liberal infrastructure bank "a complete failure," and they even, in fact, called it a "\$35-billion boondoggle" and they wanted it scrapped. So why is the Ford PC government modelling something that the feds said that they wanted to scrap?

And finally, the Canadian Taxpayers Federation said that this was a complete failure, and they had a question for the member, which is, how are you—"It's a complete waste of taxpayer dollars." That's the Canadian Taxpayers Federation. "The government could use the \$3 billion on something else like giving relief to taxpayers who can barely afford to pay their bills."

So what do you have to say to Jay Goldberg from the Canadian Taxpayers Federation that said this is a complete waste?

Mr. Will Bouma: I appreciate the question, but I think the member—well, colleagues, it's obvious: The Canadian Infrastructure Bank was set up by the federal government

in 2017, which was Liberal. Need I say more about why it's not working?

The reality is that the people of Ontario need serious infrastructure. I was having a meeting with the mayor of Norfolk. She mentioned that they need a \$400-million waterline in order to properly service Haldimand–Norfolk and Six Nations territory. That's a lot of money. There's no way those municipalities can come up with that, and quite frankly, we don't have the infrastructure dollars lying around in order to do that also. So we need to look at different products that can give us the infrastructure that we need.

As to the Liberal members, I don't know why they think that an infrastructure bank set up by a Liberal is good and one set up by Conservatives isn't.

But to the member for Hamilton West–Ancaster–Dundas: We need to build Ontario, and we're going to get it done.

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

Ms. Laura Smith: Thank you to my friend for his remarks. I appreciate—

Mr. Will Bouma: Thank you.

Ms. Laura Smith: Yes, you are my friend. We're all friends.

He touched on something that actually hit quite home for me, which is car theft, which is a reality for so many of us in the room. We battle with this issue. We hear from our constituents, and sadly this is something that we've heard from many of the people in our communities.

I was happy to hear about the initiatives that are happening in car theft and the investment of \$51 million in the prosecution teams and investigative fund. I was wondering if the member could elaborate on some of that information to me, because I'm very interested in clamping down in that area, and I appreciated his comments.

Mr. Will Bouma: I appreciate the question from the member from Thornhill, and I count her as one of my closest friends here in the House.

The reality is auto theft is a huge problem in the province of Ontario. Indeed, as geopolitical tensions rise and as affordability becomes more of a problem for so many in the province of Ontario, unfortunately, these things are only going to get worse. That's why we have to take action. And it's not just exotic cars and other things that end up in the port of Montreal; it's the average everyday Ontarians who are suffering from this. The reality is that almost all of car theft goes through organized crime. We cannot support organized crime, which is why we need to take action, which is why I'm also excited.

I remember just not too long ago I was sitting down with a car rental company, and just in our small region in southwestern Ontario—for, I think it was, Enterprise car rentals—they were losing \$400,000 a year just in catalytic converter theft. So it's something that we have to get a handle on.

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

Miss Monique Taylor: Thank you to the member for his portion of the debate this evening. Unfortunately, I didn't hear anything about the most vulnerable people in our province in his talking points. We know that many people in the province are struggling day to day with food insecurity. We have a report, the Hunger Report 2023, from Feed Ontario that states very clearly that people are using food banks at a 38% increase from last year, with numbers of over 800,000 people accessing food banks in our province.

Does the member not find it necessary to include them in his talking points and ensure that people, including one in four children, are not hungry—

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

The member for Brantford–Brant to answer.

2020

Mr. Will Bouma: Colleagues, what I always appreciate about the NDP is if they can't say anything good about a bill, they talk about something else, and that's exactly what's happening here. They don't talk about what we're doing with ODSP. They don't talk about what we're doing in other stuff in order to help the most vulnerable people in Ontario. They talk about what's not in the fall economic statement.

So, to me, since they already supported us on second reading of this the legislation, I'm absolutely looking forward to seeing full-on NDP support for our fall economic statement when we pass this at third reading, because again, they can't say anything negative about it at all. They have some ideas about random things, that there could be more that could be in the bill. Quite frankly, if we put more in the bill, then they'd be complaining that we were making an omnibus bill, because that's how this goes.

The reality is we're building Ontario, we're getting it done, and I'm very excited about that.

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): Next question: the member for Brantford–Brant—no, sorry; Brampton North.

Mr. Graham McGregor: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It's been a long night.

It's funny to hear the NDP talk about federal counterparts. The federal NDP might be the only political party that's less popular than the provincial NDP. But one of the things that they share in common is a commitment to the carbon tax and a desire to see higher taxes and higher spending out of government. We've got a good plan here extending the gas tax cut and maintaining our cut to the licence plate stickers, putting money back into people's pockets. These are clearly very popular with the public when they sent us on a mandate to form government.

Does the member have any advice for opposition members about how they might vote on this bill with so many good things in it that could give them a little bit to think about when they vote on third reading?

Mr. Will Bouma: I appreciate the question. You know, the province of Ontario is somewhat limited in some of the things that we can do on affordability, which is why on

everything that we do, we have to partner with all levels of government. And indeed, when those things all work together, then we can make great things happen in the province of Ontario.

The reality is—I can remember, when we first got here in 2018, that we still had the ICIP funding through the federal government. It was amazing, some of the projects that we got through on that. It's too bad that the federal government is continuing to penalize the province of Ontario with the carbon tax, but affordability is a real issue. I even got one Liberal member to admit that the Bank of Canada said that it is costing Ontarians more and that it's only going to get worse. It's going to be \$2,000 for the average family by 2031—let alone what's going to happen to families in Kiiwetinoong and to other member's ridings in the north because, obviously, it'll cost a whole lot more there. We have to work hard. We have to work together. Let's scrap the carbon tax.

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

Miss Monique Taylor: The member stated that he wonders why we're not talking about ODSP and why we're talking about things that are not in the fall economic statement—well, the economic statement is actually the lay of the land and the government's responsibility of the province, so when we do talk about vulnerable people, we expect the government to listen.

People on ODSP are doing worse than they have ever done. A recent report from McMaster University suggests that Ontario's "poorest and most vulnerable came out of the ... pandemic worse off than they were before." They did an interview of 16 ODSP recipients over a two-year span, and the report highlights how the inadequacies of existing support programs have deepened the post-pandemic social assistance crisis.

Does the member not think that, obviously, his ODSP plan is not enough to keep people safe in the province?

Mr. Will Bouma: You know, Speaker, that member talks about ODSP in the House. Where was she when the NDP had the balance of power? Where was the NDP when they had the opportunity? They could have brought down the Liberal government when they were in minority and said, "You fix ODSP, or we're out and we bring you down." Do you know what they did, colleagues? Nothing. Nothing at all.

Now, they're in here after our government has increased ODSP more than anyone ever has, and we've indexed it to the cost of inflation, and now they talk about ODSP. I have never heard anything more ridiculous in my life. But you know what? They still can't say anything bad about the fall economic statement. I hope you will all take a good, hard, long look in the mirror and vote in favour of this legislation.

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): We're going to move to further debate.

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: I was talking to my daughter earlier today and I wanted to say hi to my grandchildren, but two of them are sleeping. The twins had a very, very busy day, so they fell asleep early. Mom is

probably grateful for that. And I know Lily is probably still up, so hi, Lily. It's Grandma here, but you better get to bed and get a good night's rest. I wanted to start off my debate on that note because family is very important to everyone in this Legislature.

I want to talk about this morning when I woke up. Like many of you, I got ready for work. I was able to have a shower, prepared my lunch and dressed warmly. I looked outside and it looked really cold. I put my coat and scarf on. I had my radio—my radio; I had my phone. I keep thinking about those transistor radios—I have one at home, by the way. I had my phone and my earplugs in, and I was listening to Run Away to Mars. I really encourage everyone to listen to that at one time; it's a really good song.

As I'm walking to the Legislature, admiring the scenery as I walk through Queen's Park, I saw something laying on the ground, and I wasn't sure what it was. It appeared to be a blanket and then, as I got closer, it was a sleeping bag. I got worried and thought, "Is somebody in that sleeping bag?" It looked like there was a pillow or—it was stuffed. As I approached it, as I got closer, I thought, "Oh, my goodness, there's somebody in that sleeping bag." For a minute there, I stopped dead in my tracks and thought, "Are they alive?" and they moved; their legs moved.

On my path to work, I couldn't get that out of my mind because I thought, honestly, the way I started my morning in a house, in a warm place, making my lunch, making sure I was warm walking to work, and here's somebody lying on the ground—and it was cold today—in a sleeping bag, just surviving.

So what I want to talk about is deep poverty. I'm sure the poverty that I'm going to speak about today doesn't compare to what the member from Kiiwetinoong talked about, but that's what I think we're missing in this fall economic statement: deep poverty. The government has missed a moment to address what's really happening literally in our parks. While walking on our way to work, walking to the store, walking to see a movie, walking to do some shopping, we are just literally walking past people laying on the ground, on the sidewalk, and it seems to be part of every day as a matter of fact. I think that's really wrong, and this fall economic statement is missing the moment that we must address deep poverty. Yes, we have to address the affordability of home ownership.

Yes, we have to address the affordability of how things are expensive, buying food, buying gas and insurance and rent, but we're not addressing deep poverty, and if we start doing that—and I've said this before. If governments had a mandate to actually build homes for every demographic in this province, we wouldn't be in this position that we are in today.

We've been ignoring deep poverty. Now it's a crisis and we need to fix it, and the way we can fix it is, we can address it in a real way. When we're in a deep poverty situation, if you really think about it, we actually have to have reports coming out titled Hunger Report 2023. We have to write a report in this province about hunger, so we are in deep poverty and we have to acknowledge the most

vulnerable people in our society in order to get out of this crisis.

Yes, the fall economic statement there, there are some things in there that are going to help people, but we also can't forget about the deep poverty. If we, as leaders in this province, recognized that deep poverty needs to be invested in, we would actually be saving money, we would actually be doing better. Investing upfront in deep poverty would reduce police responses. If we invested in deep poverty, it would reduce emergency wait times. If we invested in deep poverty, we would reduce emergency wait times. If we invested in deep poverty, we would be saving in our corrections. That's what we would be—you would actually have extra money to use to build affordable housing.

2030

So deep poverty is something we have to address, and I have to say, ISARC was here last week, so the timing aligns with the fall economic statement. And they talk about the homeless crisis that we're in. I know all of you know that there's a homeless crisis. It's not just in the big cities anymore. It's in small-town Pembroke. When we met with NOMA last year, they were talking about their homeless situation. Pembroke's I think about 15,000 to 17,000 in population. What ISARC pointed out—and it was very poignant really. If you're not in deep poverty, or you're not living paycheque to paycheque wondering if you're going to be on the street the next month because you can't afford your rent, it's easy to dismiss deep poverty.

But we have to think about it because any one of us—and this is what I find sometimes: Unless it affects you personally, we don't take it seriously enough. Listen, any one of us can end up in that kind of poverty situation. Just get hurt and you're not able to work, you can be in deep poverty. Just have your interest rate renew on your mortgage, and your wages haven't gone up to that amount. Where are you going to find that money?

So ISARC pointed out how we have really been obviously ignoring poverty but how we've come to a point where we're accepting that every day someone is sleeping in the park on the cold hard ground in a sleeping bag. This is what they said.

So originally, they said that affordable housing was underfunded, and as a result of that, we ended up having shelters. That was one of the fixes. Temporarily, we have shelters so people can transition out of those, into some kind of affordable housing, social housing, co-operative housing—that kind of thing. But the government of the day—and this was back in the 1990s—stopped building those kinds of homes that would have prevented deep poverty. So shelters: That was the temporary fix to getting people back on their feet, but it never happened, and now we're actually expanding shelters as a solution for people who don't have homes. Honestly, it's insulting that that's where we're at today.

Then, shelters aren't enough, so now people have to be in encampments. That's the new norm. That's what we've accepted. You're now in an encampment. If you can't get

a shelter bed, well guess what? Pitch a tent. In London, that was something that we accepted as well. We had washing stations and warming stations and portable toilets in these encampments. That's the new standard.

Now, from there, think about where we're at now. You think encampments are the worst, are the lowest point in society that we can bring ourselves to bear, but it's not. It's MAID. You know you've heard it. People who are in deep poverty want to consider even having the option of having medically assisted dying. That's the new norm. We've gone from building affordable housing to accommodate people who are low-income, who possibly have health issues and can't work to temporarily shelters that are not temporary anymore to encampments, and now people are so desperate that they consider MAID, and that is what is happening. Don't turn your back on that. That's how bad it's gotten with deep poverty.

Then there's the food banks, as we talked about in this hunger report. They were supposed to be temporary too. They're not temporary anymore. People go there daily, weekly. They're not for emergency usage anymore.

How did we get here? We got here because—and I don't care what government of the day it was. We got here because we ignored people who were vulnerable, more vulnerable than us, because we can't see ourselves there.

So what are some of the things that should be done in this fall economic statement that are missing? And that's what the NDP has been talking about. Yes, there are some things in there that are moving the dial on taxation on vaping. That's great. I'd love to see that taxation revenue go to, actually, health care treatments for helping people get off addictions for smoking and vaping, but we don't know where those tax funds are going.

But anyway, one of the things that the hunger poverty report has suggested—and there's many things. I urge every member to read this, because it's going to take a lot to invest in deep poverty for us to get out of it, and once we're out of it, you're going to save money. You're going to save money on the services that I talked about. But here is one of the things ISARC talked about last week, and we've mentioned it too: It's separating the basic needs and shelter benefits, so that when somebody is couch-surfing, they're still getting the full ODSP amount. Otherwise, you don't get the shelter and the basic needs anymore. They cut your cheque. They cut that benefit, so you'd only receive \$752 a month instead of the \$1,308, which would be the full ODSP.

So there is something that can be done. The government can actually do that in this case. I would want you to increase and double ODSP. That is something that probably this government will never do. We've been asking for that. But this is something that you can do. You can stop separating the basic needs and the shelter benefit and allow that full amount so people are not in deep poverty, so people can get something to eat and possibly rent a room or half a bed. Have you heard that they're renting shared beds now? That is deep poverty.

The other thing that I want to talk about is the opioid crisis. That puts another whole dimension on what deep

poverty looks like: people who are addicted to opioids. I was speaking to RNAO a couple of weeks ago, and they talked about the opioid crisis. But the thing that the government is doing in their fall economic statement is going after the manufacturers. That's fine. That's fine, but you need to address the people that are dying on the streets because of the opioid crisis. Again, if you don't see yourself there, it could be you one day. It could be a friend, a loved one. It's not just a faceless person in Queen's Park laying on the ground in a sleeping bag at 9 o'clock in the morning. It can be someone that you love. It can be you.

So the opioid crisis—what the RNAO said is that, again, it's a crisis; people are dying on the streets. And I know it's contentious, but we need these safe-consumption sites so that people don't die; so that when the housing comes available, they can get some housing, they can get some wrap-around services and get referrals to rehab. The RNAO members were very passionate about this. They said there's not enough rehab beds to send people who actually want to get treatment. Again, if we're not investing in this type of deep poverty, we're just perpetuating a circle of deep poverty in this province.

What they also said is, when people are on these drugs and—they described it as cleaning the spoon or the element—if they don't clean it properly, there's still residue from the previous drug, and what ends up happening is they inhale that and there's a medical condition that they get; France might know. And then, of course, they are forced to go into the emergency room, because most people in deep poverty don't have doctors. They don't have doctors.

Think about this: You don't have a home. You're scrambling for food every day, if you can find some hostel that's giving you something. You don't have a doctor. You may have mental health. You could be addicted to drugs. There are no rehab beds. There's no housing that you can get. And your ODSP—they're penalizing you because you don't have a house.

So the fall economic statement falls short of addressing the seriousness of deep poverty, and I'm going to hopefully speak to the members on the opposite side—that poverty has a financial cost, and you're spending your money in places that are supporting poverty, and it's not helpful to the people who want to get out of poverty. It's really a vicious cycle, you can imagine.

2040

I want to talk about a story in my riding. I have a gentleman—and I've asked a question about this.

Basic income, by the way, is another tool that could have been used to get people out of poverty, and this government shut it down. So you're costing the taxpayers a lot more money by not addressing the poverty up front.

Rodrigo Abrantes is one of my constituents. He has stage 2 sarcoma, epilepsy and diabetes. His wife has fibromyalgia. They were living in hotels for the last two years. Currently, they're at the Centre of Hope, a shelter. They've been there for months now, and they're probably going to be there for years, because the wait-list for social housing is—you're talking five years. Everybody knows

this, probably—they have a triage—how bad you have to be even to get into social housing. If that's not a case to get into social housing, I don't know what the standard is. Again, we've lowered the standard so low that we now just think it's the norm.

Speaker, it's unfortunate that we are still dealing with poverty and homelessness, and it appears that it's here to stay. It's no secret that New Democrats favour policies that would raise everyone out of poverty. Our members represent a cross-section of communities. Right across the province, we're experiencing record levels of homelessness, poverty, food insecurity, mental health crisis and addiction. Tent communities are all-too-familiar sights. And more and more, we learn that many people facing homelessness are actually working full-time—as we've heard about these food banks.

There's so much more that we can do. We can increase the ODSP and the OW rates. We can support funding food banks. We can make sure there are rent controls on all buildings throughout the province; obviously, double ODSP; and bring back the basic income pilot. Those are some of the things that are doable.

Unfortunately, in the 1990s, when the government slashed ODSP and OW—it has never recovered from there. In the 1990s, when that government stopped the program for building true affordable housing for the most vulnerable in our society—that was stopped. And whatever government of the day was in power doesn't matter to me. They did the wrong thing. They didn't bring that stuff back into fruition. You can say, "Oh, the NDP minority government," but in a minority government, you're supposed to work together—and we tried. We tried to increase ODSP, and the member probably knows we got a very small amount, an incremental increase. The opposition at the time voted no on a lot of those things, and that's fine; that's their prerogative, but what's not a government's prerogative is to ignore deep poverty.

Maybe my debate has given some room for people to pause and understand that deep poverty costs everyone financially. There's always a human cost; that's a given, but there is a financial cost.

So talk to the Premier and your House leader and whoever else is in charge, to build the actual affordable housing that we need, along with all the other ones—no one is eliminating one over the other. We have to make it compulsory that there's the right, sufficient amount to get us out of this deep poverty in the next—oh, gosh, I'd love to see it in five years.

With that, Speaker, I will expect questions and comments.

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): Questions for the member?

M^{me} France Gélinas: It was really sobering to listen to what deep poverty means in Ontario—and how come, in a province as prosperous and as rich as Ontario, we see so many people facing homelessness, so many people facing deep poverty.

I wanted to ask the member, did she see anything in this fall economic statement that would guarantee that super-

vised consumption sites in Sudbury and Timmins will stay open? They save lives. Although the number of opioid overdoses is going down throughout the province, it is continuing to increase in my community of Sudbury, where we lose at least two members to overdose every single week. Did you see anything in the fall economic statement to help those people stay alive?

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: I want to thank the member from Nickel Belt for that, because I know that, years ago, we were working together with the doctors, with the medical association, and they wanted to call an epidemic about the opioid crisis at that time.

But no, unfortunately, there's not. The only reference to opioid overdoses is on schedule 9, where they talk about the schedule expanding Opioid Damages and Health Care Costs Recovery Act. They want to recover their costs because of the opioid crisis by including manufacturers and consultants involved in the wholesale and manufacturing of active ingredients related to opioid-related incidents. This section of schedule 9 allows the government to take legal action against manufacturers and wholesalers for the wrongdoing.

This government is very much about protecting themselves from lawsuits and going after people with lawsuits. Going after these guys, that's a good thing, but we need to stop the overdoses by putting money into safe consumption sites.

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

Mr. Ted Hsu: A little over a year ago, I spoke in this House about a constituent who has cancer, who is on treatment, and had to pay for some drugs to deal with nausea and pain coming from the cancer treatment. She could work part-time, and so I used this person—and she gave me permission to use her situation as an example of how the clawback threshold, which used to be at \$200, was hurting her ability to work part-time and pay for some of her expenses.

Now, that threshold has been increased, but I phoned her back recently to see how she was doing, and unfortunately, her disease has progressed, and she cannot work at all now. She is now considering MAID, and I wanted to just ask the member if she could elaborate a bit more on maybe some of the examples she's heard of how people have started thinking about MAID, which should never happen as a result of poverty in—

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

The member for London—Fanshawe to answer.

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: Yes, I thank the member from Kingston and the Islands.

Unfortunately, that is not an anomaly. It's not an unusual story; it's very much a prominent story. I have one in my riding—somebody who has MS has lost their doctor and they can't find a doctor. They used to be able to get treatment with the doctor at University Hospital. Since then, she's having trouble getting treatment, and she's working, so again, to your point, she is very afraid of losing her job because of her illness, because she doesn't

have a doctor who can treat her MS. She's scared and she's reached out to me, right? She's reached out to our office.

People get to a point where there's no hope and they really do consider MAID as the last resort to get out of this deep poverty.

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

Ms. Laura Smith: I listened to the member opposite, and since we're on the conversation of health care, which is so relevant and so important—and women's health is such an important issue. You know, our government recently lowered the age to ask for a mammogram. We lowered it to 40, and this actually stops a lot of early cancers, which can stop individuals from having to do more invasive cancer treatments, which saves a lot of lives. Look around the room: One in eight women will actually suffer from breast cancer in their lifetime.

I'm wondering if she approves or she thinks that this was a positive measure for our government to take, given the likelihood of women in Ontario—and North America, for that matter—getting breast cancer.

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: Sure, that's a great idea. However, there are so many other things we need to tie into that pre-screening with a lower age, right? So we get everybody tested, but do we have the labs, resources to make sure, to read those tests? Do we have the treatments and the capacity to treat them? Because I can tell you, a very close friend of mine had breast cancer and thank goodness she was able to get treated early. But I know with the pandemic, there were a lot of people who didn't get to get their treatment and suffered dire consequences.

2050

So yes, it's good that they lowered the age, but we have to make sure that all the services that trickle down to get that early diagnosis are there for women so that they can beat cancer.

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

Ms. Bhutla Karpoche: I thank the member for London–Fanshawe for her presentation. She touched upon how so many folks who are on the Ontario Disability Support Program are desperate because the rates are so low, to the point where many are actually considering the option of medical assistance in dying. I had a constituent who was in the same position and shared her story with me, and I raised it in the House here as well.

We now know that there's a federal disability support program that is on its way. Can you share with the House why it's so important that that federal disability is a top-up to the current ODSP supplements instead of a replacement, because advocates are fearing that this government is going to claw back ODSP?

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: That's what can happen. Sometimes, when there's more money in this pot, a government will take the opportunity to save money in this pot. And I think the government has to continue to at least maintain what they have and not claw anything back and allow the federal government to use their disability top-up to make sure people's lives are better. That's somewhat of

a step forward, but we still need to make sure we have the housing.

And I have to put in a note that the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing was sent a letter by ISARC. They had some really good suggestions in this letter. I don't have time to read stuff out of it, but I encourage all the members to ask the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing about some of those pieces that could actually help people get out of deep poverty and get into homes.

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

Mr. Rick Byers: I thank the member for her comments. She touched on a number of subjects during them, but I want to also come back to the opioid situation. All of us we know in our ridings have these challenges that perhaps weren't there not that long ago. I know, in Owen Sound, there's part of the downtown where it's an issue, and other communities in my riding of Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound have been struck with the same thing.

And so one important element of the fall economic statement, as I noted in my remarks, was a specific initiative to go after manufacturers directly on this and to use those proceeds to contribute towards solving a very challenging problem. So I ask the member whether that initiative is something that we would see her support this fall economic statement.

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: Legal proceedings are grueling. Legal proceedings take a very long time. So I would recommend that the government address the opioid crisis without counting on lawsuit funds to be used. In saying that, if and when you're successful because, God knows, law is not black and white—if you are successful, I would recommend, as you suggest, to take that money and direct it to the opioid crisis and help the people that are suffering.

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): We're going to move to further debate.

M^{me} France Gélinas: I am happy to put a few words on the record about the Building a Stronger Ontario Act, and basically some of what is in the act and some of what should have been in the act, given the situations that we find ourselves in in Ontario right now.

People in Ontario are feeling the setbacks with the rising cost of rent. If you renew your mortgage right now, you will be shocked as to how much more money you have to pay to stay in your own house. The costs of groceries and everyday essentials are all going through the roof. So when we saw the economic update, we really thought that this is a time to help people face those rising costs. I would say that the fall economic update missed the mark completely and did not bring to the people of Ontario the little bit of help they would have liked to see from their government. I would say the government missed the moment on affordability and supporting people struggling with the cost of daily living.

I would like to also focus on some of the requests that have been made from my community.

We have Minoogawbi, La Place, the Spot—this is the supervised consumption site that has existed in Sudbury

for the last two years. They have, since 2021, requested money from the provincial government. Health is a provincial responsibility, but the provincial government never answered their call. The city of Greater Sudbury has been funding their operation, and I can tell you that it has been a great success. Unfortunately, the city of Greater Sudbury cannot continue to fund a provincial program, and the provincial government is not willing to give the \$1 million a year that it would take to save dozens and dozens of lives in my riding and in Sudbury.

I'd like to put on the record part of a letter that was written by Dr. Emily Groot. Dr. Emily Groot is the medical director at the consumption site. She said, "I'm the medical director at Réseau Access Network's supervised consumption site, the Spot. I am a public health and preventive medicine specialist in good standing with the College of Physicians and Surgeons of Ontario. I completed undergraduate studies and medical school at McMaster University, a master's of public health at the University of Toronto, and residency training at Queen's University.

"When I finished medical school in 2010, I swore to uphold the Hippocratic oath, which includes the phrase, 'I will prevent disease whenever I can for prevention is preferable to a cure.' This has shaped my career, first as associate medical officer of health for the Thunder Bay District Health Unit, then as a regional supervising coroner for the northern region Sudbury office. In these positions, I bore witness to the untenable tragedy of the opioid crisis in northern Ontario. In my role with Réseau Access Network, I am privileged to work with a team preventing these tragedies, the deaths of people who use drugs. I accept my role with Réseau Access Network to provide high-quality care to people who use drugs, but as a public health physician, I would also like to highlight the benefits of the Spot to the general public."

She went on to explain:

"Reduced transmission of HIV and hepatitis C: The supervised consumption sites are an important tool to reduce blood-borne disease transmission"—and she goes on to explain the number of people in Sudbury who were getting the infection before and how this has gone down.

"Reduced health care system costs: For example, the average total health cost per 30 days for Canadians with both decompensated"—problem of the liver—"is \$8,753. As a result of the reduction in disease transmission and improvement in health outcomes associated with supervised consumption sites, those costs are avoided.

"Increased public safety: Although there is negligible risk associated with public drug use and discarded needles, this can lead to public safety concerns. Supervised consumption sites reduce both. Further, supervised consumption sites either decrease or have no impact on crime or public nuisance calls.

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"As you know, Réseau Access Network applied for the provincial government to fund a supervised consumption and treatment service in the city of Greater Sudbury on August 27, 2021. Our temporary municipal funding

expires December 31, 2023. It is my sincere hope that you will fund a consumption and treatment service site both to support people who use drugs and also to support the broader community of Greater Sudbury. Thank you for your consideration. Sincerely"—and it's signed by Dr. Emily Groot.

The doctor took the time to write to the Honourable Sylvia Jones, Minister of Health; and to the Honourable Michael Tibollo, Associate Minister of Mental Health and Addictions. She wrote on October 17. She has not received an answer to her letter; although I hand-delivered her letter to the minister.

The decision to not fund a supervised consumption site makes no sense for the people of Sudbury. We've never had complaints about the site. We've never had violence or any other event surrounding the site. But they have saved multiple, multiple lives. Unfortunately, the network has had to issue a termination notice to all of their staff. You can imagine that the nurses, the social workers, the psychologists who work there—they have no problem finding a job elsewhere, but it was really difficult to recruit them, and now those people have been given termination notices. It's not too late for the government to listen to the voices of Sudbury, to save lives and to invest the \$1 million we would need to keep the supervised consumption site open and continue to save lives.

I also want to talk about the Northern Health Travel Grant. This is a program that helps people from northern Ontario access care that is not available to us in northern Ontario. I have this letter from Marlene McKinnon. She is from Sault Ste. Marie. She cc'd MPP Ross Romano and MPP Mantha but wrote to me. Basically, she goes on to say:

"Northern Ontario residents are increasingly being transferred to southern Ontario facilities due to the lack of specialists and staff in facilities. This is causing increased stress on family, employers and community members.

"Within the guidelines of this grant, the mileage rate is 40 cents a kilometre if you drive more than 100 kilometres, and a maximum accommodation is \$550 for eight or more nights."

Put that together, Speaker. Do you really think it is feasible to stay in Toronto, in any hotel in Toronto, for eight nights for 550 bucks? It costs you this for two nights, never mind five.

"The maximum rate is \$100 a night. The other issues with accommodation are many.

"After a year of treatment and travel from Sault Ste. Marie to London and London to Toronto," her costs are staggering. "Parking was about \$1,900. Accommodations for the patient and caregiver was approximately \$33,500, with travel needs and essentials well over \$12,000.

"While I have to thank family, friends and colleagues, organizations and total strangers for their generosity and support during this time, I am still pursuing the grant money, and whatever is left outstanding is claimed on the federal income tax return. When this medical credit is calculated, it is a small percentage of the outstanding expenses.

“The majority of this has been to stay in Toronto for a bone marrow transplant at Princess Margaret and a resulting complication stay at Mount Sinai. To be very clear, my granddaughter was 22, but without the help of her immediate family, she would not have been able to have access to these cancer treatments.”

She goes on to say, “We appreciate and thank the support that we have received from London Health Sciences and Princess Margaret cancer programs, family, friends and strangers, but it only covers a portion of these expenses.”

She urges the government, specifically the Ministry of Health, “to review and revise the Northern Health Travel Grant to reflect the current cost of travel by auto and accommodation for northern Ontario residents during medical evaluation and treatment that are now located in southern Ontario.”

This family has incurred tens of thousands in debt in order to get their daughter the care that she needed, and they would very much like to have equity of access to health care. Those are treatments that are not available in northern Ontario. People have no choice but to travel to gain access to life-saving procedures, but it only happens if your family has a lot of money. Otherwise many people choose not to, simply because they do not want to go so far into debt.

I have another letter from Evelyn Panton. Evelyn goes on to say, “I am writing concerning your government’s position on for-profit health care. I am a senior in the province of Ontario, and I am a member of many social and political groups. While at events, the topic of health care always comes up. Many people have told horror stories of wait times, a lack of access to medical procedures and hospitals closing in Ontario. Some have been offered procedures at the doctor’s private clinic for a fee, essentially paying to jump the queue, even though the Canada Health Act does not allow this.

“The Canada Health Act says no patient can be charged for medically needed hospital and physician care. Health care is to be provided based on need, no matter where you live and no matter how rich or poor you are. This is what Canadians want when we achieve public medicare.

“Dr. Jacob Shelley, public health policy expert and co-director of health, ethics, law and policy, said, ‘We know the public system is a more effective, more efficient and more equitable system. The privatized world does benefit some people. There’s no question that there are benefits for some individuals, but it’s not an equitable benefit. It’s not a public benefit. It benefits those that have wealth, those that have opportunity and those that profit from illness, and now we have to really question a government that’s making health care profitable. What actual kind of consideration this government might have to ensuring that we remain healthy.

“This is just not politically justified nor is this something that is evidentiary justified. This is merely opportunities to make people money.’

“Canadians value a public health system and idolize Tommy Douglas, who was voted greatest Canadian. He

even has a stamp to honour him. Medicare is a Canadian legacy we must maintain and preserve.

“I am asking you to strongly take this message to your caucus. Ontarians want publicly funded health care that is accessible, timely and supported by the government. Eroding public health care, stressing the system and creating its demise in order to usher in private, for-profit health care is dangerous for people and will not be supported. Ontario is the least-funded province.

“In addition, I would like a written response from you with your government’s plans to reverse the cuts you have made and to properly fund health care.”

She sent her letter to the Minister of Health in September of 2023. She has yet to receive an answer back.

There are a number of other people who have written because they are not happy with some of the plans that are in the Building a Stronger Ontario Together Act. But at the end of the day, there is very little in this fall economic statement that will reassure people that the government will not continue to let our health care system more or less be so underfunded that it doesn’t meet the need and the care of people, and then, they always innovate the same way. When the Minister of Health says, “innovation,” what she really means is “privatization,” because the only innovations that have come from this Minister of Health have been to take services that are good-quality services in our public health care system, underfund the health care system, and then pay the private system up to 330% more to do the exact same thing.

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We pay hospitals \$1,200 to do a mastectomy; we pay the private hospitals and the private clinics \$4,300 to do the exact same thing. We give hospitals \$500 for cataract surgery; we give private clinics \$1,200 to do the exact same surgery.

Why are we spending more health care dollars to get less? I can’t understand this. People don’t understand this. But what I can tell you is that private clinics are making a ton of money on the backs of sick people. Private clinics are knocking on the door of this minister and have no problem getting meetings with the minister to secure long-term contracts to private clinics that will be really difficult to undo.

This morning, when I was asking about Don Mills—Don Mills is a private hospital. When medicare came in, we had for-profit hospitals in Ontario that were grandfathered in; Don Mills is one of them. The law made it really clear that, yes, they were allowed to continue to exist, but they could not expand, they could not bring in new services. Yet, under this government, we have seen an increase of—going from three operating rooms to six operating rooms. This is an expansion. Getting a whole lot more surgeries, an increase in their budget by 228%—I don’t see any public hospitals getting 228%; if they get a 1% base budget increase, they are really happy, and if it ever makes it to 2% base budget increase, they are really happy. But for the private clinics, for the private hospitals, we are talking about 228% increases to their budget. And I could go on and on.

There is certainly a part of the budget, of the Building a Strong Ontario Together Act, that I'm happy to see: the new tax on vaping products. This is something that should have been done a long time ago. There are many things that Ontario could do—similar to what other provinces are doing—to keep our kids from picking up vaping. The vaping industry is using the exact same strategy that the tobacco industry used before, and that is to get young people addicted to nicotine. Once they are addicted to nicotine, they will keep buying, because nicotine is a really hard addiction to break. Anybody who has ever been a smoker will know how difficult it is to stop smoking. It is just as difficult to stop vaping, because of the amount of nicotine. Regulate the amount of nicotine that you are allowed to put in, regulate the flavours that they are allowed to promote their products in—very similar to what other provinces in Canada are doing—and you will see a decrease in the number of kids, who are all too young. They're not legally allowed to buy vaping products, but they are all vaping on a regular basis. Why? Because after the first puff, after the first time, they were addicted to nicotine. This is how fast this drug can work on young kids. So it's a small step in the right direction.

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): Do we have questions for the member?

M. Anthony Leardi: Sur la page 61 du livre du projet de loi—ou un exemple du projet de loi—il y a une description de nos efforts pour augmenter le nombre de travailleurs hautement qualifiés. À mon avis, j'ai vu de bons résultats, dans ma propre circonscription, de nos efforts dans ce domaine.

J'aimerais savoir si la députée de Nickel Belt a vu dans sa propre circonscription de bons résultats. Est-ce que nous sommes dans le bon chemin pour augmenter le nombre de travailleurs hautement qualifiés dans la province?

M^{me} France Gélinas: Il y a des investissements qui ont été faits pour rendre plus facile—pour que les infirmières et pour que les préposés aux soins puissent avoir une formation. Malheureusement, ce n'est pas distribué de façon équitable dans la grandeur de la province.

À Sudbury, on a le Collège Boréal, un collège francophone qui n'offre toujours pas le programme d'infirmière/infirmier. On espère qu'ils pourront commencer à l'offrir l'année prochaine.

On sait qu'il y a un grand manque d'infirmières francophones partout en province. Boréal est certainement prêt à offrir ce programme-là. Je vous garantis qu'il y aurait beaucoup de monde qui voudrait prendre le programme, mais ça ne commencera pas avant l'année prochaine. Donc, l'accès n'est pas équitable partout dans la province, et c'est le Nord qui en a le moins.

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

Mr. Sol Mamakwa: Thank you to the member from Nickel Belt for her presentation. I know when we talk about the economic statement, we know how sometimes metropolitan Ontario is making decisions for the people that live in the Far North without any regard or any respect

for the people living in that part of the province. Example: I know the reduction in Red Lake of six physicians from seven. Do you think this fall economic statement addresses some of the shortfalls, the inequities that we see in the north?

M^{me} France Gélinas: The short answer to this question is absolutely not. I mean, the Ontario Medical Association made it really clear that just in the northeast, we are short over 220 physicians. If you include the northwest, it's 100 more physicians that we are short, and yet we see that the government goes through the different payment options for physicians, and rather than boosting that up, I can tell you that, in Mindemoya, they saw their allocations go down, very similar to what the member was just talking about.

We need equitable access throughout Ontario, and right now, we don't. People in northern Ontario—40,000 people in my riding do not have access to primary care. They do not have a family physician. They do not have a nurse practitioner. Yet we have underemployed nurse practitioners who would love to take on new primary care patients, but they can't get patients.

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

M. Andrew Dowie: Merci au membre de Nickel Belt pour son discours.

Ça fait plusieurs heures, ici, au débat, où j'écoute. Dans les mesures budgétaires concernant les crédits d'impôt pour l'investissement dans la fabrication en Ontario, je connais qu'il y a plusieurs industries dans le Nord ainsi qu'au sud et au sud-ouest où on manque un petit peu de façon compétitive avec les autres pays ou les autres juridictions. Alors, je voulais juste savoir si les 780 millions de dollars, pendant trois ans, comme impôt sur le revenu qui est disponible dans les mesures budgétaires—est-ce que c'est quelque chose que tu supportes?

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M^{me} France Gélinas: L'Ontario a toujours été un leader quand on parle du secteur manufacturier. Qu'on parle de voitures, qu'on parle de haute technologie, l'Ontario a toujours été de l'avant. C'est un secteur qui nous définit comme une province et on réussit très bien. Donc, de continuer à appuyer le secteur manufacturier, je pense que c'est une voie gagnante pour notre province. On a fait nos preuves, qu'on est capable en Ontario d'être un leader dans plusieurs secteurs manufacturiers. Il y a beaucoup de bons emplois à y avoir à la grandeur de l'Ontario, incluant dans le nord de l'Ontario. Le secteur manufacturier vaut la peine d'être appuyé. C'est une des grandes forces de l'Ontario.

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: Thank you to the member for Nickel Belt for talking about health care. It's very important. I met with the nurse practitioners as well, and they described how they're not able to be on a health care team because of the doctor shortage, and they talked about how the underserved areas of the province, like in the north and rural communities, and how if they were able to bill OHIP directly, they could actually go out and make a difference to people's life and health care.

What are your thoughts on that proposal and how it could have been built into the health care system so that people have access to health care?

M^{me} France Gélinas: In June of this year, the Minister of Health announced up to \$30,000 for integrated, interdisciplinary, primary health care teams. I can tell you that many nurse practitioner-led clinics applied for this. The government has \$30 million that they're supposed to put out. They've had over \$1 billion worth of ask for that money. All of this came in in June. We are now November 28 and not one cent of this has been announced.

There are many nurse practitioner-led clinics who are in northern Ontario—in Capreol, in Sudbury, in Lively—that have nurses that they could hire right now. They could each take an extra 700 people who don't have access to primary care. The money is there but the government has yet to make a single announcement.

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

Mr. Rick Byers: I thank the member for her comments on the fall economic statement, largely around the health care area. I was interested in her comments on the independent health facilities that the government has expanded the use of in the last while.

As I think about these, there's two parts to this initiative that I think are very important. Number one is that for OHIP coverage levels, OHIP is the payment, and that's fundamental to the way the system has been designed. And I think the other thing is that, looking at it from a point of view of patient access to facilities for the core areas that we've expanded on—cataracts, hips and knees—the line-ups have gone down. The backlogs have gone down. Aren't those factors that the member would consider supporting this initiative—

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

The member for Nickel Belt.

M^{me} France Gélinas: In an independent health facility, you are right: The physicians bill OHIP. They bill the same amount whether they do the surgery in a hospital or in an independent health facility. The difference is that the independent health facility gets what is called a facility fee. The facility fee is not paid when you go to the hospital. We've already paid. We, the taxpayers, have already paid for a public hospital. Our public hospitals sit with operating rooms with the lights off and they are built, they are ready to provide services, but our hospitals have no resources to open them up. Why do we want to pay a facility fee to a for-profit company when we could use that money to fund our public hospitals to use the assets that the taxpayer has already paid for? This makes no sense monetarily or any other way.

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): Further debate?

Mr. Andrew Dowie: I'm delighted to rise tonight after a—

Interjections.

Mr. Andrew Dowie: I'm delighted to rise here tonight, and Speaker, I move that the question now be put.

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): Mr. Dowie has moved that the question be now put. I'm satisfied that there has been sufficient debate to allow this question to be put to the House. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry?

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

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

In my opinion, the ayes have it.

A recorded vote being required, it will be deferred until the next instance of deferred votes.

Vote deferred.

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): Orders of the day?

AGRICULTURAL RESEARCH
INSTITUTE OF ONTARIO AMENDMENT
ACT, 2023

LOI DE 2023 MODIFIANT LA LOI
SUR L'INSTITUT DE RECHERCHE
AGRICOLE DE L'ONTARIO

Ms. Thompson moved second reading of the following bill:

Bill 155, An Act to amend the Agricultural Research Institute of Ontario Act / Projet de loi 155, Loi modifiant la Loi sur l'Institut de recherche agricole de l'Ontario.

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): I recognize the minister to start off the debate.

Hon. Lisa M. Thompson: I'm pleased to share my time tonight with the amazing member of provincial Parliament from Chatham-Kent-Leamington, who serves as parliamentary assistant for the Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs.

I want to start tonight by talking about why this particular bill matters. It behooves us as members of provincial Parliament to make sure that we're doing everything we can to ensure that industries and sectors within the industries have the right supports in place that reflect the current times. I have a question; I'm curious: Does anyone know when this piece of legislation was actually written? Anyone want to hazard a guess?

Mr. Anthony Leardi: In 1983.

Mr. Ric Bresee: In 1962.

Hon. Lisa M. Thompson: Okay. The member from Hastings had the right answer: 1962. Speaker, this legislation is older than I am, and it's time that we make sure that this legislation is current and modernized and reflective of where we need to go to not only sustain the amazing production that we have in this province of Ontario, but to position the agri-food industry for growth in the years to come.

Before I really dive into the prepared remarks that I have, I want to give a shout-out as well to a gentleman that has served as chair of the Agricultural Research Institute of Ontario for a number of years, Dr. Lorne Hepworth. Dr. Lorne is a farmer, a veterinarian and a former political

figure from Saskatchewan. He served for 10 years representing the riding of Weyburn, and he received the Saskatchewan Order of Merit in 2020. I just wanted to share that because we have an amazing board that's doing the best it can based on the parameters that this old, outdated legislation prescribed to them. So, in short, Lorne and I had a conversation one day and I asked him, "Are you ready? Are you ready to see this particular piece of legislation modernized so that we can unleash the potential of Ontario's agri-food industry?" And ladies and gentlemen, by supporting this legislation, that's exactly what we're going to do.

So our government is committed to advancing agricultural and agri-food research as well as innovation to ensure that we continue to progress in our overall industry. Adopting new technology and embarking upon new research is critical to maintain our position as a world leader in this field and maintain the industry as a driver of economic growth for the future.

As part of this particular commitment, we are working to strengthen the agriculture and food industry by proposing to modernize this particular act. These proposed changes will also help to position the industry to stay on the cutting edge of new technologies and practices that increase the competitiveness of Ontario, not only in Canada but throughout North America and around the world. And I want to take this moment to share with everyone that this moment is important because Ontario is looked to and has become known as the food and beverage manufacturing hub of Canada. Ontario is the place where manufacturers want to grow, expand or start new businesses, because our farmers are working 365 days a year to ensure that the crops coming off the fields and the livestock coming out of our barns are second to none. And so, these proposed changes that we're bringing forward are going to be very important.

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In the past, the ARIO Act has served the agency and has served the government well in addition to the industry. However, as the agriculture and food industry has continued to innovate their practices in the last number of decades since the act was initially introduced, the act needs to be modernized to reflect current and future research and innovation trends that this industry needs. By proposing these updates, the legislation would better serve industry's needs today and, as I mentioned before, for years to come.

An example in the current act is that the definition of "research" only describes agriculture, veterinary medicine and domestic science, which can be translated to mean "household science." If somebody can't sleep and they're watching our proceedings tonight, those three focuses actually reflect the origins of the University of Guelph. We had the Ontario Agricultural College; Mac college, which was domestic/household science; as well as OVC, our Ontario Veterinary College. We know that the agri-food industry is so much more now, and we need to make sure that modern legislation reflects that.

Proposed changes to the act would help create wider research opportunities for the entire industry, including

food processing, precision agriculture and technology development. This is going to absolutely open doors for increased growth, productivity, efficiencies as well as competitiveness.

The proposed updates to the ARIO Act include provisions that help ensure that the act is in line with modern legislative practices, but most importantly has the flexibility to adapt to future priorities. The proposed updates would also support innovation activities, commercialization, new solutions and new relationships that will help our province's agriculture and food industry to increase productivity and also to draw attention from around the world so we can compete globally.

Just a week ago yesterday, we had a significant announcement. I was with the federal Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada, Lawrence MacAulay, and we announced a \$25-million investment here in Ontario to advance efficiency and production through an agri-tech innovation program. That particular initiative is going to be really incredibly well received because not only farmers but processors alike will be able to cost-share investments in technologies that will advance their particular business.

At the announcement, we had a robotic mechanism that actually weeds commercial gardens. And that's so important because, more times than not, the agri-food industry can have jobs without people. Just think of this: A market garden that's 30 or 40 acres in size could invest in a robotic feature, a robotic piece of equipment that can weed their gardens. One charge would last for eight hours, and that translates to two acres. Just think about how much time an individual would have freed up by employing and adopting this new technology. That's what we're doing, ladies and gentlemen, in proposing this act.

We need to keep looking to the future because we have set goals out that we need to meet by 2030. We introduced a strategy about a year ago, the Grow Ontario Strategy, and these goals within the strategy are very aggressive and assertive. The strategy is based on research and innovation, a stable and secure supply chain, as well as attracting the very best talent. And innovation and research will help drive that attraction of talent to our industry.

In addition, proposed updates to the act's administrative and operational provisions would allow the agency to operate in a more effective manner. These include proposed updates to regulation-making authorities, providing the agency with increased powers to carry out its objectives; modernizing the governance of the agency; and ensuring that ARIO is able to continue their oversight of the 14 research stations that we have across the province.

We have undertaken a rigorous process to be able to put forward these thoughtful changes to the legislation.

Broad consultation has been the cornerstone of everything I do, and I'm really, really appreciative of the MPP from Chatham-Kent-Leamington for taking the lead—

Interjections.

Hon. Lisa M. Thompson: Absolutely. Yes, I think he deserves applause as well.

He embarked on this consultation not knowing where he was going to land, but he helped shepherd and facilitate thoughtful discussions that have led us to this very moment, and it's really quite historic. And what has happened as a result? We are developing legislation based on priorities and based on what we need to be looking forward to in order to achieve our actions that we've laid out in our Grow Ontario Strategy.

To everyone listening, I can reiterate the fact that we have made a commitment to listen. We listen to stakeholders, and we take time to consider feedback carefully. And here we are this evening. With the leadership from the MPP from Chatham-Kent–Leamington, after several consultations, including many virtual opportunities to connect with people, we are looking to move forward.

I want to share with you that while there were external sessions in 2022-23, I'm also proud of the fact that we engaged Indigenous communities, industry stakeholders and academia.

Some of the industry organizations that have been part of our consultations to date are leading by example. Beef Farmers of Ontario, Dairy Farmers of Ontario, Ontario Fruit and Vegetable Growers' Association, who are here today—and I hope everyone had a chance to either meet with fruit and vegetable growers from across the province or at least go down and have a conversation with them earlier this evening. We also reached out to Livestock Research Innovation Corp. and Ontario apple and tender fruit growers. Those are just a few, and I'm sure the parliamentary assistant for agriculture, food and rural affairs will highlight some other folks he connected with.

In addition to consultations, we had a discussion document, and this discussion document was posted for public comment on the province's regulatory registry from March 15 to April 14, 2023. The discussion document was also sent directly to stakeholders and Indigenous communities to encourage further review and comment. The submissions received demonstrated that stakeholders supported the proposed modernization of the ARIO Act and the proposals outlined in the discussion document.

We regularly engaged directly with ARIO members on the proposal to modernize the act. We met with the board—specifically, in June 2022, February 2023 and, most recently, this past June. During our extensive consultations, we asked stakeholders to focus on specific areas in the act that included proposed broadening of the mandate and language to reflect current and future research needs; proposed additional language focused on innovation and commercialization, in the field of research; and proposed removal of outdated references from the ARIO Act, including through proposed updating of administrative and operational provisions to allow the operations to run in a more effective manner, including proposed updates to regulation-making authorities as well as governance provisions.

And we asked stakeholders to provide feedback on the potential renaming of the agency and the act.

Posting on the regulatory registry aimed to confirm the proposed areas of the act that could be updated to benefit

our overall industry and to potentially identify new areas that could be considered for inclusion.

During our extensive stakeholder engagement, we heard feedback focusing on several common and recurring themes. The responses that we heard spoke to research priorities, and specifically, that ARIO should play a lead role in collaboration and consultation on the ministry's research priorities with the agri-food sector, and they should also have a lead role in identifying common research priorities across the sectors within our industry.

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We also heard from stakeholders on the subject of infrastructure. On this subject, we heard that ARIO research centres are critical and could be used to do even more, including training the next generation of agricultural and food experts. We have 14 agricultural research stations across the province, and they're invaluable. Additionally, the input suggested that the research centres should provide platforms for the scaling up of knowledge translation and transfer activities, as well as pilot testing and demonstration sites to support deployment of new technologies. Stakeholder feedback also spoke to innovation, with the recommendation that ARIO should create a culture of innovation and incentivize others to adopt new practices or emerging technology.

It was important to stakeholders that we endeavour to raise awareness of the profile of ARIO as well. By doing so, they felt that we could help ensure that the sector, academia and the public understand the important role of the agency, its accomplishments and how it ties into the sustainability of the province's food supply.

At this point, I want to talk about some of the things that we are absolutely proud of but need to build on. When we talk about knowledge translation and transfer, it was another theme that arose during our consultations with stakeholders, suggesting that ARIO should identify high-impact and transformational research opportunities. They noted that the agency could enhance and promote the knowledge-transfer work and commercialization opportunities that it leads, and this would help ensure Ontario's agricultural research is more accessible to the public, which is very important.

ARIO has also already had an incredible history of pushing the agricultural industry forward on vital lands that the agency owns right across Ontario, from supporting the success of the Yukon Gold potato—that maybe some of you enjoyed snagging tonight. That Yukon Gold potato was developed, if you will, at the Simcoe and New Liskeard research stations. Another example would be the Dynasty kidney bean that now represents 90% of the market in Ontario.

Another thing that I've talked about in this House was a vegetable that goes great with hollandaise sauce: asparagus. Back in the day, we were looking at a successful harvest being around 2,000 pounds per acre of asparagus, but through the collaboration through our research centres in Simcoe and New Liskeard, a new variety was created, and it's called Millennium. When we talk about increasing production, it's a perfect example.

This new variety of asparagus is hearty, and it does incredibly well. Farmers saw their production increase from 2,000 pounds an acre to 6,000 pounds an acre. That's huge. So when I talk about farmers increasing production year over year, that's just one of many examples that we've had. This Millennium asparagus actually now is the variety of choice not only across Ontario, but Canada and North America. It's important to share stories like this to share the important work that's happening right across the province.

We received also—and it comes back to our consultations—a wide variety of feedback from stakeholders with regard to the food supply chain and academia during the sessions. It was interesting. Through the regulatory registry, we even had a lot of good dialogue. People wanted to be engaged. And what was clear to us throughout all of the opportunities to express opinions was that stakeholders were very enthusiastic about the proposal to modernize the ARIO Act. So, because of that, I'm hoping everyone in this House is as enthusiastic as the stakeholders and we receive unanimous support for the passing of this legislation.

You know, Speaker, there's a strong interest among stakeholders in proposing changes to the legislation because it needed to become more relevant to better serve the needs of our overall agricultural industry. All in all, reaction to what we proposed in the spirit of modernization has been very positive.

I'd like to share a couple of quotes. Murray Opsteen, the chair of the Chicken Farmers of Ontario said, "Chicken Farmers of Ontario applauds the Ontario government for recognizing the Agricultural Research Institute of Ontario as a key driver of important research projects leading to agriculture and agri-food innovations in Ontario. The modernization of the ARIO Act will enable the Ontario food sector to advance best practices, continue exploration, and further help the sector to thrive and be successful. Chicken Farmers of Ontario looks forward to this necessary change to enable chicken farmers, the chicken industry, and the broader Ontario agricultural community to continue to flourish."

And you know, when we talk about research happening in Ontario, I think it's really important that people know that farmers are putting their own skin in the game as well. For instance, we have this wonderful corridor of excellence where we have a dairy research centre, a beef research centre. We just had an amazing opening of our swine research centre, and in the next couple of years, you're going to see a poultry research station come forward as well.

And there is important work that happens there. For instance, in the dairy and beef research area, they're taking a look at feed rations. And in terms of the ruminant, they're looking to see how they can reduce methane which comes from a belching animal. And isn't that better than culling hundreds of animals, like some countries in the EU are thinking of doing, if they haven't already done so? Another example of potential research that could happen in the poultry industry is possibly seeing if they could

develop a type of feathered bird—poultry—that could be resistant to salmonella. That would be phenomenal as well. So, those were just a couple of examples of the types of things that we can realize and advance through our research centres. Again, it's important to recognize that Ontario farmers are investing in this research, as well.

Looking at the feedback that we received, it was expressed very clearly that ARIO can help shape a stronger industry and food supply chain, and we need to talk about that a little bit. Sometimes when people think about the agri-food industry in Ontario, they just think about the primary production on farms, whether it's crops in the field or livestock coming out of the barns, but our sector is so much more than that. You need to think of the entire continuum, right through to food processing. And if farmers are succeeding, then, guess what? One of the largest job-creating industries in the GTHA will succeed as well.

I want to remind everybody listening tonight that Ontario's agri-food industry is responsible for 837,000 jobs. That's seven times more than the automotive industry right now. We also generate \$48 billion for our provincial GDP. As the Premier pointed out in the House just last week, if you add in the beverage industry, it jumps up to \$55 billion. That's significant, and it translates into good, quality jobs. I share that with you because people need to know that these processing facilities are right in their backyard.

If the member from Brampton North was here, I would quiz him to see if he knew how many—I wasn't supposed to point that out. I'm busting myself there. I'll say it this way, Speaker: I'm sure the member from Brampton North would readily say that he knew there are 300 food and beverage processors in the city of Brampton alone. That's significant. We need to make sure we're doing everything we can from a research and innovation perspective to keep those manufacturers thriving and growing to meet future needs.

It's an interesting time to be in the agri-food industry, and we've proven ourselves to be resilient. Coming out of the pandemic, we were solid as a rock and stable, but we can't take any chances. We need to do everything we can to protect and grow our particular industry. And with that, you know, all of the proposed amendments will help strengthen and ultimately grow Ontario.

2150

As mentioned, Speaker, the proposed changes to the ARIO Act align with the goals of our strategy, and, more specifically, the proposed changes will help the province meet commitments within the 10-year timelines we set out in the strategy. For instance, we want to grow production and consumption of Ontario food by 30% by the year 2032. I know we can do this. We also want to increase our exports of Ontario-grown and processed food by 8% year over year, and I know we can do this as well.

Just last week, we participated in North America's largest private label manufacturing trade show. In two short days, 19 companies that were participating in the Ontario Pavilion have realized the potential of \$17.7

million in sales, and those 19 companies are located in Hamilton, in Georgetown, in Vaughan, in Newmarket. Again, I share that with you to underscore the relevance and the amount of jobs that could be realized—not only realized, but sustained and, most importantly, grown as we move to grow our agri-food industry as well.

It was exactly a year ago today that our government released this ambitious road map for our industry's growth. Grow Ontario is our plan to strengthen the agri-food industry and ensure an efficient, reliable and responsive food supply and address ongoing vulnerabilities through new innovations. If we have learned anything through the years, it's that we can never, ever—and what did we learn through the pandemic? We should never, ever rely on other jurisdictions to ensure that we have available to us good-quality food, and that is what's driving this opportunity as well.

I think it's very, very important to make sure that when we talk about Ontario's dynamic agriculture and food sector, we talk about not only the production on-farm, but we talk about the incredibly talented and hard-working people who bring those quality products to our tables everyday.

I think about Betty. Recently, I toured a chicken-processing facility in Scarborough. Betty leads her family at D&D Poultry. She's just an absolute dynamo. They're investing in new technology and new machines to drive efficiency. Most importantly, they're realizing a better margin so that they can reinvest and provide good jobs. That's who I think about when I get up every day. What are we going to do to help the Bettys of the world—of Ontario, specifically—to realize their goals of growing their companies? That's just one of many examples that we could talk about.

But we can't forget, as well, the farmers who work 365 days of the year. They make a commitment, and we heard today from fruit and vegetable growers that they do it because they're passionate as well. One particular grower said that a friend of his who works in the financial industry said, "Oh, my gosh, man, what are you doing here, working hard day in and day out, making sure your employees are treated well and are proud of the jobs for such a little margin? Give me your two million bucks. I'll invest it, and I'll make it work for you and your return will be that much better." But the farmer simply said today, "But that's not what I want to do. I want to grow food to make sure that Ontario has that secure and safe supply of food, day in and day out."

That's why we need to make sure that we're looking at legislation, at regulations and we look at the burden of red tape, because we need to be striving in this House, in the Legislative Assembly of Ontario, to make sure that government gets out of the way of farmers and food and beverage processors alike so that they can do what they're passionate about. And when you're passionate about something, you more than likely will be succeeding in grand fashion.

I want to share a couple of stats with you as well. We can continue to increase our output in in Ontario's agri-

food industry. We're an economic powerhouse, really and truly. Ontario farmers, in terms of farm cash receipts, increased their receipts by 15.2% since 2021, and Ontario agri-food exports are up 20.9% since 2021.

You know, we want to see these numbers, as impressive as they are, increase even more, and we want to bring even more of the good things that grow in Ontario to the world. As I mentioned before, Ontario is becoming known as the food and beverage manufacturing hub of Canada. That's a responsibility that we should never take lightly, but we can build on that opportunity to demonstrate that we may be known as the food and beverage manufacturing hub of Canada right now, but we're going to lead by example and maintain that title as well.

Ontario's agri-food sector has so much potential, and we have the capacity to grow. And you know, when we think about farming, there are the realities as well. The average age of an Ontario farmer—John, the member opposite, I'm not sure whether you fall into this or not, but the average age of an Ontario farmer is the mid to late fifties. With that, we need to be thinking, how do we open the door? How do we enable people to get into this industry? How do we present young people with the opportunity to get into this industry and invest?

I look to the north. We talk about the Clay Belt. There's so much potential there. It's an area where a young farmer could establish a family and have a respectable cash-crop farm or raise sheep, raise beef cattle—the list could go on and on.

So we need to make sure that our research is reflective of one health. A lot of people are starting to talk about one health, that means a comprehensive understanding and appreciation of the food supply chain and how that food supply chain is managed and fed, in terms of primary production, so that overall, we can have a healthy economy. And it all starts from the ground up.

What I mean is, soil health matters. So in order to enable the opportunities that lie ahead of us in so many arable acres in northern Ontario, we need to continue to push research so that we can better understand the soil types, so that we can be developing varieties that can succeed in clay and succeed in a shorter growing season, and most importantly, generate a yield that a family or farmer can succeed with.

That's why research matters, and that's why we also find it so very important that the research that we conduct under the Agricultural Research Institute of Ontario is very diverse, recognizing the different types of growing conditions as well as soil types that we have across the province. Because we want to be able to continue to grow our presence at a global level, and we need to make sure that we're resilient and we have the best tools possible for us to achieve that.

I want to touch a little bit now on technology and its adoption. Our government is working to boost research infrastructure, advance the uptake of new technology, grow the market for Ontario innovative technologies domestically as well as globally, and increase the use of data to support efficiencies on farms, in processing facilities and across the entire value chain.

This is important. Why? Well, because, on this point, everything I'm speaking about today comes into focus: A robust and resilient agriculture and food industry depends on the quality and the availability of research, and it is critical that this research is able to happen right here at home, in Ontario. It is through research that Ontario's agriculture and food industry can advance, prosper and, most importantly, as I alluded to throughout my remarks, drive economic growth.

2200

The changes we are proposing to the ARIO Act are foundational actions to help build a stronger agriculture and food sector for the future. Research and innovation are cornerstones of the agricultural sector's success in managing and mitigating emerging challenges, including disease and the spread of pests. Research that drives innovation in the commercial space strengthens businesses' competitive edge and fosters economic growth and sustainability in the sector, and that enables effective responses to consumer demand.

It's interesting. Again, in talking and meeting with fruit and vegetable growers from across Ontario today, I learned that one particular farmer was told by a retailer that they wanted an onion larger in diameter. You know, they were usually going for, like, an apple—that two-inch spread. Now, they want an onion that's larger in diameter. So, they're going to have to take a look at their practices to see if they can produce that larger onion, but they may have to adapt their machinery as well to accommodate a larger size. That all takes money, and it all needs to be based on sound research.

In the last year alone, \$6.24 million has been generated from the sale of agricultural products from our 14 ARIO-owned research stations. I share that with you as well to demonstrate that these research stations are generating revenue, and that's important so that they can reinvest in other research projects and other research initiatives, right across this province. It's clear that innovation is key to advancing ARIO and our entire value chain.

Growing Ontario's strategy requires the very best of talent as well. On this front, we aim to increase the total agriculture and food sector by 10% by 2032. So, we want to increase awareness of the modern, high-tech, agri-food careers and opportunities for mentorship and hands-on job training.

The goals associated with our complete three pillars in our Grow Ontario Strategy are ambitious, but I'm confident that by working with partnerships, like we have with our stakeholders, and making sure we have the right legislation that is modernized to support them, we will achieve our ambitious goals.

You know, since releasing Grow Ontario last November, we're already making great progress. We've taken several key actions this year to strengthen our food supply chain. This summer we invested \$7.5 million through the Sustainable Canadian Agricultural Partnership to launch the Biosecurity Enhancement Initiative. I can tell you with certainty that the pork research centre will be driving biosecurity measures as well. This will help farmers, food processors and other essential farm-supporting agri-food

businesses to protect their operations against pests and disease, enhance operational resilience and heighten public trust in Ontario's food supply chain.

We're also allocating \$9.5 million over the next three years to equip farmers with the technology they need to maximize the health of their soil and increase their productivity and profitability.

Do you know, before we did this, there were actually areas in Ontario that did not have proper soil maps? How on earth can you even begin to think about what you can grow if you don't have recognition of the soil type that you have? And many of the maps dated back to the 1970s—so again, modernization that is imperative and much-needed.

The list could go on and on, but I want to touch on the Agricultural Stewardship Initiative that includes the resilient agricultural landscape program. It's a \$56.7-million five-year program that makes funds available to eligible farmers to complete projects such as reducing tillage, creating water-retention ponds and other projects aimed at conservation, reduction of greenhouse gas emissions and the sequestration of carbon. Again, this underscores the fact that Ontario farmers are the best stewards of the land and we're enabling them to demonstrate that on-farm.

At this time, I'd like to give a shout-out to a farm family that led by example. They're from Huron county outside of Belgrave. The Murray Scott family has worked with our local conservation authority to build an amazing filter to make sure that nutrients stay where they're meant to stay: on the land, to feed the crops that are growing. If the nutrients are staying on the land, that means the water will be filtered and pristine by the time it hits our watersheds and, ultimately, our Great Lakes.

There's so much that could be talked about in terms of how we're moving forward, moving the dial, giving Ontario confidence that our government understands Ontario's agriculture and food industry. And it's our government that is standing up and taking the time to listen so that we're bringing forward the programs that ultimately drive results.

Speaking of results, I want to use my last few minutes to reach out and talk about our partnership with the University of Guelph. It's a very special alliance that we have. I was very pleased to successfully negotiate a five-year, \$343-million agreement with U of G to advance agri-food research and innovation in this province. But I'm not going to be satisfied with research that just sits on the shelf; I want to see it commercialized and lead to best practices that ultimately drive the best margins possible for Ontario farmers.

I look forward to hearing the remarks that the parliamentary assistant, the MPP from Chatham-Kent-Leamington, will share.

But to close, we recognized excellence in agriculture, and Conestoga College was a recipient for the work that they're doing as an applied research centre.

I also would like to share with you that excellence in agriculture is reflected every day in the ministry's team that we have working day in and day out. I give kudos to Tara and Lindsay and Ryan and the rest of the team, who

have supported us in making this particular piece of legislation a reality.

At this time, I'd like to turn it over to the member from Chatham-Kent–Leamington.

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): The member for Chatham-Kent–Leamington and parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs.

Mr. Trevor Jones: First, I want to sincerely thank my friend and colleague the honourable member from Huron–Bruce for her leadership on Bill 155, the Agricultural Research Institute of Ontario Amendment Act, 2023. I also want to thank all the stakeholders who, over the past year, have offered their perspectives, experiences, wisdom, knowledge and insights to inform this government, as trusted partners, to bring an important initiative to fruition.

As noted, the Agricultural Research Institute of Ontario was created back in 1962. The act was created for the sole purpose of promoting research to improve the agriculture sector. As we can appreciate, the context of our sector in 1962 is in stark contrast to today's. In 1962, the ARIO's mission and pillars were to advise, providing bold, informed and strategic advice; to promote and communicate the value of Ontario's agri-food research opportunities and successes; to transform; and to leverage. Although these pillars may still apply, so much has changed since then; most notably, the driving force of change from technological innovations. The sector has become far more specialized, with incredible progress made in automation, robotics, artificial intelligence, digital and other innovative technologies. Today, Ontario's agri-food sector offers a world of possibilities in research and innovation and is thus a very different environment from the one first created.

To compete and to win on the world stage, Ontario needs to embed innovation in everything we do.

Like any legislation that has been in place for decades, it's important to revisit it periodically to guarantee that it continues to serve its purpose effectively and efficiently.

Here, we're striving to ensure that the legislation regarding research—one of the most fundamental foundations in agri-food—can support the needs now and well into the future. This focus brings us to the why: Why the proposed changes? The proposed amendments involve updating the definition of research from what it was initially to what it needs to be now. In the current act, research included agriculture, veterinary medicine and household science. In the 1960s, this definition was likely entirely as adequate. Today, the range for any food-related research is broader and so much more complex. In fact, the Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs is continually evolving, moving its programming forward and recognizing that research should be nimble. If we're to succeed and continue to be leaders on a global stage in agriculture, in the food industry, we must be nimble and we must be agile.

2210

Research and innovation are fundamental to mitigate challenges from climate change, disease and the spread of pests. Research strengthens Ontario's competitive edge

and fosters true economic growth. Research priorities developed by this ministry are reflective of a broad sector of needs and lead to discoveries and innovation that will benefit the industry far beyond the food value chain. We know that working with industry is pivotal to identify research priorities and needs. We're always open to receiving input and evolve priorities as the needs arise.

We also communicate research results to the sector in a variety of pathways, and we're open to partnerships with industry. Research and innovation play a crucial role in growing Ontario's \$48-billion agri-food sector, and we know that by working together, we can ensure this sector is positioned for future growth. Today, areas of research are incredibly broad. They include food safety, animal health, plant health and protection, soil health, water access and quality, sustainable production systems, productive land capacity, innovative products and quality improvement, and broader market and targeted sector growth opportunities.

In addition, there are complex competing priorities that go well beyond those research priorities from back in 1962. These include sophisticated performance measurements, multidisciplinary collaborations that address the complex research needs, emergency management and the emerging technologies and business practices that are today's reality in the market space. In light of the expansion of areas of research that benefit the industry, the proposed changes to ARIO would help be more aligned with the modern world as it is today. As I've outlined, research in the agri-food sector today encompasses diverse subject areas, and this is why Ontario continues to invest in strategic research programs that support the sector and rural communities.

Of note is the Ontario Agri-Food Innovation Alliance, a long-standing and successful collaboration between OMAFRA, the University of Guelph and the ARIO. Since 1997, Ontario and the University of Guelph have had a comprehensive agreement focusing on agriculture and food research, laboratory services, veterinary education and research centre management. Through this alliance, the ARIO, our ministry and the University of Guelph have worked together to advance research and innovation that contributes to success and competitiveness in the province's agriculture and food industry while promoting rural economic development. We can't emphasize that enough.

In March, the Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs signed a new five-year Ontario Agri-Food Innovation Alliance agreement, a collaboration with the University of Guelph and the institute. Over the course of the five-year period, over \$343 million was committed in investment in support of research and innovation in the agri-food sector. The renewal of this agreement builds on the success of the previous five-year term, which increased Ontario's GDP by \$1.4 billion and sustained more than 1,300 well-paying jobs.

The programming in this agreement provides specialized expertise and access to research, lab services, vet education, research centre management, and training and education and certification for a wide range of jobs as agriculture producers. The funding was also in support of

the development of a highly skilled workforce that leads to more growth economically for this precious sector.

Programs supported by the alliance continue to ensure we have access to healthy, safe food and that farmers and businesses have the information they need to be competitive and sustainable.

The alliance also supports programming to help farmers and the broader food sector build resiliency. This includes managing threats to food production and food security, such as the African swine fever and avian influenza; advancing science, research, innovation and commercialization of new products, processes and practices that support the long-term success of the agriculture and food industry; and building a skilled, resilient workforce and developing talent that will advance Ontario's broader food sector, including vet medicine and in our rural communities. This includes maintaining and maximizing the use of the network of state-of-the-art research centres that are part of the University of Guelph and the ARIO. For instance, the Knowledge Translation and Transfer Program is designed as an integral part of the alliance's commitments to ensure the benefits of agriculture and food research become available to the industry.

Additionally, the Gryphon's Leading to the Accelerated Adoption of Innovative Research, or the GLAAIR program for short—we're never short of acronyms—was launched back in 2014 to help identify true commercialization opportunities associated with these technologies. The program addresses gaps and overcomes barriers to the application and commercialization of technologies. The GLAAIR program takes research and uses it to develop new products and attract private-sector investment funding while creating jobs and making Ontario's agriculture and food industry more competitive on the world stage.

In addition to the Ontario Agri-Food Innovation Alliance, research funding opportunities under the Sustainable Canadian Agricultural Partnership are open to broader sector eligibility, such as the Ontario Agri-Food Research Initiative, or OAFRI for short. OAFRI provides funding for agri-food research and projects in Ontario, which is a key pillar to our Grow Ontario Strategy. The goal of this initiative is to fund demand-driven research and activities in the sector, activities that sustain resiliency and facilitate sustainable, real growth by improving the knowledge and technology to address unique business challenges and expanding market opportunities locally and globally.

Also recently announced was the agri-tech innovation initiative, which will provide up to \$25 million in funding to farm and food-processing businesses to help them invest in innovative technology, equipment or processes to increase production capacity. These initiatives are jointly funded by the governments of Canada and Ontario under the Sustainable Canadian Agricultural Partnership. These wide-ranging examples of investments and relationships in action in the field of research demonstrate how significant research is to the industry's success.

In addition to being an important foundation for agriculture, Ontario's research platforms serve a wide variety of other sectors. They facilitate true, trusting relationships

between government, industry and academia to support the impact and competitiveness of sustainability of our agriculture products. We're proud to continue to support research efforts and look forward to seeing the exciting developments introduced and launched in the years ahead as we continue to drive industry success forward.

Considering the range and depth of research activities under way and how much the industry has changed over the years, the proposed modernization of this act comes into clear focus. If passed, our proposed updates will help ensure it can better meet the current needs and expectations of an industry that needs to be nimble and agile, while reliant on research.

My honourable colleague our Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs outlined that we have undertaken rigorous consultations with stakeholders and board members to gain their insights into current and future needs. This engagement process was a valuable exercise. I was very proud to work closely with leaders from the industry, Indigenous communities and current ARIO board members and to learn from them and apply their perspectives to go forward.

Consultations included a diverse group of truly accomplished professionals, who also were primary producers, processors, tech leaders, researchers and representatives from every commodity group in Ontario. In doing so, I endeavoured to keep aspirational goals in mind, and began these consultations with an openness to learn from others' ideas, even ones that might be in conflict with one another and my own.

I drew from my experience studying under Roger Martin, right here at the University of Toronto, and tried to closely align my thoughts and guide this important process by approaching the question and seeking answers from the perspective of integrative thinking. This model of problem-solving, developed by Roger Martin, defines integrative thinking "as the ability to face constructively the tension of opposing ideas and, instead of choosing one at the expense of the other, generate a creative resolution of the tension in the form of a new idea that contains elements of both opposing ideas," but the answer will be superior to each.

The insights from the diverse stakeholders I met, even when they sometimes came into conflict with one another—or different, unique or opposing ideas—directly shaped the proposed changes we have here. We appreciate everyone's time and commitment to collaborating with us on this important work.

There was strong interest amongst stakeholders in seeing legislation that was modernized and more relevant, more commercially adaptable as we move forward. As my honourable colleague noted, stakeholder reaction to the proposed modernization of the ARIO Act was very positive. We incorporated stakeholders' direct feedback into proposed amendments to this legislation.

We're also incorporating those ideas into a strategic plan, the ARIO infrastructure plan, and even into the agency's memorandum of understanding. Together, these ideas will truly help to strengthen the sector and help us grow Ontario together.

At the one-year anniversary of the Grow Ontario Strategy, it's truly fitting we're here tonight to discuss proposed changes to legislation that will help us move forward and bring this industry into modernity. Over the past year, we've taken a number of steps to move the Grow Ontario Strategy forward. We'll see action being taken to move the industry into 2023 and for generations beyond.

Speaker, I've appreciated the opportunity to rise today and speak to these proposed amendments. The changes are part of a broader effort to support successes for the industry and to streamline and simplify processes for doing business in Ontario. We're confident that the process of consultation on the ARIO Act has effectively shaped these proposed changes to meet the sector's needs—to meet Ontario's needs.

As always, we're committed to listening to stakeholders and incorporating and applying their insights. By doing so, we believe the proposed changes that are captured from a broad spectrum of agri-food leaders will better serve all of Ontario into the future.

This bill demonstrates a commitment from government, from industry and from academia to build a stronger Ontario through agri-business.

I look forward to support from all members of this House, who will recognize that diverse, purpose-driven leaders thoughtfully shared powerful ideas to ensure Ontario remains self-reliant and a global leader in food production, while making a positive difference in the world.

Second reading debate deemed adjourned.

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): The government House leader has a point of order?

Hon. Paul Calandra: Yes, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, if you seek it, I'm sure you'll find unanimous consent to see the clock at midnight.

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): Is there unanimous consent to see the clock at midnight? Agreed.

Therefore, seeing that it's midnight, this House stands adjourned until tomorrow, Wednesday, November 29, at 9 o'clock.

The House adjourned at 2224.

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Fedeli, Hon. / L'hon. Victor (PC)	Nipissing	Chair of Cabinet / Président du Conseil des ministres Minister of Economic Development, Job Creation and Trade / Ministre du Développement économique, de la Création d'emplois et du Commerce
Fife, Catherine (NDP)	Waterloo	
Flack, Hon. / L'hon. Rob (PC)	Elgin—Middlesex—London	Associate Minister of Housing / Ministre associé du Logement

Member and Party / Député(e) et parti	Constituency / Circonscription	Other responsibilities / Autres responsabilités
Ford, Hon. / L'hon. Doug (PC)	Etobicoke North / Etobicoke-Nord	Leader, Progressive Conservative Party of Ontario / Chef du Parti progressiste-conservateur de l'Ontario Premier / Premier ministre Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs / Ministre des Affaires intergouvernementales
Ford, Hon. / L'hon. Michael D. (PC)	York South—Weston / York-Sud—Weston	Minister of Citizenship and Multiculturalism / Ministre des Affaires civiques et du Multiculturalisme
Fraser, John (LIB)	Ottawa South / Ottawa-Sud	
French, Jennifer K. (NDP)	Oshawa	
Gallagher Murphy, Dawn (PC)	Newmarket—Aurora	
Gates, Wayne (NDP)	Niagara Falls	
Gélinas, France (NDP)	Nickel Belt	
Ghamari, Goldie (PC)	Carleton	
Gill, Hon. / L'hon. Parm (PC)	Milton	Minister of Red Tape Reduction / Ministre de la Réduction des formalités administratives
Glover, Chris (NDP)	Spadina—Fort York	
Gretzky, Lisa (NDP)	Windsor West / Windsor-Ouest	
Grewal, Hardeep Singh (PC)	Brampton East / Brampton-Est	
Hardeman, Ernie (PC)	Oxford	
Harden, Joel (NDP)	Ottawa Centre / Ottawa-Centre	
Harris, Mike (PC)	Kitchener—Conestoga	
Hazell, Andrea (LIB)	Scarborough—Guildwood	
Hogarth, Christine (PC)	Etobicoke—Lakeshore	
Holland, Kevin (PC)	Thunder Bay—Atikokan	
Hsu, Ted (LIB)	Kingston and the Islands / Kingston et les Îles	
Jama, Sarah (IND)	Hamilton Centre / Hamilton-Centre	
Jones, Hon. / L'hon. Sylvia (PC)	Dufferin—Caledon	Minister of Health / Ministre de la Santé Deputy Premier / Vice-première ministre
Jones, Trevor (PC)	Chatham-Kent—Leamington	Deputy Government House Leader / Leader parlementaire adjoint du gouvernement
Jordan, John (PC)	Lanark—Frontenac—Kingston	
Kanapathi, Logan (PC)	Markham—Thornhill	
Karpoche, Bhutla (NDP)	Parkdale—High Park	First Deputy Chair of the Committee of the Whole House / Première Vice-Présidente du Comité plénier de l'Assemblée législative
Ke, Vincent (IND)	Don Valley North / Don Valley-Nord	
Kemaghan, Terence (NDP)	London North Centre / London-Centre-Nord	Deputy Opposition House Leader / Leader parlementaire adjoint de l'opposition officielle
Kerzner, Hon. / L'hon. Michael S. (PC)	York Centre / York-Centre	Solicitor General / Solliciteur général
Khanjin, Hon. / L'hon Andrea (PC)	Barrie—Innisfil	Minister of the Environment, Conservation and Parks / Ministre de l'Environnement, de la Protection de la nature et des Parcs Deputy Government House Leader / Leader parlementaire adjointe du gouvernement
Kusendova-Bashta, Natalia (PC)	Mississauga Centre / Mississauga-Centre	
Leardi, Anthony (PC)	Essex	
Lecce, Hon. / L'hon. Stephen (PC)	King—Vaughan	Minister of Education / Ministre de l'Éducation
Lumsden, Hon. / L'hon. Neil (PC)	Hamilton East—Stoney Creek / Hamilton-Est—Stoney Creek	Minister of Tourism, Culture and Sport / Ministre du Tourisme, de la Culture et du Sport
MacLeod, Lisa (PC)	Nepean	
Mamakwa, Sol (NDP)	Kiiwetinoong	Deputy Leader, Official Opposition / Chef adjoint de l'opposition officielle
Mantha, Michael (IND)	Algoma—Manitoulin	
Martin, Robin (PC)	Eglinton—Lawrence	
McCarthy, Hon. / L'hon. Todd J. (PC)	Durham	Minister of Public and Business Service Delivery / Ministre des Services au public et aux entreprises
McCrimmon, Karen (LIB)	Kanata—Carleton	
McGregor, Graham (PC)	Brampton North / Brampton-Nord	
McMahon, Mary-Margaret (LIB)	Beaches—East York	
Mulroney, Hon. / L'hon. Caroline (PC)	York—Simcoe	President of the Treasury Board / Présidente du Conseil du Trésor Minister of Francophone Affairs / Ministre des Affaires francophones
Oosterhoff, Sam (PC)	Niagara West / Niagara-Ouest	

Member and Party / Député(e) et parti	Constituency / Circonscription	Other responsibilities / Autres responsabilités
Pang, Billy (PC)	Markham—Unionville	
Parsa, Hon. / L'hon. Michael (PC)	Aurora—Oak Ridges—Richmond Hill	Minister of Children, Community and Social Services / Ministre des Services à l'enfance et des Services sociaux et communautaires
Pasma, Chandra (NDP)	Ottawa West—Nepean / Ottawa-Ouest—Nepean	
Piccini, Hon. / L'hon. David (PC)	Northumberland—Peterborough South / Northumberland—Peterborough-Sud	Minister of Labour, Immigration, Training and Skills Development / Ministre du Travail, de l'Immigration, de la Formation et du Développement des compétences
Pierre, Natalie (PC)	Burlington	
Pirie, Hon. / L'hon. George (PC)	Timmins	Minister of Mines / Ministre des Mines
Quinn, Nolan (PC)	Stormont—Dundas—South Glengarry	
Rae, Matthew (PC)	Perth—Wellington	
Rakocevic, Tom (NDP)	Humber River—Black Creek	
Rasheed, Kaleed (IND)	Mississauga East—Cooksville / Mississauga-Est—Cooksville	
Rickford, Hon. / L'hon. Greg (PC)	Kenora—Rainy River	Minister of Northern Development / Ministre du Développement du Nord Minister of Indigenous Affairs / Ministre des Affaires autochtones
Riddell, Brian (PC)	Cambridge	
Romano, Ross (PC)	Sault Ste. Marie	
Sabawy, Sheref (PC)	Mississauga—Erin Mills	
Sandhu, Amarjot (PC)	Brampton West / Brampton-Ouest	
Sarkaria, Hon. / L'hon. Prabmeet Singh (PC)	Brampton South / Brampton-Sud	Minister of Transportation / Ministre des Transports
Sarrazin, Stéphane (PC)	Glengarry—Prescott—Russell	
Sattler, Peggy (NDP)	London West / London-Ouest	
Saunderson, Brian (PC)	Simcoe—Grey	
Schreiner, Mike (GRN)	Guelph	
Scott, Laurie (PC)	Haliburton—Kawartha Lakes—Brock	
Shamji, Adil (LIB)	Don Valley East / Don Valley-Est	
Shaw, Sandy (NDP)	Hamilton West—Ancaster—Dundas / Hamilton-Ouest—Ancaster—Dundas	
Skelly, Donna (PC)	Flamborough—Glanbrook	Deputy Speaker / Vice-Présidente Chair of the Committee of the Whole House / Présidente du Comité plénier de l'Assemblée législative
Smith, Dave (PC)	Peterborough—Kawartha	
Smith, David (PC)	Scarborough Centre / Scarborough-Centre	
Smith, Hon. / L'hon. Graydon (PC)	Parry Sound—Muskoka	Minister of Natural Resources and Forestry / Ministre des Richesses naturelles et des Forêts
Smith, Laura (PC)	Thornhill	
Smith, Hon. / L'hon. Todd (PC)	Bay of Quinte / Baie de Quinte	Minister of Energy / Ministre de l'Énergie
Stevens, Jennifer (Jennie) (NDP)	St. Catharines	
Stiles, Marit (NDP)	Davenport	Leader, Official Opposition / Chef de l'opposition officielle Leader, New Democratic Party of Ontario / Chef du Nouveau Parti démocratique de l'Ontario
Surma, Hon. / L'hon. Kinga (PC)	Etobicoke Centre / Etobicoke-Centre	Minister of Infrastructure / Ministre de l'Infrastructure
Tabuns, Peter (NDP)	Toronto—Danforth	
Tangri, Hon. / L'hon. Nina (PC)	Mississauga—Streetsville	Associate Minister of Small Business / Ministre associée déléguée aux Petites Entreprises
Taylor, Monique (NDP)	Hamilton Mountain / Hamilton-Mountain	
Thanigasalam, Hon. / L'hon Vijay (PC)	Scarborough—Rouge Park	Associate Minister of Transportation / Ministre associé des Transports
Thompson, Hon. / L'hon. Lisa M. (PC)	Huron—Bruce	Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs / Ministre de l'Agriculture, de l'Alimentation et des Affaires rurales
Tibollo, Hon. / L'hon. Michael A. (PC)	Vaughan—Woodbridge	Associate Minister of Mental Health and Addictions / Ministre associé délégué au dossier de la Santé mentale et de la Lutte contre les dépendances
Triantafilopoulos, Effie J. (PC)	Oakville North—Burlington / Oakville-Nord—Burlington	
Vanthof, John (NDP)	Timiskaming—Cochrane	Opposition House Leader / Leader parlementaire de l'opposition officielle

Member and Party / Député(e) et parti	Constituency / Circonscription	Other responsibilities / Autres responsabilités
Vaugois, Lise (NDP)	Thunder Bay—Superior North / Thunder Bay—Supérieur-Nord	
Wai, Daisy (PC)	Richmond Hill	
West, Jamie (NDP)	Sudbury	
Williams, Hon. / L'hon. Charmaine A. (PC)	Brampton Centre / Brampton-Centre	Associate Minister of Women's Social and Economic Opportunity / Ministre associée des Perspectives sociales et économiques pour les femmes
Wong-Tam, Kristyn (NDP)	Toronto Centre / Toronto-Centre	
Yakabuski, John (PC)	Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke	
Vacant	Kitchener Centre / Kitchener-Centre	
Vacant	Lambton—Kent—Middlesex	