

Legislative  
Assembly  
of Ontario



Assemblée  
législative  
de l'Ontario

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**Official Report  
of Debates  
(Hansard)**

F-52

**Journal  
des débats  
(Hansard)**

F-52

**Standing Committee on  
Finance and Economic Affairs**

Pre-budget consultations

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

Wednesday 31 January 2024

**Comité permanent  
des finances  
et des affaires économiques**

Consultations prébudgétaires

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

Mercredi 31 janvier 2024

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Chair: Ernie Hardeman  
Clerk: Vanessa Kattar

Président : Ernie Hardeman  
Greffière : Vanessa Kattar

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



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

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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

**STANDING COMMITTEE ON  
FINANCE AND ECONOMIC AFFAIRS**

Wednesday 31 January 2024

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

**COMITÉ PERMANENT DES FINANCES  
ET DES AFFAIRES ÉCONOMIQUES**

Mercredi 31 janvier 2024

*The committee met at 1001 in Delta Hotels by Marriott Thunder Bay, Thunder Bay.*

**PRE-BUDGET CONSULTATIONS**

**The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman):** Welcome, everyone. Welcome to Thunder Bay. I call this meeting of the Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs to order. We're meeting today to resume public hearings on pre-budget consultations 2024.

The Clerk of the Committee has distributed committee documents, including written submissions, via SharePoint.

As a reminder, each presenter will have seven minutes for their presentation. After we've heard from all the presenters, the remaining 39 minutes of the time slot will be for questions from the members of the committee. This time for questions will be divided into two rounds of seven and a half minutes for the government members, two rounds of seven and a half minutes for the official opposition members and two round of four and half minutes for the independent members as a group.

Any questions from the committee?

THUNDER BAY CHAMBER  
OF COMMERCE

NISHNAWBE ASKI NATION

FEDERATION OF ONTARIO PUBLIC  
LIBRARIES, ONTARIO LIBRARY  
ASSOCIATION AND THUNDER BAY  
PUBLIC LIBRARY

**The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman):** If not, we will have the first table. The first table consists of the Thunder Bay Chamber of Commerce; Nishnawbe Aski Nation; the Federation of Ontario Public Libraries, the Ontario Library Association and the Thunder Bay Public Library.

With that, again, I repeat what you heard in the opening remarks: Each presenter will get seven minutes to make their presentation. At six minutes, I will say, "Thank you"—

*Interjection.*

**The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman):** No, I got it wrong; he got it right—I will say, "One minute." Don't stop; the best minute of your presentation is yet to come. At that point, when I say, "Thank you," it will be all over.

We will start with the Thunder Bay Chamber of Commerce.

**Ms. Charla Robinson:** Good morning. I'm Charla Robinson, president of the Thunder Bay Chamber of Commerce. The Thunder Bay Chamber of Commerce represents approximately 800 member companies with over 20,000 employees in the Thunder Bay area.

One of the biggest challenges being faced by the business community is labour shortages. Northern Ontario specifically is experiencing a demographic shift and a population decline that is fuelled by natural aging, low fertility rates, rising life expectancy and an increase of out migration. The population and migration trends suggest that northern Ontario needs 50,000 newcomers by 2041 in order to sustain our current population and our labour needs.

With that in mind, immigration policies are a top priority for our members. The federal Rural and Northern Immigration Pilot program, or RNIP, has proven highly successful in attracting new people to northern Ontario specifically, and to rural and northern Canada generally. Ontario should learn from and mirror this success through the allocation of Ontario Immigrant Nominee Program spots for northern and rural Ontario communities. We urge the provincial government to ensure that the Ontario Immigrant Nominee Program addresses labour market challenges by allocating 3,000 nominee spots to northern Ontario.

One vital piece of our immigrant attraction is through our post-secondary institutions. International students are vital contributors to our economy, working part-time jobs that help reduce labour shortages, contributing to the diversity and vitality of our communities, and reversing declining population trends in the north. As such, we're very concerned that the federal policy to cap international student permits could have a significant negative impact on our two post-secondary institutions by limiting the recruitment of international students, exacerbating financial pressures on both Lakehead University and Confederation College, and reducing the breadth of sustainable programming options. We trust that the provincial government will work with our college and university in advocating for an exemption from the international student cap for northern Ontario institutions.

I would also like to highlight some other steps that the government can take to boost growth in our economy.

We support the efforts of the Ontario Craft Brewers to achieve a more competitive and lower tax environment for craft brewers in Ontario. We call on the government to eliminate the beer can tax and implement a new beer tax structure that establishes lower progressive tax rates for

microbrewers, higher production volume thresholds for reaching maximum tax rates, and consolidating multiple existing taxes into one overall tax.

In addition, the LCBO's policies and processes add significant costs to local restaurants and bars. As restaurants rebound from the pandemic and a deteriorating economy, we need the LCBO to be more supportive of the hospitality sector by updating policies to allow imported alcohol to be stored in the region and reinstating store-to-store transfers for businesses outside of the greater Toronto area.

Forestry also continues to be a major contributor to our economy, providing direct and indirect employment to thousands of hard-working men and women in our region. The forest sector is currently facing significant and challenging headwinds. We support the implementation of Ontario's forest strategy and the recommendations of the Ontario Forest Industries Association which focus on key competitiveness measures, including those that take steps to prioritize biomass and pulpwood market development, and improve forest road infrastructure by increasing funding to \$75 million per year.

Northwestern Ontario is also home to hundreds of active mining projects which represent billions in mineral value and which will have a significant impact on the economy of the northwest and the province as a whole. The mining industry stimulates and supports economic growth both in large urban centres and in rural and Indigenous communities. Mineral deposits are often located hundreds or thousands of kilometres from rail, road, energy and technology infrastructure, and as a result, companies are faced with costs of hundreds of millions of dollars in order to simply access their mining claims. The costs to establish the required infrastructure are frequently too prohibitive for private sector investment alone. Federal and provincial financial support is needed at the front end to make these projects happen, and we know that the return on investment in tax revenues and economic growth will more than offset these costs in the decades to come.

Thank you for your time and attention today.

**The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman):** Thank you very much for the presentation.

We will now hear from Nishnawbe Aski Nation.

**Deputy Grand Chief Victor Linklater:** Good morning. I am Victor Linklater, the Deputy Grand Chief of Nishnawbe Aski Nation, known as NAN. NAN advocates for 49 First Nations located within the Treaty 9 and Treaty 5 territories, for self-determination with functioning self-government.

Having been first established in 1973, NAN has gone through many changes over the last 50 years and has seen many successes. The passion, dedication and resources of NAN leadership, staff and citizens have led to tremendous progress in the communities NAN serves.

I'm here today to speak to opportunities for the Ontario government to partner with NAN in achieving future progress in five key policy areas identified by NAN's chief committees: climate change, education, economic development, food security, and nuclear waste.

Climate change presents an immense challenge to NAN communities, many of which are the most remote fly-in

communities in Ontario. These communities face increased flooding, closure of ice roads, and devastating wildfires, such as those we saw last summer. In the face of these serious threats, NAN is looking to the Ontario government for a strengthened policy response to confront climate change.

NAN believes that greater progress can be achieved on this front, as current Ontario government policies, such as the green bonds program, provide valuable tools to address the impacts of climate change in NAN territory through clean energy, storm resistance infrastructure and conservation projects. NAN will look for targeted investments through this and other environmental policy initiatives in budget 2024.

#### 1010

Education is a policy area where NAN and Ontario have made significant progress in the past, particularly through the 2013 memorandum of understanding on education that made a commitment to work together to improve educational outcomes for First Nations students and First-Nation-operated and provincially funded schools.

NAN is looking to see continued and enhanced support for major programs, such as the Indigenous Graduation Coach Program and the Alternative Secondary School Program, that support culturally relevant learning initiatives that prepare students for success. As well, broadening language education for all three Indigenous languages spoken by NAN members—Ojibwe, Oji-Cree and Cree—is in keeping with reconciliation. NAN will look to see greater support for these programs, especially the new infrastructure bank funding for schools and other Indigenous institutions.

**Economic development:** NAN is encouraged by the Ontario government's priority of economic development in the north, while stressing the need that this development must be in concert with the consent and partnership of NAN communities. NAN's sustainable development initiative, guided by youth and elder input, focuses on pursuing economic development through capacity building in its communities and training for its citizens.

NAN is looking to see greater support for Indigenous economic development, particularly Indigenous entrepreneurs, supported by Ontario's RAISE program, featured in last year's budget, and a host of economic development programs offered by the Ministry of Indigenous Affairs for businesses, First Nations and young people.

**Food security:** While Ontario currently lacks a cohesive food security policy, NAN requests that the government of Ontario develop food security policies which would enable a collaborative approach with NAN to address food security. These policies should include support for both traditional and innovative food production for NAN citizens and communities. With food security being a key priority of the previously mentioned sustainable development initiative, NAN is seeking to secure its food sovereignty as Ontario looks to grow agriculture and agri-food in the north.

**Nuclear waste:** NAN has a concern about the transportation of nuclear waste through the traditional territories of its member First Nations. However, NAN wishes to continue

to engage with government regarding nuclear energy development, which is intertwined with a solution to store nuclear waste. NAN wishes to see the Ontario government make available suitable policy tools and requisite funding to make this engagement accessible and meaningful. These policy tools will help inform the principles of free, prior and informed consent.

To close, NAN will look to the Ontario 2024 budget with the anticipation of seeing opportunity, progress and genuine partnership from Ontario in policy areas impacting NAN and its member communities. Policy and funding tools that will help educate, build capacity, put communities first and protect the environment will represent positive steps forward between the government of Ontario and the 49 First Nations represented by NAN.

**The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman):** Thank you very much.

We will now hear from the Federation of Ontario Public Libraries, the Ontario Library Association and Thunder Bay Public Library.

**Dr. Richard Togman:** Thank you for the opportunity to address this committee. My name is Dr. Richard Togman, CEO of the Thunder Bay Public Library. Working with the Ontario Library Association and the Federation of Ontario Public Libraries, Thunder Bay Public Library would respectfully ask you to consider three important changes to library funding in Ontario: firstly, the creation of an Ontario digital public library consortium to collectively purchase digital resources for all public libraries; the second is to increase funding for public libraries on reserve through the First Nation Salary Supplement; and third is to increase provincial operating funding for public libraries.

Currently, public libraries individually purchase digital education and skills training resources for their residents. This is somewhat inefficient and costly, as we fail to take advantage of the economies of scale that group purchasing provides. Bulk ordering and large purchase discounts are standard practice in the business world and our government can take inspiration from the private sector and use the collective buying power of Ontario libraries to bulk-purchase digital education and skills training resources from private sector providers.

We need the provincial government to lead the way. With each public library system funded by each individual municipality, it becomes very difficult to coordinate this kind of bulk purchasing. As well, many library systems, especially in northern Ontario, are too small to handle their own logistics and financial infrastructure, and so in a prudent cost-saving effort, they work with the municipalities to operate it on their behalf. This makes the province a natural leader on this issue, as only you can unify the hundreds of local and municipal systems into a powerful economic actor and deliver these exceptional resources to millions of Ontarians.

We are asking you to take leadership and achieve as a province what is extremely difficult for us to do alone. The creation of provincially shared digital public library resources would see huge cost savings—up to 40%. This model is well established and is used in both Alberta and

Saskatchewan to great effect. By leveraging their ability to negotiate and purchase larger volumes collectively, they not only save public dollars but increase the resources that every resident has access to.

These include after-school tutoring and education programs to help children who fell behind during the pandemic catch up with their peers. It includes virtual courses and learning modules to help job-seekers level up, attain micro-credentials and get jobs that are desperately needed to fill the skills shortages in northern Ontario. It also offers language training programs to help new immigrants gain the skills they need to find work and succeed. Thunder Bay has benefited tremendously from an influx of new immigrants and our shared success is dependent on them having access to these free resources at their public library while they go through the profound transformation of becoming a Canadian.

These types of financial issues are even more acute for First Nations in northern Ontario. Public libraries are a critical resource to many in our community, and perhaps no user group benefits more than those on low income. For northern reserve communities who often suffer disproportionately from low income, a lack of resources and limited opportunity, free public library resources open a world of possibilities.

Right now, public libraries on reserve are chronically underfunded. With extremely little municipal tax revenue to support a public library, many First Nations communities have no public library at all. Of the 133 First Nation communities in Ontario, only 39 have public libraries. The First Nation Salary Supplement grant accounts for much of the funding reserve communities receive from the province for their libraries and it amounts to merely \$15,000 per year, on average.

On behalf of the Federation of Ontario Public Libraries and the Ontario Library Association, I would like to call for increased funding to First Nations libraries and an increase to the First Nation Salary Supplement. Combined with the creation of a digital public library purchasing effort, as previously discussed, this would greatly enhance access to the resources communities need to grow, participate in training and fully take part in all the opportunities Ontario has to offer.

Lastly, and directly connected to issues around digital resources purchasing and First Nation library funding, is a request to increase the Public Library Operating Grant. This is one of the main ways that the province currently supports public libraries. However, this funding has been frozen for over 20 years, failing to take into account any degree of inflation or cost increases. Accordingly, its value has dropped dramatically. In other provinces, provincial funding for public libraries accounts for about 15% of their budget on average, but in Ontario provincial support represents only 4% of local library budgets.

We know libraries are highly valued by Ontario voters. In Thunder Bay, the public library has a 94% citizen satisfaction score based on surveys done by the municipality. Additionally, local surveys show that residents are highly engaged in library budgets, with over 86% of people saying

that they want the library to keep them informed as to which political leaders vote to increase or decrease the library's budget. Public surveys across the province show that over 80% of voters are more likely to vote for political leaders who support the library's budget and against those who deny the library the funding it needs. Research also shows that over 80% of voters state that they would be willing to pay more taxes if they knew those funds were going to their local library.

Library funding unifies voters in a way that few issues do. The most passionate library supporters include seniors, parents with young children and working-class families. They know the value that they get for their tax dollars as they regularly come to the library and take advantage of the high-quality, free public programs, services and collections we offer.

Our community in Thunder Bay is voting with their feet, and we've seen huge increases in library usage over the past year. We have seen:

- a 70% increase in the amount of physical visits to our branches;
- a 22% increase in the number of books and educational materials loaned out;
- a 44% increase in the number of people attending library programs; and
- our library system is used over 4,000 times per day across our four branches and our digital infrastructure.

1020

**The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman):** One minute.

**Dr. Richard Togman:** So please consider increasing the province's investment in public libraries and realizing a great return on investment by creating a digital public library purchasing program, increasing funding to First Nations libraries and increasing the Public Library Operating Grant to account for years of inflation. Thank you.

**The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman):** Thank you very much for the presentation. That concludes the presentations.

We now will start with questions, first round, with the official opposition. MPP Kernaghan.

**Mr. Terence Kernaghan:** Thank you to all our presenters. It's great to be in Thunder Bay today. I'd like to begin with the Thunder Bay Chamber of Commerce with Charla. I won't begin my questions with the sole-source contracts to Staples and Walmart. It's something that I think we should be concerned about, but I did want to speak and ask about the Toronto Region Board of Trade's recent report, *The Race for Space: Securing the Future of Ontario's Employment Lands*. Can you speak about the vacancy rates for commercial property currently?

**Ms. Charla Robinson:** I don't have the particular vacancy rates for Thunder Bay. It's not [*inaudible*] been a major issue for us here in Thunder Bay at this point, so it's not something that I'm informed of.

**Mr. Terence Kernaghan:** Understood. I did want to ask as well—I know that many small businesses are currently facing a tremendous economic burden with the federal government and the repayment of the CEBA loans. Would you like to see the province reach out to the federal gov-

ernment and try to pressure them to extend that deadline further?

**Ms. Charla Robinson:** Well, certainly anyone that is advocating to the federal government is appreciated by small business because many businesses really are struggling to repay that loan in the three-year time frame, especially those businesses that haven't had the recovery the same as other businesses. Particularly, a lot of retail and restaurants or tourism-based industries are really struggling because they haven't had the same growth because discretionary income is a little tighter these days with inflation. So certainly any groups that can be supporting that call for additional extensions is most appreciated by business.

**Mr. Terence Kernaghan:** Absolutely. Thank you for that. I think it is something that the provincial government should do to advocate for all of our wonderful small businesses, seeing as they comprise 80% of economic activity in Ontario.

In your presentation, you mentioned the non-resident speculation tax. There have been changes to it recently, but there are still gigantic loopholes within that tax system. For instance, it exempts purchases of multi-residential buildings that have more than six units, and organizations such as real estate investment trusts would therefore be exempted from paying that NRST. Would you like to see the province tighten up the rules around the NRST?

**Ms. Charla Robinson:** Actually, I think our position is a little bit different. Our concern is for the individuals who are coming to the community through the Rural and Northern Immigration Pilot, that they are being penalized with that extra tax, which makes it harder for them to want to stay here. So we actually think there should be more exemptions to that tax to allow those types of individuals to not have that extra barrier of additional taxes on the purchase of a facility.

**Mr. Terence Kernaghan:** I guess the difference here is the difference between individuals as opposed to large multinational corporations. But thank you very much for your presentation today.

I'd like to move on to Deputy Grand Chief Victor. I think your recommendations are incredibly forward-thinking, and I do think they'll lead to greater economic participation for Indigenous people. My question is, what message do you think investments in NAN would represent for Ontarians?

**Deputy Grand Chief Victor Linklater:** As we gave our asks—climate change is a big thing now. We're in winter, but our—we've been experiencing pretty warm winters, and it's affecting access to building supplies going to our communities' housing infrastructure. It just affects everything. I grew up attached to a winter road, so we used to see it coming in, and it's tough.

And then education—other presenters brought up education too, right. Growing up, my mom and my father never graduated elementary school, so they always pushed education for us, and it was the key for our First Nations to get out of the legacies of colonialism: You go to school, you go to school—and we need better schools, absolutely. The system, if you compare our First-Nation-run schools and our provincial schools, there's a big gap. Not to be



totally negative, but despite those gaps, our students have exceeded and excelled, even with those challenges, and we've been forced to do more with less.

Being treaty partners, I think it's time that, as part of economic reconciliation, we close that gap. We have a lot to contribute within our NAN territory. Everybody is talking about the Ring of Fire, all the mining and the forestry that happens. As treaty partners, our forefathers agreed to share. It hasn't been a fair relationship, but we're here today. We're willing to collaborate—to work together, actually—to improve the lives of our people.

We have a lot of remote fly-in communities—many challenges. Food: One of the crazy things over the holidays was that somebody looked at the price for a chicken breast in Sioux Lookout. It was on sale for \$7.99, and then in Sandy Lake, in one of our northern communities, the same piece was \$54.

**Mr. Terence Kernaghan:** Wow.

**Deputy Grand Chief Victor Linklater:** So there's a lot of disparities, and you wonder—it's hard to dig out of that. But I think we need to do better in 2024, and I believe, as a society, we need to work together to get these innovative solutions. That's why food security is so important for us.

**Mr. Terence Kernaghan:** Thank you very much. I'd like to pass it over to MPP Vaugeois.

**MPP Lise Vaugeois:** I'll continue with you, Deputy Chief. In 2018, Indigenous programs were cancelled in the schools. I recall this because I knew people who had their plane tickets; they were ready to go.

**The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman):** One minute.

**MPP Lise Vaugeois:** I'm just wondering if you've seen anything to redress that, to bring those educational projects and developing curriculum into the schools, not so much in First Nations communities but in the public school system.

**Deputy Grand Chief Victor Linklater:** We always need more investment, because we have to tell the story, and I think power lies in who writes our story. I always believed our First Nation people have a lot to contribute to the woes of our society, and we're all experiencing trouble.

I think that, moving forward, we need to tell the true history of Ontario and Canada and work together to include that. I think we need to invest more into First Nations curriculum in the school system and start at the elementary level, the high-school level. We see it already at the college and university level. But it has to come from us, and that's the thing. Sometimes people like to—

**The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman):** Thank you very much. That concludes the time.

We'll now go to the independents. MPP Bowman.

**Ms. Stephanie Bowman:** Good morning to our presenters. Thank you for being here.

Charla, I'm going to start with you. I had the pleasure this morning to have breakfast with a local women's group, and one of the members was actually an international student who has just been in Thunder Bay for—she's in her second year. She talked about life here in Thunder Bay and how she's really enjoying it. She enjoys the small-town feel, yet with the conveniences of a larger

city and the welcoming community. I just wanted to pass that along. I think it's great that, again, you're encouraging the support or the continuation of a good international student population here in Thunder Bay. I know it's an important part of your economic development.

Also, the other members, some of them have been to your exhibit, your conference at Valhalla Hotel, and they said some really great things, so I just wanted to pass that along. They talked about the collaboration that you're doing across industries and with educational institutions, so that's great and it was really good to hear.

I wonder if you could just talk a little bit more about the challenge of housing along with providing good infrastructure to your residents. We know that development charges are not being collected to the same degree by cities and that's hurting infrastructure. Do you hear about that amongst the businesses? And what's that doing in terms of the availability and ability to build housing here in Thunder Bay?

**Ms. Charla Robinson:** Certainly, Thunder Bay is starting to feel the housing challenge. Especially with such significant growth on the horizon, there's concern around mining development and how many more people that may bring to our community and making sure we have the houses that we need. I know that the municipality is working very carefully and very closely with provincial and federal agencies to access as much funding as available. The municipality has recently updated their zoning bylaw to provide more flexibility. That will allow more multi-residential or transition of individual homes to having multiple apartments in a simpler way.

So those are some of the steps that have already been taking. It's definitely something that the chamber is working on: How can we help to support ensuring that there is more housing? Because certainly, if you don't have a place to live, it's really hard to come here for work. That's something that we have been focusing on and will continue to work collaboratively with the city, the province and the feds.

**Ms. Stephanie Bowman:** Great; thank you.

Moving on to your supply procurement comments around making sure that local businesses get access to government contracts: Certainly, it's something I've heard from small businesses—that they feel that there's a lot of barriers for them. Again, things can always get better and I'm confident the government will be listening to these kinds of suggestions.

So, I wonder if you could share any stories from some of your local businesses about the challenges that they've had in accessing government contracts and some specific ideas on how to make it better.

**Ms. Charla Robinson:** Absolutely. Certainly this is something that we've been working on for quite some time, and we do know that the province is going through a bit of a transformation with the implementation of the new Supply Ontario process and that's why we think it's so important to ensure that small communities have a voice in the development of that new system.

**The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman):** One minute.

**Ms. Charla Robinson:** The Ontario chamber recently came out with a report that talked about some of those things, so looking for best value and including that rather than some of the previous requirements maybe. To supply office supplies. You had to be able to offer all 500,000 different things. Well, a small business in Thunder Bay probably doesn't have the capacity to offer all 500,000 different things, but maybe the provincial purchasers in Thunder Bay don't need all those 500,000 things, right? So those kinds of barriers, where it's sort of a one-size-fits-all approach, don't work for small communities and for small business to be able to contribute.

We want to be able to make sure that anything that is done is done considering the regionalization of different communities. What we need to do for those regions, so that those regions can have the services they need, have the supplies they need—

**The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman):** Thank you very much. That concludes the time.

We'll now go to MPP Holland.

*Interjection.*

**The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman):** Okay. We just have to put things on hold. It seems we have a technical difficulty.

Okay, we're recessed for five minutes so the clock stops for everyone.

*The committee recessed from 1032 to 1036.*

**The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman):** We're ready to start one meeting instead of 25 again.

With that, we will go to MPP Holland.

**Mr. Kevin Holland:** I want to start off by welcoming the committee and everybody to Thunder Bay. It's great to have such a great group of our colleagues here in Thunder Bay, so thank you for coming. I really appreciate you being here.

To our presenters: Thank you for taking the time out of your busy schedules to be with us today and to let us know what some of the pressing issues are for your organizations. A lot of the conversations are continuations of the ones that we've already had, but I appreciate you coming out today and expressing that to the committee itself.

My question is to Charla. We've seen industry and business come together over the last year and a half at various round tables in Thunder Bay, recognizing the generational opportunity that exists for our region and really starting the conversation for the basis of collaboration amongst even different industries and how we can find those synergies in moving forward together, to make sure that all industries in northwestern Ontario are capitalizing on those opportunities. We don't want to leave anybody behind, basically. And that's the government's position—how we can work with all industries to make sure that as one is growing, we're still supporting the ones that are existing and those that have supported our region for generations. We've seen some tremendous results coming out of those meetings. We've seen \$330 million in investments coming into Thunder Bay–Atikokan alone in 2023, and several millions more into the neighbouring riding of Thunder Bay–Superior North. Really, that funding has been across all sectors in

our community. We've had numerous consultations with business and industry and community groups.

My question is, what benefits have you seen as a result of those investments, consultations and round tables?

We've identified a lot of areas out of those consultations that we really need to have a focus on, and I've been taking that message back to our government, on the areas that have been identified by the industry and community groups.

I know we see each other quite a lot at these meetings. We have a very open relationship, as far as being able to sit down and discuss a variety of items. I really value that interaction that we have and your participation and your co-operation.

I'm wondering if you can tell the committee what areas, in particular, are a priority for your organization and the businesses that you represent, to capitalize on those opportunities that are before us right now.

**Ms. Charla Robinson:** Certainly, we have had many conversations.

You talked about some of the investments that have been made—yesterday's announcement about significant investments to support the forest industry with biomass. Those are the types of things that we definitely need to help ensure that our forest industry is able to transition and to take advantage of the decarbonization push that is happening in reaction to climate change. Wood can be pretty much everything that we need, whether that's fuel, whether that's turned into plastics, whether that's turned into housing—those sorts of things. So those kinds of investments, I think, are really important.

And certainly on the mining front, we have a lot of opportunities here, again, based on decarbonization efforts and the push towards electric vehicles, and there are minerals that are needed in order to have those vehicles produced. We have those minerals here in the north. We need to ensure that those processes move quickly so that we can do full due diligence but in a timely manner, because the window of opportunity doesn't stay open forever and there is certainly a concern that other jurisdictions that don't have the same approach to human rights, the same approach to democracy, are potentially going to be providing a lot of the pieces that are needed for that kind of a transition. Those sorts of investments by this government are, and continue to be, very important.

Energy is another huge piece, especially in the developing northern communities. A lot of them aren't connected to the grid, and so those investments in energy also then help to drive economic development, because now you can operate a mine more efficiently and effectively from a financial perspective without having to build your own generating station in order to have a mine or build a massive, 100-kilometre road in order to get to the mine.

So those kinds of things are the investments that we're looking for to support business growth. Certainly, we know that those are the types of conversations that we've been having. We have started to see some of that, and we hope we will continue to see more of that.

*Interjection.*

**The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman):** Two minutes left.

**Mr. Kevin Holland:** You mentioned the investments that we've been making and a lot of that has been in research, in particular with the bioeconomy. You're right: We are at the cusp of seeing a lot of that going to market right now. Just quickly, in the time we have left, how do you see that impacting on the small businesses that you represent? And what will that mean for the economy in Thunder Bay and northwestern Ontario?

**Ms. Charla Robinson:** Thunder Bay is traditionally a forestry town and so a lot of our economy historically has been built on the forest industry. And so ensuring that that industry moves forward—it's not just the people that work at the mill; it's all those indirect jobs. It's the suppliers that are providing the paper towels to the office supplies, whatever they need—servicing the trucks that they're using, all those sorts of pieces. Those are all small businesses, never mind the truck drivers that are actually bringing the wood to the mill etc. There's definitely a huge circular economy in ensuring that the forest industry can move forward, and needing that biomass and bioeconomy transition will help to even grow new opportunities for small businesses that maybe haven't been there before.

**The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman):** Thank you very much.

MPP Crawford.

**Mr. Stephen Crawford:** Sorry, Chair. How much time is left?

**The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman):** You don't have any. Thank you very much.

With that, we'll now go to the official opposition.

**MPP Lise Vaugeois:** My question is to Richard from the library association. I was having difficulty hearing earlier. We know that non-profit organizations are having an enormous struggle these days. Can you repeat for me how much of the budget the province provides to libraries?

**Dr. Richard Togman:** Currently, on average in Ontario, the province is providing roughly 4%, whereas historically in Ontario and currently in other provinces, the province traditionally supplies around 15% of library budgets.

**MPP Lise Vaugeois:** Thank you very much.

I have a question for Charla. When you're talking about the forest road infrastructure, we know that, actually, in Terrace Bay right now, two very significant forest roads are no longer being maintained, as the work has paused at the Terrace Bay mill, and nobody is going to be maintaining them now. That's been announced. I'm wondering, who owns the roads and what has the role of the province been, if ever, in maintaining those roads? Because they are the emergency roads also, right? They're the secondary roads for people to get out of those communities, if they need to.

**Ms. Charla Robinson:** Certainly, forestry roads are very important not only to the forestry operations but also to the communities themselves. They're often the roads that also lead to tourism activities or other pieces like that.

What we're saying is that we would like to see that forestry road infrastructure fund that the province provides be increased back to where it was a number of years ago. It has had a bit of a reduction in the past number of years, and we'd like to bring that back to what it was, because we

recognize the value of those roads not only to industry but also to the communities.

**MPP Lise Vaugeois:** Thank you.

To you, Deputy Grand Chief: There are concerns about the decision-making process around nuclear waste burial. It's actually a very small group of people who will be entitled to vote. I wonder if you can speak to how that affects NAN communities and if you have concerns about that decision-making process.

**Deputy Grand Chief Victor Linklater:** It is a big issue because it affects all our water basins. Regardless of what route they choose or what site, if it's in Ignace, our people are very concerned because it will affect the way of life for our people. The fact that it seems so rushed and the process is so limited—it's going to be hard for us to make an informed decision. And First Nations will speak; they would want to be—free, prior and informed consent. So they're going to go back to their elders, their knowledge keepers, to get all that information they need to make an informed decision. If you're not even at the table or part of the process—it's very problematic for us.

**The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman):** MPP Mamakwa.

**Mr. Sol Mamakwa:** Thank you. Meegwetch.

Thank you to the presenters, Charla, Victor and Richard. Eabametoong First Nation: Last Thursday, January 25, their school burned down to the ground.

I'm asking Richard, as part of the library—how can you support Eabametoong First Nation to bring back whatever library that they had?

**Dr. Richard Togman:** I can say, likely, on behalf of the Federation of Ontario Public Libraries and the Ontario Library Association, they'll be doing whatever they can. We know that libraries are really central meeting points in many communities, and especially so in First Nations communities, where they don't have the luxury of other kinds of public infrastructure that many other communities do and the library not only functions as a place of learning but as a community space and as a social hub and a place that brings the community together. So we'll be doing everything we can on our end to make sure that all communities, and especially First Nation communities, have equal and full access to library resources.

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

Charla, I listened to your presentation, and I looked at some of the issues that you have, such as labour shortages, and I don't see any plan on how you're going to try to recruit First Nations, Indigenous people. I know a lot of Indigenous people are part of this city, and I don't see any plan.

Just to make the committee members aware, as well: On December 18, just down the lake over here, Mackenzie Moonias, 14 years old, who came out for high school from Neskantaga—because we have no high schools—was found in the water.

As the Thunder Bay Chamber of Commerce—what work is being done to make sure that the First Nations and the Indigenous people are involved in the economic development within Thunder Bay?

**Ms. Charla Robinson:** Thank you so much for that question.

In fact, MPP Bowman spoke to an event that we're having today—a full-day event that is being co-sponsored with the Anishnawbe Business Professionals Association. It is very much built around how we ensure that Indigenous businesses, Indigenous communities and the non-Indigenous business communities are developing relationships and working together.

**1050**

We're providing a panel of experts from local Indigenous communities that are talking about best practices that have worked well with them to develop relationships with mining companies etc.

**The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman):** One minute.

**Ms. Charla Robinson:** And so that is definitely something that's a priority to the chamber and something that we're working hard to help to share those messages.

**Mr. Sol Mamakwa:** Okay, very quickly: Deputy Grand Chief Linklater, you spoke about education, among other things. Do you think all First Nations are—let's say, for example, Eabametoong—are entitled to have high schools in their communities?

**Deputy Grand Chief Victor Linklater:** I believe we do. With students' safety becoming a great concern when we ship them out to urban centres, and the fact that it disrupts families too, we really need to see high schools in our First Nations. We've got to keep family units together as long as possible. We live in a different world, a different time, and we need to do things better. So yes, I think every community should have a high school.

**The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman):** Thank you very much.

With that, we'll go to MPP Bowman.

**Ms. Stephanie Bowman:** Deputy Grand Chief Linklater, I'd like to continue that conversation.

One of the things that you mentioned was that your parents instilled in you the value of education. Certainly, we have that in common, starting with my grandfather, who I remember telling his eight children and all of his 35-odd grandchildren—some of whom live here in Thunder Bay, actually—the value of education, and that it was never too late. So I really think that, as you said, it's important that we make sure that communities and children across First Nations have access to the education system that they need to reach their full potential.

I just wonder if you could talk a little bit more about—recognizing that there are relationships with the federal government as well that you are responsible for managing—what more the provincial government could do to support education in your First Nations.

**Deputy Grand Chief Victor Linklater:** I think in a treaty context, education with the province and the feds, they have actually worked very well in this regard, so we're moving forward in education jurisdiction. We do want to address the gaps—funding gaps is the big one. From what a federal school, per student, gets funded versus the provincial system is about \$7,000. The challenges of operating in a First Nation remoteness, those dollars are amplified. So how do we protect? How do we improve the education outcomes of our children? To us, it's innovation, working together. We do have some committees that we

sit on, where we all sit down with the feds and the province, but we could always do more, right?

In our proposal, we talked about that infrastructure fund to put into our schools and in our institutions. We just want to be at an equal level. We excel even though we have less, but imagine what our First Nation and the outcome of our students would do if we were just at that level or we could compete—because I actually believe we should be competing globally. It's not enough to be in this society because the world is changing, and our First Nation people see it. They're travelling more, experiencing more, stuff like that.

**Ms. Stephanie Bowman:** That's great. Thank you. And I want to turn to your comments on your environment. We read about stories. People experience climate change, whether, like you talked about, the forest fires, flooding, lack of ice roads in the winter. Those are things that are directly affecting your community today. We know that this government cancelled some renewable energy projects, wind and solar. They have talked about maybe getting back into that game. But I wonder if you could just talk about the opportunity in your communities and across the province around renewable energy sources and what those might be able to do for your communities.

**Deputy Grand Chief Victor Linklater:** Yes, we have First Nation communities that actually did those projects. In my own First Nation, we have a 40-megawatt solar farm that we work with a company on and we bought some ownership in it. So, you know what, the times are changing.

**The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman):** One minute.

**Deputy Grand Chief Victor Linklater:** We're just looking at ownership and investment in our community. I think with the climate change stuff, we have First Nations that just need the information. They need the capacity, and they'll jump on those projects to feed power into the grid in a more sustainable way.

**Ms. Stephanie Bowman:** Thank you.

Richard, very quickly, could you just share a success story for one of the libraries that is in a First Nation community and how that adds to the quality of life there?

**Dr. Richard Togman:** Yes. I think it's important to note that libraries aren't just the traditional place where books are housed; they're a real community hub for all different kinds of resources. So, for example, something that would really benefit, something that I mentioned here under the digital public library purchasing, is if they can get equal access to digital resources. Right now, libraries are often the only place where many can get access to the Internet, to get Wi-Fi, to get education, stay connected with loved ones—

**The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman):** Thank you very much. That concludes the time.

MPP Crawford.

**Mr. Stephen Crawford:** It's great to be here in Thunder Bay. What a beautiful community. I think once we get the word out on this community, I think there will be a lot of people that are more than willing to move up here, with some of the job prospects that you have.

I did want to mention, first of all, to the chamber, that Premier Doug Ford has written a letter to the Prime Minister

for an extension on those small business loans. So, certainly, our government is committed to supporting small business, and we will continue to fight for small business here.

I have a couple of questions. I guess my first would be for the chamber, and it relates to immigration. You touched on—Ontario right now, as many of you are aware, is the fastest-growing jurisdictions in North America, period. We're bringing in more newcomers than Texas or Florida, which are substantially larger populations. There's a reason why people are coming to Ontario: because they see opportunity. It's a great place to live, work, raise a family. With that population growth, obviously, there are challenges—health care, infrastructure, bridges, roads, education—and we want to make sure that not all of our newcomers from other parts of Canada or other parts of the world are just concentrated in one area. We would like to see them in other parts of the province where there are great needs, like in Thunder Bay. So my question to the chamber is—you touched on the nominee program. Do you have an opinion as to whether Ontario should have more say in immigration to Canada in terms of who is coming here and what skills they're bringing as to helping fulfill some of the requirements we have? And you did mention, as well—and maybe you can expand on what you said about the number of people that should be required to go to the north.

**Ms. Charla Robinson:** Certainly we know that the province has seen a significant increase in the Ontario Immigrant Nominee Program spots—almost pretty much doubled in the next couple of years. The stats actually say that 75% of the immigrants that come to Ontario go to the GTA, and that is certainly adding to the challenge of managing growth. We see this as a silver lining. We know people want to come to Ontario. We're happy to see that the province has negotiated more seats for their specific direction on where folks go, and we want to ensure that some of those seats are specifically allocated to the north in order to not only address the challenges of the GTA's growth barriers but also to address our growth barriers in the reverse. So we think it's a win-win situation and will help to address our labour shortage issues, will help to ensure that the north can actually grow the mining, forestry, education, health care that we need as well, which will be beneficial to us and to the entire province. So we certainly feel that that sort of approach of making sure that folks that do want to come to Ontario are provided a little more direction through the Ontario nominee program by assigning some of those spots would certainly help with that.

**Mr. Stephen Crawford:** Okay. Thank you. And following up on that: Mining obviously is a big industry in northern Ontario. Could you touch on the importance of the Ring of Fire to Thunder Bay, to communities surrounding the Ring of Fire, to the economic impact it will have on the people in the area?

**Ms. Charla Robinson:** Certainly, the Ring of Fire is one significant deposit in northern Ontario and has long been discussed as the highlight of opportunity for Canada because it does have such a significant amount of minerals that are going to be required for decarbonization, but it's not just the Ring of Fire.

**1100**

We know the Ring of Fire is still on a pathway that is going to take some time. The road process is being led by two First Nation communities, and they're moving towards some assessments and approvals. The mine companies themselves are working towards similar timelines, but those projects are still a few years away, and we don't want all the focus to be on the Ring of Fire, because there are other active projects that could be open before the Ring of Fire. Mining is a significant opportunity for northern Ontario, and there literally are hundreds of properties in northern Ontario. The Ring of Fire is certainly one, but there are a lot of other pieces as well, especially around lithium, that will probably move forward even more quickly than the Ring of Fire, so we want to make sure that those pieces move forward and that we don't miss those opportunities.

**Mr. Stephen Crawford:** Okay. Thank you very much. How much time left, Chair?

**The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman):** Two point three.

**Mr. Stephen Crawford:** Okay. Thanks.

I'd like to pose my remaining time to Grand Chief Victor, if I could. Thank you for being here. You touched on a few different areas in your discussion today. I think you did mention, actually, the RAISE grant for Indigenous entrepreneurs. Have any people you know taken advantage of that? Have you had any examples of success that you could share? Is that a program that should be expanded? Is it working to date in the limited time it's been available?

**Deputy Grand Chief Victor Linklater:** I think we have to do our research on it, just from our end, because we know it's been there since 2023. The problem is that a lot of these programs, especially as they come out, are not communicated to boots-on-the-ground people like First Nation people. To us, we're looking at funding to actually be that vehicle. We want to build a sustainable initiative centre to actually push all these five items that we talked about today. As a young person growing up, that program can benefit and really change the life of an individual, a family, a community.

I think it's a great program, but we have to do research on our end to see if it is. The challenge is, 49 communities, remote access, two thirds of this province, but we will work diligently to put that information out there and encourage our people to take that route, because there's so much opportunity in this province.

**The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman):** One minute.

**Mr. Stephen Crawford:** Yes, and I know you touched on five different areas. Just touching—in the very limited time we have left—the economic prosperity piece, I think it's critically important that economic prosperity for the First Nations communities—it's not going to solve all the problems, but I think it could certainly solve some of the problems, because some of them are as a result of poverty, lack of access.

In the remaining time left, any advice you can give the government to ensure there is greater prosperity in your communities?

**Deputy Grand Chief Victor Linklater:** I think the vision of many of our people is that economic development contributes to social development. In a capitalistic society, most

First Nations that go into business—they'll invest their money back into making their people well. That takes many shapes and forms. We're a holistic people. We'll tie that to health, social, other opportunities, but—

**The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman):** Thank you very much. That concludes the time for that question. It also concludes the time for this panel. We thank all the presenters for a great job of preparing and taking the time to do that. We thank you very much for being here this morning to deliver your message.

POVERTY FREE THUNDER BAY  
ONTARIO NETWORK OF INJURED  
WORKERS GROUPS  
RESOLUTE FOREST PRODUCTS

**The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman):** As we are changing, the next panel will be Poverty Free Thunder Bay, Ontario Network of Injured Workers Group and Resolute FP Canada. As they're coming to the front, we will give the instructions again. Each presenter will have seven minutes for their presentation. At six minutes, I will say, "One minute." At seven minutes, I will say, "Thank you," and that's the end of the presentation. The presentation will start—

*Interjections.*

**The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman):** If we could have the committee back in order, we'll start with Poverty Free Thunder Bay. I believe they're on the screen.

*Interjection.*

**The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman):** Thank you very much. The floor is yours.

**Ms. Sara Williamson:** My name is Sara Williamson. I'm a member of Poverty Free Thunder Bay and the lead in the campaign to double the Ontario Works and Ontario Disability Support Program rates.

Poverty Free Thunder Bay is an advocacy coalition working for change at the local, provincial and national level to eliminate poverty and its impact on our community. Our membership is broad and diverse.

Social inequality and structural disparity is a subject that's top of mind for Poverty Free Thunder Bay and our city. Thunder Bay, like cities across Canada, is not a well urban setting. We've fallen to some depths, witnessed by our own very visible tent encampments that were near the downtowns until the deep freeze set in. Businesses, social life, community safety and basic infrastructure are impacted. Disaster is building due to insufficient attention to this problem.

When people grow up in hopelessness and are of no concern to others who do have resources to do something about it, resentment along with humiliation, rage and despair can be the result. People are being asked to live outside the boundaries of basic human needs. No one should be too poor to live in this wealthy province.

We're troubled that 68% of the homeless individuals enumerated in the Thunder Bay 2021 Point in Time Count were Indigenous people. The disproportionate percentage has roots in the intergenerational trauma of colonial systems.

The Truth and Reconciliation recommendations call for closing the gap in health between Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities.

Income is a social determinant of health. Keeping people so far below the poverty line is unacceptable. If you, our members of provincial Parliament, fail to act, you're participating in the institutional racism of this archaic colonial system.

In looking at the Ontario Works and ODSP program in Ontario, we can go back to 1995 when the General Welfare Assistance Program was replaced with Ontario Works. The rate immediately prior to this time for a single person on GWA was \$663. Following the hand-up policy of Premier Harris, this was reduced to \$520 per month for basic needs and housing. Today, the rate is \$733 a month, which is a raise of \$213 over 29 years.

Poverty Free Thunder Bay adds our voice to the call for action to address food insecurity, which is the inadequate or insecure access to food due to financial constraints. Food insecurity is not just a lack of food; it's an experience of pervasive material deprivation due to financial constraints. While food banks, mutual aid groups and others continue to do their best to help those in need, they also recognize that they can't solve food insecurity. They're joined by public health organizations, anti-poverty advocates and other groups in calling for federal and provincial governments to take action through income-based interventions.

It's a problem of income inadequacy, not solved by food. Income-based interventions treat the core problem rather than its symptoms.

Here are some clear examples of Ontario's impossibly low social assistance rates. On Ontario Works, "The maximum amount provided to a single OW recipient remains at \$733, or 64% below the poverty line," a shortfall of \$1,320. Even if OW rates had increased annually with inflation, it would be only \$863 per month. Ontario Disability Support Program, ODSP, rates were increased by \$54 to \$1,322 a month, which falls 51% below the disability-adjusted poverty line, a shortfall of \$1,362 per month.

This Poverty Free Thunder Bay call to immediately double social assistance rates tied to the cost of living would be a short-term measure while the Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services consults with stakeholders, including OW and ODSP recipients, on details for a more substantial long-term plan.

**1110**

Food insecurity is a tremendous burden on people's health and the health care needs, as well as a drain on Ontario health care budgets. When governments balance their budgets by cutting services and when businesses produce more profits by relying more heavily on precarious workers, the basic needs that a strong social safety net and good jobs once fulfilled do not magically disappear. Instead, the burden shifts onto individuals and community-based organizations, like food banks, to try to do more with less.

We are supportive of calls for action on four key policy levers:

- a social assistance increase;
- affordable, accessible housing;

—ending precarious work by classifying gig workers as employees, reducing barriers to unionization, and enforcing the Employment Standards Act;

—progressive taxation, which would lower income tax rates—

**The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman):** One minute.

**Ms. Sara Williamson:** Okay.

It's good to do this because every \$10 invested in housing and supports for the chronically homeless saves \$20 in health, justice, shelter and social assistance.

Increasing minimum wage, ODSP and Ontario Works rates to livable levels would not only provide immediate relief to people on lower incomes, but it would benefit businesses, boost worker health and well-being, and create a positive multiplier effect in local economies, which we always need.

This provincial government can and should treat people on social assistance with respect and recognize that by providing a substantial increase in both Ontario Works and ODSP, in fact—

**The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman):** Thank you very much.

We will now go to the next presenter, Ontario Network of Injured Workers Groups.

**Mr. Steve Mantis:** My name is Steve Mantis. In the agenda, it says I'm the chair of the Ontario Network of Injured Workers Groups, but I'm not. I am chair of the research action committee.

I want to start by thanking you all for coming to Thunder Bay. Lots of times, we feel a little bit left behind, with all the focus on southern Ontario.

It's also kind of interesting; 40 years ago, I made my first presentation to a parliamentary committee here in Thunder Bay, so it has been a while. These grey hairs speak for, I guess, a lot of the activity.

We're a provincial organization. Our local chapter here is the Thunder Bay injured workers support group. We have about 22 groups across the country. We have been working closely with universities, over the last 25 or 30 years, to really document what happens to workers when they become injured and disabled at work and what the long-term aspects are, in terms of how it affects their families, themselves and our communities.

I'm appearing today because the issues, normally, that are faced by workers when they're disabled are supposed to be covered by the Workplace Safety and Insurance Board, the WSIB, but over the last 15 years we have seen a big cost-shifting so that many of these costs are now picked up by the provincial budget, which is taking revenue away from the many other deserving programs that are funded through our provincial budget. In my presentation, I wanted to really call attention to this because it not only has financial impacts directly on this year's budget and those going forward, but it has a long-term impact in terms of the health of our communities and our economy.

So our three main messages that we want to share: The cost-shifting that's happening today in Ontario is in the range of \$3 billion or \$4 billion a year—to think what the budget could do if you had an increase of \$3 billion or \$4

billion. That should be being picked up by the system—our first social system in Ontario. Workers' compensation was supposed to be covering these costs; it was not supposed to go under the public purse. What we have seen is the priority, in the last 15 years, has been to reduce the costs at the WSIB. It's not to say that it's actually helped the workers or helped the employers, but it has helped in terms of the premiums the employers pay on an annual basis.

The second is that, really, the occupational health and safety of all workers in Ontario has many impacts and ramifications and that the cost shifting that's happening now in fact may really be damaging our future economy and our future workforce.

And the third is that, in order to really fund the programs that we need, we need to ensure that our revenue streams are fair and equitable across the levels of society.

So, I want to come back to that first issue, our first main message, around the cost shifting. This is an area that we don't actually have hard numbers because no one has really taken the time to say, "How do we really understand what those numbers are?" But I've tried to lay out and quoting a number of different research studies, a number of which we have been involved in over the years, that show what those costs used to be and what they are today.

As an example, if we look at the WSIB annual report 2022, the most recent report, they state that the number of lost-time claims has increased by 50% over three years. The amount of money they pay out has not changed. Well, what happens? If you have a 50% increase in people coming to you and you have no more expenses, what's going on? And they brag about, "We've cut the amount we pay to hospitals, to health care, to benefits."

These workers that don't get that support end up being—OHIP is covering the cost. We see thousands of workers ending up on social assistance that should be receiving money from the WSIB. So, these monies are all being pushed onto the provincial budget, which really is robbing the budget of money available to other worthwhile programs.

Our first recommendation is that we should have a study. We should try to document what is actually happening, how this WSIB is really robbing the provincial budget, and what are those real numbers.

One of the big aspects is claims suppression or the lack of reporting. Research in Ontario, Manitoba and British Columbia have all noticed major incidences of people not reporting injury and illness.

**The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman):** One minute.

**Mr. Steve Mantis:** Those costs still exist, but they're not being captured by the WSIB.

The second is, really, what is the impact long-term? And what we see is that over 30 years, the amount the employers pay for workers' compensation has fallen by 70%. Well, if you're a business and you don't have to pay what you used to pay, you don't pay as much attention to that issue anymore. What we see as a result is an increase in the frequency of injuries at work—as I mentioned already, a 50% increase over three years. You think about how that's going to continue, and that cycle is going to continue to

build. What are the financial and the human impacts, as well as the loss of skilled workers to our economy?

**The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman):** Thank you very much. That concludes the time. Hopefully the rest of the presentation will come out in the questions.

**Mr. Steve Mantis:** Thank you very much, Chair.

**The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman):** We now go to Resolute FP Canada.

**Mr. Tom Ratz:** Thank you and good morning. I am Tom Ratz, the chief forester for Resolute Forest Products in Ontario, and online is our operations manager, Kyle Monkman. We appreciate and thank all the things the government has done for the forest industry over the last few years.

Resolute is a major contributor to the northwestern Ontario economy, with a regional economic impact in excess of half a billion dollars a year. We have over 480 direct employees and 3,500 indirect employees. We own three sawmills and a wood-pellet plant, plus we're the main supplier for other mills in the region.

1120

We are proud of our collaborative relationships we have built with First Nations in northwestern Ontario, with economic opportunities in excess of \$65 million a year.

For our company to be successful, we need three key ingredients. We need, first, a competitive environment. These are things like taxation, electricity, regulatory burden and labour. Second, we need access to a wood supply from trees grown on crown land. And third, we need access to markets on a fair and competitive basis. This is primarily access to the US market for lumber, pulp and paper. For my comments today, I'll focus on those three things.

In competitiveness, there's a lot to unravel and I'll focus on transportation, labour and energy. Resolute alone in northwestern Ontario has over 400 trucks a day moving raw materials, every day. Wood fibre costs are over 60% of the cost of producing lumber in Ontario. Forest roads are a key contributor to that cost. Forest access roads are a public asset, utilized by First Nations to access their reserves and many other industries like mining, tourism and recreation.

Forest access roads have been used as critical infrastructure for the province. For example, when Highway 11/17 washed out east of Thunder Bay here, it was the only link between eastern and western Canada to move commerce and people.

Forest access roads create economic value for the province by creating businesses, and it increases employment, particularly in northern and rural communities. Our recommendation is to continue the strategic investment of the vital provincial forest access roads program, plus to review the program in light of the cost of living, fuel and all the other things that have been going on recently.

For all industries, a skilled labour force is critical to a profitable business. The forest industry has a shortage of skilled labour in both our manufacturing facilities and our field operations. We need to increase the skilled workforce coming out of our colleges and universities. This could only be done if we are promoting these high-paying jobs

in schools, right through the school system. In Thunder Bay, Resolute is going into the schools to talk to students. We're having teachers to help out the students in northern Ontario look for these high-paying jobs.

As a province, we also don't make it easy to hire immigrants. To date, in Atikokan, Resolute has hired over 60 Ukrainians, but we don't make it easy. What we recommend now for this is that funding be maintained to assist students to get the qualifications to fill the lack of skilled workers. We also recommend for immigrants coming in that vehicle licensing for qualified people—their qualifications are accepted as equivalent. Yes, they need to do a road test; yes, they need to a health test; yes, they need a written test, but nothing more and nothing less.

We also need clarification on the non-resident speculation tax, as in places like Atikokan, people are not speculating on real estate, but it's a 25% tax to those people as a barrier for them put down roots in the community.

Ontario's industrial sectors have worked for more than a decade with Ontario's power regulators and agencies to address the province's competitive disadvantage. We are, in fact, surrounded by more competitive jurisdictions that are buying and outcompeting Ontario for manufacturing investment.

With this mind, recognition of the integrated nature of the forest sector and the unique attributes of the biomass- and pellet-based renewable energy generation in our circular economy needs to be recognized.

We need to ensure that biomass-based power purchase agreements in this province are renewed as a priority and on schedule before their expiry. Also, we need to change the process of dealing with by-products like bark and ash from our facilities so we can put these to work, and they don't end up in our landfills.

To this end, we need to continue to reduce and eliminate duplication and redundant red tape within the province. I know the government has been doing this. We need to continue doing this.

For wood supply, all products we make originate from a renewable resource. The wood that originates from these carefully managed forests is recognized as the best in the world. The same can be said about the world-class forest management system in Ontario.

We need a reliable and affordable access to raw materials. We need to ensure, then, that the federal funding obtained through the caribou section 11 agreement is used wisely and timely and efficiently.

We need to continue to fund and support the work that is ongoing to revise the forestry manuals and guides that guide our business in Ontario. We need to review how the forest inventory program is conducted in Ontario as this is the basis of all of our business.

**The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman):** One minute.

**Mr. Tom Ratz:** Lastly, I'd like to mention access to markets. The forest sector is an export-driven sector. We need to access markets on a fair and competitive basis—this is primary access to the US market for pulp and paper. Ontario, like Quebec, should insist on free market access. If there is to be an agreement in some form in the future,



Canada must not give away its market—particularly important given the ongoing restoration of capacity in Ontario.

We have three recommendations:

—continue to counter misinformation from market campaigners and other sources designed to discredit Ontario's sustainably produced forest products;

—continue to make available the necessary resources to vigorously defend Ontario and its forest sector against unfair trade actions from the United States;

—we also need to ensure that any new softwood lumber agreement provides for adequate access to US markets at the current lumber capacity.

In closing, Resolute has made it—

**The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman):** Thank you very much. That concludes the time. Hopefully, the rest will come out later.

We will now start with the independents. MPP Hazell.

**MPP Andrea Hazell:** Thank you to every one of you for coming in and presenting to us. My first question is going to go to Poverty Free Thunder Bay. Everything that you presented in your document, we've been hearing a lot of this across our travels, and it's not new to what you are, I would say, bellowing out to us here at this table. I feel the pain. But I want you to detail—because every hardship that you describe in this document, it goes back to the families that are being impacted, so can you talk about the severity of how the families are being impacted?

**Ms. Sara Williamson:** The remote person on my team—unfortunately, they're not allowed to be here—Susan Forbes, is available to talk, I believe.

**Ms. Susan Forbes:** When we're talking about the effects on families—I think we kind of looked a lot at single individuals—but just recently looking at a report from the health unit, there are so many things that are happening around this. I think that housing is a big factor in families, but food security and the use of food banks to feed children—this is not a sustainable way to move our society forward. I worked with Ontario Works for a number of years, primarily in the area of employment supports and looking at how they're increasing employment activities, but you can't get people employed, for example, if they're hungry. That was my experience 12 years ago, working with people in Ontario Works: You would get them a job and then they couldn't move forward with that.

But talking about children, I think so much effort is being done to help with breakfast programs and all of these other programs that are piled on top of each other, but on a day-to-day basis, people have to feed their kids. Parents are feeding their kids pop because it's cheaper than milk, and then kids get bad teeth, and then kids get diabetes. We've seen, certainly in the Indigenous communities, where for generations this has been the case with poor food and poor health outcomes.

So if we want to start helping our next generations of kids—and I wonder how many of those next generations of kids were affected by that deep drop in income provision in 1995 and how many of them are now out on the streets joining gangs and stuff like that. I mean, we have to start to feed children and provide them with careful

housing and activities that will move them forward in life, and we can't depend on the regional food distribution or other donation-based charities.

**The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman):** One minute.

1130

**Ms. Susan Forbes:** We have to do this as an Ontario government, as an Ontario population. We have to look at how we can bring our children forward and not leave them behind. And this program right now is leaving kids behind in health, in schooling if they can't concentrate in school because they're hungry. They're left out of sports activities that middle-class kids have all the time.

Let's look at what we're doing here and look at the future of this province because it depends on those kids. They need housing and they need food and they need to wear some decent clothes so that they don't have to go to school embarrassed. It's time that we change this, you know? And I've seen it right from about 20 years that—I've worked for most of my life in social—

**The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman):** Thank you very much. That concludes the time for this question.

We'll now go to the government. MPP Holland.

**Mr. Kevin Holland:** Thank you to the three presenters here today. I can appreciate you taking the time out of your busy day to be with us. I've had the opportunity to meet with most of you over the last year and a half several times and I've always enjoyed the conversation and perspectives that you've been able to bring to me. I also wanted to say to the last speaker on the screen that I do appreciate your passion for what you're working on. It's definitely seen.

As you know, I was 31 years as the mayor of my community. I served 10 years on the DSSAB board. When I left to take this position, I was the vice-chair. And the one thing that I'd always seen over those years was that the investments and the funding formulas being used by governments of the day were inadequate and continuing to disadvantage areas like our communities in northwestern Ontario.

One of the things that we've done through the several consultations and discussions, and the several ministers that have been up in Thunder Bay going to these agencies and seeing first-hand what the circumstances are, is that we're seeing a change in the way that we are funding organizations to ensure that communities aren't being disadvantaged by a funding formula. That was happening.

The greatest example we've seen has been with regard to the HPP funding for Thunder Bay DSSAB. We've seen an increase from \$5.4 million to over \$16.5 million for the next three years. That's an \$11-million increase over three years. DSSAB are telling us that \$9 million of that increase per year is going to be spent on capital: \$27 million over the three years for new construction. We all know that housing is foundational to addressing the circumstances in Thunder Bay and to really help people and give them that start in life that they need. The remaining funds are to support other agencies that are delivered through DSSAB such as shelter houses. Minimal is being spent on administration.

Now, to Poverty Free: You have indicated in your speech that every dollar invested in homelessness yielded a \$20

return. So over the three years, the \$33-million increase in HPP program funding is going to yield a return of \$660 million. Those are your calculations based on your statement. Do you see this investment as a benefit to Thunder Bay and district in starting that change that agencies like yours are advocating for?

**Ms. Sara Williamson:** Susan will be answering it.

**Ms. Susan Forbes:** I see that any investment in housing is important. I guess historically, I like to look at Castle-green Co-operative as one of the ways that, years ago, things moved ahead for people, where it was co-operative housing. It's still functioning as a wonderful community and it has lifted so many people, particularly people with disabilities, into a situation where life is so much more manageable. And we have to look at more and more development in that way to help people move on.

I know that Ontario Works, as well, is doing a lot of work looking at the employment end of things, but my experience showed that when people were—I was trying to get people referred for jobs; they couldn't do that because—they would say, "Well, I have to go to the shelter house for lunch," or, "I don't have a place to live."

You have to look at the whole picture. You can't just say, "Well, get people into jobs," or whatever. Housing is very important; it's essential. People need safe, decent places to live so that they can organize their lives and start to move on. It's important to families; it's important to single individuals, especially those people who have been in tent cities or whatever. We've got to move them out, and I know all the social agencies are working so closely. They did get everybody out of the tents this year before it got too cold, but they were working like crazy. We can't just count on all of these agencies to fill it out. We've got to do that through our tax base, and we've got to do it by a whole-community process.

So I'm glad to hear, Mr. Holland, that you are looking at housing as being a key issue. From single people to families to seniors, which is where I am right now, we're all looking at that housing piece as a big component of making our communities safer and better for everyone. So please keep up—

**Mr. Kevin Holland:** Thank you. I appreciate that. From what I'm hearing, there's agreement that addressing the housing crisis is foundational to helping people who are a little disadvantaged—because the money is going into all aspects, including supportive housing, transitional housing as well as Indigenous housing. There have been substantial investments made in Thunder Bay, historic investments made across the board on all those, so I appreciate that there's an agreement that that's going to be a key indicator in making sure that we can start addressing some of the poverty issues that you have spoke about here today. Thank you for that.

Next question: If I could, I'll move on to Mr. Ratz. I want to thank you for your presentation but, as well, thank you and your company for the support and investments you have made and continue to make in our communities. You've been around for a long time, and you've been the backbone of—not you, personally. Your industry has been the backbone to the economy of northwestern Ontario. The

continued investment in our region is well documented and much appreciated. The ability for your industry to work with government so well has really led us to being able to see the investments and the changes that we need to ensure that your industry continues to grow and thrive and provide those jobs.

I was wondering if—we have shared in our discussions about what your company has been doing to support, in particular, the refugees coming from Ukraine. You've got such a success story in Atikokan.

**The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman):** One minute.

**Mr. Kevin Holland:** I was wondering if you could elaborate on how we can better serve you in helping those people in particular.

**Mr. Tom Ratz:** Thank you, MPP Holland. Also, thank you for your work in the last little while of bringing ministers to the region so that they have a better understanding of what it is to live and work in the north.

Specifically, your question: In Atikokan, now with 60 refugees from Ukraine, before they came, the turnover rate of employees in Atikokan was 49% a year. With those people who wish to set down roots, it's now less than 15%. One of the big stumbling blocks is these people actually want to stay here in Canada. They want to put down roots, so they want to buy a house. The speculation tax, which we understand is aimed at citizens in Toronto and that, wasn't intended in a small community like Atikokan, of preventing them from buying a house. We just need clarification on that to satisfy that.

The other one is the issuing of drivers' licences. We have a van that drives them around, drives them to get groceries, drives their kids to school, because when they come here, they're put as if they're 16 years old and start all over again, so—

**The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman):** Thank you very much. That concludes the time.

We will now go to the official opposition. MPP Kernaghan.

**Mr. Terence Kernaghan:** Thank you to all our presenters here today.

I'd like to begin my questions with Poverty Free Thunder Bay. Sara, I want to thank you for your presentation, and Susan, I want to thank you for your very impassioned words on this topic. And I want to thank you first for connecting the dots. You've reminded this committee that it was their own government that, in the 1990s, delivered a punishing blow to social assistance recipients, the 22.5% cut that many people never recovered from. Even the government in between chose to look away. We have a homelessness crisis on our hands at unprecedented levels, and it's important that we connect the dots to that initial disastrous cut to people. The fact that assistance has increased \$213 over 29 years is shocking.

**1140**

I also want to thank you for indicating that it's this government that has actually indexed people below the poverty line. They have chosen to keep people under water.

I want to ask, does it make any sense that the government is currently sitting on a \$5.4-billion contingency fund while vital service agencies have to fundraise to keep the

lights on and provide those services to the people who are struggling the most?

**Ms. Susan Forbes:** Can you just point out your question a little bit more clearly?

**Mr. Terence Kernaghan:** Yes. Does it make any sense that this government is sitting on \$5.4 billion in an unspent contingency fund—some would call it a slush fund—while service agencies have to fundraise to provide those services and to keep the lights on while people are struggling?

**Ms. Susan Forbes:** No, it doesn't make sense. Making sure that everyone is contributing appropriately—we've got to have more money in the system.

One of the things that I think Ontario Works is doing is this whole employment thing, which is good. I think locally, the DSSAB really works hard—I know they are, because I've worked there.

You can't do things for people if we don't have the basics. I can't understand why the government just doesn't say, "Wait a minute. We're keeping people below the poverty level"—and certainly with Indigenous people. Our population of Indigenous people is growing in every city, basically. Just like our kids, they're moving to cities because they want to be part of opportunity.

Unfortunately, without proper housing and supports and health care needs, it just impacts—so it doesn't make sense, because you're impacting every other aspect of life.

If you go down in Fort William right now—I walked down Victoria Avenue. I used to work at Victoriaville. I was shocked at the fact that there are hardly any businesses there anymore. It's all social service agencies holding the situation up.

It's not good economics, I don't think, to save money and then let the whole social system and the whole community fall apart. We talked to the chamber of commerce today—everything is being affected by this. You cannot just kind of keep people so low down that things don't happen to the rest of society.

You have to raise these rates. You have to give people more money. People want to move on. They're not just wanting to sit there. They want to move on, and they want to have a life and contribute to life.

We're talking about needing immigrants to come in. We have a large Indigenous population. If you look around our city right now, much of the activity in business and stuff is from Indigenous groups, and young people need to be included and be part of it. So we need new immigrants, yes, but we also need to take our young people and our Indigenous youth and train them and help bring them up to go into these jobs in forestry and all of the other areas. They can do it. They just need the help and they need the support—and that means financial support, and it means finally saying, "Yes, social assistance is a necessary part of a functioning society." And if we want our society to function properly, we need to start at that point, to provide people with enough in their lives so they can move and build on—especially children. Do it for the kids if you can't do it for other people. Look at children and say, "Yes, we have to lift them up and we have to make them part of our economy." Otherwise, our economy will also collapse.

**Mr. Terence Kernaghan:** Thank you so much for more impassioned comments, Susan; on the side of the official opposition, we absolutely agree. Rates need to be doubled.

Let's hope that this government stops looking away and actually looks at the problem that we have here across Ontario.

I'd like to now move over to the Ontario Network of Injured Workers Groups with Steve. Steve, I wanted to ask a question. WSIB has long been an issue that the government has, again, ignored. My question is, who knows your health better: your physician or a physician hired by an insurance company?

**Mr. Steve Mantis:** Well, obviously, it is the person that has looked after you, year after year after year. Certainly, this is one of the concerns we have, that in the effort for the WSIB to save funds, they put in place barriers to people accessing support.

**The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman):** One minute.

**Mr. Steve Mantis:** So we see many physicians who are throwing up their hands and going, "Why am I sending a report to WSIB? They won't listen to me. I'm recommending certain treatments, certain programs, therapy," and the WSIB has a paper doctor that never sees the worker say, "No, that's not really needed. Just go back to work. Everything will be fine." And, in fact, it's not fine.

**Mr. Terence Kernaghan:** Absolutely, paper doctors—can you speak about the problem of deeming and phantom jobs?

**Mr. Steve Mantis:** Yes. In our report, we have a link to our submission to the United Nations under the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, where we're really saying that this is discrimination, that people with disabilities are not being treated fairly. It's being said, "Oh, you can do this job and we're going to now assume you have that income," when, in fact, you don't, and then therefore subtract that phantom income from the benefits you receive from WSIB. So they've created this world of dreams that—

**The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman):** Thank you very much. Time's up.

MPP Bowman.

**Ms. Stephanie Bowman:** Thank you all for being here.

Tom, I'm going to start with you. It's good to see you again. I believe we met last year in Kenora. I have to say that some of the concerns that you raised last year are still concerns this year. I remember specifically the drivers' licences that you talked about for Ukrainian workers, and it's great to hear that they are contributing and happy and wanting to stay. That's a great thing, so I certainly encourage that and I'm glad that your company is part of making life good for them here in Thunder Bay.

I have to say, though, it's surprising to me that—the government can move quickly when it wants to. We know that it had a deal to give developers \$8.3 billion in the greenbelt; it then cancelled that. We know that they have a deal with Walmart and Staples that got done very quickly, without any public process. Why do you think we can't get this driver's licence issue resolved quickly?

**Mr. Tom Ratz:** I think it is complicated and there is a lot of looking at what is happening currently on our high-

ways, which is why we as a company say that, when somebody comes in, they need to be treated fairly. They need to write the test. If they pass the test, great. If they can do the road test, great. If they pass their medical, great. They need to do those things. We don't want anybody out there driving transport trucks that are unsafe. What we don't think they need is to go through a nine-month training program when they've been driving vehicles for over 20 years. I think there's risk management, a little bit, to look at, but it is possible to move forward, and we need to move forward as soon as possible.

**Ms. Stephanie Bowman:** Thank you. I think you brought forward a very specific and helpful recommendation on them going through the right steps. I hope the government and the Ministry of Transportation listen, because, again, we want these workers working to their full capacity. We want them to thrive here in northern Ontario and in Canada overall. So thank you.

I want to just touch briefly on the studies, the work that you're doing with the Ontario Network of Injured Workers Groups, Steve. I really appreciate the analysis and the research because facts help us make informed decisions. I wonder if you could just talk a little bit about the recommendation on doing this study to look at how the shifting of dollars from WSIB to public systems—what could that study look like? How much do you think it would cost? Just very briefly, so I can also get to the poverty reduction group.

**Mr. Steve Mantis:** Yes, thank you so much. We don't have an actual estimate of what that would cost. I have actually engaged, for three decades, with the Minister of Labour, in particular, to track what happens to workers. So this is really the first part of that equation, that if we know what the experience is in terms of their employment status, their health care status, we can start collecting that information that are costs that are being incurred. That's one of the key components to understand that cost shifting that goes on.

1150

The second part is then doing that analysis with data, say, from OHIP, as an example, because that's where we think most of that cost shifting is really taking place, is in terms of health care, so that we can do that analysis and we see that, oftentimes, the laws in health care that are in place aren't being followed.

**The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman):** One minute.

**Ms. Stephanie Bowman:** I'm going to have to stop you there, but thank you so much for that.

Sara and Susan, thank you again for your work to advocate for those living in poverty here in Thunder Bay in particular. I wonder if you were involved in this work back when the universal basic income pilot was in place here in Thunder Bay. You know that that program was cancelled by this government, so we don't have the results—again, fact-based results—of what that study could have shown us in terms of the impacts of providing housing, providing wraparound supports, providing a steady income that would allow them to live beyond the poverty range. So I'm wondering if you have any personal stories that you

could share from people you might have known who benefited from that program.

**Ms. Susan Forbes:** I think that program was largely conducted—

**The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman):** Thank you very much. That concludes the time.

We'll now go to MPP Ghamari.

**Ms. Goldie Ghamari:** I'd like to thank all the presenters here today. I can't recall the last time I've been in Thunder Bay. It must have been a while, but it's really great to be here with my colleagues. I think it's a testament to MPP Holland as well and all the work he's been doing for the area, for his constituents. The fact that we are here today to learn more about the issues here in Thunder Bay I think is so important.

Again, it's great to have MPP Holland here as well. He is a very strong voice for Thunder Bay at Queen's Park in the Ontario Legislature and makes sure that we're always aware of the issues.

First question is for Mr. Mantis, who's the research chair—not the chair. I was paying attention to that.

**Mr. Steve Mantis:** Thank you.

**Ms. Goldie Ghamari:** You make some very interesting points here, and I want to thank you for this very detailed and informative presentation. It's very interesting to me what you're seeing here, and I do agree with you. I do think that perhaps the government needs to look into this and to see what the motivations are behind WSIB, especially if WSIB is sending correspondence to employers noting the savings to corporations of over \$8 million. The purpose of WSIB is to protect injured workers. Obviously, we want to make sure no one is taking advantage of it, but we're not talking about that; we're talking about actual needs and actual assistance. So thank you for this. It's very, very interesting, especially the potential economic impact this might be having on the provincial budget. I just wanted to thank you for that. I don't have any questions for you yet, but I will be following up for sure, and we've been discussing this as well here on our side.

Before I go to Mr. Ratz, if you have any further comments or questions about this report or anything—if you could sum it up in like 30 seconds the one key message that you'd like for us to take back to our government and the Premier.

**Mr. Steve Mantis:** I think the key message is that if we don't pay attention to what happens in the workplace in terms of the workers' health, we have real long-term risks that are going to happen. So we need to keep track of what happens, and we have to encourage that we have the healthiest and safest workplaces possible.

The government says that we do, and they say, "We'll give \$8 billion back to corporations because you're safe." But when we see a 50% increase in lost-time claims over three years, the evidence clearly is not supporting those assumptions by government. We need to keep track. We need to use that data to make good decisions going forward.

**Ms. Goldie Ghamari:** Thank you very much.

I'd now like to turn to Mr. Ratz. Forestry is certainly a very big industry in Thunder Bay. It's always interesting

for me especially, because I'm from southeastern Ontario—the city of Ottawa, actually. Our big industry there is agriculture, really. That's one of the big ones. So it's always interesting when I come here and you hear the chamber of commerce talking about forestry and yourself and the impact there and how forestry really is such an important thing. In a prior life, I was an international trade lawyer, so all the softwood lumber cases—I'm very well familiar with that and the issues there.

I'd like to dive a little bit into a couple of the issues that you were speaking about, because they seem to be something that is really more issues that the federal government has to deal with, but I'm just wondering what we can do as a provincial government to support businesses like yours and the forest industry in general. For example, you said that you need to have access to wood pellets on crown land. Are you talking provincial or federal crown land?

**Mr. Tom Ratz:** It's all provincial.

**Ms. Goldie Ghamari:** Provincial?

**Mr. Tom Ratz:** Yes.

**Ms. Goldie Ghamari:** Okay. So what would be the issue there?

**Mr. Tom Ratz:** For us to succeed, we need barrier-free, red-tape-free access to timber on crown lands. That's Ontario. The only federal lands we have in Ontario are some parks, and the First Nation reserves are not part of that. We need access to that material, and that's where the roads and everything else come into play. It's a very long and complicated issue.

Yesterday, actually, MPP Holland—and we are honoured by the Minister of Natural Resources—the Honourable Graydon Smith came here and spent all yesterday morning listening. They listened to us—there were community members there; there were also First Nations members there—to what the issues are in Thunder Bay and northwestern Ontario and how we can move forward today and into the future to grow our industry.

**The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman):** Two minutes.

**Mr. Tom Ratz:** There is a long list of things, and it is going to Minister of Natural Resources and to MPP Holland.

**Ms. Goldie Ghamari:** Great; thank you. Before I pass my time to MPP Anand, I just want to say very quickly, if you have time I'd love to come do a quick tour or site visit of one of your facilities today with MPP Holland, just to get a bit more understanding and knowledge of that.

**Mr. Tom Ratz:** We'd love to have you.

**Ms. Goldie Ghamari:** Great. Thank you so much. I'll turn it now to MPP Anand.

**The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman):** MPP Anand.

**Mr. Deepak Anand:** First of all, I want to say thank you to all the presenters for taking time and coming. I was in Sudbury yesterday, and I said I love Sudbury. Now I have to change that statement again: I love Thunder Bay also.

Steve, first of all, I was reading over your bio—what an incredible story you are.

**The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman):** One minute.

**Mr. Deepak Anand:** You lost your arm in 1978, but you stood strong, so you are a lived experience. I'm sure

you're doing this to thank God and serve the community and make them strong like you. I just wanted to add that.

Apart from that, I don't have much time, so I'm going to talk about Poverty Free Thunder Bay. I absolutely agree with you that the status quo is not fair and the status quo is not right. We need to have more housing, maybe more inclusionary-zoning housing, and spend more time on making sure that employment for our youth—we live in the best-of-the-best province in the world, and it needs to display and show that. So do you guys know about the Skills Development Fund, SDF? If not, please do reach out to our office. We'll be happy to work with you and support the local youth for their employment.

**The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman):** Thank you very much. That ends the time.

We'll now go to MPP Vaugeois.

**MPP Lise Vaugeois:** I'd like to address my first question to Sara from Poverty Free Thunder Bay. I really think about basic economics with these questions because, if people actually had enough money to live on, if we were to double those ODSP rates and OW rates so that they are not in abject poverty, that money comes into the community. That's all money that's going to be spent on food, housing, clothing—very basic things. That money stays here. But when people are reliant on food banks, all that money actually comes out of the community, because people are desperately trying to provide those food sources as the only way to help.

**1200**

Now, I think that the housing is one piece, but I also know that it's extremely time-consuming to be poor. It takes a lot of time and a lot of work to actually go and get food from a food bank and get to your doctors' appointments. I just would like you to speak a bit to the personal, but also the economic context.

**Ms. Susan Forbes:** I don't know if Sara wants to point out that—I mean, having worked in social services, I can certainly talk about how people had to go from one point to another. Trying to get people into employment, quite often people would say, "Well, I can't do that. I have to go to the Shelter House for lunch and I have to do this." And families were just always trying to get around town to do things.

Or if I was getting someone into employment, I would say, "Okay, you don't have that much money there, so just buy your black pants, your top, whatever, and that will get you there." And if somebody else needed work boots, we'd go in the back and say, "Do we have any extra work boots that we could do?" You know, things like that. People don't even understand how much people have to run around just to survive.

And then transit is very difficult to access here, particularly if you're not right on a bus thing. So if you want to get to a particular point or whatever, that's very hard to do.

**MPP Lise Vaugeois:** Susan? Thank you very much—

**Ms. Susan Forbes:** When you don't have money and you don't have the support, you don't have the ability to

do things. It also cuts down on people's dignity to constantly have to be literally begging for food—

**MPP Lise Vaugeois:** Susan, I'm going to cut you off there, but thank you very much because I think that does paint a very important picture.

How am I doing? Okay, because I want to make sure that Sol has a question, but I do want to talk briefly—Steve, if you could talk about, perhaps—I mean, we're seeing a transfer of business responsibilities to the public coffers and then we see that people are actually punished for having a disability, for being injured at work, pushed onto ODSB when WSIB payments have fallen by 70%.

I wonder also about the incentive to companies to not report accidents if they know they are going to get a bonus for not paying out for those accidents. If you could speak briefly to that?

**Mr. Steve Mantis:** Yes, thank you so much. Really, the issue of how the rates are set for employers are based on an experience rating program, which actually goes against the foundational principles, which was the collective liability. Our OHIP system is a collective liability. It doesn't matter how often you use a hospital, you pay the same.

When we put in an incentive to say, "Every time you report a claim, you're going to pay more money," people are going to say, "Well, jeez. Is there some way we can get around that?" That, then, creates a problem in terms of occupational health and safety. If you don't report, if you don't keep track of the injuries, you don't then identify where the risks are and then take corrective action so it doesn't happen again. And so it has a multiplier effect.

It also creates a problem in terms of equity among employers so that those ones that are doing bad practices get a financial return while good employers who follow the law and who do what is expected of them have to pay more. So this is really an equity issue.

The other equity issue is clear. We've heard, "Jeez, the forest industry will meet with minister after minister after minister and we can't even get a meeting with the ministers." So this government, and successive governments, have prioritized corporations over people, and we're seeing that in terms of the structures of worker's compensation, in terms of our taxation and in terms of how we move forward.

Thank you so much.

**The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman):** MPP Mamakwa.

**Mr. Sol Mamakwa:** Meegwetch to the presenters. I didn't listen to the presentations, but I have some reports, but, you know, also just a dialogue.

I know that from where I'm from in the north, when we talk about crown lands, crown lands are stolen lands. I say that because sometimes there is no proper engagement or process to be able to engage in a process where there are meaningful benefits from all parties, because where I'm from, we are treaty partners.

Susan, you talked about homelessness. I think what you described, 68% of the people without homes—that is colonialism, oppression, inaction, and I say that because we see the numerous, needless deaths, the unnecessary suffering that happens in Thunder Bay. People pay in full with their lives because of that. For example, February 1,

tomorrow, is the 29th anniversary of the boil-water advisory in Neskantaga—29 years.

**The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman):** One minute.

**Mr. Sol Mamakwa:** I think the homelessness work that we do—we just keep them alive longer. That's all it does. We need to keep them living, get them out of poverty. How do we do that?

**Ms. Susan Forbes:** Are you talking about homelessness?

**Mr. Sol Mamakwa:** Yes.

**Ms. Susan Forbes:** I retired 12 years ago, and things were nowhere near to where they are now. We did not have tent cities. We did not have all of the social disruption that we have now. I guess I was seeing it coming, but—

**The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman):** Thank you very much. That concludes the time for this presentation. I hate to cut it off, but the time is up. Also, the time is up for this panel.

We thank the panel very much for joining us today and for the time you took to prepare. I'm sure that your presentations will be of great assistance, moving forward.

With that, we are now recessed until 1 o'clock.

*The committee recessed from 1207 to 1301.*

**The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman):** Welcome back. We'll now resume consideration of public hearings on pre-budget consultations 2024.

As a reminder, each presenter will have seven minutes for their presentation. After we have heard from all the presenters, the remaining 39 minutes of the time slot will be for questions from the members of the committee. This time of questions will be divided into two rounds of seven and a half minutes for the government members, two rounds of seven and a half minutes for the opposition members and two rounds of four and a half minutes for the independents as a group.

WEYERHAEUSER

BRAIN INJURY SERVICES OF NORTHERN  
ONTARIO

MS. PEGGY BREKVELD

**The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman):** If there are no questions from the committee, we will proceed on. I think our first presenters are at the table: Weyerhaeuser, Brain Injury Services of Northern Ontario and Peggy Brekvelde.

With that, as I mentioned, you have seven minutes for your presentation. At six minutes, I will give you the one-minute warning. Don't stop; the best minute is yet to come. Then I'll say, "Thank you," and move on to the next presenter. We also ask each presenter to give their name at the start of the presentation to make sure it's attributed in Hansard to the right person.

With that, we shall start with Weyerhaeuser.

**Mr. Erik Holmstrom:** Good afternoon, members of the standing committee. My name is Erik Holmstrom. I'm a registered professional forester and the timberlands manager for Weyerhaeuser Co. Ltd. in Kenora. It's an honour to be

with you discussing the importance of Ontario's forest sector with you.

For those of you from other regions, I'd like to welcome you to northwestern Ontario. Honestly, usually, it's much colder this time of year, and I recognize some of you from Kenora last year, so you would agree. However, we're still blessed to live in such an alluring and resource-rich region with endless opportunities for recreation and economic development.

I was born and raised in Kenora, and after working in Saskatchewan, New Brunswick, British Columbia, Washington state and Alberta, I was fortunate to have the opportunity to come home to Kenora and northwestern Ontario 10 years ago.

The forest sector's strength in this region has always been its ability to use renewable resources sustainably and responsibly. In fact, my great-great-grandfather was a papermaker at a pulp mill in Thunder Bay over 100 years ago, and numerous jobs in this industry still exist here today. As a forester and a proud resident of northwestern Ontario, it's important to me that we ensure future generations continue to have the opportunity to reside in this region and participate in the forest community.

Generating \$18 billion in total revenues and contributing \$4.3 billion to provincial GDP annually, the Ontario forest sector supports 148,000 direct and indirect jobs across this province. Over the last two years, the province collected over \$500 million from the industry in crown timber dues. This money contributes directly to the province's revenue and supports vital public services to the people of Ontario. A portion of these revenues is also redistributed to Indigenous and rural communities, facilitating the sharing of economic benefits generated by our sustainable and renewable resource.

In 2001, Weyerhaeuser constructed its most innovative facility to date and chose Kenora as its location. We are one of Kenora's largest employers and employ 220 people within the mill and the same number in our forest operations. Through advanced manufacturing, this facility produces an engineered lumber product from underutilized poplar and birch trees that we call TimberStrand. This is the first and only TimberStrand plant in Canada and it's the most advanced engineered wood products operation in the world.

One of the items I'd like to discuss with the standing committee is public investment into crown road infrastructure. Fifteen years ago, the government introduced a provincial roads funding program. This program helps to support our infrastructure and is critical to the people of northwestern Ontario.

Many of our forest roads are built by our Indigenous partners and used by the forest industry, the mining industry, First Nation communities, hunters, trappers, fishermen, recreationalists and tourist operators. This program is not a subsidy but an investment in our northern infrastructure.

We are blessed with the abundance of forest in this region, but for the northwest to be truly open for businesses, we need the infrastructure to access these resources. Initially, the funding for public access infrastructure was \$75 million.

The current government has reduced this funding to \$54 million. Inflationary pressure alone would require increasing that program to \$100 million.

The forest industry has more than matched the province's contributions to critical public, multi-use infrastructure while supporting 148,000 jobs. I ask that you revisit this funding envelope for this program and increase it to its original amount, adjusted for inflation.

While on the topic of infrastructure, major accidents and collisions continue to plague northwestern Ontario's highways. Last year alone, we lost 34 people to deaths on our roads. Improved highway maintenance, the twinning of our highways and increased enforcement are all required to ensure northwestern Ontario is a great place to live, work and conduct business.

The next topic I'd like to discuss is forest biomass. With the reduction in the pulp and paper industry across the province, biomass has emerged as a concerning issue. Due to the lack of biomass market, we at our Kenora mill are forced to send our short strand material—which is pure wood that we can't put in our product. We ship it off to Winnipeg for landfill to be mixed in as compost. We also send 10,000 tonnes of other biomass material to the local landfill site in Kenora. The combined cost of dealing with both of these products is very significant, as there is no revenue and transportation costs and landfill tipping fees are incredibly expensive, not to mention the fact that we're shortening the life of our landfill as a result.

Ontario has made a welcome commitment to strengthening the forest sector and increasing the use of biomass through Ontario's Forest Sector Strategy and the biomass action plan. I strongly support any initiative that will maximize the use of wood residuals, reduce the need for carbon-intensive fuels and then void unnecessary pressures on landfills, all of which will help sustain the bioeconomy and the integration of Ontario's forest sector.

Lastly, I call upon the government to better communicate the effectiveness of Ontario's sustainable forest management framework to the public as well as to the federal government. I'm very passionate about forestry. That's because I've seen how we can take a mature stand of trees, turn it into products that we use every day. I've seen how our silviculture practices can replace that mature forest with a beautiful, healthy young forest to be enjoyed by wildlife and the residents of Ontario for generations to come.

**The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman):** One minute.

**Mr. Erik Holmstrom:** I've seen how we have created economic prosperity for the individuals and communities that rely on forestry. I've also seen what happens when we don't actively manage a forest, leading to the destruction created by insects, wind and wildfires that threaten the lives and livelihoods of the people of northwestern Ontario.

The biggest threat to forestry in Ontario is misinformation. As a sector that is older than Canada, a true pillar in Ontario's foundational economy and a climate change champion, it is imperative that the Ontario government acknowledge the significant role of the community in creating

a prosperous, sustainable, low-carbon economy for the well-being of all Ontarians, but especially those here in northwestern Ontario.

Thank you for your time.

1310

**The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman):** Thank you very much for the presentation.

Our next presenter will be Brain Injury Services of Northern Ontario.

**Ms. Alice Bellavance:** Good afternoon to the Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs. Members and fellow guest presenters, thank you for this opportunity to present a written submission. I'm Alice Bellavance. I'm the chief executive officer with Brain Injury Services of Northern Ontario, or BISNO for short, for those of you who have been around for a while, especially in this part of the province.

In March 2023, Ontario Health North West hosted a design day with Thunder Bay Regional Health Sciences Centre, St. Joseph's Care Group, and BISNO. The purpose of the day was to brainstorm and set next steps for a very challenging group of individuals with neurodiversity, and their ongoing needs for highly specialized assisted living services. The profile of these individuals were—first of all, facilities are seeing an increasing number of these clients with complex behavioural needs in the region, and because both St. Joe's and the regional are regional providers, they often end up there, but some of our smaller regional hospitals are also experiencing similar challenges. They often have a co-occurring physical disability. They often have a traumatic or acquired brain injury. They tend to be marginalized clients. They have poor social determinants of health. Some have or are suspected to have fetal alcohol spectrum disorder. Often, they are involved with the criminal justice system. They have a history of trauma. The majority of the individuals we profiled that day were male; they were also Indigenous. Many had pre-existing neurocognitive disorders, co-occurring substance use disorder, as well as ABI and schizoaffective disorder. So it's a pretty complicated group of people. It was agreed that BISNO would take the lead to propose a development of a first-of-its-kind-in-Canada service that would be a community-based assisted living service, along with schedule 1 capacity spaces, and these would have to be co-sponsored by a hospital.

BISNO submitted an expression of interest to the Thunder Bay social services administration board on June 30, 2023. At this point, we do not have a formal commitment for the build, which will likely not be the full amount—it's almost \$17.5 million. Therefore, we'll have to receive the balance from another source. We would also need to secure one-time funding for a piece of property and possible demolition of a building—we're looking at a number of properties, and some of them have buildings on them—and that could cost upwards of \$5 million. Further, we will be required to go to Ontario Health North West for program operating and physical plant operating on an annualized basis of upwards of \$6 million.

The proposed housing development would be custom-designed to accommodate the specialized needs of the client population who would reside there. BISNO anticipates that the housing development would be a semi-rural or a large enough piece of property in Thunder Bay that's functionally safe and secure for the residents and staff. These are the main design considerations.

This would also be a regional service for all of northwestern Ontario. Brain Injury Services of Northern Ontario is a regional provider. We provide services from the French River to the Manitoba border, and the American border to Hudson Bay.

The housing development would include the main housing unit, which would have 24 individuals. There would be four separate wings, each containing six individual units, in addition to the six individual self-contained units on the property. The idea is that people would titrate from schedule 1 down to the other level of beds, and then possibly into one of the self-contained units on the property, and then hopefully be repatriated to their home communities after a period of time. There would also have to be additional structures on the property for maintenance and to promote recreational opportunities and enhanced well-being for the residents.

Functionality of the building design is a critical component to the proposed housing development. Each unit would be equipped with a bed-sitting room and self-contained bathroom. The wings of each unit would each have a servery for food, as well as dining and lounge areas.

Safety and security are critical considerations for the proposed housing development, as well. Some of the safety and security features would include barrier-free units; call bells for private areas such as bathrooms; video surveillance in all common areas, entrances and exits of the housing development; fencing around the perimeter of the property and some of the self-contained housing units, as well as the schedule 1; and secured and alarmed doors to the wings.

We have been in discussions with both regional hospitals as well as Hamilton Health Sciences—Hamilton Health Sciences has been designated by the Ministry of Health as the designated hospital-based Acquired Brain Injury Program for the province—to see who would be the co-sponsor for the schedule 1 beds; 12 of the 30 beds would be schedule 1 beds. We also need to engage with Indigenous communities and service providers, as a large portion of the individuals are Indigenous. We have received support from all four Ontario health teams in the northwest, along with many community partners. Letters of support were attached to our expression of interest, and I will leave a copy of that with you.

As BISNO is also a member of the Ontario Community Support Association as well as Addictions and Mental Health Ontario, because the population that we currently serve has multiple intersections with the mental health and addictions sector, both of these associations have prepared submissions and those have also been attached.

With the fact that the Ministry of Health is very focused on alternate level of care and moving people out of hospital,



based on the design-day event, this is the following breakdown of those that were identified in that day:

**The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman):** One minute.

**Ms. Alice Bellavance:** —10% were individuals who are chronically homeless, who cycle through services, tend not to engage in service and become homeless, end up back in the hospital due to some sentinel medical event and then are discharged from service and the cycle begins again;

—45% of the people who were profiled are currently alternate level of care, 20% of them being Ontario Review Board clients, so these are individuals who are not fit to stand trial and are housed on the forensics unit; and

—45% are precariously housed in existing social housing or supportive housing or assisted living programs; however, their care needs are beyond what the care provider can deliver, and part of that is due to legislative requirements about not restraining or holding individuals, not having safe spaces in existing physical plants to isolate etc.

Further, the Ministry of Health and the centre for excellence for mental health and addictions are working on integrated care pathways for many diseases and disorders. I'm involved with the Neurotrauma Care Pathways initiative, in its third year, and I'll—

**The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman):** Thank you very much. That concludes the time.

We'll now go to Peggy Brekveld.

**Ms. Peggy Brekveld:** Thank you for the opportunity to speak today. I'm Peggy Brekveld and I'm a proud northern farmer, a mother of five and a long-time advocate for rural Ontario and Ontario agriculture. You will likely hear me speak about all three of those titles today. Welcome to my hometown.

Thunder Bay is a transportation hub—rail, air, water and roads all connect to Thunder Bay. Of these, everyone is connected to Highway 11/17, as the Trans-Canada Highway is called here. It is the thoroughfare between eastern and western Canada, and our milk, our tractor parts, our cattle and even our children travel on the 11/17. It's a lifeline for those who live here.

Those who live here also know that driving the highway can be risky, beyond the threat of meeting a moose in the middle of the night. Anyone who regularly travels the Trans-Canada Highway knows the risks and has probably had a close call with someone passing when it wasn't safe. You can watch the videos online and they are scary. If you haven't, you should look it up.

My husband has helped rescue animals when they have been in a crash and helped clean up what was left afterwards—not pleasant work. And many of us, including me, have lost a family member or a friend on the highway. Last week, there was another fatality. And it isn't just driver error. There are ways to make this highway safer—I echo what you said.

The ultimate answer would be a divided highway, the full length of the Trans-Canada. The cost may be intimidating, but the plan should be there. And as we go towards those goals, we can continue to make improvements, like widening and paving the full shoulder of the highway; or

building more pass lanes, which would make such a difference; making more rest stops big enough for the trucks to go in; and for full luxury, heated winter toilets.

Announcing a date for the completion of this and that the first steps are happening now—I really believe that's an important announcement for northern Ontario. Getting it done would save lives, and knowing how much commerce travels on those roads, I really believe it would help Ontario's economy as well.

The second recommendation is a policy change that would make a world of difference to small communities. I live in one of the larger municipalities around Thunder Bay—6,000 citizens—but there are smaller yet. I actually was born in one that right now has about 250 households and a huge area, and almost no businesses live there. It's a bedroom community. I drive there, visiting family, and on Sundays, I like to tour. I want to add my voice to those who are calling on more dollars to help small, northern and rural municipalities to do the ordinary things like fix roads and bridges and improving infrastructure.

**1320**

One municipality recently raised their property taxes 26%. It wasn't for extravagances; it was for ordinary upkeep, as in plowing snow and grading roads. To put this in perspective, my daughter went down to college in Ridgetown, near Chatham-Kent's deep south. After a couple of weeks, she actually told me that driving in the south was boring because she wasn't avoiding potholes and bumps in the road. I would like to say she was kidding, but she actually wasn't. She had never been down there. She actually was in Oxford, and truly, it was an experience for her to know that roads could be that smooth.

It was announced at ROMA that there are new dollars, mostly for investments toward supporting new housing. Many of the smaller communities are trying to do the basics. One challenge that has been flagged that could make a difference would be a change in policy and not necessarily in full dollars that you would spend, and that is, right now, if communities get approved for a large project, they have to cash flow the full project and submit costs at the end, at completion. In this current banking environment, this policy has stalled investment. A real-life example: There is one municipality; their operating budget is \$500,000, and they got approved for a road project of \$2 million, and then when they read the fine print and they had to finance it, the interest alone put a stop to it because they didn't actually think they could realistically fund that project. The ability to hit milestones and submit some of the bills ahead of time would help reduce their costs and wouldn't make that much difference in the road budget.

Finally, I want to thank the province for several recent announcements, including the review of the Veterinarians Act, the Veterinary Incentive Program and the announced 20 additional veterinarians trained per year at Lakehead University. Currently, Thunder Bay citizens drive sometimes four hours to Dryden and sometimes into the States to get care for their pets. That is significant; the need is obvious. The program needs to get off the ground. They've now looked at a date of September 2025. They pushed it off,

but that program needs to go. Anything you can do to help move that program forward will make a difference, and yes, expanding it to four years makes sense, when you get it started.

**The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman):** One minute.

**Ms. Peggy Brekveld:** Saying that, there's an additional way that government can improve support for large-animal vets in northern and underserved areas. The Ministry of Northern Development runs a Veterinary Assistance Program, and it subsidizes the travel costs of isolated veterinarians up to \$40,000. The total cost of the program is \$830,000, but that dollar amount was set in 1988. I know \$800,000 in a budget your size is probably not big dollars, but it would make a big difference if we could move that dollar amount up to \$1.6 million. It would make isolated vet practices more enticing to new vets coming in and taking over practices, and it would support the mobile service for animal health in northern and underserved areas and support Ontario farmers just like me. Thanks.

**The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman):** Thank you very much for the presentation. That concludes the presentations.

We'll now start with the questions, and we'll start with the government side. MPP Holland.

**Mr. Kevin Holland:** Thank you to everybody who came out today to make a presentation to the committee. I appreciate you taking time out of your busy schedules. As the other last few groups, I've had the opportunity to meet with each of you individually on more than one occasion to talk about some of the concerns that you conveyed here today. Honestly, it's not new to me, and I appreciate that the information is being passed on to the committee. Rest assured that I have forwarded all of your concerns and information and had those discussions with the relevant ministries moving forward, so this is a great backing-me-up type of thing on what you're saying.

I think I will start with you, Peggy. I appreciate the comments that you made with regard to the highways and to—I'll start with the highways. I appreciate your concern with the—nobody wants to see those fatalities. As you know, I was a firefighter for 21 years. A great part of my work was doing auto extrication calls on the highway, where the outcomes were not great. This is an issue that we've been facing here in northwest Ontario for decades. It's not something new.

I spoke with the OPP, particularly the Thunder Bay detachment, for statistics. The statistics are showing that although the traffic volumes have increased substantially, the number of accidents involving commercial trucks has dropped. On the flip side, we have seen an increase in fatalities on the highways. So it's a really complex issue. I agree with you: highway improvements—we're taking steps on those highway improvements, but the ultimate goal that people are asking for is a long ways out. I want to see what we can do, and I'm working with the agencies to address what we can do in the short term to alleviate some of those issues. We know some of it might be driver training, and our challenge is a lot of the drivers' training is outside the province of Ontario. We need to work with our federal counterparts, which we are trying to do, to ensure that we

can have that national training course, right. So I appreciate those comments.

With the municipalities, a lot of them in the area—one in particular, you mentioned a 28% increase or 25%. There are a lot of circumstances that led to that substantial of an increase. I've spoke with the councillors, family members of yours, about what led to that increase, and we've been working through that. We have increased the infrastructure funding commitment to municipalities, doubling the OCIF funding for the next five years. We've committed to that, and we're allowing them to bank that money for the five years so that they can address some of the larger projects you're talking about.

There is always more work to be done. It's a conversation I continue to have with finance and treasury with regard to the local circumstances here, but I appreciate you bringing it up to the committee. I just want you to be assured that I'm addressing that with the relevant ministries.

I want to go back to your comment on—we've met a number of times. We even met when I was a former mayor of my community with regard to a proposal similar to what you're asking for here, located in the development that we're looking to do in our community. I just told you, I'm more willing to work with you to move this venture forward, and I commit to that. I continue to commit to that. So I look forward to our future discussions.

Now, I want to go to Erik. You know, you made some really good points here, and we've had those discussions on the crown land infrastructure funding as late as yesterday. That's a conversation that, obviously, Minister Smith heard loud and clear yesterday in our round table discussions. I'm fully confident that that will be coming back for further discussions.

The forest biomass program—I'm not aware—we've made some substantial announcements; one, yesterday, of \$2.5 million to the forest biomass program. We know that that is a program that's going to help sustain the forestry industry moving forward. The plus to that is, from the research that we've invested in over the last several years, there are initiatives coming out of that that we can see the forestry industry and the mining industry becoming carbon neutral, and in some cases, even carbon negative. So I appreciate your interest in that. I'd like to sit down and talk to you more with regard to where you're at in that process and what it is you need to see that program coming to Kenora. The funding is being rolled out. Like I said, the one announcement was made here yesterday.

One of the comments that came out in our round table discussion yesterday was that we need to do a better job to educate how well the forestry industry is doing. The forestry industry isn't the industry of 40 years ago or 50 years ago. It's responsible harvesting of the timber, which is actually supporting the forestry because if it wasn't for that selective harvesting that you are taking place, the other option to renew our forest is forest fires. That's nature's way of renewing the forest.

So I would like to know, as we educate colleagues from southern Ontario and the general public with regard to how sustainable and how environmentally responsible the

forestry operations are, if you could elaborate on that piece. And would your company be willing to work with the government—in particular, me—to bring that message forward?  
1330

**Mr. Erik Holmstrom:** Absolutely, we'd be willing to work with you.

We do spend a lot of time—especially our younger foresters, trying to get them out into the elementary schools and high schools to talk to students, to try to correct some of the misinformation. It's just mind-boggling, the amount of misinformation that exists.

I think yesterday we heard Kent Ramsay mention the LCBO coming out and saying that they're not going to use paper bags anymore and by doing so they're going to save—I can't remember—200 trees per bag, something ridiculous.

The truth is, the province needs strong forest management. Forest management helps to capture carbon in our wood products. It helps companies to become carbon-neutral. It provides us with sustainable products, renewable products that we use every day.

So whatever help or assistance I can provide—I'd be more than willing to.

**Mr. Kevin Holland:** Thank you. I appreciate that.

**The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman):** We'll now go to the opposition. MPP Vaugeois.

**MPP Lise Vaugeois:** Erik, it's interesting; it's the second time that the forest roads issue has come up today. I would like to add to what you said. They're used for recreation. They're used for work. These are also the emergency exits, the alternate routes out of communities. I've been hearing about this for quite a few years now. You'll certainly have our support in seeing the funding raised so that those roads are maintained. Right now, in Terrace Bay, two roads—the mill has only been shut down for about three weeks, and it has already been announced that those two forest roads are not going to be maintained. So that's a very, very serious issue. Thank you for raising it.

I also want to thank both you and Peggy for raising the questions of the highways and safety on the highways. Sure, in an ideal world, we'd have it all double-laned all the way through. But in the interim, passing lanes and shoulders need to be put in place. That's far less costly, but it would make a very significant difference. I want to thank you for being so specific. I know that between Raith and Ignace, for example, there's not a single passing lane, and we know that so much of the highway has no paved shoulders, and that causes trucks to roll over unnecessarily. They're stopping there because there are no rest stops.

I really want to thank you for bringing those forward. As you know, these are issues I've also been talking about since I was elected.

BISNO, I've also heard about your project, and I hope very much that—it's an expensive project, but we also know that not addressing the needs of this population is expensive in other ways. If we actually did a cost-benefit ratio, I think that the need for the facility that you're describing would be there.

I've spoken, but I haven't asked a question. I think I will actually pass on my turn.

**The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman):** MPP Kernaghan.

**Mr. Terence Kernaghan:** Erik, it's good to see you at committee again this year. I remember you from last year.

You mentioned shipping short strand to Manitoba. How much does that cost?

**Mr. Erik Holmstrom:** Well, we spent \$500,000 last year shipping that material, so there's a bit of a backlog there. Annually, I would guess that it's about \$200,000 a year, if we were on top of it.

**Mr. Terence Kernaghan:** Oh, my goodness.

We often hear at this committee about the circular economy and making sure that we're not being wasteful. I want to hopefully bring to the committee's attention what you have presented here: that we are sending out a resource—and you've outlined it very well. You've spoken about how this will increase carbon in the atmosphere, to be used with fuel, as well as reduce the pressures on landfills. So I want to thank you very much for that.

Also, I noticed that your CEO, Devin Stockfish—he notes that you folks are focused on climate change solutions as well as creating sustainable homes for everyone and supporting thriving rural communities. My question is, can you tell this government how a lack of investment might hinder your efforts in achieving those goals?

**Mr. Erik Holmstrom:** Yes, absolutely. I talked about one being the forest roads in terms of investment. One thing I should make clear, because not everybody understands it: In the forest industry, we all rely on each other. We compete in the marketplace, but Resolute here, Dryden Fibre—and you guys will be in Dryden tomorrow, I believe—Norbord—somebody has to consume the hardwood, which we do. Somebody has to consume the pulp wood. If there isn't a pulp wood outlet, then they've got to utilize the biomass. Somebody has to take the saw logs.

In order to have a strong forest industry, we need investment amongst the sector, and we've got to support those primary industries. As soon as one leg falls, then—and we're going to feel that in Terrace Bay and Espanola—that's going to create a challenge for numerous sawmills across the board where the pulp mill consumes those chips and there's no outlet for it. They're going to have a similar biomass issue that we have. So it's critical for the government to not just look at individual mills but whatever can support the whole industry, and I've mentioned a few in my presentation today.

**Mr. Terence Kernaghan:** Thank you. You can count on our support for that request for an investment of \$100 million for the provincial roads. I think it would be money well spent given the number of jobs you support and the fact that the industries rely on one another in a partnership, such as you say. It will benefit everyone across the north.

I did want to move over to Alice with BISNO. Alice, I wanted to just specifically ask—I want to thank you for your presentation. It's leadership like this which is absolutely required for folks who are sometimes the most difficult to serve. You are certainly looking after folks who have slipped through the cracks of society and people who

need our support more than most. I wanted to ask, when did you specifically request funds from the province for this initiative?

**Ms. Alice Bellavance:** We submitted an expression of interest to the DSSAB at the end of June, and we're working with consultants right now working on the proposals that need to go to Ontario Health for the operating as well as the one-time cost for the purchase of land. We have a meeting with the architect next week to review the feasibility and functional programming that's required to build the building. So there's a lot of work going on on the ground right now. The next big thing that we have to do as well, of course, is work with Hamilton Health Sciences and the two local hospitals to see who are going to be the sponsors for the schedule 1 beds because that's typically a hospital service.

**The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman):** One minute.

**Mr. Terence Kernaghan:** Okay. Have you received any sort of formal reply from the province yet, or are you just still waiting for that meeting to take place?

**Ms. Alice Bellavance:** No formal response yet.

**Mr. Terence Kernaghan:** Okay. Do keep us posted. I think this initiative is truly brilliant and something that I hope will come to the community, because—

**Ms. Alice Bellavance:** It will—before I retire.

**Mr. Terence Kernaghan:** That's the spirit we like to hear. Keep going.

Thank you very much, Chair.

**The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman):** Okay. Thank you very much.

We'll go to the independent. MPP Bowman.

**Ms. Stephanie Bowman:** Thank you all for being here today. It's great to see some of you again.

Erik, I will start with you. Last year when you presented in Kenora, you talked a little bit about the biomass and the challenges with putting waste into the waste facilities, as well as the opportunity to really innovate in that sector. I don't want to sound discouraging or discouraged, but do you feel that you've made some progress in this past year on those fronts in terms of, again, reducing the amount of waste going to landfill and the opportunity to innovate in the biomass sector?

**Mr. Erik Holmstrom:** In short, we've made some minor progress. We've worked with Atikokan BioPower, and we're now selling some of—I shouldn't say "selling"—sending some of those strands to them, which is positive. The unfortunate thing is just yesterday I heard that where those pellets are being utilized at the biogeneration plant, they're restricting the consumption of those. So, what that means to me is, because Kenora is likely one of their further suppliers, we'll likely get cut off.

1340

I want to give the government credit. They've got the biomass action plan. They have announced some funding for specific products. Nothing has materialized that has helped us, aside from we found a market and it looks like there is a potential impact that the government is making to reduce the consumption of that, that will have an adverse impact to us.

**Ms. Stephanie Bowman:** I just want to, again, highlight that it's important that we make investments across sectors in our economy. I know the government is making some very large investments in EVs and minerals, and those can add to the economy, but we also need to make sure we're not forgetting things like forestry and like the green transition sector, which would include things like biomass. How do we take advantage of those things? Both to reduce our carbon footprint—which we heard about today from a First Nation, that they're really suffering from climate change. So I just want to encourage the government to take action on those files.

Peggy, I'll turn to you. You talked a bit about the highways. I know we heard from Erik about that as well. Last year, just before these hearings, we had heard about, from the Auditor General, that the government has re-prioritized building Highway 413 and deprioritized twinning of Highway 11/17. While we don't know the cost of Highway 413, because they won't share those estimates, we know that the cost to twin 11/17 is between \$500 million and \$1 billion. Certainly, it's a lot of money, but as you say, it's part of developing the north and continuing to build our communities here.

So I just want you, again, to reiterate to the government why it would be important to prioritize that up to \$1 billion to spend on twinning those highways as opposed to building Highway 413, which goes through valued agricultural land, which I know, in your recent position, you were really fighting to preserve.

**The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman):** One minute.

**Ms. Peggy Brekfeld:** A couple of years ago, the bridge in Nipigon went out. That's part of the Trans-Canada Highway, too, and in northern Ontario. The shelves in Thunder Bay saw a depletion of food pretty quickly, because most of our food was coming from the south.

Now, good northern innovation: We figured out how to get the bridge open again. But saying that, every time there is some type of automobile crash, the road is closed, and it was again last week. If you tell me that that doesn't stop commerce for all of this province, I won't believe you. It does; it makes a difference. So to think this is just a northern highway is wrong. The importance of the Trans-Canada Highway can't be overstated, in both the survival of northern communities and northern Ontario, but also for the province and for the country. I really believe that we can make a difference, and any death is not worth any—

**The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman):** Thank you very much. That concludes the time.

We'll now go to the government. MPP Dowie.

**Mr. Andrew Dowie:** Thank you to all the presenters today. I'm just delighted to be in Thunder Bay. This is one of my favourite places to visit, certainly.

Peggy, I've heard your comments about the highway. I have driven it out to Quetico, and even in the summer, it's certainly an interesting drive. Actually, it echoes some of the issues we've had back down in my riding. We've had a two-lane road, Highway 3, that had been promised over and over and over again and never delivered. Finally—finally—it's under construction and I'm grateful for that.

So I understand where you're coming from on that and, ultimately, I'd say the message has been received, as has your concern.

I was hoping, actually, to ask some questions of Alice. On brain injuries, particularly, I know—I'm a Scout leader, and Scouts Canada and Hydro One partnered a few years ago on a concussion strategy. A lot of us received training on how to avoid head injury for the express purpose of trying to reduce that possibility for conflict. I think what it emphasized was how little knowledge most of us have as to how a brain injury or head injury could occur.

Even in recent years, I've been communicating with my local brain injury association about some of the programs that they offer, and they have articulated very similar stats as what you've provided—particularly, that they are, effectively, trying to provide preventative health care, but there's very little recognition of that in the system designed today. The rehabilitative nature of health care is really anchored in more of our larger health care providers.

I was hoping to explore with you, in what ways do you think that brain injuries have fallen under the radar? And what kind of structure for addressing them do you see as being more suitable than the way the system is designed today?

**Ms. Alice Bellavance:** Obviously, prevention is key. Fifty per cent of the people that are injured who come to us requiring our services are injured on our highways, so I'll just add on to the need for fixing that problem, because not everyone dies. We're able to save lives now that we've never been able to save before.

The survival rate has totally reversed from the—in the 1970s, 85% of those individuals with severe brain injury died; by the 1990s, we're saving 85%, but we haven't been able to keep up with the level of service to support those individuals. So if we're going to save the life at all costs, we better be prepared to pay for some quality of life for that individual after the fact, and we're just not doing that to the level that we should be.

**Mr. Andrew Dowie:** Thank you for that. Could you put us in the space of someone who has suffered from a brain injury? What kind of barriers are they going to face? Say they were in an accident and every effort has been made towards recovery, but it's just not destined to happen in full. What does life look like for someone who is suffering a brain injury and the barriers that they will face?

**Ms. Alice Bellavance:** I've been working at BISNO for 33 years. I still have some of the same clients I started with when I started 33 years ago. People live a long time after a brain injury. If they get appropriate care and supports, they can manage.

The challenge for us is I currently have 30 assisted living spaces for people who need 24-hour care, who can't be cared for in the community, but I have 114 people waiting. For each one space that I have, I've got four people waiting, and so people wait for decades. I had two people die last year in January. One had been with us for 23 years; one had been with us for 26.

The challenge is that families carry the biggest burden in terms of caring for family members at home. That's why I added the Ontario Community Support Association that

deals with community support services, because if the informal care system in this country all walked out on their jobs, our whole health care system would crumble. If it wasn't for families and friends caring for people at home at no cost to the province—they're doing it because it's their family member. It's a real challenge for families.

**Mr. Andrew Dowie:** Thank you very much for that.

I'd like to move on to Erik. Thank you for your presentation. I'm certainly intrigued by forest roads. I know I've also used some of them in my canoeing exploits, sharing the road with some of the drivers with the logs. It's just incredible to see how they can manage on roads of that nature with trees growing through the centre and very narrow. My kudos for the excellent driving skills that the drivers have.

I'm hoping you can share with us a little bit about what leads to the deterioration of the roads. Is this just regular, seasonal heaving and thawing that is getting into the base? Is it overuse? Is it too much weight? I'm wondering if you could just shed some light on whether we're having the right design of the roads to begin with versus just regular use.

**Mr. Erik Holmstrom:** When I speak to the funding levels, the maintenance of the roads has gone up over time. Like I said, that fund was brought into place 15 years ago. I'm sure everybody realizes how things have been inflated, especially in the last three years. Just the cost of maintaining the roads has gone up, but as has the cost of constructing them as well. The challenge is, yes, that we have winter, and so there are some freeze-thaw cycles. There's a lot of snow, in terms of maintenance that's required. But then it's just the general gravel grading, those types of activities and, again, the construction of new roads into new areas.

**The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman):** One minute.

**Mr. Andrew Dowie:** Just with the remaining time I have, how many users share these roads? Your company would use it. Would there be a competitor, another company that would use it as well? What would each of the contributions be from the companies?

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**Mr. Erik Holmstrom:** It's a good question. Across the province, the forest industry itself would currently invest at least \$100 million into these roads. But there are other users and they're not just forestry roads. Like you say, you've used them; the mining industry uses them; First Nations use them to access their communities or to participate in their traditional activities. So they're Ontario's roads and I wouldn't be able to quantify how many people use them, but fortunately for us, they are widely used and widely enjoyed by the people of Ontario.

**The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman):** Thank you very much. That concludes the time.

We'll now go to the official opposition. MPP Mamakwa.

**Mr. Sol Mamakwa:** Thanks for coming again, Erik. I know I saw you in Kenora. Good to see you again. Peggy and Alice, thank you for your presentations.

Erik, last year we were in Kenora. The intent of these hearings is to make recommendations to the Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs on what they

want to see in the budget. From your presentation last year, did you see any of your recommendations, your asks, that you had from last year?

**Mr. Erik Holmstrom:** There was some movement on biomass. We haven't specifically benefited from that, but it's positive. Like I say, we need a strong industry as a whole, so whatever can help other members of the industry eventually helps all of us. That was probably the only part where we've seen the government make change that would address some of my recommendations.

**Mr. Sol Mamakwa:** Okay.

Alice, thank you for your presentation. When we talk about brain injury services, thank you for being the voice of the people that go through those injuries. You mentioned some work done with First Nations. I'm just wondering if there are any relationships or partnerships with Sioux Lookout First Nations Health Authority and, perhaps, Matawa Health or perhaps others. Can you share how you do that and how we can move forward to better provide that service?

**Ms. Alice Bellavance:** We certainly have worked closely with Matawa health centre because they are a sending agency to us. We have done some work in Sioux Lookout. We have enough scale and capacity to develop some supportive housing and a rehabilitation program there as well, but again, it's going to be the cost of building something and getting the annualized operating dollars.

But outside the city of Thunder Bay, Sioux Lookout is the only community where I have scale. Because we're a regional provider, 75% of the people that are in our assisted living program right now are not from the city of Thunder Bay; they're from all over. But I have scale in Sioux Lookout. If I could build something like 10 beds in Sioux Lookout tomorrow, I could move people that are in Thunder Bay closer to home because they are from northern communities, so at least if they're in Sioux Lookout, they're one flight closer to home, right? To Bearskin Lake or wherever they're from.

So we have that scale and it's on the radar with the ministry, but we're too busy working on this project that that now has taken a backburner. But that is certainly something that we're working on.

**Mr. Sol Mamakwa:** Yes, I know that in my riding, the Kiiwetinoong riding, we have 24 fly-in First Nations and anything that they come down to, obviously, we want to be able to bring that service closer to home.

**Ms. Alice Bellavance:** Absolutely. We did meet with the committee of health with the Sioux Lookout First Nations Health Authority, and they also identified a very similar concern. Like I said, it's on the radar, but it's kind of like in second place right now compared to what we're trying to do here. But many of the people that we identified here are from northern communities and they're stuck at the regional or they're stuck at St. Joe's because it's not safe to move them anywhere else.

**Mr. Sol Mamakwa:** I'll pass it over to my colleague here.

**The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman):** MPP Vaugeois.

**MPP Lise Vaugeois:** Peggy, I wonder if you could speak to—you know, we see farming roads and smaller roads in rural communities. You might think of them as not being that important—they're secondary or tertiary roads—but

in fact, they're key, I think, to the infrastructure because you can't get your goods out and you can't transport animals safely and so on.

Can you speak to the importance of those roads that are under-categorized?

**Ms. Peggy Brekveld:** Of course. To start with, we don't have subways and buses in most of our rural communities, and we're not expecting that. Instead, we have to invest and do a really great job on the roads and bridges that we have. That is how we get our food to you, and that includes the milk or the meat that you are eating. It includes the fruit and vegetables also. It's so important.

I know you might have time tonight—I would love it if you took an hour or two and did the circle: Go through Stanley, and then go up through South Gillies, and then go beyond that and back down Moose Hill and head into Slate River Valley and see it. But when you get to Stanley, I'll be surprised if you can miss the potholes. And I really think it isn't because the township doesn't care; it is because they just don't have the funds and the ability to do it. Any way that we can support our local small communities to do the regular stuff—the maintenance and buildup on those roads and bridges—would be helpful. And that's not just in northern Ontario; that is all of rural Ontario.

**MPP Lise Vaugeois:** Is there still time?

**The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman):** Yes, you have 1.4 minutes left.

**MPP Lise Vaugeois:** Okay. Well, I'm going to go back to you, Peggy, because you also talked about wanting to change the rules so that—I think of a community that has a \$500,000 budget. They can only leverage so much borrowed money—not very much. In order to even start a project, they're going to need cash in hand. If you would clarify that for us once more, because I think it's a very important point.

**Ms. Peggy Brekveld:** When you have a small community and small budgets, every penny makes a difference.

**The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman):** One minute.

**Ms. Peggy Brekveld:** A \$2-million project when you have a budget of \$10 million, \$50 million, whatever, it doesn't hit you as hard or challenge you in the same way it does when your budgets are small. In that community, even if it's a six-month bridge financing, you could be looking at a \$50,000 or even \$100,000 interest bill on \$2 million right now, the way the interest rates are, and that is a significant thing. At a \$500,000 budget, \$50,000 is 10% of their entire working capital.

So, we want to ensure that there are good solutions. This isn't an ask for money; it's an ask for a change in policy that if you hit a milestone, you get some of the money. Do a holdback if necessary. Ensure that those milestones are met. But it would make such a difference to a small community that you could get part of the money as you went along and reduce those financing costs.

**The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman):** Thank you very much. That concludes the time.

We'll now go to the independent. MPP Hazell.

**MPP Andrea Hazell:** Thank you for coming in and thank you for presenting. I hear your concerns very deeply. Erik and Peggy, I want to concentrate on both of you for a

little bit of time within my short time I have. Speaking about road safety—that’s horrible. Lives are being lost, and a lot of lives are being lost. It makes me wonder: Are we putting an investment dollar on the lives that are being lost? Do more lives have to be lost so the government can put some investment into this grave concern?

What I need Erik to speak to, and that I didn’t hear you detail the second time of questions to that, is the government did reduce, I guess, the funding from \$75 million—you got \$54 million—and with inflation it’s gone up to \$100 million. If you do not get funding, what is going to happen?

**Mr. Erik Holmstrom:** Thank you. To be clear, that’s for the forest access roads, not the fatalities that we’re seeing on our highways. Generally, what that does is it makes us uncompetitive. We’re not just competing with forest companies within Ontario. We’re competing against forest companies in South America and the United States and Scandinavia and all over the place. When we set up the system so the forest companies have to pay for all the rural roads—“rural roads” is a bad term, sorry—all the forest roads for the province of Ontario, it just makes us uncompetitive. Years ago, the government recognized that, and they just haven’t kept up the pace. In fact, they’ve reduced the funding and put us into an uncompetitive situation, which is terrible because that’s exactly how you start losing mills like in Terrace Bay or Espanola or, years before, in Fort Francis or our pulp mill in Kenora as well.

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**MPP Andrea Hazell:** Are you able to give me the number of how many employees you have throughout Ontario? Because you are basically adding a vital revenue to this economy.

**Mr. Erik Holmstrom:** Yes, so within Ontario, we have 148,000 people that are employed through the forest industry. And everybody in the forest industry should be completely proud. We make a renewable product. We help to maintain healthy forests. We help to build access roads so that other people in Ontario can enjoy those forests as well.

**MPP Andrea Hazell:** Thank you for putting that on the record.

I want to go to Alice—timing for me?

**The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman):** One point three minutes.

**MPP Andrea Hazell:** Okay. Alice, 44 people sustain a brain injury a day in Ontario. When I found out about that stat, I was like, “That is a shocker.” And it’s a very crucial and sensitive area for the patients that you look at that have a brain injury that are unserved and under-represented. In my constit, I know some of the patients like that and it’s very financially disruptive to the family.

**The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman):** One minute.

**MPP Andrea Hazell:** If you didn’t have your service where you are in your community, what would be the impact on your community right now?

**Ms. Alice Bellavance:** If we weren’t here?

**MPP Andrea Hazell:** That’s right.

**Ms. Alice Bellavance:** All those people would be stuck in a hospital bed.

**MPP Andrea Hazell:** Can you expand a bit on the cost savings that you’re actually taking on for the hospitals?

**Ms. Alice Bellavance:** Well, our per diem cost for assisted living is quite high. It’s about \$400 a day, but a hospital bed can be up to \$1,200 a day, depending on what wing you’re in. We’ve had individuals who have been in the hospital, and they couldn’t manage them in the hospital, and they have to hire a security guard and I get the president and CEO calling me: “Alice, you’ve got to get this guy out of here. He’s costing me a million bucks,” because not only is the per diem of the mental health bed being added, but he’s got to pay for 24-hour security. And now he’s living in the community and he’s in our assisted living program.

**The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman):** Thank you very much. Not only is the time for that question gone, the time for this table is also gone. We want to thank the presenters for taking the time to prepare to come here and presenting it to us in such a very capable way. We look forward to using that going forward to prepare the 2024 budget.

LAKEHEAD UNIVERSITY  
CONFEDERATION COLLEGE  
THUNDER BAY AND DISTRICT INJURED  
WORKERS SUPPORT GROUP

**The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman):** With that, as we change the table, we will lead the instructions for the next table. It will be Lakehead University, Confederation College and Thunder Bay and District Injured Workers Support Group. As we have with others, as we’re coming to the table, we would note that you have seven minutes to make your presentation. At six minutes, I will say, “One minute.” Don’t stop because that’s the best minute in the presentation coming up, because when I say, “Thank you,” your time is up and we will stop right there. We also ask, as you start making your presentation, that you put your name on the record to make sure that your great remarks are attributed to the right person.

We will start with Lakehead University’s presentation.

**Dr. Gillian Siddall:** Thank you. My name is Gillian Siddall, president and vice-chancellor of Lakehead University. Good afternoon, esteemed members of the Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs and distinguished colleagues. It’s an honour to represent Lakehead University today, where our commitment transcends educating the next generation, playing a pivotal role in the socio-economic landscape of northern Ontario.

Before I begin, I would like to acknowledge the original custodians of this land and pay my respects to the elders, past, present and future, for they hold the memories, the traditions, the culture and the hopes of Indigenous peoples.

Lakehead University in Thunder Bay is located on the traditional territory of the Fort William First Nation, signatory to the Robinson-Superior Treaty of 1850. Lakehead University acknowledges the history that many nations hold in this area and is committed to a relationship with First Nations, Métis and Inuit peoples based on the principles

of mutual trust, respect and collaboration in the spirit of reconciliation.

As I present an overview of Lakehead University's pivotal role in northern Ontario, it's important to contextualize our discussion within the framework of the blue-ribbon panel's efforts to assess and enhance the financial sustainability of post-secondary institutions across the province. We certainly support the recommendations in the blue-ribbon panel report.

At Lakehead, we pride ourselves on being more than just an academic institution. With campuses in Thunder Bay and Orillia, we serve over 9,000 students across diverse disciplines. Our presence in these regions is a testament to our dedication to providing accessible, high-quality education and to our role as a cornerstone of community and economic development. Situated over 800 kilometres from Toronto, our Thunder Bay campus is uniquely positioned as the only comprehensive university in northern Ontario, serving a vast region with a diverse population. This geographic and demographic context underscores the critical importance of our educational and research missions, not just to our students but to the broader community and the regional economy at large.

Lakehead's economic contribution to Ontario is substantial, contributing over \$4.2 billion to Ontario's economy annually. We also fuel the economy of northwestern Ontario with an impact exceeding \$2.4 billion annually. These figures represent not only the direct financial contributions through employment and university operations, but also the broader economic activity stimulated by our students, faculty and alumni. Lakehead attracts over \$23 million in external research funding a year, acting as a catalyst for innovation, entrepreneurship and business development; fostering an environment where new ideas and partnerships flourish.

Despite our contributions and efforts, Lakehead, like many institutions, faces significant challenges that threaten our ability to continue serving our region effectively. The COVID-19 pandemic strained our resources while systemic issues like tuition cuts and freezes along with demographic shifts have added layers of complexity to our operations. In response to these challenges, over the past number of years, Lakehead has adopted a multi-faceted strategy focused on innovation, efficiency and strategic resource management. We have made difficult, but necessary, budgetary decisions, optimizing our resources to ensure the continuity and quality of our educational offerings. Our ability to maintain operational balance during these times is a testament to our resilience and commitment to our core missions.

This summer, we conducted a review of our operations with a third party who validated that we have taken significant measures to be as efficient as possible.

The role of northern universities in Ontario's educational ecosystem is indispensable. Lakehead, as the region's only comprehensive university, is integral to addressing the unique challenges and leveraging the opportunities inherent to northwestern Ontario. Our strategies to diversify our student body and expand access to education are crucial for regional development, contributing to talent retention

and economic growth. To ensure our continued ability to contribute to northern Ontario, we advocate for enhanced financial support and policy reforms. The challenges we face are not only institutional but also systemic, requiring collaborative solutions that recognize the unique context and needs of northern universities.

So, I have two recommendations today. As I present our recommendations, I do so with full recognition of the ongoing deliberations and findings of the blue-ribbon panel on financial sustainability in the post-secondary education sector. Our recommendations are in line with the spirit of the panel's work to ensure a resilient and sustainable future for higher education in Ontario, particularly in its northern regions.

The first recommendation is an enhancement of the northern grant. In light of the blue-ribbon panel's examination of the unique challenges faced by post-secondary institutions in Ontario, we advocate for a principal increase in the northern grant. This recommendation is grounded in the necessity for stability, sustainability and the autonomy of northern institutions like Lakehead University. Such support is not merely financial. It is a commitment to preserving the distinctive educational, cultural and socio-economic contributions that our university provides to the north. It is our hope that the panel's findings will further underscore the critical need for tailored support to institutions that are foundational to their communities.

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The second recommendation: development of a robust university model for northern Ontario. Consistent with the objectives of the blue-ribbon panel to enhance the post-secondary education landscape across Ontario, we propose the development of a robust university model specifically designed for northern Ontario. This model would recognize and build upon the unique roles and contributions of northern universities, ensuring they are equipped to address regional challenges and seize opportunities for growth. By fostering an environment where institutions like Lakehead can not only survive but thrive, we are investing in the socio-economic vitality and resilience of northern Ontario.

We believe that the panel's insights and recommendations will be instrumental in shaping a framework that supports this vision. We're committed to working alongside with the government and other stakeholders to implement solutions that will ensure the long-term sustainability and success of higher education in northern Ontario.

**The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman):** Our next presentation will be from Confederation College.

**Ms. Michelle Salo:** Good afternoon. My name is Michelle Salo, and I'm the chief operating officer for Confederation College. I'm here representing president Kathleen Lynch.

Today, I wanted to identify a couple of recommendations that we have, but first, I wanted to say thank you for hearing our submission today. Confederation College plays a vital role in shaping northwestern Ontario's economic future by producing highly qualified graduates in key sectors such as mining, health care, advanced manufacturing, aviation and skilled trades. As we address the critical issues im-



pecting our institutions and the region, we seek your support and partnership.

Given the recent announcement of caps for international students by IRCC, the following recommendations must be addressed. The announcement will profoundly impact northwestern Ontario's economy as well as the financial viability of Confederation College and the programs we offer. Confederation College has already experienced close to a 40% decline in domestic students in the past 10 years, based on demographic changes. The additional reduction in international students threatens the economic welfare of a region that is in dire need for more young workers.

My recommendations are very similar—they follow the recommendations of the blue-ribbon panel. I've also included a hyperlink and a URL on the document that you can actually see that blue-ribbon panel report, if you wish to.

The first recommendation is to end the tuition freeze. We propose ending the tuition freeze and allowing a modest 5% increase in public college tuition in the first year. For most of our programs, this is an amount of approximately \$134. We urge you to consider the rising costs in sectors like aviation, where fuel and insurance expenses have surged.

Create a distinct tuition policy: Develop a distinct tuition policy for public colleges to address long-standing inequities between college and university education.

Flexibility for students: Implement practical changes to incentivize part-time study in high-demand programs, thereby improving accessibility. In Ontario colleges, grants for part-time students are significantly lower than for full-time programs, while universities receive the same level of funding for both full- and part-time programs, adjusted only for part-time hours. The existing policy primarily encourages colleges to prioritize full-time students since part-time students receive the minimum unit funding value, irrespective of their actual program of study.

The fourth recommendation is to increase the operating grants. Increase the provincial investment in public college students with a 10% boost in operational grants. Frozen grants that do not keep pace with inflation, combined with a frozen tuition rate, have led to program deficits based on domestic student enrolment.

The fifth recommendation is special consideration for northern institutes. In accordance with the blue-ribbon panel report, provide special consideration for northern institutes like Confederation College, including adjustments to grant funding models that do not penalize the college for low domestic enrolment, when our domestic population will continue to decline for the next 20 years; increase the allocation of the Small, Northern and Rural Grant; and limit the international cap.

The sixth recommendation is to enhance OSAP support. Offer enhanced OSAP support for students studying in northern and rural areas, ensuring equitable access to higher education.

Trade capital infrastructure fund: Grant eligibility for colleges to apply and receive funding under provincial programs to modernize facilities and promote emerging skill requirements, including renewable energy.

We recognize that these recommendations may face challenges and concerns, but we firmly believe that they

are crucial for ensuring the continued success of Confederation College and its contribution to the economic prosperity of northwestern Ontario. Our attached documentation provides further details and supporting evidence to address any potential concerns or doubts.

Our call to action: We urge the committee to review and consider these recommendations seriously. The future of Confederation College and the broader higher education sector in Ontario depends on it. We stand ready to collaborate and provide additional information as needed.

For further details, as I mentioned, there's documentation but also some links to Confederation College's website, a video of what Confederation has to offer and some statistics about our college.

**The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman):** Thank you very much.

Our next presentation will be the Thunder Bay and District Injured Workers Support Group, and I believe that's virtual.

**Mr. Eugene Lefrancois:** Yes, it is.

**The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman):** Very good.

**Mr. Eugene Lefrancois:** Thank you all for attending.

**The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman):** The floor is yours.

**Mr. Eugene Lefrancois:** Okay. So, I've got a couple of questions for you guys and a couple of things. I've went to Lakehead, and I went to Confederation College, and they're churning out a lot of workers—that's their business, right? And I find that when these workers all get mangled in the workplace, WSIB is not there for them. If you got a scratch or a cut, no problem. That's about—

**The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman):** Excuse me. If I could just for a moment, I think we want to make sure that this section is for making a statement, not for asking questions. The questions will come after your presentation.

**Mr. Eugene Lefrancois:** I know, but I want them to think about it, right? I'm just doing this thing. Okay, so—can I speak now?

**The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman):** Yes.

**Mr. Eugene Lefrancois:** Okay. Thank you.

These workers, when they go to Confederation College and university and enter the workforce, there's going to be a lot of things on them: They're paying taxes; they've got to go back and forth to work. There's a lot of expense. Now, if they get injured, they are going to be hurt—more than just pain; I mean financial.

Okay, so, I have a little list here of what I wanted to ask you. A loss of income of an injured worker: What is the actual cost? We can't get it from WSIB, so maybe this group can.

The taxpayer rate: We would like to know what is the rate of the taxpayer, what they're paying for the employers.

Universal health care: Universal health care is great, and universal coverage—I know it's going to cost a few shekels, but WSIB right now is sitting on about—I think it's over \$40 billion, so you do have money for the universal WSIB.

And a flat rate for all sectors of employment: I heard a guy just before, about the trees, talking of forestry. I got injured in 1985. The cable skidders were just leaving, and the grapple skidders came in—and I am so glad, because

the injury rate went down so much. Now, the only time you really get hurt is when you're fixing your machine or getting on and off the machine.

Getting back to the loss of income of people: What is the cost? That is a question that I can't answer, the board can't answer and the government can't answer—because I asked the Minister of Labour, “What is the actual cost of an injured worker who gets deemed by the WSIB but can't return back to work?” So where do they go? Do they just disappear? No, they go on welfare—ODSP, OW and if they have enough time, CPPD, also known as Canada Pension Plan Disability. What is the cost to the taxpayer? I know CPPD is self-funded, but in Ontario, when injured workers get hurt and they cannot return to work, what is the actual cost that the employers are getting? What is the subsidy that taxpayers are giving the employers? That is one hell of a big question that cannot be answered. I can't answer it. Freedom of information is really hard now. Maybe you guys can have a better whack at it.

Other than that, how many—oh, we're not ready for questions yet. But other than that, I want to say a lot more, but I'm supposed to be talking about finances, and WSIB is all about finances because they don't pay us. They're not paying benefits. So who pays for all that stuff that we can't get, that we should get when we're entitled but we can't access? Who really pays for that?

1420

Right now, if I go to physiotherapy, the board already told me I can't go; they're not paying for it. So I have to go 22 times with OHIP, and who paid for that? Did the board pay for that? I don't think so: taxpayers. I've been too long on this thing, but taxpayers are paying for the employer's problem. That is what you guys have to face because we're looking at rough figures of about \$4 billion—maybe \$3 billion or \$3.5 billion. That's a lot of money. That would buy a lot of things, like fixing our roads. Also, maybe we could get our roads plowed. We've got gravel on our road now, so, oh, man, we can really travel.

Okay, I'm done. Thank you very much.

**The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman):** Thank you very much for that presentation. That concludes the presentations for this table.

We will now go with the questions. We'll start with the official opposition. MPP Kernaghan.

**Mr. Terence Kernaghan:** Thank you to all our presenters here today, as well as those participating virtually.

I'd like to begin with Gillian from Lakehead. I want to thank you for an excellent presentation about what Lakehead provides. It's rather bizarre that this government would have a blue-ribbon panel, they would create a report and then they wouldn't actually implement any of the recommendations that they have provided themselves. It kind of reminds one of the Housing Affordability Task Force and the expensive report that just basically went on a shelf.

Many presenters have outlined how Ontario is dead last when it comes to post-secondary education funding when we know it's a key economic driver. It is investing in our future. It's necessary for every single type of growth. What

does it say about the lack of attention to post-secondary education, Gillian, when many institutions have to plead not to be brought up to an exceptional amount of funding, but just to be brought up to the average? Do we ever tell students to simply try to be average?

**Dr. Gillian Siddall:** Thank you for that question. We were all very happy to hear about the announcement of the blue-ribbon panel and the work that they were committed to doing to address financial sustainability in the post-secondary sector. I think many of us in the sector are very pleased with the recommendations in that report, so we are definitely advocating for implementation of those recommendations and that would go a long way to enhancing financial sustainability in Ontario.

**Mr. Terence Kernaghan:** Most definitely. What contributions does Lakehead make to the northern communities and local economies?

**Dr. Gillian Siddall:** All kinds of contributions. I think I mentioned that the economic impact is tremendous. We're the only comprehensive university in the north and consequently we're graduating students from all kinds of different disciplines: engineering, nursing, social work, arts and science, music, visual art. All of these are absolutely critical to the well-being of our society and our economy.

We also have great value added at Lakehead University. Students come to us; they do very well. Our retention rate is unusually high for students and the graduation rate is high—we're in the top 10. And employment rates are very high for Lakehead University graduates.

**Mr. Terence Kernaghan:** Excellent.

I'd like to move over to Confederation College and Michelle. Thank you, Michelle, for your recommendations. They are really quite nuanced and quite interesting, making sure that you have students at the front of every single one of these recommendations: providing that flexibility for those part-time students, making sure they get attention, and that's helping the economic prosperity of everyone across all different ages to further themselves.

I wanted to ask you the same question that I just asked Gillian: What contributions does Confederation College make to northern communities and local economies?

**Ms. Michelle Salo:** Confederation College makes a significant contribution. You can see in our document what the financial contribution is, but I'd also like to say that with eight regional campuses in very small communities, we provide training within these small rural communities. We've recently been able to bring international students into those small communities to study PSW, practical nursing and social work, and it's really needed in those communities. They were begging for students to come there because there is such a lack of domestic students in those regions.

Through our contract training group, we do training out in remote communities. We helped, recently, Grassy Narrows with a PSW program in the community. So, we actually bring training to the people who need it versus always having to have them come on campus. We have multiple partners within First Nation communities that we support with specific training to help with the economic value added in their own communities.

**Mr. Terence Kernaghan:** Excellent. When people study and work in communities, they often want to stay. It's obviously a deep concern, and I think your presence here is incredibly timely given the cap that the federal government has placed on the number of international students. I believe Fanshawe College in my area, the president, Peter Devlin, said it was like a sledgehammer. I do wish you all the very best. As a former educator, you deserve more attention from this government and, quite frankly, more funding.

At this point, I would like to pass over my time, Chair, to MPP Vaugeois.

**The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman):** MPP Vaugeois.

**MPP Lise Vaugeois:** Thank you. Both of these institutions, I know pretty well and know how much of a contribution they make to our lives and the economies here in northwestern Ontario. But we have seen, going back to the 1990s, consistent cuts to the operating funds for universities, to the point that Ontario is at the 57% level compared to other provinces, which has also then created an enormous dependence on international students paying extremely high wages. What I know about that history is that the cuts were initially made by the Rae government when there was a recession, but after that, when the Harris government came in, that's when they really started making very significant cuts, and universities and colleges have not recovered from those cuts.

I wonder if you can speak to that. We know also that the GDP has gone in the opposite direction of university cuts—I've just looked at a chart showing me that—so that there is no longer a rationale. Really, there hasn't been a rationale since the early 1990s for cutting post-secondary education, so I wonder if you can speak to that.

Gillian, start, and perhaps Michelle, you could follow.

**Dr. Gillian Siddall:** Thanks, Lise, for that question. I think the first thing I'd like to say is that there's no question that this was a bombshell for the sector, this announcement last week.

**The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman):** One minute.

**Dr. Gillian Siddall:** Universities have been bringing in international students for years. There hasn't been the kind of sudden acceleration in numbers as we've seen in some colleges—not all, for sure—in the province. We bring them into high-quality programs, and we take good care of them. We provide housing and quality education for them. I think that's one very important point to make, first of all. International students are not the problem here, and they are being cast as the problem in the country by the federal government.

I would also like to say that for universities the number of international students is a fraction of what it is in the college system, and so we are quite worried about how that's all going to play out. We don't know yet the details of how this is going to go, but the impact on Lakehead University and on—

**The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman):** Thank you very much. That concludes the time.

We'll now go to the independent. MPP Bowman.

**Ms. Stephanie Bowman:** Thank you to Gillian, Michelle and Eugene for your comments today.

Gillian, I will start with you. You talked about a report that you've had done, a third-party assessment that highlighted that your operations are efficient or that you've undertaken work to do that. And yet, we have the Minister of Colleges and Universities saying that it's her "expectation that we will work with post-secondary institutions to create greater efficiencies in operations, program offerings and sustainability of the sector ... we need to ensure that colleges and universities are taking the necessary steps to ensure that they are operating as efficiently as possible."

**1430**

Do you feel that there is any more you could do at Lakehead to operate as efficiently as possible?

**Dr. Gillian Siddall:** No, I don't. We are beyond lean. We are understaffed, and we need to renew our full-time faculty complement. So we welcomed having a third-party review. We were asked to do that by the ministry, and we were happy to do that. It absolutely revealed that the financial management has been sound and responsible and that there is nowhere else that we could cut.

I think it's possible that universities within the sector, within the province, are at different stages of that work. I think most are pretty lean, but certainly a small university like Lakehead, in the north as we are, we've done everything we can do. And we're communicating that with the ministry.

**Ms. Stephanie Bowman:** Great. Thank you. I did also want to say that I had the chance to meet with one of your students this morning. It was an international student in her second year who is having a great experience at Lakehead. Again, that was really great and encouraging to hear.

I just want to talk about the program offerings aspect of the minister's comments. What might you anticipate in relation to making program offerings more efficient? What do you think that might mean?

**Dr. Gillian Siddall:** I don't know what is meant by that. I think for us, it's absolutely critical that Lakehead remain a comprehensive university. I think that's what makes it so incredibly special and an absolute gem in the sector, that it serves our region in very important ways for that reason. Again, I think the institution is lean in terms of the academic delivery of programs as well as on the staffing side.

**Ms. Stephanie Bowman:** Great; thank you.

I will turn now to Michelle. Thank you again for being here today and for the important contribution you're making here in the northwest part of the province.

You talked about the challenges around the full-time students and the part-time students, and I think you've made some very great recommendations in terms of some of the potential solutions. Have you had the opportunity to dialogue with the ministry about those solutions? And what has their response been?

**Ms. Michelle Salo:** Well, it's mostly through the blue-ribbon panel, but we're obviously recommending the same things. It's usually through Colleges Ontario where they've had discussions with the ministry. We expect more to hear

more, I believe, in February. There has been no movement on any of the recommendations so far.

**Ms. Stephanie Bowman:** To both of you, in terms of the caps, I know that there's some uncertainty around that related to international students.

**The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman):** One minute.

**Ms. Stephanie Bowman:** Certainly, what I understand is that in Ontario they are really concerned about the private colleges that have "popped up", in strip malls and plazas, a lot of them in the GTA, and that that is really the focus. I think that those are things that, again, I would encourage you to make sure that your voice is being heard around the value that international students bring, the diversity they bring to your institutions, and that you want to maintain both strong availability for domestic students but also international, because that enriches your institutions as a whole.

Anything else you'd like to add on that front?

**Ms. Michelle Salo:** I think you've hit the nail on the head there, yes.

**Dr. Gillian Siddall:** Yes, I absolutely agree. We hope that the province will look at those colleges that are really causing the problem and recognize how incredibly valuable international students are in enriching our institutions and our communities.

**The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman):** Thank you very much.

We'll now go to MPP Holland.

**Mr. Kevin Holland:** Thank you for being here today, all of you. I appreciate you, again, taking time out of your busy schedules. I know how busy you truly are.

Gillian, I just want to start off by welcoming you to your first finance submission as the new president of Lakehead University. It's been my pleasure to get to know you since you've taken over, and I very much value the working relationship that we've established.

Of course, Michelle, I've been at the college many times as well, meeting with yourself and Kathleen.

Recently, in the last three weeks, I've had the opportunity to meet with both of your organizations as we discussed our path forward in light of all the circumstances that we're facing in the education, college and university sector. I think we've had some really fruitful discussions and really thoughtful ideas that came out of those discussions. We went away with, "Yes, let's see what we can do. Let's work on that."

Recently, we had the opportunity to bring York, Lakehead University, Thunder Bay Regional and NOSM University together to see what we can be doing to collaborate and really work together better. You're working together great—I don't want to leave the impression that you're not—but what we can we do to increase those efficiencies and collaborations amongst those organizations to really position ourselves well for meeting the workforce needs that we are experiencing in northwestern Ontario?

We had a similar conversation at the college, Michelle, around the skilled trades and what the role is for the college to be playing in that. We had some pretty great ideas come out of those conversations. You suggested to me what you could be doing in collaboration with some of the union

halls, with industry themselves, to really develop that training program, that training centre in Thunder Bay. I'm really encouraged by those conversations, and I think it's key that all of our organizations come together and work on this as a collective group. I really think that's how we're going to move the needs of Thunder Bay forward, particularly on the jobs that need to be filled.

Our government is reviewing, obviously, the blue-ribbon panel. Michelle, you just said yourself that you're constantly in conversation with the ministry on that, and we're expecting a report to come back in February on that, moving forward. But aside from that, the discussions we've had I've been able to take forward to my colleagues in the ministry office and really advocate on behalf of what an important role you are playing in northwestern Ontario and how vital you are to sustain the north and fill those job needs.

I guess I really appreciate—I don't have a lot of questions because we've talked so often that we get those questions and then we converse back and forth regularly on the answers that I've been able to find out for you. But moving forward, I guess one question I would have is, what do you think are the benefits and the merits of us continuing trying to find those collaborations and that co-operation and working together across all the education systems that are in Thunder Bay? Do you see that there's more that we can be doing in that aspect?

Michelle, if you want to go first.

**Ms. Michelle Salo:** Sure. Well, I think it's hugely beneficial. We actually work together quite a bit in different pathways and articulation agreements so that many of our students have a pathway, potentially, from college to university, and even back from university to the college environment. So for our students, being in the same city provides a lot of opportunity for them. Also, with a lot of our partnerships that we have in industry, they rely on us all working together. We work as a very strong community. All aspects of this community work really hard together.

**Dr. Gillian Siddall:** I would agree with that. I've worked at universities in Toronto and Vancouver, and there's no question that it's a very different scenario being in a university in Thunder Bay and in Orillia. The sense of community is profound and the opportunities for collaboration are great. I appreciate the role that you've played in facilitating some of that collaboration.

**Mr. Kevin Holland:** Absolutely. That's my responsibility.

So with regard to the caps—we've had this conversation as well. I've taken the opportunity to talk with my federal counterpart and suggest that—and we talked that there are a lot of student visas where students aren't actually in school, right? I've read a report that up to almost 20% of student visas could be issued to people that aren't actually attending school, university or college.

We know the importance of those international students for both of your operations. I've conveyed that I would like to have seen the federal government do a little bit more to address those student visas that aren't actually going to school before they automatically cut. And we know that

the cuts are quite a bit higher in Ontario than across the rest of the country, and then that falls upon the province to determine how we're going to address that.

The continued advocacy of your organizations to convey the importance of those international students to meet the workforce and to sustain your operations is vital information for our government, so I encourage you to continue to speak with me. I'll take your message forward. I'm happy to advocate with you on that behalf.

Do you see that if—had we addressed some of the 20% that aren't actually going to school, would we even be needing to go down this road?

**Ms. Michelle Salo:** I'm not certain. I know for sure that doesn't happen here in Thunder Bay. We have very strong oversight from our international department. We have a very strong reputation in the international markets here in Thunder Bay, which, by virtue of just increasing the amount of students that we have and them not going to the Toronto area represents what our image is in the international market. For sure, in Thunder Bay, that doesn't happen. I can't speak to the other colleges, but I would say that there are, as has been mentioned in the media, some players that are not acting in the way that they should be in some of the colleges in southern Ontario, the private partners. But I can't speak to that specifically.

1440

**Mr. Kevin Holland:** That's a good argument for us and a good advocacy piece for us in saying that you are doing the job to ensure that those who are here on visas are actually enrolled in classes, so I commend you on that.

What supports do you find to be most helpful for your students, and in what areas could we better support your students?

**Ms. Michelle Salo:** One thing for us was the RNIP program. That was a significant value for students coming to northwestern Ontario as well as to those high-demand markets that they're working in now.

**Mr. Kevin Holland:** Great. You want to see that continued, obviously.

**Ms. Michelle Salo:** Yes.

**Mr. Kevin Holland:** Okay, thank you.

**Dr. Gillian Siddall:** Financial supports, housing—housing is not really an issue for Lakehead in Thunder Bay; it's becoming an issue for our campus in Orillia.

**Mr. Kevin Holland:** Thank you. I appreciate your time.

**The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman):** Thank you very much.

We'll now go to the official opposition. MPP Mamakwa.

**Mr. Sol Mamakwa:** Thank you to the presenters, Gillian, Michelle and Eugene.

Perhaps to Michelle: I know in Kiiwetinoong, we have a lot of fly-in First Nations. A lot of them do not have hospitals, and a lot of them do not have an ambulance service, so we rely on Ornge. If there are any medical emergencies that happen, that's our ambulance. We need airports to be able to provide that service and access that service. The paramedic program is very critical.

I'm not sure if it's back, but I heard—somebody told me that Confederation College had discontinued the paramedic program. The need for paramedics is in high demand. We cannot continue to have needless deaths and unnecessary suffering of the people that rely on the service of Ornge. What's the plan for the paramedic program?

**Ms. Michelle Salo:** We do offer the paramedic program still. We have discontinued it in the region because Seven Gens is also offering it in the region. It didn't make sense to break apart two smaller groups, so we've left that for Seven Gens to offer in the region. But we're definitely still offering it in Thunder Bay. We also assign a certain number of seats for students in the region so that when they're completed their program, they can go back into community to do their placement work as well.

You mentioned Ornge. We have a flight program that's a huge impact to northwestern Ontario as well. We provide pilots that are in multiple different avenues of aviation. We have wait-lists for those students. We're at capacity with the flight restrictions that we have in Thunder Bay, but I would say that that's a critical program that needs to continue so that we can make sure that valuable services are still provided to northern communities.

**Mr. Sol Mamakwa:** Yes. Actually, that was my next question, the pilot program. My question was toward how you provide that service in the north, where they don't have to come to Thunder Bay. Are there opportunities for that?

**Ms. Michelle Salo:** Yes. We have done quite a bit in community with our workforce development group. We also have some remote access as well for students that are in community, but the workforce development, as I mentioned, will bring the training to the northern communities, often in fly-in residential areas as well. So we provide a fulsome service across all of our communities in northwestern Ontario.

**Mr. Sol Mamakwa:** Thank you for those answers. I think when we talk about the effects of a cap on international students, on their programs—I'm thinking about what happens to the labour force in the north when people leave and they go down south to do their studies in southern Ontario. Can both of you explain that?

**Ms. Michelle Salo:** Just to clarify, you're asking about students who come into Thunder Bay or into a region—

**Mr. Sol Mamakwa:** I think both of you spoke about the impacts of the cap on the international students. And then the second piece is what happens to the labour market when northerners leave for southern colleges and universities.

**Ms. Michelle Salo:** The cap, for us, is significant. A lot of our programs that we offer depend on having international students alongside of the domestic and Indigenous students in order to be able to provide the programming. Without that, we would have a number of programs that would not be financially viable, so I think that's critical. That includes our health care programs, our technology programs.

We do like when students come in from community to some of the health care sector—for example, that they do their practical or placements back in community wherever possible. That's not always the case in some northern

communities where there may not be an opportunity for that.

We do whatever we can to support students for employment after graduation, as well.

**Dr. Gillian Siddall:** I don't have stats on how many students leave our region to go to southern universities, although Heather might be able to speak to that, if there's time.

One of the challenges for us is that during the pandemic, when numbers were dropping, universities in southern Ontario took in way more students than they normally did, and that definitely had an impact on us and, I suspect, also on Confederation College. So the issue around the corridor and where we all fit in the corridor is one that is of great concern to us.

**The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman):** MPP Vaugeois.

**MPP Lise Vaugeois:** I have a question for Eugene. I know that injured workers were promised an increase of their loss-of-income—to 90% from 85%—by this government. Have you heard a deadline as to when that change is going to take place?

**Mr. Eugene Lefrancois:** Well, I'll put it this way: Your information, since you're inside, would be more than I get. I haven't heard anything since the promise. He promised, but that was it. I hope it's not just another broken promise—please, please, not be broken.

**MPP Lise Vaugeois:** Is there time for me to say anything more?

**The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman):** Less than a minute left.

**MPP Lise Vaugeois:** All right.

We also know that because these loss-of-income rates are not at a satisfactory level, this also impacts retirement incomes, so that people who have had a permanent disability then wind up with very low retirement incomes.

Also, I want to emphasize that when the responsibility for supporting injured workers is taken away from WSIB and put on the public and workers are forced onto ODSP, then they are no longer able to contribute to the economy of the community.

Can you speak to the retirement income situation, please, Eugene?

**The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman):** That concludes the time.

We will go to the independent. MPP Hazell.

**MPP Andrea Hazell:** Everyone, thank you for coming in.

I understand the budget pressures—I'm speaking to Lakehead University and Confederation College. I get your operations budget pressures, because I've heard from many colleges and universities that are experiencing the same said deficits that you're experiencing.

Of course, the restrictions on the visa—I think colleges have up to 50% international students making up for their revenue. And I think universities—you suffer from a 20% of that revenue.

What I'm mostly interested in is—you're here for funding and you are presenting the pressures to your budget. And you have to work on making sure that you can still give

the quality programs to your students. These are our futures. We want the international students to stay and work and contribute to the economy. It's so sad that we have other colleges where it's not the quality of what you're producing that is causing this harm to more international visa students coming into this great country.

What I want you to talk about is, if you did not get funding, how are you able to sustain your operational budget for 2024 and beyond? Do you have a sustainable model right now?  
**1450**

**Ms. Michelle Salo:** Depending on what the caps actually are allocated to each of the colleges, it's hard to determine, but at the 50% rate, we would not be financially sustainable as a college into perpetuity, unless there are some drastic changes in terms of the funding model for colleges.

**MPP Andrea Hazell:** But that's what I want you to put on record. If you didn't get that funding, if that 50% is gone, are we not going to have colleges here open in the rural areas that you're now serving?

**Ms. Michelle Salo:** We would be running a deficit every year. We wouldn't be able to sustain that. It's a bit of a going concern model from a college perspective, and I assume a university perspective as well.

**Dr. Gillian Siddall:** Yes, it's the same for us. We're projecting a deficit of about \$6 million next year. This year, for the first time ever, our board of governors made an exception to a policy whereby they will not approve a deficit budget, but they had to this year because that was our situation. We're not a going concern yet, but we are quickly moving towards that state of being. So we desperately need the blue-ribbon panel recommendations to be implemented.

**MPP Andrea Hazell:** Can you take the rest of my time?

**The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman):** Yes—who? You do with your time what you want. You have 1.1 left.

**MPP Andrea Hazell:** Thank you. Can you talk to us about your vision had you had funding today for the cities that you serve?

**Dr. Gillian Siddall:** Sure, I'll go first. I think the first thing—it's hard to be visionary when you have a massive deficit. So I think the first thing is, let's get financial stability and then we can think about more visionary things. That said, Lakehead has very exciting projects on the go, and I know Confederation College does too, but it is challenging to keep that going when we're worried about a large deficit and the ongoing sustainability of the university.

**Ms. Michelle Salo:** I would say for the college, if we had the appropriate funding, we'd be able to expand into new opportunities such as renewable energy. We've dabbled in that in some of our programming, but we know that's the future of Canada and Ontario, is that people have to be net zero.

**The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman):** Thank you very much. That concludes the time.

We'll now go to MPP Crawford.

**Mr. Stephen Crawford:** Thank you to the presenters for being here today, virtually and in person, I appreciate it.

With respect to the blue-ribbon panel, I know the Minister of Colleges and Universities has made it clear that that is

under review at this particular time. So we're taking all that information back to her and we certainly want to hear your thoughts on some of the issues there.

Is it fair—can I just ask you: I'm assuming, then, you are supportive of the ability to increase tuition. Is that a fair comment?

**Ms. Michelle Salo:** Yes.

**Dr. Gillian Siddall:** Yes.

**Mr. Stephen Crawford:** Yes? Okay. In terms of—I just want to get an understanding of the university model—or college. Both of you, so I'll ask you both quickly. Just in terms of revenue—because obviously you've talked about the expense side and you're suggesting that you've become pretty efficient, and that's great. In terms of revenue generation, obviously tuition is probably a large component—government funding. Are there other avenues? Is there fundraising? Are there other avenues maybe I'm not aware of? I just want to know where your revenue comes from.

**Ms. Michelle Salo:** We do do fundraising. We have an advancement team that works primarily to raise funds for students—bursaries and those types of programs—but they also work on campaigns when we have any type of infrastructure project, building a new building or doing some renovations. So we absolutely look to community to fund a lot of those opportunities, but some of the other revenue generation that we have is what I mentioned before with workforce development that does training for individuals with some organizations. We go in and help companies with different types of training that they might need to offer. It's not huge, but it does help.

**Mr. Stephen Crawford:** Sort of a co-op model or—

**Ms. Michelle Salo:** Well, typically, often what we get involved with is a community might get funding to provide training for some of their community members, and we would work with them to actually do the training in community. The funding flows through the community and to us to offset the cost of training.

**Mr. Stephen Crawford:** Okay. And the same question to Lakehead.

**Dr. Gillian Siddall:** Yes, we have an advancement office, and we have a major campaign under way right now—a 10-year campaign; we're in year 4—so we haven't gone public yet. That raises funds for our major capital projects for the most part and student awards. It doesn't tend to go into operating. So, it helps us do other things, but it doesn't address the deficit.

**Mr. Stephen Crawford:** Okay, that's good. Thank you.

With respect to the challenges you face, just in terms of being in the north, could you maybe touch a little bit more on that? In terms of Lakehead, you said—I think you were in Toronto and Vancouver. What are the challenges of being in the north relative to, say, southern Ontario?

**Dr. Gillian Siddall:** Well, one of them is demographics. In terms of domestic students, we have a declining population here. That is quite different from southern Ontario. Again, that's another reason why international students are so critical to our institutions—only one of the reasons. They bring so many wonderful things.

It's expensive to function here. We don't have the economies of scale that larger universities in the south have. So that—

**Mr. Stephen Crawford:** Are you attracting much in the way of international students or students from southern Ontario here? Like, what percentage of your students are actually from this region, ballpark?

**Dr. Gillian Siddall:** That, I'm going to ask Heather to answer.

**Dr. Heather Murchison:** Thanks. Domestic students attending the Thunder Bay campus—about 40% of our student population comes from northwestern Ontario, another 35% comes from the GTA and surrounding area and then we recruit from other provinces as well and from central Ontario. Right now, about 21% of the population at Lakehead University is comprised of international students.

**Mr. Stephen Crawford:** Okay, thank you very much.

I'm going to pass my remaining time to MPP Anand.

**The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman):** MPP Anand.

**Mr. Deepak Anand:** Thank you so much. First of all, thank you to the presenters for coming.

I came to Canada on January 15, 2000. I started as a lab technician. I went to Sheridan College. That's where I got my first promotion as a quality engineer, quality tech and quality manager. Then, five years later, I went to York University to do my master's in business administration. I'm just saying, the colleges and universities have a lot of contribution to the people's life and their career, so thank you for doing what you're doing.

Quick question: With respect to the new cap which has been introduced by the federal government, which, in other words, means there is a big pressure on saying if there were 20 students coming, we're paying \$50, for an example. Now, there will be 15 or 10 students coming, and some of the colleges and some of the universities are still expecting \$40 to \$50 revenue—it means the pressure on them is going to go up. What is your take on that? How are you going to handle the number of students which are going to come versus the tuition fees?

**Dr. Gillian Siddall:** Sorry, are you asking whether we would be looking at increasing tuition to make up for the smaller number of students?

**Mr. Deepak Anand:** For the international students.

**Dr. Gillian Siddall:** For international. Well, at Lakehead, I think we would be considering that for undergraduate international students, because we have relatively low tuition in the province. At the graduate level, we're more competitive, so we'd be less likely to raise it there.

**Ms. Michelle Salo:** I would say that this probably wouldn't be a good time to raise tuition rates. I think the reputation of Canada is at risk right now in the international student market, and so an increase in tuition would probably not be a good idea.

**Mr. Deepak Anand:** It's not. Okay. In terms of the housing, do you have the housing from the college?

**Ms. Michelle Salo:** Yes. In the past two years, we've actually done a lot of work. We have quite an old residence, but we've done renovations within the residence. We've

reduced the price, so students pay anywhere from \$350 for a room to \$650, depending if they're in a single room with its own amenities. So a very, very cheap cost, and that's an impact to the college. It's one of our ancillary operations. But we've also increased capacity.

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**The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman):** One minute.

**Ms. Michelle Salo:** So, no issues on housing.

**Dr. Gillian Siddall:** The same is true for us. We have lots of housing on the Thunder Bay campus. We are looking at converting some of the single rooms to doubles to make them less expensive for students, especially international students.

**Mr. Deepak Anand:** I just want to say thank you for doing it. Some of the challenges that we have—we have Sheridan College, and many other colleges, they do have the accommodation, but students don't want to go into the accommodation; it's so expensive. They're already struggling with their cost, and if they have to add this and then the meal plan—you have to have a mandatory meal plan, which sometimes, of course, when you're struggling with money, you may go find a better, cheaper way of feeding yourself. But if there is a mandatory meal plan, that adds to the cost. So, again, I just want to say thank you for taking care of that.

**Ms. Michelle Salo:** You're welcome. And we've eliminated the mandatory meal plan at Confederation College for residents and put in kitchens and kitchenettes.

**Mr. Deepak Anand:** So I guess you're a great example. That's all I will add. Thank you so much.

**The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman):** Thank you very much. That concludes the time for the question and also concludes the time for the panel. We want to thank all the presenters for the time you took to prepare for this and the able way that you presented it. Thank you very much. I'm sure it will be of great assistance to us moving forward.

LEVELJUMP HEALTHCARE  
THUNDER BAY HEALTH COALITION  
MR. JON POWERS

**The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman):** With that, as we change the guard at the head table, our next will be LevelJump Healthcare, Thunder Bay Health Coalition and Jon Powers. As with others, the presenters will get seven minutes to make a presentation. At six minutes, I will give notice that there's one minute left. Don't stop, because that's the best minute of your presentation; that's what they call the ask. With that, we also ask the presenters to start with introducing themselves to make sure that Hansard records the right name.

The first presenter will be LevelJump Healthcare. The floor is yours.

**Mr. Rob Landau:** Good afternoon, everyone. My name is Rob Landau. I'm the CFO of LevelJump Healthcare Corp. It's an honour and a privilege to be before you today to present the important work that we are doing to provide access to health care in underserved communities across Ontario.

We were established in 2004. LevelJump has 20 years of experience integrating high-quality care into Ontario's health care system. Our mission at LevelJump is clear: We alleviate the stress and backlog burdening the Canadian health care system, and we strive to find solutions that expand critical care for everyone.

We currently operate seven diagnostic imaging clinics, including X-ray and ultrasound and mammography. But more importantly, we're also a leader in hospital tele-radiology in Ontario and we serve over 35 hospitals and ER clinics. That's about 15% of the province's hospitals, including most of the Thunder Bay regional hospitals.

We also know that quality accessible health care in our province consistently remains top of mind for every resident. We also know that there continue to be growing concerns as hospitals are either overwhelmed or closing. While the province is taking meaningful steps towards addressing these issues, we think it is important that the list of solutions include innovative ideas like what we are proposing around mobile MR and CT machines.

Geography remains a largely unnecessary barrier to access that disproportionately affects northern and rural communities, including First Nations, Indigenous and Métis peoples. We also know that health human resources are crucial, and that is why our HHR plan will balance the requirements to deliver mobile MR and CT services while respecting the needs of the broader health care system.

LevelJump is eager to be part of the solution by offering innovative mobile services that provide support in northern and rural Ontario. We are highly motivated to establish convenient and connected care pathways that are integrated with the broader health care system.

I'll give you a sense of the numbers: We're talking about 800,000 northern Ontario residents, many of whom live in communities that just cannot support their own MR or CT services. Patients have to drive hours, sometimes days, to get service, and that's just bad for the economy and bad for the environment. These numbers represent real people who deserve access to reliable, convenient health care that can save and prolong lives. We are here to not only show you that better is possible but that it is attainable. That is why today we are asking you, the provincial government, to match our \$6-million investment to help solve some of the unique health care challenges in rural and northern Ontario.

Thank you for your time today, and I would be pleased to answer any questions.

**The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman):** The next presenter is Thunder Bay Health Coalition.

**Mr. Jules Tupker:** My name is Jules Tupker. I'm the co-chair of the Thunder Bay Health Coalition. I'm very pleased to be here. Thank you for allowing me to make a presentation today, and welcome to beautiful Thunder Bay.

You have a copy of my presentation, and as it says in the presentation, this is my seventh time since 2013. Every year, I make the same presentation, so I thought today that I would divert from reading it and just doing my regular spiel to sort of put a personal spin on why I'm here today.

I retired in 2004. I was a national representative for the Canadian Union of Public Employees here in Thunder



Bay. I serviced locals from Thunder Bay to Fort Frances to Rainy River. That included long-term-care homes. It included social service agencies. It included home care and hospital locals as well as municipal and school boards. So I had a first-hand opportunity to talk to the members and to hear from the members the struggles that they had.

When I first started as a staff rep, it was 1993, and I heard from them the problems they were having because health care was underfunded back in 1993. I was a staff rep for 11 years. During that time, we went through a period of Conservative government with Mike Harris, and things got worse and worse and worse.

I retired in 2004, and in my retirement, I became a member of the United Way of Thunder Bay. I became the president of the United Way of Thunder Bay. I was a campaign chair twice for the United Way of Thunder Bay. I had all kinds of opportunity to talk to a lot of the agencies that we fund. Those are also social service agencies and health care agencies. So I heard from those people the struggles that they were having. That was after 2004.

When I talked to them, they told me about all the problems that they had: staffing problems, funding problems. I would talk to the administrators. They'd say, "We'd love to do more. We'd like to have more funding to provide some of the programs that we want to provide." It wasn't there. When I would talk to long-term-care members—and, in fact, my mother-in-law was in a long-term-care home, and the local that was working that long-term-care home was one of my former bargaining units. So I knew the members; I would talk to them.

They would come to me crying, literally crying, when I had the meetings with them because they couldn't do the job that they wanted to do. They wanted the home to be a home. It's called a long-term-care "home." These people in a home wanted to be treated like they were treated in a home. But the PSWs and the RNs were not able to do that because they didn't have the time. They would come to me, crying, and say, "I can't give Mrs. Smith a bath. She had to miss her bath because there was not enough time. I had to cover up for somebody else that wasn't there," or there was just not enough staff. It was unbelievable. When you hear the stories from the workers that are there, it's unbelievable.

I would hear from home care workers who were saying, "I can't afford—I need a second job. The pay that I get in this organization is not enough. I love the work. I want to help people in their homes. I want to let them stay in their homes for care, but I can't afford it and I can't find the time to do that, and I haven't got the money to do that."

The stories I'd hear were, they would have 10 clients. They would come to work in the morning; they would have 10 clients they would have to visit. They would go there, and then halfway through their day, they would find out that one of the other workers didn't show up for work. They didn't show up for work because—because they're all working part-time—they also had registered as a part-time worker at a long-term-care home. So that worker would then phone in in the morning and say, "Oh, I'm sorry. I'm not feeling well today, so I can't take my home care calls.

I'm sorry." So they would go to the long-term-care home because it was about \$4 an hour more in wages. Who would pick up the slack of those residents, of those patients in those homes? It would be the worker that was there, and they would be working until 10 o'clock at night to try and catch up in-home care services for the people that weren't there. It's just unbelievable.

Of course, they couldn't catch up to a lot of them, so there were missed visits. I would get calls from people that had home care, and those people were saying, "I'm waiting for my nurse to come in to give my drugs. I don't know what drugs to take. My nurse is supposed to give them to me, and she didn't show up. What am I going to do now?" I'd just say, "Well, phone the administration. Phone your home care provider and find out what's going on." So it's stories that I've heard right from the time I was a staff rep in 1993, and I still hear that. When I was a staff rep and I was also president of the city of Thunder Bay local, I spent a lot of time working with different unions in the city. I still have communications and contact with all the unions now in Thunder Bay. I have their phone numbers and their email addresses, and I continue to contact them. I hear stories from them that things haven't got any better. In fact, a lot of them have said that things have gotten worse. It's unbelievable, when you understand what is happening in the health care system in this province.

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We were told by the current government, in the previous four years that they were here, that there would be improvements—"We're going to fix health care. We're going to provide more money for long-term care. We're going to provide more money for hospitals. We're going to provide more money for home care." It's absolutely not happening. We hear the stories.

And there are promises—"Yes, we're going to get more nurses." I talked to the Confederation College presenter just now, and I asked her, "Are you getting more people applying?" "Well, we're getting more foreign students applying. But now there's a cap on the foreign students, so we're not going to be able to educate more nurses, more PSWs to provide the care that is required in the community." So there you go. There's an opportunity here to have more people going to college to learn how to do PSW work and RNA work, and it's not going to happen because there's a cap. The promise that the government is saying—"We're going to get more"—is not going to happen.

So what's going to happen a year from now? We're going to hear the same story. We're going to be talking to the people who work in health care, who are going to say, "I still can't do it. I don't have the time to do the job that I want to do."

It doesn't matter if you're working in a hospital—because I have friends of mine who work in the hospital. One of them works in the hospital, and five of her co-workers in the surgical area have retired, have left in the last couple of months—five—and she is one of them.

It's scary, scary stuff, and things have to be done.

I have got recommendations in here, and basically, all three of them—the recommendations are increase the

funding, increase the staffing to allow the workers to do the job that they want to do. It's as simple as that.

Thank you.

**The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman):** Thank you very much.

We'll go to the next presenter: Jon Powers.

**Mr. Jon Powers:** I'm Jon Powers, private citizen.

First, I would like to thank everyone in Ontario for still being here four years after whatever it is we just went through.

I will give direction to future programs that you are working on and ideas for future spending.

First and foremost, justice: I need to have the option to elect and hold judges accountable for their mistakes. Currently, the status quo in Thunder Bay is that if you are charged with murder, you stay behind bars, you get credit for time served. That needs to stop. You have the power, as the Legislature, to compel crown prosecutors to appeal that and give them money to do so.

The second thing: Police service boards need to be elected and handle the money. Two years ago, Ottawa was occupied by a bunch of interlopers. On a per capita basis, if Ottawa had the same number of police that the city of Thunder Bay has, they would have had an additional 1,500 officers—they have the smallest, per capita, of any police their size. They're 10 times the population of Thunder Bay, yet they have less than 55% of what we have here up here.

Health: We have an addiction problem in Ontario, and its name is fentanyl. When the federal government approved fentanyl, there was a participation process in which the province of Ontario could have said no. The weight of everything in this room not bolted down to the floor is enough to kill every single person in the greater Toronto area if it were fentanyl. It's a weapon of mass destruction. It shouldn't be on the market. Charter-challenge its existence.

Highway safety and trucking: You need to inform your national counterparts that you must be 21 years old and have a G licence for five years before you step behind a big rig. Age does matter. When you're a little bit older than 17 or 18, you know a little bit more. As human beings, our species, our minds, our cognitive ability to reason takes the long route. It's about 30 to 40 years before our minds are fully developed.

For program updates to Ontario Works and ODSP, a number of those recipients have criminal records. You have the ability to pay for them to be sealed. It's not a pardon that they receive. This is how the pardon works at the federal government: When the name and particulars of the offender are registered in CPIC, the RCMP must take a look at the physical file and record. If it is sealed, that is a Canadian pardon. It has a domestic publication ban. That is how the Nazi was able to penetrate the federal House of Commons and pass his background check, because that part of his immigration file was sealed shut and kept out of public view.

For subsidized housing, I would like to see a separate section added to the landlord and tenant act for subsidized

housing. Currently, there are a large number of people on ODSP that do not understand what they are doing. In legal terminology, that's called want of understanding.

During the pandemic, I stayed home and took care of my late mother who had dementia, and during the pandemic, that really sucked. I'd like to say stronger words, but I can't say them without being kicked out of the room.

When we have tenants that can't spend 35 seconds to go into a room and turn off water from a hot water tank or don't understand what's going on, they shouldn't be tenants. They should be in assisted living, not by themselves. When this committee phoned to confirm my presence here today, I was on the floor cleaning underneath my sink because of water damage from a next-door neighbour.

For the Municipal Act, the municipalities of Ontario have the lion's share of infrastructure, yet they have the very smallest percentage of access to tax base. That needs to change.

Finally, Mr. Chair, for non-disclosure agreements, in Ontario, if you sign a non-disclosure agreement and you have abused a child or committed a crime, that becomes illegal for you to sign them as the recipient of an out-of-court settlement. And no more contract caveats either. If you come to a gentlemen's agreement where you say, "You can't use this after I give it to you," then that's not fair either.

**The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman):** Thank you very much. That concludes the presentations.

We'll now start with the questioning. In the first round, we'll start with the independents. MPP Bowman.

**Ms. Stephanie Bowman:** Thank you all for being here. I will start with LevelJump Healthcare. I wondered if you could just provide a little more context around your ask, \$6 million to match the capital that you'd be planning to invest. Is this a grant? Is this a loan? Would the government have an ownership interest? What's the financial model for this ask of yours?

**Mr. Rob Landau:** The initial capital outlay is about \$12 million, and that would get us two MRI trucks and two CT trucks, and it would allow us to build suitable platforms at about 30 to 40 northern communities. Then the trucks would be on a cycle so that doctors in the community would know ahead of time that a truck, say, is going to be there on the 10th so that all their patients could then go and have their MRIs and CTs, as opposed to the system now, where some of them have to drive hundreds and hundreds of kilometres and that kind of thing.

So as far as the part of the problem with getting it done, as with a lot of things in the north, you need some government assistance because otherwise the economics don't make sense. You can't put an MRI machine in a town of 5,000 people. It just doesn't work. The same thing goes for the model. For us to make any kind of reasonable return—in this case, we're looking at maybe a 10% return a year on investment and stuff like that—you have to have some participation with government; otherwise, it just would never work.

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Ideally, a grant would be the best thing, with conditions and service levels and timelines and hiring implementa-

tions, but we wouldn't oppose a loan or some kind of participation. We're open to discussions with the Ministry of Health on how they want to structure it.

**Ms. Stephanie Bowman:** Thank you. Do you know of other models in other provinces or in other parts of our province where this kind of thing is happening and working well?

**Mr. Rob Landau:** It's unbelievably not, but in the US, they've been using mobile machines for decades, and for some reason, in Canada, I think it's just a general lack of MRI and CT use to begin with, which is just unfortunate because we all suffer for it. Ontarians suffer for it because it gives us early detection, and early detection is everything when it comes to health care.

**Ms. Stephanie Bowman:** We've heard during these hearings from family doctors and other doctors who, even in populated areas, are having trouble accessing the services that they need. Could you talk about what kind of service level this would be in terms of—again, today they might have to travel a long time or it would be months of delays. What kind of service level might this solution offer to the north?

**Mr. Rob Landau:** Typically, we're seeing wait times now of three months, four months, as much as six months, and that includes people having to go at 3 o'clock or 4 o'clock in the morning. I had one a year and a half ago; I had to go to North York General—the busiest hospital, probably, in the country, or one of them—at 4 o'clock in the morning to get my MRI.

I think we can probably get the wait times down to less than four weeks for the northern communities because we would have the schedule set up ahead of time and all the doctors would know when we were coming to town so we could book, and then we also can extend hours.

**The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman):** One minute.

**Ms. Stephanie Bowman:** Great. Thank you, Robert.

**Mr. Rob Landau:** You're welcome.

**Ms. Stephanie Bowman:** I will go next to the Thunder Bay Health Coalition. Certainly, I'm aware of some of the challenges in rural health care. Your document mentions the Minden ER, which was closed this year. Certainly myself and Dr. Adil Shamji attended a number of rallies there trying to keep that hospital open. Interestingly enough, that hospital had no staffing closures as a result of staffing shortages prior to it being closed, so very unfortunate.

Could you talk about the impact that the rural closures are having here in the north, in your communities?

**Mr. Jules Tupker:** Well, obviously, there's going to be a huge impact. As I said, Minden is closed. We've had a couple of emergency room closures here in northwestern Ontario, in Red Lake and Marathon. Thank goodness there hasn't been more. What we see is that the—

**The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman):** Thank you very much, that concludes the time for that question.

Government side: MPP Holland.

**Mr. Kevin Holland:** Thank you to the group for being here with us today. I really appreciate you taking time out of your busy day to come and give us your perspective and your input as we wrestle with the massive budget needs of the province.

I'm particularly pleased that health care has come up in the discussion here with your presentations today. We had a monumental task before our government when we were elected in 2018. Our health care was on the verge of collapse, and this is what I'm hearing from health care providers across the district as well as across the province. We've seen decades of underfunding and under-planning to address what the needs were going to be for what we're experiencing today.

We took office in 2018, and we were hit with a pandemic that really had an impact on so many aspects of everyday life, the least of which isn't the impact that it had on health care. I'm not about sitting here pointing fingers as to how we arrived at where we're at. We recognize that we are the government that is charged with the responsibility of addressing this. But it's not lost on me that former Premier Wynne has stated that her biggest regret was cutting the funding to health care when she was the Premier, because it has led, quite frankly, to the situation we're experiencing now. We have immediate needs that need to be addressed while we also grapple with what the future needs of health care in the province of Ontario are going to be.

When you govern, you don't just govern for today. You have to be governing and planning for the future. A lot of the initiatives that the government has put in place are actually going to be addressing the health care needs that our province is facing in the future. We put a number of initiatives in place on the health human resources file to make sure that we're attracting people to the health care field and fill the needs of our future. We recognize those are going to be long-term goals—five, six, seven or eight years to get them through the education system. As well, the initiatives that we've put in place to attract those individuals that are entering the health care field to practise in underserved areas across the province—and particularly we know that the need is great in northwestern Ontario. So we're doing the work, we're putting the initiatives in place that we need to do moving forward.

To address the current needs, we are increasing the availability of health care workers from all over the world to come to Ontario and practise medicine. We have increased the number of countries that we are allowing those health care professionals to come in and immediately start practising in Ontario. We've taken those steps.

The challenge we face, and particularly with a lot of the underserved areas that we're experiencing in the north, is that we're in global competition for these health care workers. This isn't just an issue that's facing Ontario. It's facing Canada, North America—the entire world. So it's going to really require everybody coming together and seeing what we can do to attract those workers here to Ontario.

I don't want leave the picture that was painted about the doom and gloom. There are substantial investments, record investments being made into health care in Ontario since the government took office. Here, locally, we've had two round tables: one on mental health and addictions, one on health care. Out of those round table discussions, we're working on four new initiatives for Thunder Bay, pilot projects that are going to really be foundational in addressing some of the most severe problems that we're facing in

Thunder Bay and in northwestern Ontario—and those aren't my words, those are the words of the professionals in the field that attended those round table discussions and provided the input to our government as to what direction we needed to take forward. We listened to them, we took their advice, and we're moving on those recommendations and the input that was provided to us. So I'm fairly optimistic that we're taking the right steps and moving in the right direction and it's not as dire as what some may lead us to believe it is.

I'm not a fool though. There's a tremendous amount of work that needs to be done. But as I said, the work isn't just restricted to Thunder Bay and northwestern Ontario. It's a global issue that the whole world is grappling with. Our government is taking the steps necessary to address the needs now and in the future in light of the fact that it was decades of underfunding and under-planning to realize where we're at.

I am committed to continue to work with the health care providers in Thunder Bay, listening to them, hearing them out, taking their message to my government with regard to what the realities and what the circumstances are in Thunder Bay. But I'm asking them—government should be creating the environment to allow people to succeed. Government shouldn't be about, "Thou shalt." Government should be about, "What do you need for the government to support you?" That's what we're doing here in Thunder Bay, and that's what I am committed to continue to do in Thunder Bay.

By taking that approach, I am confident that we're going to be able to seriously start addressing the decades of neglect that we have experienced in this community by previous governments. Again, I'm not pointing fingers. We're the government that has to deal with it. I am committed to making sure that what the needs are in Thunder Bay are being met, and I will continue to move that forward. I am always open to a discussion with anybody that has any input to provide to me to take to government, and I will continue to do so.

I will pass the remainder of my time over to—

**The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman):** One minute.

**Ms. Goldie Ghamari:** One minute? Okay, we'll wait for the next round, then.

1530

**The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman):** Now, you're past the one minute. Thank you very much.

We will now go to the official opposition. MPP Kernaghan.

**Mr. Terence Kernaghan:** Thank you to all our presenters here today.

I'd like to begin my questions with Jules from the Thunder Bay Health Coalition. First, I want to thank you for appearing at committee today, but I want to thank you for your years of advocacy. It's very clear that you care deeply about this topic. It's distressing that we see the province moving backwards on this file and moving backwards at speed.

During the pandemic, we saw the unmitigated disaster of for-profit health in long-term-care homes, and it's not care. I mean, let's call it the for-profit health industry, as this government would reshape it. Profit seems to be their primary concern, whereas care is a vehicle for that profit.

Does it make sense that homes with the worst track records during the pandemic are getting the bulk of the new licences?

**Mr. Jules Tupker:** Absolutely not. It's scary when you realize that, as you said, the majority of the deaths during COVID were in private, for-profit homes. Right now, the Ontario Health Coalition has a court case going for Orchard Villa, where there was the highest number of deaths. You've taken them to court because the Southbridge homes owns that home, and they are again being given more licences to renew that home, to build that home up, and they're given licences to build, even, new homes.

We feel that that is not proper. If this organization is providing the poorest care that is possible—I guess it could get worse, but it certainly could get better. And yet, here they are. Here the government is saying, "Oh, we're going to overlook what you've done and the people who have died in your homes, and we're going to give you a new licence"—not just a year or a two-year licence, a 30-year licence. For 30 years they are going to be able to provide substandard care, which they have been doing for many years.

The thing is, it's not just the homes that are being privatized. Again, it's the hospitals that are being privatized. This government has decided they are going to privatize the last public sector in the health care system that is public, and that is the hospitals. They have now opened the door to privatizing our public health care system to give that work to private, for-profit clinics and hospitals. It's obscene, and it should be stopped.

**Mr. Terence Kernaghan:** You're absolutely right. It seems very strange that rewards and awards would go to the worst of the worst. It's not accountable. It's not at all connected to one's track record.

You're not the first presenter here today, Jules, who has connected the dots between the reckless cuts that happened during the Harris regime and the growing and dramatically escalating crisis that we have within our service sector. The devil's in the details. We have to always focus on public funding as well as public delivery. The government would like to only talk about public funding as they shift money towards for-profit health institutions.

I also wanted to ask your thoughts about private surgical centres—you just mentioned those. Should the province invest in recreating the infrastructure that we already have so that it can be a vehicle for a few people to turn a buck?

**Mr. Jules Tupker:** Absolutely not. There are all kinds of services—the public health care system can work, and it should work. We are investing poorly in them at the moment. Right now, I've got a freedom-of-information request into the hospital here in Thunder Bay. Health coalitions across the province are contacting their hospitals to find out how many operating rooms they have available and how long they're being used every day. Are they being used on the weekend?

The Ontario Health Coalition has done their research. We know that there are enough vacant hospital operating rooms right now to take care of all the operations that need to be done. To now, all of a sudden, open the door to private organizations to start doing that and to start—these private

organizations are called for-profit organizations. If they get paid for doing an operation, obviously they're going to have to skim some money off that funding from the government to cover their shareholders' dividends. There's a problem in making private health care, because it's just going to—there's no need for it in the first place, and if it goes that way, then there's going to be a real problem.

I might also want to add that, of course, in the Ontario Health Coalition, we had a referendum last year. Over 400,000 people voted opposed to the hospital closures that the government is proposing. If you have a referendum or a study that has 20,000 people signing a petition saying, "We don't want this," that's huge. We had 400,000 people in this province saying they don't want privatized hospitals. And I can tell you, if we had it for homes and home care, we'd have the same result.

**Mr. Terence Kernaghan:** You've mentioned it quite well. We have the tax base. We all have our tax funds. And yet by allowing this to happen, it's allowing a few people to skim money off the top when that money should be for everyone's care.

I wanted to ask, Jules, how does privatization, in particular in the health field, dramatically impact northern, rural and remote communities?

**Mr. Jules Tupker:** Well, we don't know that, do we? We don't know, if they're going to have private clinics, are you going to have to pay? You heard this morning from Sara about the problems of poverty in this community. I'll tell you, there's money in this community, but there's also a lot of poverty. If we're going to have to start paying to have our health care, people are not going to go to get that health care. And when they don't have that health care, they're going to get sicker and then they're going to be going—what's going to happen? I don't know what's going to happen. They're not going to be able to go to the hospitals, because if you have private clinics, the people in the hospitals are going to go to the private clinics. That leaves a vacancy in the hospital, and there's not going to be enough services in the hospital. It's going to be a disaster.

**Mr. Terence Kernaghan:** It is moving backwards, when Canadians used to go bankrupt because they couldn't afford their health care. It's removing a Canadian value, isn't it?

I wanted to ask, Jules: Can you speak about Bill 124? The government hasn't met a lawsuit that it didn't want to lose. It's now appealing the most recent decision. It seems they aren't getting tired of attacking nurses and health care heroes.

**The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman):** One minute.

**Mr. Terence Kernaghan:** Bill 124—the floor is yours.

**Mr. Jules Tupker:** Bill 124, the cost of living—I'm a union rep. When I was negotiating, I would always ask for more than the cost of living, obviously. My members want me to ask for more. But if we settled for the cost of living and my members would be upset, I would say, "Listen, you're keeping up. You're able to work and support your family with the wages you've got now. If the cost of living goes up, at the least you're staying status quo."

Bill 124 eliminated that possibility. We have nurses now, we have people in the health care field—not just nurses, in all the health care field—that are struggling because they haven't been able to keep up with the cost of living. Bill 124 has to be rescinded. There's absolutely no doubt about that in my mind.

**Mr. Terence Kernaghan:** Thank you very much, Jules.

**Mr. Jules Tupker:** Thank you.

**The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman):** We now go to the independent. MPP Hazell.

**MPP Andrea Hazell:** Thank you, everyone, for coming in and presenting to us. My questions are going to go to the Thunder Bay Health Coalition and LevelJump Healthcare.

To be honest with you, I am trying to find a new question for you. I'm trying to find a different question for you, because throughout this journey, your counterparts, your agencies, other health care associations, we hear this over and over. It's music to my ears right now. Even in my constituency, in Scarborough, it's the same; this is not unique. So it tells me that Ontario does have a health crisis, where we have emergency departments being shut down and we have beds in the hallway.

We have beds in the hallway. This is Canada. I came from the Caribbean for a better health care system, a better living. I came here as a teenager, and I worked myself and gave back to this country, not to have my kids living in this situation.

We have a crisis, but I don't think the government is taking it as a crisis. I think they're looking at it as, "We're doing what we can to support the system, because we've met it under-invested." But how many years have you been in the situation and not fixing the situation, because it's now gone to the profit side?

Your community has one of the lowest incomes. We're talking about privatization of health care. What is that going to do to your residents if you become privatized for health care in Thunder Bay?

**Mr. Jules Tupker:** Well, you heard the people from Poverty Free Thunder Bay this morning talking about that. People don't have the money to pay for private health care. They're going to get sicker and sicker, and I guess they're going to die. The only option they have is to go to the public hospital. If the public hospital hasn't got the staff, hasn't got the funding to provide those services, I don't know what's going to happen. It just keeps multiplying, multiplying and multiplying, and it's just a real dilemma.

**1540**

If I may, to answer Mr. Holland's question, I have a solution. The solution is the social determinants of health. If people are healthy—I belong with Poverty Free Thunder Bay. I belong with the Ontario Network of Injured Workers Groups, and I belong with the Thunder Bay injured workers group with Eugene, who you heard a few minutes ago. I deal with people who are living in poverty. If people are living in poverty, they don't have homes. They don't have the funding or the money to eat proper, healthy food. So what happens? They become sick. When they become sick, they go to the hospital. They access the health system. When you access the health system, it costs money.

So I would suggest to this government that they look at the social determinants of health. Increase funding for homes. Increase funding for poverty. If you get that solved, then you're going to find that the people who access the health care system are going to cut, are going to drop and maybe you'd be able to afford the health care system that we want.

**The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman):** One minute.

**Mr. Rob Landau:** If I may, the blame game that I'm hearing and that I've been hearing for days and weeks and months—enough. All of you, from all your parties, stop. None of your parties, none of your governments have fixed the problem. The problem is very simple. It doesn't matter whether you lose 10% to a private company on margin or whether you have a publicly managed union shop that spends 10% extra on administration; 10% is 10%. Math is math. Math doesn't lie ever.

The solution is simple: Ontario needs doctors. We need lots more doctors. We need to train one and a half doctors for every thousand people, and then, on average, you will be left with about one doctor after.

**The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman):** Thank you very much. That concludes the time for that presentation.

We'll now go to the government. MPP Dowie.

**Mr. Andrew Dowie:** I want to thank all the presenters for being here, and, actually, I want to say thank you to Mr. Landau for that comment. I think of a couple of things. One is one of the first visits I went on after my election was the Southern Ontario Endoscopy Centre, which does colon cancer screening. They had asked me what the status was of the independent health facility application they put forward in 2013 under the last government. I inquired and I understood that the government created this application process and went through, spent several years at it, and then it was rescinded. So any talk I hear from members of the last government about being against private delivery is nonsense because their government was part of it and encouraged it and encouraged this application process.

I understand what you're saying about the lack of health human resources. The establishment of the Brampton medical school will create new medical school spaces to train those physicians. So I hope that was music to your ears when you heard that announcement.

There's also the Learn and Stay program for nurses and medical technologists and paramedics here in the north, which is taking away barriers to getting health human resources upskilled and brought into those areas that need them. In my community and many others, there are new nurse practitioner seats at universities: University of Windsor where I'm at, 24 new spaces; 121 throughout the province of Ontario. And with a couple of other incentives in my community, there have been 300 bonuses of \$25,000 given to nurses who are repatriated from the United States to practise back in Canada.

Plus, the credentials recognition that is being worked on, certainly, for all of Canada is in place, and international, we shall see. But there's a 16-week pilot project for upskilling physicians who are licensed in other jurisdictions rather than waiting two years. Look, they've got the knowledge of medicine. Why not leverage their skills?

So, I hear you 100%. I believe the government has demonstrated its commitment to health human resources development, growing the workforce, growing the choices that we have so that we're not in this situation again. So the days of cutting medical school spaces, the days of cutting nurses, they're over. That's done. This government is making the investment in growing the workforce, and I hope you've seen that progress in the last year and a half. I know I've been delighted to make many of these announcements in my community, about growing the workforce.

I'm wondering if you can comment on anything that you may have seen here in the north that has helped to support the growth of your local workforce.

**Mr. Rob Landau:** Not specifically in the north, but just general comments.

You mentioned, for example, technologists. In the US, it takes two years to train a medical technologist for X-ray or ultrasound; in Ontario, it takes six years. Are X-rays any better quality in Canada than they are in the US? Absolutely not. Technologists get paid \$10 more an hour in the US, pay 10% less taxes, and their cost of living is 20% less, so they make almost double the money. So as soon as we train the ones we have here, any one of them can go to the US like that and get a better job and a better standard of living. So make our program two years. Again, you're not going to have defective X-rays; you're not going to have defective ultrasounds. And within two years, you'll fix the technologist shortage problem.

The problem in Ontario is not the money. We spend more per capita on health care than almost anywhere in the world. People call it "free" because they don't see the bill, but some of us who make more money pay a larger share of taxes, and then that goes to help other people who need health care. And that's the right thing to do. But when you take the sum of it, we're still spending more per person than anyone else; we're just not spending it intelligently. It just needs to be reallocated into doctors and nurses and away from administration. It's going to take five to 10 years to fix, but it won't get fixed until you start. When you start, it will then be fixed.

**Mr. Andrew Dowie:** I just want to confirm that four of the new positions for the nursing practitioners are here at Lakehead and then there are six others at Laurentian—so a total of 10 for the north.

I'm going to move to the health coalition.

Thank you, Jules, for your presentation. I read the document intently, and I see the reference.

You mentioned the privately delivered services. I think many of the health coalitions have mentioned the Don Mills Surgical Unit, but none of them have mentioned my local one, Windsor Surgical Centre.

In 2018, the Liberal candidate for Windsor West, Rino Bortolin, celebrated this in an article in the Windsor Star, showing that community facilities are important to have and they take away barriers.

We had testimony from the CEO of Windsor Regional Hospital this time last year where he celebrated this, acknowledging the reduction in the backlog for ophthalmology.

Actually, I've been keeping my local hospital CEO in the loop as to the discussions around the table here, and he stands by every word that he said a year ago. He does not have the challenges that are being cited in many of the documents provided by health coalitions. He's reporting that there's no loss of staff. It's a partnership with the local hospital, and really, the cost is reduced to the user because they don't have to pay for parking at the hospital.

**The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman):** One minute.

**Mr. Andrew Dowie:** Otherwise, everything is the same—the same doctor; the same service being delivered—different physical location. No, it's not owned by the government, but it's the same operation in every other way.

So I'd love to ask you, and perhaps you may know: Why is the Windsor Surgical Centre never raised, given its track record, in the health coalition's documents condemning private service delivery?

**Mr. Jules Tupker:** I can't answer for Windsor, I'm sorry to say. There are only two private medical services that I am aware of—Shouldice and Don Mills in Toronto—and they were created many, many years ago. So Windsor is a surprise—

**Mr. Andrew Dowie:** It's for ophthalmology.

**Mr. Jules Tupker:** I'm unaware of it, so I'll make a note of it. I'll be contacting the Ontario Health Coalition and the Windsor Health Coalition to see what's going on. It's very interesting. I can't—

**The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman):** Thank you very much. That concludes the time for that one.

We'll now go to the official opposition. MPP Vaugeois.

**MPP Lise Vaugeois:** I'm going to disagree with you somewhat, Robert, although I don't disagree that there could be cost savings within the system, but there are government policies that have increased the crisis in health care. One was the imposition of Bill 124, which has pushed so many senior members of the profession out of the profession.

1550

We also know that people—NPs, nurse practitioners, for example, their wages have not been adjusted for a long time and they are actually leaving the country because they can make better wages elsewhere. We also know that there's a clinic in town now that charges membership fees, and people have been looking for doctors for so long that they feel forced to go there, but of course, if you can't afford the fees then you're not going to go to that clinic.

We just came from ROMA, Rural Ontario Municipal Association, and met with many municipalities, and without exception, they were talking about the concern with nursing agencies. We already know that when long-term care was privatized, a lot of profits were made. People made a killing, those who had the means to invest in that. The concern is that that's happening—it's certainly happening with the nursing agencies right now. You have a nurse in a building, in a hospital, leaving the hospital, joining a nursing agency, coming back for three times the wage; coming into the same job, only now, the province is paying three times the wage. So hospitals are going bankrupt because of the cost

of nursing agencies. It needs to be stopped. It is another privatization of health care.

We also know that—you were talking about the person who was working home care but also in long-term care. There was a bill turned down this year, actually presented by a member of the independent caucus, to bring the PSW WSIB coverage in line with the same coverage as people working in long-term care. It was turned down, so it's no wonder, then, that a PSW will say, "Well, I'm going to go work long-term care. If I'm carrying two or three jobs, I'm going to go work in long-term care because I'm paid better and I'm actually going to get coverage if I have an injury on the job."

So again, if you can speak, perhaps, to how we are seeing senior people leaving the profession, that there have been no retention strategies and, in fact, the strategies that are there are pushing people out.

**Mr. Jules Tupker:** Well, yes. Again, if I was a nurse and I was making a certain wage five years ago or four years ago—whenever Bill 124 was—and I was surviving, budgeting my income and budgeting my home, and all of a sudden, I'm falling behind and falling behind, it gets to a point where I say, "You know what? If the money isn't there and certainly the stress of working in this workplace because we're understaffed, the acuity of patients is much higher—I can't take it anymore. I have to leave." And that's the story that I'm hearing from a lot of the workers. And they're not old. They're certainly not at the senior level. They're retiring at a younger age or going to another job.

I'm finding a lot in the long-term-care home here in Thunder Bay, which I'm very familiar with, that the nursing staff are bidding on housekeeping jobs because it's a lot less stressful: "The pay isn't quite as much as a PSW, but you know what? I can handle the housekeeping or the dietary jobs." And it's just absolutely ridiculous that senior people are leaving the profession. The expertise that we need—and I know that the government is telling us that they're bringing in new people. It's going to take a few years for those people to get the expertise that these senior workers have. It's collapsing. It really is collapsing. And I hate to sit here, and every year I come here and make these presentations and cry wolf, but it's the reality. Something has to be done. We don't see it.

**MPP Lise Vaugeois:** Thank you.

How much time is left?

**The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman):** You have three minutes.

**MPP Lise Vaugeois:** Three whole minutes. Oh my goodness. All right. Robert, I wonder if you can tell us a little bit about your structure. I know you want to get a 10% return on investment. Do you have a shareholder structure?

**Mr. Rob Landau:** We're a public company on the Toronto Stock Exchange, on the Venture Exchange. We're 99% Canadian-owned. There's not really any great big secret about it. Any profit we make is shared amongst the shareholders, but it gets returned in Canada and gets reinvested in Canada. That's what it's all about.

The best health care system in the world right now is medicare in the States. Anyone over 65 is covered. It's

universal payer, private provider. When you go into the places, most of them, you have clean sheets, you have good meals, you get the same doctors. I was in St. Mike's a year and a half ago. My bedsheets were all stained; the food was inedible. They charged me \$400 a night for that, and that's one of your public hospitals. They couldn't spend \$5 to make a meal that someone could eat?

Medicare should be our model. We want to have a universal payer so that everyone is covered, the government sets the rates, and we let the private companies provide the service, because they're the only ones who can do it efficiently, because, quite honestly, the provincial government cannot manage 18 million to 20 million people. Marshall McLuhan said it: "The higher you go, the less you know." A small committee or five or six people can't determine how to allocate resources amongst 20 million people, and that's why we're always behind. We're always behind.

**The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman):** One minute.

**Mr. Rob Landau:** A small little surgical clinic like this one in Windsor, if they see the winds changing and patients need a different type of service, can quickly turn on that, and they can quickly make the changes. They can go to the ministry and say, "We need this new code into the schedule of benefits," or, "The supplier from Thailand is charging us \$2 more for ultrasound gel," or whatever it is. But from the government, it's just impossible. You just can't manage 20 million people's health care centrally. It's just not possible.

*Interjection.*

**The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman):** No, and there's not time to change.

**MPP Lise Vaugeois:** No time left? Okay.

**The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman):** Thank you very much. That concludes the time for this presentation, and we thank all the presenters for taking time to prepare and ably delivering your message here. We're sure it will be helpful as we move forward, so thank you very much.

NORTH SUPERIOR WORKFORCE  
PLANNING BOARD  
PERLEY HEALTH  
ONTARIO'S BIG CITY MAYORS

**The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman):** Our next table is North Superior Workforce Planning Board, Perley Health and Ontario's Big City Mayors. With that, as with all the other delegations, we'll start off by giving the ground rules of this game. You will have seven minutes to make your presentation. At six minutes, I will say, "One minute." Don't stop, because the next minute is the important one, and at seven minutes I will say, "Thank you," and I will stop you.

And with that, we do ask each presenter, those that are virtual and those that are at the table, to state your name before you do your presentation to make sure we record it in Hansard, and if anybody secondary is going to be speaking during the question period, when they speak, we ask them to introduce themselves before they start speaking.

So, with that, the first one will be the North Superior Workforce Planning Board.

**Mr. Gary Christian:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. Through you, I'd certainly like to recognize our local MPPs, Kevin Holland and Lise Vaugeois, and thank them for coming this afternoon for the presentation. They do represent the Thunder Bay–Superior North and Thunder Bay–Atikokan regions.

I'll continue on with the presentation.

North Superior Workforce Planning Board is one of 26 local boards across Ontario. North Superior Workforce Planning Board's mandate is to create innovative labour market solutions by providing authoritative and evidence-based research, identifying employment trends, targeting workforce opportunities and initiating workforce development strategies.

Ontario's budget review comes at a time when non-profits across Ontario are facing formidable challenges in sustaining their operations. Non-profit entities play an indispensable role in advancing social welfare, addressing community needs and catalyzing positive change.

From Thunder Bay to Barrie, Windsor to London and across the greater Toronto area and Kanata, the non-profit sector stands as a linchpin for job creation, volunteering, engagement and the provision of programs and services essential to the well-being of Ontarians. It's noteworthy that the sector contributes a substantial \$65 billion a year to the province's GDP, employing 844,000 people. However, despite these commendable contributions, numerous organizations continually find themselves at a crossroad, grappling with financial stability and operational complexities. These dedicated entities tirelessly work to address a diverse array of social challenges, encompassing poverty alleviation, health care accessibility, environmental conservation and education outreach. These immeasurable impacts underscore the unwavering commitment to the well-being of our communities.

**1600**

Nonetheless, the noble missions of many of the non-profits in Ontario are imperilled by financial instability, with the absence of sustainable funding sources being a primary contributor to their struggles. Unlike their for-profit counterparts, non-profits heavily rely on grants, donations and volunteer support, which can be unpredictable and insufficient, placing organizations at precipitous financial risk.

Government funding, traditionally a vital support system for non-profits, has failed to keep pace with the escalating demands of their services. Recent years have witnessed funding cuts, freezes and exacerbating the challenges faced by these organizations and impeding their ability to fulfill their missions effectively.

It is imperative that policy-makers acknowledge the indispensable role non-profits play in our society and allocate the request, prerequisites and resources and assure their funding for sustainability.

The challenges faced by non-profits had been further escalated by COVID-19. Many organizations have witnessed



a decline in donations, as individuals and businesses re-directed their resources to the immediate pandemic-related needs. Concurrently, the demands for non-profit services has surged, placing an additional strain on already stretched resources.

A little insight from the Ontario Nonprofit Network, ONN, has underscored the severity of the situation. The absence of a policy response is projecting to indicate the troubled trajectory through 2026, with every non-profit in Ontario anticipating an increase in services and demand: a 131% increase and rise in costs—so costs exceed demand—and a substantial number of closures, which are being faced now. Service demand has surged 29% since 2020, and non-profits' financial situation spiralled downwards.

A human resources crisis persists, driven by the lack of sustainable funding that hampers staff retention and recruitment across the sector. Alarming, two thirds of the sector report staffing challenges. Reports of non-profit closures are escalating, with 35% of organizations acknowledging awareness of another, similar non-profit closing. So we're seeing the closing of these organizations.

The potential collapse of knowledge, awareness and of similar non-profit closings would reverberate across Ontario, affecting every individual benefiting from support and programs facilitated by these organizations in communities throughout the province. As we emerge from the pandemic, it is imperative to prioritize the recovery of these organizations, recognizing the vital role they play in rejuvenating our communities.

Volunteerism has taken a big hit. A cornerstone of non-profit operations has been adversely affected. The pandemic has distributed traditional volunteer models and posed challenges for organizations to engage and retain volunteers. Addressing the issue necessitates innovative approaches, such as virtual volunteering and flexible opportunities aligned with the evolving landscapes of work and personal commitment. That takes money to do that.

To overcome these challenges, collaboration is paramount. Businesses, government agencies and community members must unite to support non-profits. This entails exploring new funding models and advocating for policies, prioritizing the stability and growth of non-profit organizations. Exploring new revenue streams, embracing technology outreach and service delivery, and enhancing organizational efficiencies are crucial steps to navigating the current landscape.

In conclusion, the formidable challenges faced by non-profits in Ontario warrant our immediate attention.

**The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman):** One minute.

**Mr. Gary Christian:** As a society, we must acknowledge the pivotal role these organizations play in shaping our communities and addressing social challenges. A comprehensive response requires an Ontario-wide labour force strategy; a workforce development plan; stable, long-term and flexible operating funds; increasing investments in organizations serving equity-deserving communities; and modernization of volunteering strategies. A government champion representing non-profits, charities and social innovations is a necessity.

Thank you.

**The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman):** Thank you very much for the presentation.

Our next presenter will be Perley Health, and we're going virtual.

Perley Health, the floor is yours.

**Mr. Akos Hoffer:** Thank you for inviting me. My name is Akos Hoffer. I'm the CEO of Perley Health in Ottawa.

Perley Health is regulated under the Fixing Long-Term Care Act. While the name of that legislation has been controversial, there are actually many problems that do need fixing in long-term care.

My aim this afternoon is to talk about some of the reasons long-term care continues to be in crisis and to propose some policy solutions. Our recommendations include permanent increases to the capital funding model, along with funding flexibility to accommodate the range of construction costs around the province.

More than 650 seniors and veterans live at Perley Health and receive long-term care or live independently in our apartments. We are recognized as one of the most progressive and innovative care communities in Canada. As a charity, we benefit from strong donor and volunteer support and the funding we receive from Veterans Affairs Canada.

The population we serve, most of whom are over age 85, is set to double in the next 20 years. That is why we have set a target of doubling the number of people we serve by 2035. To achieve this goal, we aim to be a trusted voice to government. In other words, we want to work with you to improve care.

The government has done a lot to improve long-term care in the last few years, and I'm not just saying that. There have been many improvements that are benefiting our residents and their families every day. But because of the coming explosion in the seniors population, the problems currently facing the sector are going to keep getting worse, even with all the positive changes being made. The long-term-care system is simply not adding beds fast enough to keep up with the growth in demand.

This reminds me of being on a boat last summer, when we had to outrun an approaching storm. There were sunny skies ahead, but when we looked behind the boat, the sky was black and menacing. We just barely managed to outrun that storm before reaching the harbour.

How can the long-term-care sector outrun the gathering storm? I think we're going to need a bigger boat.

Today, many Ontarians wait more than two years for long-term care, and some die before a space becomes available. What does this actually mean? What does a person on the long-term-care waiting list do for 200, 300 or 400 days while they wait? Some have to spend that entire time in a hospital. Some are living at home with support from their spouse or adult children, and those caregivers are getting burned out and sick. Others are in retirement homes, at great expense—they're running out of money, even though the home has stretched to keep them safe.

The people on our waiting list tell us that they are in distress. The spouses are often dealing with a variety of

health issues themselves, and those problems only get worse as their loved ones' needs become more complex. I saw this with my own mother, who was so dedicated to looking after my dad as he got older that she could not stay on top of her own health issues. This meant more preventable hospital visits and lower quality of life.

Unless more capacity is added to the system now, these wait times and the pressure on the hospital system will only get worse. The government knows this and has taken significant action. The Ministry of Long-Term Care has a plan to increase the number of long-term-care beds by roughly 50% in the next five years. That is a massive plan. And it's the right thing to do. The trouble is actually executing the plan and building the new beds with the government funding that's available. We and many other non-profit and for-profit operators simply can't make the business case work in today's high-interest-rate and construction cost environment.

Perley Health has been allocated an additional 240 licences, which would increase our bed count from 450 to almost 700. Last year, the Ministry of Long-Term Care temporarily increased the construction funding subsidy. This was intended to spur construction across the province. Even with that increase, however, we and ... others were unable to finance the construction needed to expand.

**1610**

Long-term care in Ontario is operated by both for-profit and non-profit organizations. We know the public strongly prefers non-profit care and yet non-profits are a shrinking proportion of the long-term-care system. Most of the beds are being built by for-profit operators. Until the funding aligns with the realities faced by non-profits, this trend will continue.

Our written submission outlines several potential solutions to the financing challenge. I will mention only a few, beginning with the construction funding subsidy. Permanently increasing the subsidy by at least \$35 per day will do much to address the challenge facing non-profits. A permanent increase would also open the door to more projects, including those that could not meet the relatively short deadline last year.

While a permanent increase would be a great first step, more needs to be done. This is because construction and financing markets are in a constant state of flux. To address this, we are asking the Ministry of Long-Term Care to introduce some funding flexibility. This is how it works for hospital construction. The province currently covers up to 95% of the cost of hospitals' capital projects.

**The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman):** One minute.

**Mr. Akos Hoffer:** Long-term-care funding usually only covers 50% to 60%. The cost of construction varies greatly across the province, so that's why we're recommending some flexibility.

There is also an opportunity to align funding to help us maintain our facilities once they're built. Our operating funding is not enough to create a reserve fund to do facilities maintenance. We're very good at fundraising, but it will only get us so far. Our donors like to see their names on plaques, but it's very hard to put a plaque on a new roof or on a furnace.

Even with all these challenges, there is room to be creative. For example, many urban properties are landlocked and won't support the traditional layout of 32-bed long-term-care units. These types of buildings simply take up too much room. It turns out, this may be a feature and not a bug. That's because we have the opportunity to build new long-term-care homes using the small-home model, which stacks 10- to 12-bed units. This provides greater connection—

**The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman):** Thank you very much. That concludes the time for the presentation. Hopefully we can get the rest of it as we do the questions.

Our next presenter will be Ontario's Big City Mayors.

**Ms. Marianne Meed Ward:** Thank you, Chair Ernie Hardeman, Vice-Chair Catherine Fife and all the members of the standing committee for the opportunity to speak today. My name is Marianne Meed Ward. I'm the mayor of the city of Burlington and the chair of Ontario's Big City Mayors. OBCM represents Ontario's 29 largest cities and the mayors of those cities, with populations of over 100,000. We are the voice of Ontario's big cities and govern ourselves through policy development, discussion and partnerships with all levels of government.

I'm here today to highlight three key areas that OBCM is focusing on in our pre-budget submission to the government. These three areas are housing, municipal financial support and the mental health, addictions and homelessness crisis that we all face. As we now know, these three areas are deeply interconnected. For example, municipalities need sustainable funding to support housing-related infrastructure that allows for the building of new homes, as well as for the services our residents need to create the thriving communities that they expect. More housing is a major component to solving the housing crisis felt across the province and, in particular, building deeply affordable and supportive housing to address mental health, homelessness and addictions in our cities. More housing will also help keep our local economies strong by providing opportunities for all of our residents to thrive.

With regard to housing, OBCM continues to support the government's goal of building 1.5 million homes over 10 years. All of our members have endorsed the housing pledges assigned to us and we're working very hard to do our part to support building new homes. It's important to note, though, that municipalities don't actually do the building. We don't pour the foundations. Our role is through policies and permits and building the supportive infrastructure required for housing, and we're trying to do our very best to speed up that process.

Of course, we know that more needs to be done by all sectors involved in housing, which is why we've been calling on the province to convene a table of all partners in the home building process so that we can work collaboratively to prevent detrimental delays associated with getting shovels in the ground. In my community in Burlington, we're working closely with the province to build transit-oriented communities around our three GO stations to provide more housing options. We also are working with the federal government and just recently received \$21 million through the Housing Accelerator Fund. We also

are just about to launch a pipeline-to-permit standing committee, a new model not been done in other municipalities that I'm aware of, that brings council members, members of the development industry, the non-profit housing sector and local residents in a decision-making recommendation body to council.

And of course, there's lots of innovation among our members, but I'll give a shout-out to Mayor Ken Boshcoff at the city of Thunder Bay, who is doing a lot of great work and of course has reached the housing targets for this year, and in support of building new homes has convened a mayor's housing task force to have all partners around the table working on collaborative solutions from the start. Each of our members are working in different ways to tackle and address this issue as it works for local realities.

Our success occurs when we collaborate, and that's what we're asking the province to do: to see us as partners, which we are, and to work with us. Work with municipalities to deliver on the government's commitment. We need you to keep us whole from the impacts of Bill 23. We simply can't fund the infrastructure required to support housing on the backs of property taxes, especially if we don't have development charges, which are intended to pay for growth. Develop and consult on a sustainable funding problem so municipalities can deliver the infrastructure, but also the community services that are required for complete communities. We need a new deal for cities.

We also need a program with measures of the success, the progress that municipalities are making, and to be judged—we're happy to be judged and to be counted but judge us on what we control. We don't pour foundations. What we do issue is approvals for permits, so we really need more accurate data to assess how a municipality is doing, and then look at why housing is still delayed—factors that are beyond the control of municipalities, including labour shortages, supply chain issues and, of course, interest rates, which are making it very difficult to qualify for financing, whether you're a builder or a first-time or second-time homebuyer.

We do look forward to—as do all of our members—working with the province on housing and looking at items that will be considered to help support us and partner with us in the next budget, including the potential of a use-it-or-lose-it policy, which is under discussion.

With respect to the municipal fiscal and service delivery review, municipalities really need predictable, sustainable and workable solutions to deal with the growing financial pressures we are facing, which include increasing demands from services that have been downloaded by the province. The Association of Municipalities of Ontario has calculated that municipalities are subsidizing the province around \$4 billion annually, even after provincial transfers are accounted for. That is not keeping up with cost-shared social service programs. It's asking for funding for hospitals, which are outside of purview—a whole host of areas where municipalities, through property taxes, which were never intended to support these things, are being asked to subsidize the province.

**The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman):** One minute.

**Ms. Marianne Meed Ward:** And finally, mental health, addictions and homelessness: We certainly support the budget announcements in the 2023 budget, but we are still feeling the impact, and so are our residents, so we would ask for an investment in a centralized dispatch system, low-barrier hubs, stabilization and treatment beds, and a number of other items outlined in our OBCM submission to the province.

In conclusion, we're here to partner with you. We are doing our part, and we need the province's help to keep us whole so that we can continue to serve the residents we all serve. Thank you.

**The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman):** Thank you very much for the presentation.

That concludes the presentations, so now we will start the questions with the government. MPP Ghamari.

**Ms. Goldie Ghamari:** I just wanted to ask—sorry, I'll just grab the name here—Mr. Hoffer, if you could just please continue along with your presentation. Feel free to take your time. I am from Ottawa, even though we're here in beautiful Thunder Bay right now, so obviously this is something that's really important to me personally. I'd love for you to have an opportunity to finish your presentation before I ask questions. Thank you.

**Mr. Akos Hoffer:** Thank you. That's very kind of you. I was down to the last word.

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**Ms. Goldie Ghamari:** Really?

**Mr. Akos Hoffer:** Really, though, what I wanted to highlight was that necessity is the mother of invention. So if you're building a long-term-care home in a landlocked space, it's really hard to fit the traditional 32-bed-unit type of design in there. So you could make the assumption, "Well, we just can't do it." But instead, there are all kinds of examples emerging in the US and across Canada of these smaller unit sizes, which, if you think about it, are much more like a traditional home. My mother-in-law was one of 15 children, so at any one time, there were about 10 children in the house. They thrived, and they supported each other. That's really the kind of model that we're after.

We actually have that model already on our campus in our apartments. We have these co-housing clusters with these very nicely appointed studio apartments with a shared eating, dining and living area. The result is that the staff get to know the residents a lot better; the residents get to know each other, and they support each other. People know when things are changing, and they make those social connections much more easily than if you're on a long hallway and, really, it's up to you whether you leave your room or not, and it's just easier to become isolated. We see some real benefits to doing that. For us to build on our campus, we don't have a lot of room, and this is the design that we're really excited about pursuing.

The government also has increased operating funding quite a bit over the last few years. The hours of care are rising to an average of four hours. What that allows, because this may cost more to operate—it may or may not; we're looking at it right now. But with that increase in funding, it gives

operators a little bit more flexibility in trying to address the needs of their residents and to organize themselves.

Thanks for the question.

**Ms. Goldie Ghamari:** Just to follow up on that, then: This design that you're speaking about, is this something that is currently approved or is not approved? What stage is this at? Is this a regulatory thing? Because I'm definitely interested in learning more about this.

**Mr. Akos Hoffer:** We haven't gotten far enough in the design to know if we're going to run into any regulatory issues. I don't think we will. In the US, this is called the green house model, so if you want to read about it, there's lots of information out there. In British Columbia, this has been developed as well. In our discussions with the Ministry of Long-Term Care, there's a real openness to it.

As always, we would need to talk about: Are there risks? Are there extra costs? How is this actually going to work? But we have partners—again, in the US and Canada—that we can look to, to help see how it's working. Again, the evidence shows that it creates a really nice living environment, good quality of life, great engagement amongst the residents and much more of a home-like environment, which is what we all want.

**Ms. Goldie Ghamari:** If I understand correctly, it also takes up less space and can accommodate more people, but it also provides more of a communal-living-type experience as well, so that they're not isolated.

**Mr. Akos Hoffer:** Yes, that's right.

**Ms. Goldie Ghamari:** Is that correct, my understanding of that?

**Mr. Akos Hoffer:** Yes. If you're building a long-term-care home in an urban setting, you may need to wedge the building in between what's already there. This is a model that can work because traditionally—if you see our campus, we're on 25 acres, and there's a lot of sprawl. That also has some benefits, but it's nice to know that there are alternatives. It can be a model for the rest of the province. Instead of building out, we build up, and that's something that can be more efficient as well.

**Ms. Goldie Ghamari:** I believe I have visited your campus in the past, so—

**Mr. Akos Hoffer:** Yes, you have.

**Ms. Goldie Ghamari:** Yep. I might have a little bit of a bias here in asking you to speak because I am from Ottawa, so just putting that out there.

Could you talk a little bit about how the investments our government has made over the past years—for example, we're investing \$6.4 billion right now to build more than 58,000 new and upgraded long-term-care beds across all parts of the province. Can you speak to how these investments have impacted long-term care, the industry in general, whether it's yours or what you're seeing across Ontario?

**Mr. Akos Hoffer:** Yes, sure. At the beginning of the presentation, I talked about the waiting lists and how important it is to pay attention to that—because when you just hear “waiting list,” well, that does that mean? A person is waiting; they don't get what they want. But there's desperate need there. There are people and families who are in crisis. So, what this movement by the government is

doing is creating relief, it's bringing help, it's bringing support. It's also supporting the rest of the health care system because, unfortunately, if you're living on your own and you qualify for long-term care, it means you're probably juggling a number of medical conditions that could, for example—I'll just use one example—maybe you're taking medication that causes you to be dizzy from time to time. Maybe your balance is not as good as it used to be. So, unfortunately, people fall. They end up in hospital. Maybe they suffer a concussion or a fracture or something like that. And when that happens, that's when there's a real bottleneck or a problem, because they can't go back home. Their spouse is often the same age as them, maybe 85 or 90 years old, and then you have a very valuable hospital bed that's being occupied by one of these residents as they wait for long-term care. So it's super important to build more and, again, it's something that we want to do everything we can to support.

**The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman):** One minute.

**Ms. Goldie Ghamari:** Thank you. Yes, I definitely wanted to bring that up, because I was actually just going to say, if, God forbid, there's an accident and they're admitted to the hospital, the hospital won't discharge them back home if they need to be in a long-term-care home. So, you're absolutely right: It's critical for these beds to be built as soon as possible in order to alleviate that wait-list. That's something we've done and we're going to continue to do. But thank you for being here and thank you for your presentation and for giving us some insight into Perley Health and long-term-care industry in general. Thank you so much.

I don't have any more questions.

**Mr. Deepak Anand:** Chair?

*Interjections.*

**The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman):** You don't have any time. She was just finishing it out. She had the one minute, already passed.

MPP Kernaghan?

**Mr. Terence Kernaghan:** Thank you to our presenters, both here in person as well as those virtually.

I'd like to start off with yourself, Gary. You've mentioned that non-profits are facing tremendous challenges right now, and I think we should all agree that non-profits are the linchpin of communities, as you've said—very well said. Can you speak to the issues that you face with staffing in non-profits because of wages?

**Mr. Gary Christian:** What happens is that we know that the labour market in Ontario is pretty intensive right now. There are a lot of jobs that are not being filled because of the number of vacancies, so the demand for that labour is pretty tight. So a lot of organizations, non-profits, get outbid because—for example, as an administrator—you've got the private sector or another organization that can offer that position at \$65,000. A non-profit can only offer that at \$45,000. So they lose out on that, so that wealth of knowledge and experience is un-gained and lost because they can't compete at that level.

So that's been a real big factor in terms of non-profits hiring qualified people. Yes, you can do internships, but

those are only temporary stops. You can get by on an intern, but that's only a gap-stop. You still have to look at the long-term picture, which is, if you stabilize that, allow them to compete at a more parallel level in the labour force—and it's only going to get worse, because we know the economy in Ontario is really moving right now, so there are going to be more jobs, especially in northwestern Ontario, with the mining sector exploding. So we're going to see more demand for that in this region, so that's going to increase even more pressure down on non-profits because they're competing with the bigger market, not just themselves.

**Mr. Terence Kernaghan:** About a month ago, a little while ago, in front of this committee, a visiting government member mentioned that they were upset about the number of non-profits in their community. They felt there was too much competition and that they served the same people. Is there a duplication of services within the non-profit sector? Would you say that non-profits are necessary?

**Mr. Gary Christian:** Non-profits don't compete against themselves, because if they did, they wouldn't survive, first of all. There would be no need for them and they would not exist. But a lot of non-profits specialize. They specialize in social services. Some specialize in Employment Ontario programs. They specialize in certain sectors of the economy. So, the likelihood of gaps crossing over is very slim because if they do, then, in most cases, that's a collaboration between non-profits because they have to, because their situation, financially, is that they have to collaborate in order for both to survive. But it's unlikely a social services non-profit organization is going to go over to an Employment Ontario non-profit organization offering the same thing. That's not going to happen. Collaboration, yes—but I don't see that crossover.

1630

**Mr. Terence Kernaghan:** It almost speaks to the growing need—that there are so many non-profits. We obviously see that there are still people who are struggling despite the best efforts of wonderful people in the non-profit sector.

You mentioned the need for stability. How can you stabilize non-profits?

**Mr. Gary Christian:** That's a really tricky question, because some non-profits have a limited life and they do not exist forever; they may exist only for a short period of time. But the stability factor is, if it's multi-year funding—at least when an organization knows that they've got two- or three-year funding in place, that allows them to stabilize their operations for the next three years. Then, you can offer, for example, if you're hiring somebody, a position for the next, say, 18 months, 24 months or 36 months. The likelihood of that non-profit getting that person is much greater, because there is some stability there. So that will help in getting those key people in place, especially the talent you need, be it on social services, education or labour force—whatever the case may be. And the funding may change year to year. The reality is, funding is based on the economy. If the economy is not doing well—we get that. But if we at least have some stabilization that they can work with, then that gives them stability in the long-term picture.

**Mr. Terence Kernaghan:** Given the broad range of services that non-profits provide, would you like to see a government champion, an associate deputy minister position be created, so that non-profits have somebody inside of government to help represent their needs?

**Mr. Gary Christian:** Absolutely. There has to be leadership that shows direction. No matter what government is in power, you have to have that leadership at the top that can help non-profits. That particular minister or associate minister could also work with other ministries—two at the same time. So it's a collaborative effort between the government itself—but having that one voice for non-profits or organizations that fall under the non-profit there, so that just is one voice. It also gives it a voice at the table in terms of the cabinet itself. And it could be an associate minister or it could be a minister with associate position portfolio of this—but there has to be some type of leadership at the top to support them.

**Mr. Terence Kernaghan:** It would certainly help break down the silos, wouldn't it?

**Mr. Gary Christian:** Absolutely. Silos separate us all. If we're in silos, we can't talk.

**Mr. Terence Kernaghan:** Thank you very much. I appreciate all of your comments today.

I'd like to move over to Marianne Meed Ward. It's great to see you, albeit virtually.

Have any of Ontario's Big City Mayors been made whole after the shortfall created by Bill 23?

**Ms. Marianne Meed Ward:** Thank you very much for that question. I appreciate it.

We have not actually heard an announcement of what that will even look like, so we have heard no details, and we really need to see that in the next budget. In fact, we're calling for a whole review of the financing system of municipalities. The Association of Municipalities of Ontario, which I know you're familiar with—they're the voice of all the municipalities, 444, big and small, north, south. They estimated the \$4-billion gap between funding that we get from the province and the services that we deliver on their behalf, that we subsidize the—that's just one area.

We're also being asked to fund mental health, addictions, homelessness—all of these issues that were really never intended to be put on the property tax.

The province struck a new deal with Toronto. We're asking for a new deal for all cities. We all need predictable, sustainable funding, and Bill 23 is actually going to go in the opposite direction, by limiting our ability to collect DCs. So we hope that there is good news in the budget that will scale back that situation.

**The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman):** One minute.

**Ms. Marianne Meed Ward:** We're happy to do that on supportive housing, on deeply affordable assistive housing, but not for every unit of housing, because that guts our budget.

**Mr. Terence Kernaghan:** You mentioned that you are in favour of a use-it-or-lose-it policy. What problem would that solve?

**Ms. Marianne Meed Ward:** We actually haven't taken a position, as a caucus. We are looking into what that might mean. The one part of it that's intriguing is, it starts to put

some of the responsibility on the development sector. So far, the narrative has been solely that the only thing standing between a young couple or a low-income family and a house is the municipal permit process, and that is a grossly oversimplified picture of the system. We don't build housing. We depend on developers to actually get shovels in the ground. Why are they not able to do that? So that's where the use-it-or-lose-it—

**The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman):** Thank you very much. That concludes that question.

We'll now go to the independent. MPP Bowman.

**Ms. Stephanie Bowman:** Thank you all for being here today.

I will start with Perley Health. It's lovely to meet you, virtually. I know that MPP Stephen Blais has great things to say about your organization, and I know it's making a great contribution in your community, so thank you for that.

In my riding in Don Valley West, we have two somewhat similar organizations. We have the Sunnybrook Veterans Centre as well as Suomi-Koti, which is a retirement home and also has some long-term care. I've heard from Suomi-Koti the same challenge you're talking about as it relates to trying to get funding. They actually own some land and would like to build more beds, but they are unable to—as you talked about—make the numbers work right now in terms of their cash flow, but also the operating funding. They are a not-for-profit, like you, and also have a very strong volunteer base that comes in and help make that community feel part of the broader community as well.

Could you just elaborate for a moment on the challenge for not-for-profit homes getting this access to the capital, the funding, the financing they need to expand, especially homes like yours, which are doing great work?

**Mr. Akos Hoffer:** Thank you. I really appreciate the question and your kind words.

The challenge is really that we have fewer financing options compared to, let's say, a for-profit long-term-care operator of a chain. They would have a great deal more equity, because oftentimes they have scale that we don't have. The risk is spread across many other locations, and banks look upon the risk of lending to an organization like that more favourably than they do us. So there are fewer lenders that will consider us and, when they do, the interest rates are higher.

There's work being done to address that as well. We already have Infrastructure Ontario. They're a lender of ours for one of our buildings. Mind you, borrowing from them was not inexpensive. There is a new Ontario Infrastructure Bank being formed, which I believe could address the issue to a certain extent.

The other issue—and this is faced by both for-profit and non-profit operators—is that the conditions in each municipality are different. For example, in Ottawa, we have a lot of seismic activity. There are a lot of little earthquakes that go on, so it costs more to build a safe building here in Ottawa than it does in other parts of the province. The funding, though, is identical. One of the things we are recommending is that there be more flexibility to say, “Okay,

it costs more, so perhaps the funding needs to be a little bit higher.”

To be clear, some projects can actually go ahead with the existing funding formula. There are beds being built. But then there are other ones, both for-profit and non-profit, that fall outside of that and were not able to move ahead.

**Ms. Stephanie Bowman:** Thank you for that.

Marianne, I will move to you. Thank you for being such a strong voice for the big cities across our province. You talked about some really important challenges, and certainly we heard about those as well at AMO, that you haven't yet been made whole and that you can't take that \$5 billion of development charges and put that onto the backs of taxpayers. I wonder if you could just, again, try to drive home your message here around why you need that sustainable funding, why you need a new model, and the fact that a deal like Toronto has might be something that would benefit other cities so they also have access to different revenue tools etc.

**Ms. Marianne Meed Ward:** I really appreciate the question. We have a funding model and relationship with the federal and provincial governments that is 100 years old, and yet the issues we face are very new and recent and growing. We cannot continue to operate and put all of the issues that I've talked about—back in the day, when it was really just about potholes and parks, property issues—that's why it's called property tax. We're dealing with people issues now: mental health, homelessness—

**The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman):** Thank you very much. That concludes the time.

We'll now go to the government. MPP Anand.

**Mr. Deepak Anand:** Thank you to all the presenters for coming.

Ontario's Big City Mayors: Madam Mayor, it's good to see you again. I think you were trying to say something and the time was over, so I would like to go back to you if you want to finish the line.

1640

**Ms. Marianne Meed Ward:** Thank you. How much time do I have? I'll try to keep my answer to like a minute or—

**Mr. Deepak Anand:** A minute would be ideal, maximum.

**Ms. Marianne Meed Ward:** The way we fund what we're trying to do—in Burlington, 11% of our budget comes from the federal and provincial governments. The federal government has all the money; provincial governments have all the power over us to either upend or help us, and municipalities have all the problems. We are the first level of government that people see when they walk out their front door, and we are being asked to do it all with a 100-year-old model. We can't continue to wait for a funding stream to open, hope we qualify, put in an application and maybe get half of what we asked for when we're trying to build major infrastructure that takes decades to plan.

The whole system is broken. It's not necessarily about more money; it's how it's allocated. AMO has called for a social and prosperity review. The Federation of Canadian

Municipalities has called for a growth framework. OBCM has endorsed both of those positions. We all need a new deal. We simply can't continue to build a great province and a great country this way.

**Mr. Deepak Anand:** Thank you. I think the best way forward would be if you can put together this conversation, your asks—ask number one: cost, cost and benefit; ask number two: how much it's going to cost, and what is the cost and benefit. I greatly appreciate it. We actually have PA Crawford; they're going to look after and look into it. Thank you again. Good to see you.

Now, I'm going to—

**Ms. Marianne Meed Ward:** Thank you.

**Mr. Deepak Anand:** It's great to see a neighbour in farther places, but it's good to see you have that company.

I want to move to the local champions here. I see the member from the North Superior Workforce Planning Board. Gary, quick question: On your website, it says, "prosperity ahead." What does that mean?

**Mr. Gary Christian:** How do you define prosperity? Everybody can put prosperity in two forms: economic, personal and social. When we look at prosperity—I defined it in three different ways. It could be personal views and so forth—

**Mr. Deepak Anand:** Your website is saying, "Northwestern Ontario: Prosperity Ahead." I'm just asking that question.

**Mr. Gary Christian:** No, it's—

**Mr. Deepak Anand:** Okay, I'll get another question.

It's good to see the tools that you have, whether it is a job board, job market, census tool or career tool. How much is the need for workforce in Thunder Bay?

**Mr. Gary Christian:** The need right now is significant. Obviously, we see an explosion in the mining sector in northwestern Ontario. We've seen one mine opening up; we see another one opening up three hours east of Thunder Bay. We're also seeing development exploration happening three hours northwest of Thunder Bay. So the jobs are going to be there. It's going to be tight.

I met with the CEO of Avalon. We're opening up a mine up in Kenora, and they bought an old mill here in Thunder Bay which will be the centre at which the delivery will occur. The job market is going to get really tight. It's tight right now. It is very tight right now.

**Mr. Deepak Anand:** A quick question to you is, there is an organization—for an example, Achēv in Mississauga—which is doing a similar task. I do remember going to Windsor, and MPP Andrew Dowie was kind enough to take me to another job board in his riding. Do you guys talk to each other?

I'll tell you, the reason I'm asking is because we have a different problem. You and I have exact opposite problems. I have a riding, which is Malton. Every year, 11% more new people come to Malton. That's a reasonable, sizable amount of people always looking for a home, looking for a job, looking for a career. So, we have an excess of people, whereas you're talking about you need people. Do you intersect with those places, those job boards where you can leverage each other?

**Mr. Gary Christian:** Yes. There are a lot of Employment Ontario agencies also throughout northwestern Ontario and in Thunder Bay that actually work with that. We do work in collaboration with other agencies. The Thunder Bay Multicultural Association, for example, when they brought in immigrants from Ukraine, in that point there, were managing to get those people into jobs immediately in the mining sector and in the forestry sector. But you're right. There is a collaboration of different organizations for that.

One issue that has not been discussed is retention of international students. We did a study a year ago looking at retention of international students. They're highly educated, high-skilled people, but we can't seem to keep them. That in itself is another issue when we talk about prosperity and personal choice, and so that all leads to that factor there. And that implodes, also, on non-profit organizations because the skills coming out of colleges and universities, you can't get them—and that's another issue itself right there. So that's why the job market in this region is very, very tight.

**Mr. Deepak Anand:** I do want to acknowledge that one of your board members, Heena, who came as an international student, found the love of her life, married him here, started a business and they're actually living here and part of the board and giving back to the community. And that goes two ways—your acceptance, getting them into the system and collaborating, also, is one reason. And I do understand. I know that you have a local champion, our MPP Kevin Holland, who has done a great job. He always talks and fights for the local area. So anything that we can do, we'd be happy to.

One ask that you want us to take back—actually, to my neighbour next to me—what would that be?

**Mr. Gary Christian:** Yes, and that's very good to hear, and that's the big picture too. Everything is in perspective when we look at the size of the population of Thunder Bay. It's growing. We look at the housing that has to happen in order to support that.

I'll give you an example: the town of Marathon. They built two apartment blocks. They have to build a third now because they recognize they don't have enough housing for the 500 people that are going to be coming and working in the mine there. So in perspective of that, it's actually getting bigger and bigger—which is great for our economy. Twenty years ago, we would never have seen what we saw today.

**The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman):** One minute. MPP Dowie.

**Mr. Andrew Dowie:** I'll be very quick. Mayor Meed Ward, thank you for being here. Just a quick question for you on Bill 23 and your comments: Can you share with us which development charges have been not collected since the adoption of the bill? Does it have to do with the attainable category, which isn't defined, or the affordable or the purpose-built rentals? I hope you can share.

**Ms. Marianne Meed Ward:** Thank you for that. The bill has identified affordable housing related to income. We supported that. It hasn't been proclaimed—so the draw

on DCs hasn't started yet, but it will, and we've calculated in Burlington that that would mean several percentage points per year in property taxes to cover the balance and put that on the backs of our community. And there's no guarantee that those—

**The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman):** Thank you very much. Maybe finish the answer in the next question.

But we go to the opposition.

**MPP Lise Vaugeois:** I actually would like to hear the answer to that question, and maybe also highlight that you asked for collaboration with the government. I do recall that AMO wrote a very strongly worded letter opposing Bill 23. So now you do have to, ultimately, deal with the consequences. Can you continue with your explanation, please?

**Ms. Marianne Meed Ward:** Thank you. We have no problems with credits for purpose-built rental, assisted housing, social housing—and, in fact, many municipalities have already built that into their existing development charges bylaw.

The real challenge is on this undefined “attainable.” There's no definition. Somebody who makes \$1 million a year, a house that is attainable for them is quite different than somebody that would make \$25,000 or \$30,000 a year, and this essentially means “everything else.” And we rely on development charges to pay for new buses, new parks, new community centres, as well as the water and waste water infrastructure that—if you don't have a sink and a toilet, you're not opening that house to somebody to live in.

This is actually counter to the government's goal of building more houses. We simply can't continue to raise property taxes to cover this, and there has been no guarantee that any of those savings would be passed on to homebuyers. There are no protections built into the legislation. So these are the kinds of concerns that we've raised. We've said, “The system is not broken, so don't break what's working just fine.”

Also, we need the government's assistance to pay their fair share of cost-shared social programs so we're not subsidizing them—that would be a start—and then we just need a new deal. We can't continue to run thriving cities that serve the needs of our community on the property tax base alone. It wasn't intended to pay for the things that are now being downloaded to that sector.

**MPP Lise Vaugeois:** I must say, I'm well aware that there has been so much downloading over so many years and that municipalities are finding themselves cutting core services that people really need—recreation—because the funding has just been gobbled up by things that should not be the responsibility of municipalities. So thank you.

Gary, I'd like to talk to you a little bit about the non-profit situation. I'm also aware that there have not been increases to budgets for many, many non-profits over at least 20 years. In many respects, it says then what the government values, if the money is not being put into those organizations.

1650

You also touched on—so I think you could say a little bit more—what happens with staffing. Because often, staff

comes to a non-profit, perhaps without experience, and then they're trained in that non-profit, and then they immediately leave once they have the training and the non-profit is left, again, without the funding and without the staff.

**Mr. Gary Christian:** Yes. It's an important point. Last October, we had a conference in Thunder Bay with the Ontario Nonprofit Network and local non-profits in Thunder Bay, and that issue came up in discussion: that non-profits become almost like a training centre. You bring people in, you train them to get the skills that they need to do their job, and then, six months, eight months, 10 months, 12 months down the road, they're out the door, because now they've got training with the experience. They go to another position and get a higher salary, which you don't blame them for doing that. I encourage them to do that. But the problem is that we're still going back to that point A again, doing what we've got to do in circles and then come back. It's a back-and-forth situation. Again, it creates instability. So if you have two-year or three-year funding, you can avoid that instability by having that.

Again, people look at opportunities. Not everybody works based on the salary, but they work at experience, especially someone that recently graduated. They're going to get the experience and go. That's the reality. We have to face those issues, and that's definitely a big issue, the fact you're always in training mode with organizations.

**MPP Lise Vaugeois:** Thank you very much.

I don't know if you've got another question. I have a little bit here.

One of the things that we heard a lot at ROMA was that people in organizations, people in municipalities are the subject experts in your fields. So, really, I want to encourage and underscore the importance of actually listening to what's happening—for governments, opposition, all of us to be listening and appreciating, I would say, in the non-profit sector, all the volunteer hours that are put in by paid staff. There are volunteers, but there are also paid staff that wind up, because they're so committed to the work—they give their lives, but it's really not fair. They need to be paid properly. Those organizations need to be funded properly.

I want to say the same thing for the municipalities. Municipalities know what they're dealing with, and they knew that when Bill 23 was first proposed, and that is why there was so much opposition.

I think I will leave it there. Thank you.

**The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman):** MPP Kernaghan.

**Mr. Terence Kernaghan:** I also wanted to ask Akos—you discussed new beds and the disparity between the for-profit as well as not-for-profit new beds in the long-term-care sector. In addition to building new beds, can you comment on the human resource issue in the sector? Something that I often hear at Queen's Park is that you can build as many beds as you would like, but a bed is just a piece of furniture without a nurse. Would you like to comment on the human resources issue?

**Mr. Akos Hoffer:** Thank you. I appreciate the question. They're absolutely right. When we go to our board with a proposal to build something new, we need to have a human resources strategy to go along with that. Really, it's about the relationships that you build with workers, with the



professions, with your unions, and also with academic institutions. It's a huge opportunity there.

One of the things that's worked really well here is something called the Living Classroom.

**The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman):** One minute.

**Mr. Akos Hoffer:** Here in Ottawa, one of the organizations that trains a lot of our nursing staff is called Algonquin College. We worked with them a few years ago, where they took over what used to be a dining room on one of our units. You can enrol in that program as a nurse and instead of stepping foot on the college campus at all, you're coming here for all of your in-class learning, and the whole time you're getting guest lectures from residents, from staff. You're getting to find out if this is really for you.

Then, really importantly, once they graduate, you can measure the retention rates. We also train personal support workers in this program, which, unfortunately, many—like 50% of PSWs will leave that work to go and do something else once they graduate. We managed to get the retention rate to like 80% or 90% because they get such a different learning experience—

**The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman):** Thank you very much. That concludes that time.

We'll now go to the independents. MPP Hazell.

**MPP Andrea Hazell:** Thank you, everyone, for coming in and presenting. Thank you for that. I appreciate that. Marianne, I'm going to go to you for my first question, but I have two questions for you. You detailed your housing initiatives and you talked about your budget pressures and funding. You want to help the government to build 1.5 million homes over 10 years. So I get that, but what I didn't hear you detail that much, and I'm pretty sure it has a lot of effects on your population, is the mental health crisis, addiction, opioid overdoses and homelessness. That must be adding a lot of pressures to your housing situation.

Can you detail that? And I have one more question for you.

**Ms. Marianne Meed Ward:** I really appreciate that question because I ran out of time to get to that piece, so thank you. We have, as Ontario's Big City Mayors, made that one of our three priority items. We actually met with Sylvia Jones on this to see housing, homelessness, mental health and addictions as primarily, first and foremost, a health issue, including the homelessness component. We have to see it as a health issue.

We've prepared a paper with the help of industry and sector experts. We're happy to send that to the committee. Among other things, we're looking at a centralized dispatch system, low-barrier community hubs which we can put in place in our communities, stabilization and treatment beds with experienced staff. Because hospitals can't continue to be the de facto shelter for folks. They're the first lines of this. Of course, we need funding for more supportive housing. And we need collaboration most of all. People fall through the cracks; they don't know where to go to get help, including some experts in the field. They find it just as confusing as the person that's trying to get help. So we

have detailed a whole series of recommendations to the government which we have presented on multiple occasions, including at delegations.

We are on the front lines of this. This is showing up in our streets, in our downtowns. It is leading to encampments and tent cities. We can do better in this country. There is no reason why anyone in a country as full of resources as Canada should be living on the street, and yet we have this issue. It's not good enough, and there's much more that we should and can do. We are willing to be partners and do what we can do, but we can't do it all and we can't do it alone.

**MPP Andrea Hazell:** I just saw the government announce \$3.6 million to \$4 million in new refugee support funds, so let's see where that's going to land. I just thought I'd quip that in.

I want to ask you my second question, very quickly, and I'm going to make this as short as possible. The government's Building Faster Fund rewards municipalities who build housing but doesn't really help them build faster. Meanwhile, the federal government's Housing Accelerator Fund awards municipalities that make the regulatory changes that will enable more housing to be built. My question: Should the provincial government change their approach so that the funds actually go towards building housing? What are your thoughts on that?

**Ms. Marianne Meed Ward:** Absolutely. We have said that the Building Faster Fund, which measures and rewards foundations—we at the municipality do not pour foundations. In Burlington alone—and this is across Ontario—we have almost 4,000 units that we have approved. We are waiting for developers to come in and get permits. We can't force them to. That's foundations waiting to be built, but we're penalized when they don't come in. We will not get access to the Building Faster Fund because the wrong measurement, the wrong criteria, is being used. Therefore, we can't build the infrastructure because we don't have the money to build the infrastructure; therefore, the homes can't get built; therefore, the foundations don't get poured; therefore, we can't get the BFF. So it's a circular problem, and we've alerted the government that this is the wrong metric. And it's wildly inaccurate. CMHC data on foundations is also dated and inaccurate. So not only is the data set wrong, it's the wrong measurement by which to judge municipalities and award or punish in terms of funding.

**The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman):** Thank you very much. That concludes the time for that question, that concludes the time for this panel, and it also concludes the time of our hearings in Thunder Bay.

With that, I want to thank all the presenters here this afternoon, I want to thank all the presenters all day and I want to thank all the presenters who have so far presented to our committee. And I want to thank the city of Thunder Bay for their hospitality.

With that, the committee is now adjourned until 10 a.m. on Thursday, February 1, 2024, when we will resume public hearings in Dryden, Ontario.

*The committee adjourned at 1700.*





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