

Legislative
Assembly
of Ontario



Assemblée
législative
de l'Ontario

**Official Report
of Debates
(Hansard)**

No. 142A

**Journal
des débats
(Hansard)**

Nº 142A

1st Session
43rd Parliament

Tuesday
9 April 2024

1^{re} session
43^e législature

Mardi
9 avril 2024

Speaker: Honourable Ted Arnott
Clerk: Trevor Day

Président : L'honorable Ted Arnott
Greffier : Trevor Day

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



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

CONTENTS / TABLE DES MATIÈRES

Tuesday 9 April 2024 / Mardi 9 avril 2024

ORDERS OF THE DAY / ORDRE DU JOUR

Building a Better Ontario Act (Budget Measures), 2024, Bill 180, Mr. Bethlenfalvy / Loi de 2024 visant à bâtir un Ontario meilleur (mesures budgétaires), projet de loi 180, M. Bethlenfalvy

Miss Monique Taylor	8167
Mr. Andrew Dowie	8167
Ms. Peggy Sattler	8168
Mr. Terence Kernaghan	8168
Mr. Billy Pang	8168
Ms. Peggy Sattler	8169
Mr. Mike Schreiner	8169
Mr. Lorne Coe	8170
Ms. Jessica Bell	8170
Ms. Laura Smith	8170
Hon. Doug Downey	8171
Mr. Jeff Burch	8174
Ms. Laura Smith	8174
Mr. Sol Mamakwa	8174
Mr. Billy Pang	8175
Mr. Chris Glover	8175
Ms. Chandra Pasma	8175
Second reading debate deemed adjourned	8178
Wearing of pins	
Mr. Nolan Quinn	8178

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS / DÉCLARATIONS DES DÉPUTÉES ET DÉPUTÉS

Health care post-secondary education

Mr. Billy Pang	8178
----------------------	------

Beyond the Streets

Mr. Jeff Burch	8178
----------------------	------

Napanee Beaver

Mr. Ric Bresee	8178
----------------------	------

Gender-based violence

Mrs. Lisa Gretzky	8179
-------------------------	------

Giving Spoon fundraiser

Mr. Trevor Jones	8179
------------------------	------

Energy policies

Ms. Chandra Pasma	8179
-------------------------	------

Housing

Ms. Donna Skelly	8180
------------------------	------

Ramadan and Eid-Ul-Fitr

Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon	8180
---------------------------------	------

Health care post-secondary education

Ms. Laura Smith	8180
-----------------------	------

Battle of Vimy Ridge

Ms. Laurie Scott	8180
------------------------	------

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS / PRÉSENTATION DES VISITEUSES ET VISITEURS

Ms. Bhutila Karpoche	8181
Mr. Will Bouma	8181
Mr. Guy Bourgouin	8181
Mr. John Fraser	8181
Mr. Kevin Holland	8181
MPP Jamie West	8181
Mr. Ted Hsu	8181
Ms. Goldie Ghamari	8181
Ms. Catherine Fife	8181
Mr. Rick Byers	8181
Mme France Gélinas	8181
Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon	8181
Hon. Vijay Thanigasalam	8181
Ms. Aislinn Clancy	8181
Mr. Ric Bresee	8181
Ms. Bobbi Ann Brady	8182
Mr. Stephen Crawford	8182
Hon. Doug Downey	8182
Mr. Sam Oosterhoff	8182
Hon. Michael S. Kerzner	8182
Hon. Todd J. McCarthy	8182
Mr. Tom Rakocevic	8182
Hon. Graydon Smith	8182
Hon. Michael D. Ford	8182
The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott)	8182

Legislative pages

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott)	8182
-------------------------------------	------

House sittings

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott)	8182
-------------------------------------	------

Roland "Roy" McMurtry

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott)	8182
MPP Lise Vaugeois	8183
Mr. Mike Schreiner	8183
Mr. John Fraser	8184
Hon. Doug Downey	8184

QUESTION PERIOD / PÉRIODE DE QUESTIONS

Affordable housing

Ms. Marit Stiles	8185
Hon. Paul Calandra	8185

Health care funding	
Ms. Marit Stiles.....	8186
Mr. Nolan Quinn	8186
Hon. Jill Dunlop.....	8187
Health care	
Mme France Gélinas	8187
Mr. Nolan Quinn	8187
Taxation	
Mr. Sam Oosterhoff	8188
Mr. John Yakabuski	8188
Tenant protection	
Mr. Peter Tabuns	8188
Hon. Doug Downey	8189
Ms. Jessica Bell.....	8189
Taxation	
Mr. Steve Clark	8189
Hon. Victor Fedeli.....	8189
Executive compensation / Public transit	
Mr. Joel Harden.....	8189
Hon. Prabmeet Singh Sarkaria	8190
Public sector compensation	
Ms. Stephanie Bowman	8190
Hon. Paul Calandra	8190
Taxation	
Mme Dawn Gallagher Murphy	8191
Mr. John Yakabuski	8191
Long-term care	
Mr. Wayne Gates	8191
Hon. Stan Cho.....	8192
Tenant protection	
Ms. Aislinn Clancy	8192
Hon. Doug Downey	8192
Small business	
Ms. Natalia Kusendova-Bashta	8193
Hon. Nina Tangri	8193
Consumer protection	
Mr. Tom Rakocevic	8194
Hon. Todd J. McCarthy.....	8194
Taxation	
Ms. Effie J. Triantafilopoulos	8194
Hon. Vijay Thanigasalam.....	8194
Tenant protection	
MPP Lise Vaugeois.....	8195
Hon. Paul Calandra	8195
Visitors	
Mr. Amarjot Sandhu	8195
Mrs. Jennifer (Jennie) Stevens	8195
Mr. Sheref Sabawy.....	8195

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS / PRÉSENTATION DES VISITEUSES ET VISITEURS

Hon. Michael D. Ford	8196
----------------------------	------

REPORTS BY COMMITTEES / RAPPORTS DE COMITÉS

Standing Committee on Social Policy

Mr. Steve Clark	8196
Report adopted	8196

Standing Committee on Social Policy

Mr. Steve Clark	8196
Report adopted	8196

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS / DÉPÔT DES PROJETS DE LOI

Supporting Mobility, Affordability and Reliable Transportation in Ontario Act, 2024, Bill 184, MPP Hazell / Loi de 2024 pour une mobilité accrue, des prix plus abordables et des transports plus fiables en Ontario, projet de loi 184, MPP Hazell

First reading agreed to.....	8196
MPP Andrea Hazell.....	8196

STATEMENTS BY THE MINISTRY AND RESPONSES / DÉCLARATIONS MINISTÉRIELLES ET RÉPONSES

Vimy Ridge Day

Hon. Michael D. Ford	8196
Mrs. Jennifer (Jennie) Stevens	8198
Mrs. Karen McCrimmon	8199

PETITIONS / PÉTITIONS

Supportive housing

Mme France Gélinas	8199
--------------------------	------

Social assistance

Miss Monique Taylor	8199
---------------------------	------

Programmes d'alimentation scolaire / School nutrition programs

Mme Chandra Pasma	8199
-------------------------	------

Assistive devices

Mme France Gélinas	8200
--------------------------	------

Mental health services

MPP Jamie West	8200
----------------------	------

Anti-vaping initiatives for youth

Mme France Gélinas	8200
--------------------------	------

Éducation en français	
Mme France Gélinas	8200
OPP detachment	
Mme France Gélinas	8201
Labour legislation	
MPP Jamie West	8201
Adoption disclosure	
Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong	8201
Subventions aux résidents du Nord pour frais de transport à des fins médicales	
Mme France Gélinas	8201
Social assistance	
Mme France Gélinas	8201
Visitors	
Mr. Andrew Dowie	8201

ORDERS OF THE DAY / ORDRE DU JOUR

Building a Better Ontario Act (Budget Measures), 2024, Bill 180, Mr. Bethlenfalvy / Loi de 2024 visant à bâtir un Ontario meilleur (mesures budgétaires), projet de loi 180, M. Bethlenfalvy	
Ms. Chandra Pasma.....	8202
Mme France Gélinas	8203
MPP Jamie West	8203
Hon. Andrea Khanjin	8203
Mr. Andrew Dowie	8204
Miss Monique Taylor.....	8204
Mr. Stephen Blais.....	8204
Mr. John Fraser	8205
Ms. Lisa MacLeod	8206

Mr. Tom Rakocevic.....	8206
Mme Lucille Collard	8207
Mr. Rudy Cuzzetto	8207
Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong	8207
Hon. Andrea Khanjin	8208
Miss Monique Taylor.....	8211
Ms. Laura Smith.....	8211
Mme France Gélinas	8212
Hon. Jill Dunlop	8212
Mr. Tom Rakocevic.....	8212
Mr. Deepak Anand	8213
Mme France Gélinas	8213
Mr. Billy Pang	8215
Mme France Gélinas	8215
M. Guy Bourgouin	8216
Mr. Deepak Anand	8216
Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong	8216
Mr. Deepak Anand	8216
Ms. Lisa MacLeod.....	8217
Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong	8218
Mr. Trevor Jones	8219
Mr. Guy Bourgouin	8219
Mr. John Fraser	8219
Mr. Deepak Anand	8220
Mr. Tom Rakocevic.....	8220
Ms. Laura Smith.....	8221
Miss Monique Taylor.....	8222
Mr. Deepak Anand	8222
Second reading debate deemed adjourned	8222

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

Tuesday 9 April 2024

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

Mardi 9 avril 2024

The House met at 0900.

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

Prayers.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

BUILDING A BETTER ONTARIO ACT (BUDGET MEASURES), 2024

LOI DE 2024 VISANT À BÂTIR UN ONTARIO MEILLEUR (MESURES BUDGÉTAIRES)

Resuming the debate adjourned on April 8, 2024, on the motion for second reading of the following bill:

Bill 180, An Act to implement Budget measures and to enact and amend various statutes / Projet de loi 180, Loi visant à mettre en oeuvre les mesures budgétaires et à édicter et à modifier diverses lois.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): When the House last debated Bill 180, the member for Hamilton Mountain had the floor, and she still has some time left on the clock. I recognize the member for Hamilton Mountain.

Miss Monique Taylor: Good morning, everyone. I'm happy to have the opportunity to have a few more moments on the budget bill and to bring up a very serious issue that's happening right now within Hamilton and the way that naloxone kits are distributed in our community.

I believe it was on February 9, this executive officer order notice was put out with no consultation to the community, and quite frankly, one of our pharmacies, who has been doing brilliant work, found out by chance on I believe it was February 21. So there was no direct notice to him, who was doing this program and really saving lives within the Hamilton community. What this did was it stopped him from being able to do training unless people went directly into his pharmacy. He used to provide full training on naloxone kits and all the tools necessary to our community-based organizations.

There is a program for community-based organizations, but many of the organizations with Hamilton had not set up that practice, because we did have a practice that was working really well. All the rules were being followed. Nobody was doing anything wrong, except doing the hard, heavy lifting in the grassroots of our community and truly saving lives, making sure that naloxone kits were available and that training was widespread. He was doing workplaces. He was doing work with First Nations in the north.

That's how good this Faisal is at doing this job. But due to this executive order, he has literally been cut off and not been able to do this work.

We have many organizations who are not able to get that quick response. I know our Hamilton public health is doing everything they can. But when you change something without proper notice, something that actually saves lives and was a major pillar in our community, it does nothing but hurt people.

I've sent a letter to the minister previously, but nobody has heard anything. I'm calling on the government today to ensure that this program is relooked at quickly and readily to ensure that Faisal and the pharmacy that he works within can continue the work of our community, whether it's a temporary measure until they find another plan, another way around it, whatever it takes. I just plead with the government to please make sure that this is looked at immediately.

I will send another letter to the Premier and to the minister, ensuring that all information is readily available and that we can continue to save people's lives in Hamilton.

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

Mr. Andrew Dowie: I want to thank the member opposite for her speech both last night and today. Certainly, I took back the passion for helping those in the community, and I know certainly the people in my community want access to health care for their constituents as much as possible, just as I'm sure the residents of Hamilton Mountain do.

That's why I was happy to see in this budget many investments in health care. This includes \$2 billion over three years for home and community care that ensures that people get the care they need when they need it, right at home. And also, the hospitals have said very clearly to me that they're excited about the 4% increase in hospital funding so that they can fund more support for critical care for the people of Ontario. And the new medical school is going to go a tremendous way to improving the number of medical students in our province focused on training family doctors.

Speaker, my question is this: The government is making historic investments in health care to help Ontarians. Will you support budget 2024, to join with us in providing better health care for Ontarians?

Miss Monique Taylor: What we see in health care is actually only 1.3% going to health care of what was necessary. It's not near enough to keep up with inflation. It may be historic numbers, but we are in historic days. Let's not forget this.

We still have 2.2 million patients in Ontario without a family doctor. We have great programs, like the Hamilton health program, which very clearly put together an amazing plan and asked for \$20 million to be able to implement that plan to ensure that 55,000 Hamilton residents had access to a family doctor. This government didn't see fit to ensure that that program was in place. Instead, they gave them \$2.2 million, which is not near enough to ensure that we can do the programs that we know are necessary.

Regardless of the talking points of the members opposite, we know in our communities that the health care system is falling short and privatization is not the answer out of this. We need actual real investments in health care and proactive work.

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

Ms. Peggy Sattler: I want to thank my colleague the member for Hamilton Mountain for her remarks on the budget.

One of the things that I hear about the most—and I think everybody in this chamber shares this in their constituency offices. It's hearing from people who don't have access to a family doctor. I had a telephone town hall recently. I want to thank Dr. Andrew Park, who is a London West constituent and also president of the OMA, who participated in that town hall meeting.

I heard the people who logged on to the call. More than one quarter didn't have access to a family doctor. Almost 90% said someone close to them didn't have access to a family doctor. So I wondered if the member could comment on whether the measures that were included in this budget are sufficient to address the dire shortage of family physicians in the province.

Miss Monique Taylor: Thank you to the member from London West. As I was just saying, the Greater Hamilton Health Network had put together a full 72-page plan to ensure that family doctors in Hamilton, and I'm sure that across the province each health network—that's why they were put in place: to know and understand our communities. We put together a full proposal; that was not easy work. Like I said, we asked for that \$20 million to ensure that we gave access to 55,000 Hamiltonians. I'm sure that in the member's riding, they're also doing that same kind of work. But by not funding them and only giving them \$2.2 million out of a \$20-million ask, you cannot expect the changes that our communities truly need to be able to be healthy and to be able to succeed and have a good, strong health care system.

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

Mr. Terence Kernaghan: The Royal Bank of Canada's research recently warned that the housing crisis is going to get even worse if governments don't act. This government, because of their measures, have only created 8% of the housing that they promised will be created by 2025. In fact, since 2018, their measures have only created 1,100 units of affordable housing. RBC has indicated this:

that drastic measures need to be taken right now by government.

0910

So my question for the member from Hamilton Mountain is: Should the government return to its historic responsibility, do the heavy lifting, pick up their shovels and actually build the affordable housing that Ontarians need right now?

Miss Monique Taylor: Thank you to the member from London North Centre. Absolutely, there should be nothing more important than ensuring that people are housed. When you have safe, affordable housing, you're then able to make your way into getting that job or being able to go to your job and be fresh, and not put yourself in danger in a job.

When someone isn't housed, they find themselves in a precarious position. There's food insecurity. There's the ability to—just self-maintenance. All of those things go so far into making sure that people are able to live a healthy lifestyle. And when you have a government that actually takes money from municipalities instead of invests in municipalities so that they can have that affordable housing route, then we have people living in tents across our city, which we see each and every day. And it's growing and growing.

This government, in all of their talk about all these housing plans—we're literally seeing nothing happen, and people are continuing to fall through the cracks further and further.

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

Mr. Billy Pang: To the member opposite: The government is continuing to support K to 12 education, investing over \$23 billion, including \$16 billion in capital grants over the next 10 years to build more schools and child care spaces, including a new joint French and English public school in Blind River, a new elementary school, a new secondary school in Ottawa, and additional in other areas, including one in my riding. This includes \$1.4 billion in funding for the current school year to support repair and also renewal needs of the schools.

Since the government keeps investing in education, is the member going to support this budget so that we can move forward with the public education sector?

Miss Monique Taylor: I'm glad that this member asked me about education, because we're seeing so many children in our schools with not enough supports. We have over 67,000 children on wait-lists for autism services, and all of those kids are fed into the schools. They don't have enough supports. There are not enough EAs, and schools, quite frankly, are in distress.

We're hearing, each and every day, they're six years under inflation, and they were given 2.7%—not near enough when we know that families are struggling. If they want to talk about a big increase into education, is that to make up for the pay wages that they took from educational workers in Bill 124? That's where that money is going. It's making up for their errors.

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

Ms. Peggy Sattler: I know that my colleague the member for Hamilton Mountain has some outstanding post-secondary institutions in her riding. There's Mohawk College, McMaster University. The post-secondary sector is really in a state of crisis right now in terms of the financial stability of the sector.

The government made an announcement in February; nothing additional was announced in this budget. Can the member comment on whether the path that this government is on is going to ensure the stability that our post-secondary institutions need?

Miss Monique Taylor: Thank you to the member from London West once again. Yes, we have seen a terrible cut, year over year, to post-secondary in this province, which has left colleges and universities in a precarious position, where they were, then, counting on international students to able to make up that budget. Because let's not mince words: They're businesses. They have to be able to keep their doors open. They have to be able to keep the lights on. They have to be able to pay educators to provide these. If they don't have the funding to do that and they're not able to increase tuition, which nobody wants—because we need young people to be able to flourish and to be able to be our next generation of nurses, doctors, lawyers and caregivers. But by not funding post-secondary education, you're failing.

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

Mr. Mike Schreiner: It's an honour to rise today to speak to Bill 180, the government's budget measures act. Speaker, I think it's important when you talk about the budget to contextualize the challenges that people of Ontario are facing right now.

What if I told you that in Ontario right now 16,000 people were sleeping rough and unhoused, where a one-bedroom apartment costs \$2,200 a month on average, and it takes the average person 22 years to save up for a down payment to buy a home? And yet in the budget, housing starts go down, not up.

What if I told you that the wait-list for social housing is longer than the number of social housing spaces available?

What if I told you, Speaker, that last year, 700 forest fires destroyed one million acres of forest and the health care costs associated with the toxic air that that produced cost our health care system \$1.28 billion in just four days due to increased hospital admissions?

What if I told you that our electricity sector grid has gone from being 90% clean to 80% clean, getting dirtier each and every year, and the government plans to make it dirtier?

What if I told you that 2.3 million people right now in the province of Ontario do not have access to a family doctor, where last year we had an unprecedented number of emergency department closures, where hallway medicine is the norm in hospitals across this province, and we have hospitals actually taking out lines of credit to be able to keep the doors open?

What if I told you, Speaker, that a third of secondary schools in the province right now are experiencing teacher shortages and a difficulty educating students, where the repair backlog in our education system is \$16.8 billion?

What if I told you that 60,000 young people are on a wait-list to access autism services, and 30,000 children were on a wait-list to access mental health services that can be as long as two years, where organizations who provide services for people with developmental disabilities have told me their budgets have been frozen and they're struggling to not have to cut programs for people in need? What if I told you that 717,000 people in Ontario right now are forced to live in legislated poverty?

That's the Ontario we live in today. So then the question we have to ask the people of Ontario and the government is: Did the budget meet the moment? Did it meet the moment to address the real challenges that so many people in this province are facing? And Speaker, I would say no.

I want to start with housing. We have a government that has housing starts going down, not up. And the Premier, instead of saying, "Let's legalize housing. Let's make fourplexes legal across the province, so we can quickly build homes in a fast and low-cost way that people can actually afford in the communities they know and love without having to pave over our farmlands, our forests and our wetlands"—the government said no to that.

What if we had a government that actually sat down and read the Scotiabank report? Scotiabank—nothing too radical here: Over the next decade, Ontario needs to build 250,000 deeply affordable, non-profit and co-op housing spaces just to keep up—just to keep up, Speaker. And yet the government has built 1,188 of those spaces in the six years they've been in government.

There was nothing in the budget that talked about actually putting some money on the table so that Ontario once again could start building homes that people can afford so we can address chronic homelessness. The government had an opportunity with this budget—and I will, again, later today, when my colleague the MPP for Kitchener Centre brings forward a private member's bill to actually bring in protections for renters in this budget, at a time when there is no city in Ontario where a minimum wage worker working full time can afford the average rent of a one-bedroom apartment.

0920

The housing crisis is getting worse, the dream of home ownership is getting further and further away, and thousands of people are struggling to pay the rent. And while I appreciate the government providing some funding for permanent supportive housing in my riding of Guelph, which was highlighted in the budget, the budget fails to meet the moment of the housing crisis we're facing, which is the number one driver of the affordability crisis. The Premier has been talking about bags at the LCBO, but let's talk about what's really driving up costs for people, and that is the housing crisis.

Speaker, I want to move to the climate crisis, because we're already seeing an early start to the fire season in

western Canada, and we have numerous experts predicting that we could have a historic fire season here in Ontario after the historic season that we experienced last year. So what I was hoping to see in the budget were two things: one, a firefighter protection preparedness plan that actually takes and gives wildland firefighters the dignity they need to be able to be treated as firefighters and the resources they need to ensure that we are prepared in Ontario after what we went through last year. The other thing I wanted to see was an actual, dedicated funding stream for municipalities to ensure that they can be climate ready.

According to the Financial Accountability Officer, the additional cost to public infrastructure in the next seven years will be \$26.2 billion in the province of Ontario due to the impact of the increasing frequency and severity of climate-fuelled extreme weather events: floods, droughts, fires, extreme heat. It costs our economy when communities don't have access to electricity for two, three weeks or longer due to a climate-fuelled extreme weather event, which we had last year in Ontario—nothing in the budget that actually prepares our communities or our economy for that.

As a matter of fact, I stepped out of committee. Right now, the government is going to ask people to pay more on their gas bills to subsidize Enbridge to expand gas services in the province. Instead, they could have brought in a climate affordability plan in this budget, making access to heat pumps, which reduce climate pollution, operate more efficiently, and save people money—save people money—rather than having people pay more money to expand gas infrastructure in the province. They could have brought in a climate affordability plan that helped people completely disconnect from the pumps and give them rebates to be able to afford the electric vehicles that we want to build in this province, or a rebate to buy an electric bike for those who live in urban areas so we can actually lower our cost of transportation in this province.

Speaker, my time is limited, so I want to close with health care and poverty. The budget could have brought in funding to address the fact that 2.3 million people don't have access to a doctor. The budget failed to do that. And they could have taken pressure off the health care system by ending legislated poverty by more than doubling social assistance rates, because we know that poverty costs the province \$33 billion a year, primarily putting additional pressure on our health care system, and the budget failed to do that.

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

Mr. Lorne Coe: Thank you, Speaker. You will know that, in the budget, there is a new \$200-million investment in the Community Sport and Recreation Infrastructure Fund, which is intended to help build new recreation, sport and community centres in ridings across the province, including my colleague opposite in Guelph. It's intended to revitalize older ones, but also to get upgrades that they need to continue to bring health to our communities and also joy for hard-working families, including Guelph.

Will the member opposite be voting against our budget measures to build and revitalize more community infrastructure?

Mr. Mike Schreiner: I appreciate the member opposite's question. I do think we need more funding for recreational facilities, and I think that's a good measure in the budget.

But, Speaker, what municipalities also need is to ensure that those facilities are built in a way that withstands the increasing severity and frequency of extreme weather events, fuelled by the climate crisis. We're already spending billions more in insurance costs and to deal with the uninsured losses due to the increasing frequency of climate-fuelled extreme weather events. The Financial Accountability Officer has shown that just public infrastructure alone will face additional costs of \$26.2 billion this decade—I think I said seven years. Actually, it's 2024 now; it's six years.

The budget didn't meet that moment. When we build these facilities, we have to make sure they're ready for extreme rain, heat and freeze-thaw cycles, and there's nothing in the budget that provides a dedicated funding stream for that—

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

Next question?

Ms. Jessica Bell: When I look at this budget, my first impression is that it doesn't make it much easier for people to get a doctor. It doesn't make it easier for our kids to get a good education. It doesn't make it easier for people to rent or buy a home that they can afford.

To the member for Guelph: When you're looking at how this budget is going to impact the residents of Guelph, what's missing?

Mr. Mike Schreiner: I appreciate the member's question. So, first of all, I would say funding for our health care system is a huge miss in this budget. If you talk to any hospital CEO—and I meet with mine regularly, and they're doing a fantastic job at Guelph General, but they're barely hanging on right now between the extreme wait times in the emergency rooms, hallway medicine and the incredible financial pressures they're facing. They need funding that is with inflation and population growth, and we didn't see that for health care in this budget.

Secondly, I can't not answer that question without talking about post-secondary education because the University of Guelph, like many universities, is facing incredible financial pressures, because the province of Ontario is dead last when it comes to funding colleges and universities. I was meeting with a plant scientist who was telling me that two of her colleagues will be leaving and won't be able to be replaced, which is going to have a direct impact on our agricultural economy, because of the research they do, let alone the students.

So I just want to close with, I know I'm out of time—

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

Ms. Laura Smith: Through you, Speaker, I know the member and every member in this room is concerned

about the cost of living, but support for seniors is such an important issue. And I'm sure the member realizes that we all have people in our communities that need help and deserve our support as they grow older.

So, there are many ways, for crucial parts of the communities, we need to be there to provide for that. My question to the member is simple. Will you support the government's expansion of the Ontario Guaranteed Annual Income System program to provide more support to our seniors?

Mr. Mike Schreiner: I appreciate the member's question. I absolutely support the expansion of GAINS. I think it's an effective anti-poverty measure, and I wish the government would take the same approach when it comes to dealing with people on Ontario disability support and Ontario Works.

It's impossible for somebody to live on \$1,300 a month or \$731 a month, so let's more than double that. Let's bring them up to the low-income cut-off level to help eliminate poverty in this province.

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

Hon. Doug Downey: I'm very pleased to rise and continue the debate on our government's historic 2024 budget, Building a Better Ontario which, as Minister Bethlenfalvy stated previously when he introduced it a few weeks ago, is our road map and our blueprint to rebuilding Ontario's economy.

0930

As part of budget 2024, the Ministry of the Attorney General is continuing to do its part to realize this goal. A significant part of our plan to create a more prosperous Ontario is by ensuring we have strong, resilient and safe communities. I can assure you that the Ministry of the Attorney General is doing its part to create a better, more responsive justice sector for people across Ontario.

I'll start, Madam Speaker, with how our government is working very diligently to ensure the justice system and its laws meet the needs of the 21st century. In recognizing that, let me take a moment to discuss an issue that is impacting families and people right across the province. As you know, auto theft is on the rise. This is deeply concerning.

I just want to stop there for a moment. We're talking about auto theft. This isn't somebody who, when you're in the mall, is taking your car. These are individuals who break into homes, who assault people, who commandeer the keys and then, of course, take the vehicle. It's very personal. It's in people's homes; it's in people's personal spaces. Of course, this is happening as well at shopping malls, where people are being ambushed. This is very, very serious stuff.

Mr. Kerzner and the Premier and I and our entire government remain steadfast in our advocacy to the federal government to do more to combat organized auto thieves. Across the province, particularly in the GTA, we see the issue worsening and it concerns me, it concerns the Premier and I know it concerns everyone at home. That's

why we're taking pointed steps to combat the rise in auto theft, because drivers and families need peace of mind.

So far this year, to use Toronto as an example, there has been over a 100% increase in auto thefts compared to the same time in 2023. In response, the OPP are expanding vehicle theft investigations, which means there will be more cases for specialized prosecutors to review and pursue, and more hours in court. Myself, Minister Kerzner and the Premier have listened to the concerns around this issue from law enforcement here in Ontario, and we're ready to support them in stopping these crimes.

I've said this before and I'll say it again: Only a strong, coordinated approach across the sector will stop the rise in auto theft. We'll continue to take action to ensure thieves are held to account and keep drivers and families safe. We're taking this extremely seriously. This is why our government is ensuring the court system has the capacity to hear and prosecute the influx of cases. It's why, over the last year alone, our government has invested in new measures to help police identify and dismantle organized crime networks and put the thieves behind bars.

Last year, I joined Premier Ford and Minister Kerzner to announce that we're creating a major auto theft prosecution response team to include dedicated legal and prosecutorial support to the Ontario Provincial Police. A \$6-million investment this year in the specialized prosecution teams will help prevent violent vehicle thefts and identify, disrupt and dismantle organized criminal networks that are involved. This team will provide permanent, dedicated prosecutors at priority courthouses in areas facing the highest rates of auto theft, such as Toronto, Hamilton, Ottawa and London, and we're structuring the team so prosecutors can provide support in other areas if expertise is required.

Our investment in the coming year also includes \$1.7 million for court staff and judicial resources. We're adding more court staff, and we've already appointed an additional judge to the Ontario Court of Justice specifically to address the anticipated increase in cases. Work is well under way to appoint remaining judicial positions related to this priority. We hear you loud and clear. Ontario will continue to do its part to keep communities safe.

When it comes to protecting our communities, we're also working to improve our aging institutions, including courthouses. It is a fact that the average age of a Ministry of the Attorney General building is 65 years old. It's why we're working to modernize the system with key investments right across the board.

I'll stop, Madam Speaker, from my notes to say I was recently speaking with justice officials in Dublin, in Ireland, and I was telling them about the age of my buildings and how difficult it was to modernize those buildings when the minister of justice stopped me and said, "You realize you're sitting in a 250-year-old building." So, we have our challenges; they have their challenges. But we do have to modernize because people expect that, and we have to make sure that we're working in a proper forum.

But we're working to modernize across the system with key investments, something I know Premier Ford and our

government are excited about. We're modernizing public infrastructure, making our courthouses safer, more secure and efficient while improving access to justice in our growing communities across Ontario. We're using new and existing technology to our advantage by putting it to use to support those on the front lines—all so more people can benefit.

Let me give you an example of how recent modernization is improving communities in Ontario. Just a few months ago, I was joined by my colleagues in Brampton to unveil the new Brampton courthouse expansion. As the busiest courthouse in the province—I think the busiest courthouse in the country—we knew that investing in an expansion would improve operations for years to come. The previous government had shelved the building, but left no money to build it out. Madam Speaker, that is shameful, and it's performative politics. But this government is getting it done. Today, it has more space and better accessibility features that serve people in Peel region, one of the fastest-growing communities in the province.

Just over a year ago, we opened the new Ontario courthouse in Toronto, not too far down the street. It's an award-winning courthouse that brings together six different court locations into an accessible and inclusive state-of-the-art courthouse.

I'm proud to share that the courthouse was just recognized by the Ontario Association of Architects with their 2024 Design Excellence Award. I want to take this opportunity to thank all the partners and leaders who came together and supported our vision and made this unique space a reality.

Now, let me tell you about the courthouse itself. If you haven't been there, I encourage you to go. This new courthouse has technology that allows for virtual and hybrid hearings in every one of the building's 63 courtrooms and 10 conference settlement rooms. It has state-of-the-art security features and accommodates the unique needs of drug treatment, Gladue, youth and mental health courts, as well as supports for victims.

By building, upgrading and modernizing courthouses across Ontario, as well as the ways we deliver justice, we're ensuring Ontario is built to last both today and for the future generations—a key tenet in this year's budget.

I also want to note that Renzo Piano was the architect of the new Toronto courthouse. Renzo Piano—if you don't know him, grab your phone and google him—is a renowned architect, internationally. He was the architect for the Shard—if that's a reference point for people. It really is a magnificent building, well-designed, well-executed and now it's being well-used.

Part of modernizing the justice system also means supporting more victims of crime, something I'm very passionate about. The 2024 budget includes significant and meaningful investments in victim services—a critical pillar in strengthening public safety in communities and our justice system.

Our government remains focused on increasing access to justice for more victims of crime. Budget 2024 builds on that commitment, and recent unanimous support in this

Legislature—and I thank all parties and all members for their support of Bill 157, the Enhancing Access to Justice Act. This legislation recently received royal assent, became law and will support even more victims of crime.

In collaboration with our partners, we're supporting victims, local organizations and people who keep our communities safe—and we'll continue to be there to make those critical investments, because a responsive and agile justice system is one that works to keep people safe, especially the most vulnerable.

Now, Madam Speaker, as you read the budget, as you look through the budget, you'll see that we're investing more than \$2 million per year over the next three to expand those supports for victims of crime in Ontario. This new funding will help to sustain and expand the Child Victim/Witness Program, which helps reduce the trauma of testifying in court for children and youth victims right across—and witnesses in fact, not just victims but victims as well.

Madam Speaker, I'm going to talk a little bit more about those children victim/witness programs. They really are unique, and they really are impactful. Right now, this program is delivered by seven community-based organizations in eight areas across the province. The new funding will allow my ministry to explore ways to expand this important service into additional communities across the province. The additional investment also includes funding to support improvements in Ontario's independent legal advice program for victims of sexual assault. Demand for the program, unfortunately, has increased tremendously since it was first piloted in 2016.

How does it work? Victims of sexual assault receive up to four hours of free, independent and confidential legal advice, no matter how much time has passed. The independent legal advice program is delivered by a roster of independent lawyers, as well as the Barbra Schlifer Commemorative Clinic—that was once a community clinic—here in Toronto, an organization dedicated to showing support for victims of violence. They're among the many heroes in our justice system who work tirelessly to support victims of crime and advocate to make our communities safer for everyone.

0940

Madam Speaker, I want to talk a little bit about the Child Victim/Witness Program and the CYACs that exist in many of our communities across the province. They are a vital tool for children, whether they be victims or witnesses to incidents or caught up in some of the nastier parts of what happens in our communities. These locations are always supported by police. You can imagine a child victim or a child witness, who is already in a form of trauma, having to go to a foreign place like a police station to be among the busyness that is there and the confusion that happens. It's a very intimidating way to potentially tell your story. We know that that isn't the best way for things to happen.

The CYACs in my area—there's one in Orillia, in Minister Dunlop's riding, that also has a location in Barrie in my riding. I was around when it was first set up. I was

just a member of the community; I wasn't elected. I can tell you the impact these organizations have is absolutely phenomenal.

You come in the front door and in my area, in my case, there's a COPE service dog. It's a service dog that is there for comfort. I came to learn that if a dog is lying down when you enter a room and it doesn't get up, it actually reduces your blood pressure, because if the dog's not fussed, you're not as fussed. So there's a lot of science that goes behind what they're doing and how they're providing care and treatment, but also helping these young victims tell their stories.

These are victims, whether it be of domestic abuse or human trafficking or any number of heinous scenarios, and it really is a wonderful service that is being provided in the toughest times of life for some of these individuals. So I am thrilled to be able to not only fund, but potentially expand across the province so that we have even more services for the victims that we know that exist, Madam Speaker.

Now, that's pretty heavy stuff and it's important stuff. It's very dear to me. My mother was a crisis councillor and she was one of the founding directors for the York Region Abuse Program, so it's important to me that we're providing the services for things that have been going on for a very long time, when services weren't there for these children and for these youth. They're not all children, quite frankly; they've had to grow up much faster than their chronological years.

On a different note, Madam Speaker, this budget covers everything from victims to how the government operates to the investments that we need to make. Another exciting investment for me—and you hear us talk about it—is the transportation infrastructure. When I was a kid riding my bike out to the 400 to see it back up, and that was some time ago, there was one GO train that went to Bradford. That was the end of the line. That one GO train would take commuters in in the morning and take commuters back at night, and that was as good as the service got.

The Northlander was running at the time. It was a very popular train. It was well-used. It opened up parts of Ontario that you couldn't get to otherwise. I had the privilege of getting to ride those trains, because my father was an engineer. I'm not sure that you would be allowed today to bring your kids on the engine, but that's what happened. I'd get on the GO train in the morning and we would go to Toronto. We would go to the bunkhouse and they "cook up," as they say. You do what you do during the day, and then get on the train and ride it back. It was a pretty neat job. There is a lot of pride by the engineers in doing that.

The Northlander, as well, opening up through the north: I remember taking that train, again, as a kid, up through areas that I had never heard of, and I can rhyme them off now. I know Hornepayne and Wawa and a lot of the small towns up through there. That came to serve me well later on, when I had a summer job at a company that was a road company. They had operations in New Liskeard and different parts of Ontario. I said, "I know where that is;

I've been through there." It's really a wonderful part about Ontario.

But for reasons that I don't understand, previous governments let it wither. They didn't do the investments that needed to happen to keep the north open. So I'm really proud, in this budget, that we're moving forward, that we're acquiring the machinery, that we're acquiring the engines. We're getting things done to make sure that the north is being opened up again.

We know the tremendous value in the north, not just from a lifestyle—I don't know anybody who has gone to the north—and when I say "north," I mean the north. If you look on a map, Sudbury is in the middle of Ontario. Sudbury is not the north. I'm talking about the north.

My friend in the back there—if you go up and have a visit, he will show you some of really northern Ontario. It's a part of Ontario that had been neglected for way too long, until this government got elected. We have some very strong members from the north making sure that everything from highway expansions from Kenora, Thunder Bay is getting significant attention, and of course, the Ring of Fire.

The Ring of Fire—my goodness, I love it. When I hear President Biden get up and talk about the domestic minerals needed for manufacturing, I turn to my friends and say, "He's talking about our minerals." He doesn't have any domestic minerals. They're ours, and we're going to make the best of it.

I grew up listening to economics professors, listening to professors in political science and others say, "Oh, it's"—gnashing of teeth that we're not manufacturing our own resources. "Why don't we build furniture when we have the wood? Why don't we do the metal when we have the inputs?"

I can tell you, Madam Speaker, we are in a state where we have the critical minerals, and we have a plan to not only use those critical minerals, in partnership with First Nations and others—to make sure that we're getting the minerals out, to make sure that we're putting them to use, and we're manufacturing them domestically. That is something that, really, people complained about for decades and decades and decades. This government has figured it out, and we're putting the resources in place. They're in the budget.

It's really important that we're extracting the possibilities for Ontario and putting Ontarians to work, to make sure that we're world leaders—and we are, in fact, world leaders. That's why Minister Fedeli is attracting businesses, talking to businesses, that are setting up in Ontario. That's why we've created 700,000 jobs, after Ontario had lost 300,000 jobs. It is quite a swing. It's really incredible—the potential of Ontario. But it's not going to happen on its own. And that's why the Liberals took us down 300,000 jobs—because what we do matters. What we put in the budget matters. Where we invest and how we help really, really matters.

We can talk about infrastructure right across the board, but if we don't plan for the future—as they say, a failure to plan is planning to fail. So we are planning for the

future, whether it be some of the things I've talked about—the Northlander, the GO trains, the subways.

The investments we're making are the largest in North America, if not the world.

I haven't even talked about highways yet. The Bradford Bypass—my goodness. I grew up hearing about this Bradford Bypass. I didn't know what it was as a kid. I used to play hockey in Bradford. I went to high school in Bradford. They don't own it now, so I don't have any conflict of interest on this, but my brother-in-law's family owned a farm a little bit on the 10th, just north of Bradford, which is now affected, but it was long sold. So it's incredible that it's coming to be. The people who are producing the vegetables—the Holland Marsh is the vegetable basket of the country. I talk to friends there and they say, "Yes, we need this bypass. We need to move our goods. We need to get things out." This is going to help with affordability, with helping to keep costs down, by moving the product that is grown in Ontario—not just across Ontario, but we will move it to other markets. Just that one road alone is going to have a huge impact.

I could talk about the 413, but I don't want to get the opposition all exercised. It is before the final stages in the courts, so I won't talk about that. But it's that kind of thing that we have to do, and we have to do it today, because it takes a long time to bring these things into being.

I couldn't be prouder. The Minister of Finance, Minister Bethlenfalvy, has crafted investments in every sector of life, as you go through the budget. We are getting the job done. We're going to make sure that we get Ontario built and we get Ontario's economy going.

0950

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

Mr. Jeff Burch: Thank you to the member from Barrie-Springwater-Oro-Medonte. He talked a lot about victims and it reminded me of an issue with EMS workers across the province.

Just a couple of weeks ago, I was at a rally for CUPE 911 EMS workers in Niagara and they face the same problems that emergency workers all over the province do with lack of funding, lack of staffing. Those are costs that are shared with municipalities, but if the government cares so much about victims, why are they not providing more support for EMS workers across the province who are calling out for support for ambulance attendants and dispatchers and folks who are really struggling with code blacks and not enough staff in their departments?

Hon. Doug Downey: I appreciate it's a very specific question and it sort of allows me to give some specific answers.

Of course, we can always do more and we work with our partners to do that. As you go through the budget, I think you'll see our continued focus on front-line services, whether it be the police, the firefighters, continuing to work with EMS—and it's not always about money, Madam Speaker. Sometimes, it's about operations.

I did a tour of the London Health Sciences Centre last Thursday. What a world-class hospital that is. I can tell

you, Madam Speaker, the leadership team is top notch, but they're working on how they interact with EMS, how they interact with the front-line services to make things more efficient and to make sure that the capacity is built so that we can serve the people of Ontario as well as we can, Madam Speaker.

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

Ms. Laura Smith: I was kind of moved by the member's statement on building system and supports and infrastructure, and the fact that his mother was a crisis counsellor.

So I used to work under the child protection act, and he talked about the independent legal clinics and the CYAC, which protect our most vulnerable. I was just wondering what these investments and the supports and the improvements to the court will have on the future generations of those victims?

Hon. Doug Downey: We know that when there's intervention early for a child, their resilience is exponential. We can't take away that they're a victim; we can't turn back time. But we can work with the children to make sure that they get a chance to tell their story in an appropriate setting, to make sure that their story is received in a credible way so that the perpetrators are held to account. We help the children—the crisis counsellors and children and youth advocacy centres and Barbra Schlifer and the others. There are so many phenomenal individuals. We can help them help the children.

By the way, I brought back Attorney General's victim services awards, and all members get an opportunity to nominate people or have people nominated. I can tell you, the work that's done—it's absolutely stunning, the work that is done across Ontario by these individuals. So, thank you for that.

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

Mr. Sol Mamakwa: I was listening to the member from Barrie-Springwater-Oro-Medonte talking about auto theft and his concerns and also the investments that they're making into trying to address that issue. But I know that up in Kiiwetinoong, there are other concerns, other issues that we are facing.

Right today, I have 14 long-term boil-water advisories. One of the First Nations, Neskantaga, is on its 30th year of a boil-water advisory.

I'm just wondering, with regard to the budget, how is this government addressing to make sure that everyone in Ontario has access to clean drinking water?

Hon. Doug Downey: I'll tell you. I think the Prime Minister came in with very clear commitments in terms of boil-water advisories. As far as I can tell, he's failed every one of those commitments, Madam Speaker.

But I'm going to talk about what I am doing to help those communities. We've put Starlink in each of the fly-in reserves that the court has held and that's so we are not dislocating communities.

It was surprising to me, when I became the Attorney General, to think of a six-seater plane that had on it the

victim, the accused, some witnesses, all—I don't know if you've been on a six-seater plane, but it's a pretty intimate adventure. And to fly them out of their community into Sioux Lookout, and then potentially even drive to Kenora, and then what's happening back at home over that extended time when you're dislocating family—it didn't make any sense. So we've invested in those communities, in justice services, and we're working very hard. And we're working collaboratively with our federal counterparts to try to arrive at better systems that are more effective for those in those communities.

So I can't give you a direct answer on the boil-water, but I can tell you that we're very focused on making sure that services are enhanced.

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

Mr. Billy Pang: I'm proud to see that our government is acknowledging the disturbing rise in crime we are watching unfold across our communities. In my own community of Markham–Unionville, my constituents have come to me countless times to share their concern of the safety of their neighbours, their families and their fellow Ontarians. Saying that safety is paramount is something I think all members of this House can agree on. It is something that I hope my NDP and Liberal colleagues will consider supporting in this budget.

So, through you, Madam Speaker, I ask the minister to please tell us what our government's 2024 budget does to keep our streets safe and protect our communities.

Hon. Doug Downey: The budget does part of what we need to do, because we have constraints in terms of jurisdiction. The federal government needs to do its part as well. What we're doing is we're putting front-line resources in place. We're putting court resources in place. We're putting specialized prosecutors. We're putting victim services. We're funding helicopters, you saw, Madam Speaker—four helicopters, which will aid in some of this. We're dealing with organized crime. We're not dealing with a 15-year-old neighbour who got themselves into trouble. We're dealing with sophisticated individuals who are wreaking havoc in our communities.

Now, we're doing our part. What the federal government needs to do is potentially look at legislative change. Grand theft auto isn't just a video game; it's actually a charge in the States. So we need to do something about that. We need to make sure that they're checking at the ports. They only check 1% of the cargo containers, Madam Speaker. It's just ridiculous.

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

Mr. Chris Glover: I appreciate the Attorney General's comments today. One of my biggest concerns about this government, in terms of its legacy, its continued attacks on our democratic rights: They've passed three bills that use the "notwithstanding" clause to strip Ontarians of their charter rights, and more recently, the Attorney General was actually caught interviewing candidates for the Chief Justice of Ontario position. When I asked him about this a couple of weeks ago, he said, and I quote, "Politics never

came up" in those interviews. It would be inappropriate. "It would be crossing a line."

A week after I asked that question, the Premier spoke to the media and said that he wanted to appoint Conservative judges; he didn't want the Attorney General appointing Liberal or NDP candidates. The Attorney General has directly contradicted what the Premier has said. So, will the Attorney General stand up in the House today and tell the Premier that his comments were inappropriate and he crossed the line in demanding politically motivated appointments of judges?

Hon. Doug Downey: I look forward to seeing that clip and what I'm about to say on Twitter, as I saw the last one, Madam Speaker.

They're trying to do "gotcha" politics. There's no got-caught nonsense. It's my obligation to appoint the Chief Justice, and I of course asked what is protocol, what is normal. It's my obligation to appoint the Chief Justice. So of course I'm going to do an interview and make decisions, Madam Speaker. I'm not going to willy-nilly appoint somebody without even talking to the individual in an interview.

Now, we're talking about the importance of making sure that the justice system is as solid as possible to protect people, keep our communities safe. That's what this budget does. That's what we're working towards, and that's what this budget does. The "gotcha" politics is nonsense. We're getting the job done. We're building highways. We're building subways. We're making sure the infrastructure is there, and we're building the justice system.

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

1000

Ms. Chandra Pasma: It's always an honour to rise on behalf of the members of Ottawa West–Nepean and to be their voice in the House. This morning, I'm speaking about the government's budget implementation act.

Last week, I spent time door-knocking in Ottawa West–Nepean and I heard from my constituents that this is a really difficult moment in Ontario right now. People are struggling to afford their rent or find a decent place to live. They can't afford to put food on the table. They don't have a family doctor. They're waiting 12 hours or more at the hospital for emergency care. Their children can't get the supports that they need in school. And yet this government is running ads using their taxpayer dollars telling people everything is fine in Ontario. It reminds me of that meme of the dog sitting drinking coffee while the flames are rising around him, saying, "This is fine. Everything is fine." The government wants people in Ontario to believe that everything is fine as things are crumbling around them and they're struggling.

What we really needed, Speaker, was a budget that met the moment that we are living in, a budget that showed that the government actually gets what people are experiencing right now, when people are in desperate need of a government that gets it. Instead, we have a budget that completely misses the moment.

I attended the pre-budget hearings in eastern Ontario, and we heard loud and clear from witness after witness that people are struggling, and the government is more focused on talking points than actually doing something about their struggles. The organizations that provide care to people and that fill in the gaps are struggling because they are so underfunded that they can't keep up. Demand is growing for their services, but these organizations are losing staff and having to cut back on services because they do not have the funds they need to keep operating.

We also heard about the incredible waste that is happening on this government's watch and because of this government's poor decisions. There are people in hospitals—and hospital care costs \$720 a day on average—because home and community care, which costs only \$36 a day, isn't available. And why isn't it available? Because the government will not fund it. There are people who are in hospitals today because there is no place for them in a home for people with developmental disabilities, so when their parents can no longer provide care at home, a hospital bed is the only place for them. The government has frozen funding to the developmental disability sector for over 10 years. There's 1,200 people on a wait-list for this care and yet the government has offered them no support at all.

The government is also downloading costs onto the individuals in our province who can least afford it. We see this in education, where children with disabilities and learning exceptionalities are being forced to pay for this government's cuts to education. They just cannot receive the supports and services they need in order to be able to learn, but also to be able to be safe at school. There are seniors who have lived in their own homes for decades who are seeing their property taxes go up and up because the provincial government keeps downloading costs onto municipalities, refusing to invest in the kind of infrastructure that people need in order to live in their homes but also to be safe in their communities. We see aging parents struggling to provide care for their child with developmental disabilities, unsure of what will happen to them because there is no space available for them.

It was very clear from these presentations that this government is incredibly bad at managing money, Speaker. Doris Grinspan, the head of the Registered Nurses' Association of Ontario, used a phrase at the Belleville hearing which has stayed with me ever since, which was "waste through poor planning." And we see example after example after example from this government of waste through poor planning, where we are spending more because the government is failing to make the important decisions that we need, the systematic decisions that would actually provide the people of Ontario with the supports that they need but also save us money in the end. The lack of investments in primary care is a perfect example of that, where when we don't provide primary care and address a problem before it becomes an emergency, then people end up in the emergency room; they end up having a problem addressed only once it's become much more severe. And, again, that hospital visit is \$722 a day, when a primary care visit is much less

expensive, Speaker. So we are making foolish decisions in the province that are costing the taxpayers of Ontario more.

But we also heard from the witnesses at the pre-budget hearings that there are solutions in place. There's incredibly good work happening in eastern Ontario in health care, housing and community supports, and I saw this with the leader of the official opposition in Ottawa when she came recently and we met with the Pinecrest-Queensway Community Health Centre, the Centretown Community Health Centre, CHEO, Ottawa Community Housing, that there is incredibly innovative programming happening, usually held together by a shoestring budget and lots of goodwill, and the government is failing to support these organizations in delivering these solutions, refusing to invest in the kind of care and supports that we desperately need.

A great example of this is Counselling Connect. So 30 health care organizations, community support organizations in Ottawa came together during the pandemic to form Counselling Connect, where there's one number, there's one website. Anybody can go there, no matter what your age, no matter what your challenge is, and you can select an appointment with a counsellor that will happen within a matter of days, and you can receive a counselling appointment that provides you with immediate care and they will also make a referral on to other support services.

It only costs half a million dollars to provide this care in Ottawa, yet their funding is about to run out. When they came and testified at the pre-budget hearings, they received nothing but praise from government members and, in fact, government members were saying, "This is amazing. How can we scale this model across Ontario?" And yet, there's no funding for Counselling Connect in the budget.

Only half a million dollars to provide counselling to over 27,000 people a year in Ottawa and yet, there's no funding here, and so these people end up on wait-lists for other forms of mental health care while their problem becomes more serious and they need more care, instead of just investing in these kinds of innovative solutions. And half a million dollars is less than a rounding error in the government's health budget. These kinds of decisions just make no sense.

We're also seeing record demand for food banks right now. In my riding they've had to extend into evening and weekend hours to serve those who are employed full-time but still need to use a food bank.

Last Monday, I was at the Ottawa Mission serving Easter meals. This year, the Ottawa Mission served a record 17,400 meals across Ottawa between two food trucks, plus the Easter meals served at the Mission on Easter Monday. This is just an incredible expansion of the demand for food within Ottawa.

When I was knocking on doors last week, affordability was the number one issue that I heard about. People are not able to make their rent, let alone being able to pay for food. I spoke to one woman who is deeply upset that she can no longer afford the apartment where she lives but she doesn't know where else she will go because everything else is even more expensive.

I've heard from Sharon, a senior living on a pension, who in the last eight years has seen her rent increase by more than the guideline seven times. The Landlord and Tenant Board keeps approving the increase even when it's being imposed because of repairs, which aren't supposed to qualify, so Sharon, who's living on a pension, is now looking for a roommate or a new place to live because she can't afford her housing. And what did this government offer people like Sharon in the budget, the people lined up at food banks who are working and still need the food banks, the many folks eating Easter dinner at the Mission? Nothing.

There are no measures to address rental affordability, no increase to ODSP or Ontario Works. They promised to raise minimum wage in October of this year but there's no funding in the budget to support that, and even their increase in the minimum wage falls \$4 short of a living wage in Ottawa so it's still going to be difficult for people to afford housing, which is why so many people who are employed are going to food banks. There was no crackdown on price gouging, and in fact, the government is allowing people to be gouged by private, for-profit health care providers.

Let's talk about that lack of access to primary care. Connie, who is one of my constituents in Ottawa West–Nepean, says:

"We are both 68 years old in very good health. We do everything to protect our health—we eat well, we exercise regularly, we see our dentist regularly, we are active in our community and have a good circle of friends and family. We live in our own home and hope to remain independent as long as possible.

"We've signed up with the Ontario government site that promises to match us with a doctor. We've approached several medical offices and clinics to ask if they're taking new patients. We've networked with friends and relatives. We have a niece who is a nurse practitioner and have sought, and followed, her advice. At this time, we are on one waiting list and were warned it was likely at least a three-year wait.

"The thing that baffles me is how we got to this place. Surely you understand that every year we remain healthy, independent and living in our own home is a win for Ontario and our collective budget. The cost of the occasional GP visit to maintain our health, versus the cost of an extended hospital stay to treat a complicated illness—well, there is just no comparison."

1010

And Connie is right. This makes no sense. It is wasteful. It is absolutely short-sighted. The only explanation is that it is deliberate.

Some 2.3 million people have no family doctor, like Connie and her husband. The NDP offered a plan that would provide primary care coverage for almost all of them and the government voted against it. The budget offers funding to provide primary care coverage for only one quarter of them by the end of three years. Yet the Ontario College of Family Physicians is saying that by

2026, 4.4 million people will have no family doctor. This is literally fiddling while Rome burns, Speaker.

And what happens when people have no family doctor? A few weeks ago, one of my constituents, Angela, cut her finger so badly that she needed stitches, but she didn't have time to wait 10 hours in the ER. She initially wanted to go to a local Appletree clinic but she was told she would be charged \$69 to see a nurse practitioner, so in the end she had a roommate who was trained in first aid stitch her finger. That's what we've come to in Ontario, Speaker: roommates stitching wounds.

And let's talk about those wait times at hospitals, because the government recently cut funding to the Queensway Carleton Hospital for the ER, so the Queensway Carleton is down 10 physician-hours per day, every single day. Earlier this year, one of my constituents who was experiencing extreme pain went to the ER. She couldn't move, yet she sat for 15 hours before finally seeing a doctor. Here's what she said:

"I was not the only person who had waited 15-plus hours to be seen, and if it had not been for the encouragement and advice from other patients in the waiting room, I believe that I would have gone home without care. Many people left as they could not handle the wait."

It's not just our patients who are sitting in primary-care waiting rooms and ER waiting rooms who are suffering. We're also seeing incredibly important services to people with developmental disabilities—residential and day programming—being cut or being put in jeopardy by this government's underfunding.

As I mentioned, the funding for this sector has been frozen for over a decade. So L'Arche, which operates a number of homes in Ottawa West–Nepean, has made the incredibly painful decision to close one of their homes. The other organizations, like the Ottawa-Carleton Association for Persons with Developmental Disabilities; TCE, Total Communication Environment; and Tamir are also having to face incredibly painful financial choices. And Christopher, one of my constituents, talked about what closing a TCE home would mean for his brother Jamie:

"For somebody like my brother Jamie, who has an intellectual disability, to then have to change where he's lived for over 20 years would be devastating for him. He's very high-needs, and he has his same routine every day and has his house set up in a way that supports his needs—and it's everything that TCE has done with the eye of" being "person-centred. His needs are always at the forefront, and everything that we do is to ensure that his needs are taken care of. So to upend him like that, to have to close a home and to move him into a home where his needs might not be met would be very devastating for him. He's very immobile, so he needs a place that's accessible."

I have another constituent whose son has been on a wait-list for supportive housing for 15 years, and he's currently in a hospital bed because there is no place for him.

This is truly waste through poor planning. The sector asked for a 5% increase so that they could continue to

support people with developmental disabilities, and this budget gave them nothing. Who even are we as a society if we cannot provide care for the most vulnerable members of our society?

And speaking of the most vulnerable members of our society, Speaker, we need to talk about education, because what this government is doing to education funding is appalling. The minister's favourite word is "unprecedented." In fact, when his term as a minister comes to an end, I'm probably going to give him a plaque that says "unprecedented" so he can stare at it every single day.

But let's look at what actually is unprecedented in education. The levels of violence are unprecedented. The mental health crisis is unprecedented. The shortage of teachers and education workers is unprecedented. In fact, we are seeing teachers leaving, retiring and resigning in the middle of the year, some of them in September, because they just can't take it anymore—

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): It being 10:15, I have to interrupt the member and ask for members' statements.

Second reading debate deemed adjourned.

WEARING OF PINS

Mr. Nolan Quinn: Speaker, point of order.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Point of order: the member for Stormont–Dundas–South Glengarry.

Mr. Nolan Quinn: Speaker, if you seek it, you will find unanimous consent to allow all members to wear pins in recognition of April being the Canadian Cancer Society's daffodil campaign.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The member for Stormont–Dundas–South Glengarry is seeking the unanimous consent of the House to allow members to wear pins in recognition of April being the Canadian Cancer Society's daffodil campaign. Agreed? Agreed.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

HEALTH CARE POST-SECONDARY EDUCATION

Mr. Billy Pang: Speaker, last week, I was glad to join Premier Ford's funding announcement of \$9 million for the establishment of York University's school of medicine. This new medical school will be the first in Canada to focus on training family doctors that will work towards ensuring Ontarians have access to the connected and convenient care they deserve. It stands as a significant milestone, underscoring our government's steadfast commitment to improving health care, accessibility and quality across our communities.

I firmly believe that nurturing a new generation of primary care physicians will not only serve to strengthen our communities but also contribute sustainably to the overall health and well-being of Ontarians.

I would like to commend the university for its unwavering dedication to addressing the health care needs of underserved regions.

Furthermore, I am enthusiastic about the forthcoming opening of York University's Markham campus this spring. This strategic move will embed the university in the vibrant heart of Markham–Unionville, one of the most diverse and dynamic urban communities in our province and country.

As MPP for Markham–Unionville, I pledge my full support to York University's endeavours in nurturing talent for our province and nation, and I remain committed to advocating for their continued success.

BEYOND THE STREETS

Mr. Jeff Burch: I've spoken many times in this House about Beyond the Streets, a volunteer-run organization in Welland that connects those without a home to community services and basic necessities.

This winter, Beyond the Streets created and operated an emergency shelter in partnership with Holy Trinity church in downtown Welland. They started this shelter after they saw people nearly die of hypothermia on the streets earlier this winter and because other shelters were completely full. Unfortunately, their shelter closed last week due to an end to a city grant that lasted to the end of March.

In the words of the organizers, "What we can say from all this, is that the need is greater than even we expected. Our friends need a permanent place to go to until they can find a place to call home. Living on the streets isn't a life for anyone. It doesn't allow for anyone to better themselves because they are always in survival mode."

"So we guess the next question is ..."

"Do we give people a fighting chance?"

Speaker, access to housing is a human right. No person should be living on the streets, fighting for their survival through the bitterly cold winter months. A fighting chance means housing, food and medical attention as well as livable assistance rates.

My heartfelt thanks go out to the dedicated volunteers from Beyond the Streets, Holy Trinity church and the citizens of Welland for stepping up and making this emergency shelter happen when other levels of government failed.

NAPANEE BEAVER

Mr. Ric Bresee: Good morning. Speaker, I want to share about the legacy of local news reporting in Hastings–Lennox and Addington. Founded in the back of a Newburgh, Ontario, store in January of 1870 by Cephas Beeman, the Addington Beaver newspaper shared local news on a four-page, six-column weekly paper. Shortly after creating the paper, he then sold it to his brother George Beeman and his partner William Templeton, moving it to Napanee, calling it the Ontario Beaver, and then shortly thereafter the Napanee Beaver, and it has remained a family-owned business.

1020

In 1892, George Beeman sold his portion of the paper to Templeton who remained the sole owner of that newspaper until his death in 1908, when his wife took over that paper. For several generations, the family ran the paper until 1953 when they sold the paper to a local family: Earl and Jean Morrison. Then, after Earl's death in 1978, Jean continued that tradition of the Napanee Beaver. The Morrison family led that paper for more than 30 years.

But just recently, the Napanee Beaver has been sold to Adam Prudhomme. Adam has actually been a resident of Napanee and an employee since 2008 and has been the managing editor since 2019.

Throughout its existence, the Napanee Beaver has won numerous awards, both from the Ontario and Canadian newspaper associations, and I'm delighted to see the tradition of community-owned local news still alive here in Ontario.

GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE

Mrs. Lisa Gretzky: On Tuesday, June 28, 2022, the jury recommendations from the Renfrew inquest into the deaths of Carol Culleton, Anastasia Kuzyk and Nathalie Warmerdam were presented. Eighty-six recommendations for change were made, most of them directed to the provincial government.

The very first recommendation from that inquest was for the provincial government to declare intimate partner violence an epidemic—a simple, yet incredibly important and impactful step that this Conservative government rejected. The government is terribly wrong to reject or resist this recommendation, and tomorrow they have an opportunity to do the right thing by passing Bill 173, the Intimate Partner Violence Epidemic Act.

From Windsor across Essex county to Toronto, from Hamilton to Milton and Oshawa, from Niagara, Lanark to Renfrew, from Ottawa to Sault Ste. Marie and Timmins, from Mississauga to Sudbury and Thunder Bay, from Sarnia, Brantford, London to Brampton, just to name a few, 94 municipalities have declared intimate partner violence an epidemic, yet the Conservatives refuse to.

We must call this gender-based violence what it is: an epidemic. The Conservative government claimed intimate partner violence is not an epidemic because that term is reserved for the spread of infectious or communicable disease. That is simply semantics, Speaker. Not only dictionary definitions but data proves otherwise, and unfortunately this epidemic continues to claim lives.

We need to use every tool available to make a difference. There is one we have right here at our fingertips, and I call on every member of the Legislature, including the Premier, to do the right thing and pass Bill 173 tomorrow.

GIVING SPOON FUNDRAISER

Mr. Trevor Jones: Good morning, Speaker. This past weekend, I was proud to work alongside a team of 70 volunteers at the Bridge Youth Resource Centre in

Leamington to participate in an exciting fundraiser led by my friend who operates the Giving Spoon, a local non-profit charity. The event featured a wide array of fresh homemade soups donated by local families and organizations to raise funds and awareness for youth programs and access to attainable housing.

The weekend showcased an impressive lineup: 18 cauldrons each day of unique varieties of soup served by volunteers, myself included, to hundreds of people from our community who lined up to enjoy the fresh soup and fellowship while raising important funds for the Bridge Youth Resource Centre. In my non-scientific observation, I would say that the cream of potato and bacon was the most popular.

The Bridge Youth Resource Centre is an organization supporting youth, ages 14 to 24, through collaborative programming with multiple community partners to address education, job support, mental health and addiction, social inclusion and general life skills. The facility also supports youth experiencing homelessness or housing instability and actually partnered with Habitat for Humanity and researchers from the U of Windsor's department of civil engineering and environmental engineering to design and build 3-D homes, the first printed in Canada.

Congratulations to my friends at the Bridge and the Giving Spoon for another great event.

ENERGY POLICIES

Ms. Chandra Pasma: In the past few years, Ottawa has experienced multiple severe storms that have taken out power for multiple days. Every time this happens, people on fixed incomes have to throw out a fridge or freezer's worth of food, food that they can't afford to replace. Seniors and people living with disabilities who live in multi-storey apartment or condo buildings are being trapped in their own homes without access to food, water or medical care. Those who need life-saving devices struggle to find power sources.

We've been incredibly lucky, so far, that every one of these storms has been followed by reasonably temperate weather, but it's only a matter of time until we have freezing cold or severe heat while the power is out, putting lives at risk.

Thankfully, there is a way to address the risks of power outages while also fighting climate change and making life more affordable. Bill 172, the Affordable Energy Act, would save Ontario residents on their hydro bills by investing in deep retrofits, reducing the amount of electricity needed to power a home. It would also oversee the creation of community energy sources, known as distributed energy; such as solar panels on roofs or over parking lots. These would provide energy credits to the owners of the solar panels while offering a cost-effective source of power to the grid. These community sources of energy would also mean that homes and communities will have a local power supply when the grid is down, keeping the lights and heat on for residents of Ottawa.

The Affordable Energy Act will be up for debate on Thursday, and I hope that all MPPs, regardless of party, will vote to support this plan for more affordable, climate-friendly and resilient electricity in Ontario.

HOUSING

Ms. Donna Skelly: It's my pleasure to rise today to highlight Ontario's efforts to address the current housing crisis.

In August of last year, our government announced a new, three-year, \$1.2-billion program that provides significant funding for municipalities that are on track to meet provincial housing targets by 2031. In order to achieve Ontario's goal of building 1.5 million homes by 2031, municipalities have agreed to housing targets to assist in meeting the goal. The Building Faster Fund encourages municipalities to meet these housing targets. Municipalities that reach at least 80% of their annual target receive a share of the \$1.2-billion program, and for those that exceed their targets, even more funding is granted.

My community of Hamilton will receive over \$17.5 million for exceeding its 2023 target and for breaking ground on a total of 4,142 new housing units last year.

I am pleased to recognize the hard work of the city of Hamilton and other communities across the province that have made housing a priority.

Ensuring that every resident has an affordable place to call home is our government's top priority, and I am hopeful that with the support of these provincial funds, there will be even more housing starts in the year ahead.

RAMADAN AND EID-UL-FITR

Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon: Tonight, at sun-down, Muslims around the world and across Ontario will begin celebrating Eid-Ul-Fitr to mark the end of Ramadan.

For Ramadan 2024, the moon was sighted on the night of Sunday, March 10. Since then, Muslims who observe Ramadan have taken part in the holy tradition, with sunrise-to-sunset fasting for the entire month, praying, giving, and spending time with family. When the month of fasting is over, though, it's time to celebrate.

In my riding of beautiful Beaches-East York, many will be gathering tomorrow morning for Eid prayers at Dentonia Park, and I have the honour of joining them for that blessed event. I am always so proud to attend Eid prayers and connect with my constituents as they observe this important and sacred event.

Dentonia Park is nestled in the heart of Crescent Town and Bangla Town. Not only can you find the best Bangladeshi food, probably in all of Canada, there, but it is truly a neighborhood of warmth and camaraderie, where community members look out for one another and lend a helping hand in times of need. Bangla Town and Crescent Town are a testament to the rich cultural heritage that thrives within Beaches-East York and the beautiful energy that the Bangladeshi Muslim community brings to Toronto and Canada.

To Muslims around the world and in Beaches-East York, I wish you peace, hope, amazing meals, and time with loved ones this Eid.

I look forward to seeing familiar faces tomorrow morning for prayers in Dentonia Park.

Eid Mubarak.

1030

HEALTH CARE POST-SECONDARY EDUCATION

Ms. Laura Smith: Last week, I had the great privilege of standing with the Premier and my York region caucus colleagues to announce a brand new medical school just north of Thornhill, in the city of Vaughan. This school will be the first medical school to focus on primary care physicians—so important. It will include up to 80 undergraduate and 102 post-graduate seats starting in September 2028, with up to 240 undergraduate and 293 post-graduate seats on an annual basis once operating at full capacity.

This project is in partnership with York University and will be situated beside the state-of-the-art Cortellucci Vaughan Hospital and the soon-to-be-built long-term-care home. Together, these projects will significantly improve the quality of care our families and seniors have, bringing health care closer to home.

Speaker, our government is launching the largest expansion of Ontario's medical education system in more than a decade. Parents, students, grandmothers, grandfathers, bubbes and zaydes, this is so exciting because our students will now have more opportunities to attend medical school locally, just a few minutes north in the city of Vaughan, a little bit north of Thornhill, and that is such positive news.

I want to thank my friend and colleague the member for King-Vaughan for being a strong champion for this project and a great advocate for the people of Thornhill and Ontario.

BATTLE OF VIMY RIDGE

Ms. Laurie Scott: Over a century ago, on the 9th of April, 1917, the Canadian Expeditionary Force embarked on a mission to capture Vimy Ridge. This endeavour mobilized over 170,000 Canadians from coast to coast and all segments of society, engaging them in a battle that spanned four days and would eternally etch itself into the annals of our history.

The Vimy offensive epitomized a uniquely Canadian venture, serving as a testament to the Dominion of Canada's stature as an integral component of the Allied forces. That day, Canadians demonstrated their mettle, securing our enduring reputation as valiant fighters and steadfast allies.

Among those who answered the call were numerous individuals from Victoria and Haliburton counties and my own hometown of Kinmount. They were part of the 109th battalion. My grandfather Wallace Scott stood among

these brave souls. He was one of the gallant Canadians who charged at Vimy on April 9, sustaining serious injuries. Despite his wounds, like many of his fellow servicemen, he healed and rejoined the battlefield, remaining until the war's conclusion.

The Battle of Vimy Ridge emerged as a pivotal chapter in our nation's story, igniting a new-found sense of national pride. Today, we collectively honour the memory and sacrifice of those who fought at Vimy Ridge and in subsequent conflicts, commemorating a significant milestone in our nation's journey. We will remember them. Lest we forget.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Thank you very much. That concludes our members' statements for this morning.

I understand the member for Ottawa–Vanier has a point of order she wishes to raise.

M^{me} Lucille Collard: Mr. Speaker, I do have a unanimous consent request. I seek unanimous consent that, notwithstanding standing order 100(a)(iv), five minutes be allotted to the independent members as a group to speak during private members' public business today.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Ms. Collard is seeking the unanimous consent of the House that, notwithstanding standing order 100(a)(iv), five minutes be allotted to the independent members as a group to speak during private members' public business today. Agreed? I heard a no.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Ms. Bhutila Karpoche: It is my honour to welcome to Queen's Park the president of the Central Tibetan Administration, the honourable Sikyong Penpa Tsering. Joining him are Namgyal Choedup, representative of his Holiness the Dalai Lama and the Office of Tibet in Washington, DC; and Mr. Sherap Tharchin, executive director of the Canada Tibet Committee. Welcome.

Mr. Will Bouma: I couldn't help but notice that the Mayor of Norfolk is here today. Mayor Amy Martin, welcome to the people's House.

Mr. Guy Bourgouin: I'm pleased to welcome members of the Ontario Road Builders' Association and the Ontario Asphalt Pavement Council at Queen's Park today. I'd like to especially thank Mark Mallett and Graziela Girardi. We met this morning to discuss northern development and necessary built-road access. Thank you. Welcome.

Mr. John Fraser: It's my honour to introduce my former boss and, most importantly, my seatmate for four years, who made my life so much easier and enjoyable, the 25th Premier of Ontario, Kathleen Wynne.

Mr. Kevin Holland: I'd like to welcome, from the Ontario Provincial Council of the Catholic Women's League of Canada, four representatives, one from Thunder Bay. Welcome to Colleen Martin and her colleagues Linda Squarzolo, Wilma Vanderzaag and Mary Capobianco. Welcome to your House.

MPP Jamie West: I want to welcome, all the way from sunny Sudbury, Linda Squarzolo, from the Catholic Women's League. She's the Ontario Provincial Council president. Welcome to Queen's Park.

Mr. Ted Hsu: I wanted to just take this quick opportunity to introduce a page, Duncan Venditti, from my riding of Kingston and the Islands, of precocious knowledge and interest in all things government and politics. If we had more young citizens like him, our democracy would be in good hands.

Ms. Goldie Ghamari: From the village of Greely in the great riding of Carleton, I'd like to welcome page Simon Valentini and his mother Miranda Valentini. Welcome to your Ontario Legislature.

Ms. Catherine Fife: It's my pleasure to welcome farmers from Wilmot township here in the House today: Mark Reusser, Alfred Lowrick and Steve Bottoms. Welcome to your House.

Mr. Rick Byers: It's my pleasure to welcome a number of visitors here to support page Bella-Sitara Soares—the first page from Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound while I've been an MPP—many here in-person or supporting from elsewhere: Monica Singh Soares, the great councillor from the municipality of Southgate; Joey Soares; Ryker Soares; Maria Soares; Zachary Bhachu; Baljeet Bhachu; Kamaljeet Singh; Jaspreet Singh; Bhagat Singh Bhachu; and Akash Bhachu. Welcome to your House.

M^{me} France Gélinas: It gives me great pleasure to welcome Linda Squarzolo from Nickel Belt, representing the Catholic Women's League of Canada. Thank you for coming, Linda.

Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon: I would like to introduce an extremely charismatic man you all know well. Former member for beautiful Beaches–East York Mr. Arthur Potts is in the chamber today. Welcome.

Hon. Vijay Thanigasalam: I would like to welcome my friend and volunteer Mr. Kenny to the Ontario Legislature. Welcome to Queen's Park.

Ms. Aislinn Clancy: I also would like to welcome our awesome farmers from Wilmot township in Waterloo region.

I'd also like to welcome the Ontario Road Builders' Association and Ontario Asphalt Pavement Council to Queen's Park, who have over 200 members and 56,000 workers they represent across the province.

And finally, I'd like to welcome constituents and renters from my riding of Kitchener Centre who are here at Queen's Park to advocate for tenants' rights for all Ontarians: Leonard Shushan and Karolina Kruk. Thank you so much to all of you for coming, and welcome to your House.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): If there are no objections, I'd like to continue with the introduction of guests.

1040

Mr. Ric Bresee: In my new role as the parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Transportation, I'd like to welcome the Ontario Road Builders' Association and the Ontario Asphalt Pavement Council to Queen's Park today.

Specifically, I'd like to welcome Walid Abou-Hamde, Andrew Weltz, Malcolm Croskery, Mark Mallett and Graziela Girardi.

Ms. Bobbi Ann Brady: I, too, would like to welcome to the House one of the mayors from my riding of Haldimand–Norfolk, mayor of Norfolk county, Amy Martin, who is here to present to the committee of the interior this afternoon. Welcome.

Mr. Stephen Crawford: I'd like to welcome the McMurtry family to Queen's Park, in particular, a good friend of mine, chairman of the Royal Commonwealth Society of Toronto, Andrew McMurtry.

Hon. Doug Downey: I'll begin with Shelley Sarin, who is the mother of page Aura Sarin from Barrie–Springwater–Oro-Medonte.

In addition to that, we heard Andrew McMurtry is here, but so are many of the other family members: Michael McMurtry, his son; Jeannie McMurtry, his daughter; Erin McMurtry, his daughter; Patti Moran, daughter-in-law; Chris Deacon, daughter-in-law; Kaia McMurtry–Moran, granddaughter; Aidan McNab, grandson; Matthew McMurtry, grandson; Tim Armstrong, his friend; Kate Lee, his daughter and caretaker of Mr. Armstrong; Robert Alan Eagleson, former MPP for Lakeshore during the 27th Parliament; William Sutton, caretaker of Mr. Eagleson; David Warner, Speaker during the 35th Parliament; of course, Kathleen Wynne, MPP for Don Valley West during the 38th to 42nd Parliaments; and Steve Gilchrist, former MPP for Scarborough East during the 36th and 37th Parliaments.

Mr. Sam Oosterhoff: I have the privilege of welcoming to the Legislature a constituent from Niagara West, Andrew Weltz, who is here with the Ontario Road Builders' Association. Welcome to Queen's Park.

Hon. Michael S. Kerzner: I'm delighted to welcome my city councillor, James Pasternak, councillor from the city of Toronto in ward 6 from York Centre. Welcome to the Ontario Legislature.

Hon. Todd J. McCarthy: I'd like to welcome to the House today a member of the other branch of government, my brother, the Honourable Mr. Justice John Raymond McCarthy.

Mr. Tom Rakocevic: I also want to welcome the Catholic Women's League. I thank them for their meeting this morning and all the important work they do.

Hon. Graydon Smith: I want to welcome Aislyn Doyle, a page that's here from Parry Sound–Muskoka joining us for the next few weeks, and her parents, Sonya Doyle and John Doyle, and her sister Rowan Doyle joining us today here at Queen's Park. Welcome.

Hon. Michael D. Ford: Good morning. Just on behalf of the government side of the House, I would also like to welcome the Tibet delegation here to Ontario. It was a wonderful bilateral, bipartisan meeting we had this morning.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): I am very pleased to recognize two special guests who are with us in the members' gallery: Juergen Klingohr and his wife, Anita Klingohr, of Pickering. Mr. Klingohr served the people of Ontario for 28 years in the Ministry of Transportation,

working as a full-time chauffeur with the executive transportation services of the minister. He twice received the ministry's Beacon Award for service excellence in 2009 and 2016. He retired from the ministry in 2020 after a distinguished career marked by exceptional day-to-day dedication.

I consider Mr. Juergen Klingohr a good friend and he has earned our sincere gratitude. I would ask you to join me in welcoming him and Mrs. Klingohr here today.

LEGISLATIVE PAGES

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): I am going to now ask the pages to assemble.

It is my honour and pleasure to introduce this group of legislative pages: from the riding of Brampton East, Armaan Bagarhy; from London North Centre, Jerome Bow Pearce; from the riding of Kitchener Centre, Lyra Cooper; from Niagara West, Jack Cunningham; from Parry Sound–Muskoka, Aislyn Doyle; from Kitchener–Conestoga, Ryder Harris; from Don Valley West, Audrey Lo; from Etobicoke Centre, Ruby Madden; from Kitchener South–Hespeler, Shivanshee Patel; from Mississauga East–Cooksville, Mariam Rasheed; from Haldimand–Norfolk, Emirson Ricker; from Hamilton Centre, Nate Rochwerg; from Dufferin–Caledon, Shylah Sandhu; from Barrie–Springwater–Oro-Medonte, Aura Sarin; from Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound, Bella–Sitara Soares; from the riding of Milton, Shiara Sribalan; from Carleton, Simon Valentini; from Kingston and the Islands, Duncan Venditti; from Cambridge, Brayden Vermet; from Richmond Hill, Erwin Wang; from Newmarket–Aurora, Manha Yusuf; and from the riding of York–Simcoe, Malcolm Yusuff.

Please join me in welcoming this fine group of Legislative pages.

Applause.

HOUSE SITTINGS

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): I beg to inform the House that, pursuant to standing order 9(g), the Clerk has received written notice from the government House leader indicating that a temporary change in the weekly meeting schedule of the House is required, and therefore, the afternoon routine on Wednesday, April 10, 2024, shall commence at 1 p.m.

ROLAND "ROY" MCMURTRY

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): I will now recognize the government House leader on a point of order.

Hon. Paul Calandra: Speaker, if you seek it, you will find unanimous consent to allow members to make statements in remembrance for the late Mr. Roland McMurtry, MPP for Eglinton, with five minutes allotted to His Majesty's loyal opposition, five minutes allotted to the independent members as a group and five minutes allotted to His Majesty's government.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Agreed? Agreed.

Today, we are honoured to remember and pay tribute to a former member of our provincial Legislature, the late Mr. Roy McMurtry, who was the MPP for Eglinton during the 30th, 31st and 32nd Parliaments. Joining us in the Speaker's gallery are Mr. McMurtry's family and friends: his children and their spouses Michael McMurtry, Jeannie McMurtry, Erin McMurtry, Patti Moran and Chris Deacon; his grandchildren Kaia McMurtry-Moran, Aidan McNab and Matthew McMurtry; his cousin Andrew McMurtry; and his friend Tim Armstrong.

Also in the gallery are Kathleen Wynne, the MPP for Don Valley West during the 38th, 39th, 40th, 41st and 42nd Parliaments; David Warner, Speaker during the 35th Parliament; Steve Gilchrist, MPP for Scarborough East during the 36th and 37th Parliaments; Alan Eagleson, MPP for Lakeshore during the 27th Parliament; and Arthur Potts, the MPP for Beaches—East York in the 41st Parliament.

1050

MPP Lise Vaugeois: First, I want to welcome the many family members and friends of Roy McMurtry to the House today. It's an honour to speak to you and to members of this House about Roy and his remarkable legacy.

There are many examples that show what kind of a person Roy was. For example, in the 1950s, he started taking legal aid cases when the plan didn't actually pay any money. In fact, it didn't pay anything until 1968, which was 18 years later. When Roy became Attorney General, however, he used his position to boost legal aid clinics so that people with limited means would be entitled to legal representation.

Roy ordered bilingualism in the courts, over the reluctance of his own party, creating an extremely important change in access to justice, in their own language, for Franco-Ontarians. As Attorney General, he pushed for tougher sentences for drunk driving, took on racism, made the use of seat belts compulsory, and launched a move to criminalize violence in hockey. We might take the legitimacy of these positions for granted now—that drinking and driving causes terrible harm, that wearing seat belts saves lives, that violence in professional hockey can be deadly and diminishes the game—but addressing these issues met with tremendous resistance at the time.

Roy took a lot of flak for his attempts to call out and reduce the levels of violence in professional hockey, for example. As Jeff Gray wrote, “The hockey world rebelled at his intrusion into on-ice violence.” It's fair to say that these battles are not over, but I think about what courage it took to speak out against violence in professional hockey at the time, because fights were not only expected, they were encouraged. Many people here will remember that as late as 2004, Don Cherry of CBC's Coach's Corner was ridiculing and questioning the masculinity of players who chose to wear visors. That Roy McMurtry was challenging these attitudes and behaviours in the 1970s and 1980s is something that we can look on with respect and admiration.

Roy also pushed to prosecute racial hatred, provoking a response in 1977 from the American Ku Klux Klan accusing him of anti-white activities. He received a letter, which he proudly framed and put in his office.

He mentored people in the law, including racialized women and men, opening doors to people who otherwise faced enormous barriers trying to gain entry as legal professionals into the halls of justice.

Now, I want to point out that these changes didn't occur in a vacuum. Since the beginnings of Canada, racialized people, Indigenous, Black and brown people have been fighting for justice and equality. Without these movements, the impetus to change the laws would not have been there. But if we think back to the work it took for the initial group of white middle-class women to get the vote, it took men with power and a strong sense of justice to bring about changes in the law, and Roy McMurtry is one of those men who used his power and position to open doors where they had previously been closed.

Importantly, that also included opening doors for people with disabilities, by pushing against his own caucus to include disabilities as a right enshrined in the new Charter of Rights and Freedoms of 1982.

I want to use the little time I have left to talk about why Roy McMurtry has such a place of honour in queer history. It was a long road of movement activism to get here, but in 2003, Roy took the bold step to uphold the legality of same-sex marriage. This ruling has changed so many people's lives for the better and is still reverberating around the world today.

We can see the effect of this legal ruling in the history of this Legislature, where in the mid-1980s, we had Attorney General Ian Scott, who was not able to be open about his male life partner until after he retired from politics; and Kathleen Wynne in 2003, who was able to win the Liberal leadership and become Premier of the province of Ontario, and she did this with her same-sex partner at her side.

Today's official NDP opposition has our first-ever queer caucus, with four out and proud MPPs sitting in this Legislature. For this and so many of the reasons I've been able to touch on today, we have so much to thank Roy McMurtry for. He was a model politician and jurist who put fairness and inclusiveness at the forefront of his work.

In the words of lawyer and disability activist David Lepofsky: “May we each be a Roy McMurtry to someone else.” May we each be responsible for opening more doors to make our province more humane and inclusive.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The member for Guelph.

Mr. Mike Schreiner: I'm honoured to rise today to pay tribute to the late Honourable Roy McMurtry. Mr. McMurtry was a giant in the legal profession, serving as Attorney General, Solicitor General and, of course, Chief Justice of Ontario. As Attorney General, he was instrumental in the creation and expansion of the province's legal aid system, led the effort to reform family law, and started the process to make Ontario's legal system bilingual and to translate Ontario's statutes into French. In

addition to being a champion for Franco-Ontarians, he was a steadfast advocate for human rights and he was an ally for the Black community, chairing Ontario's Cabinet Committee on Race Relations and being steadfast in opening doors and ensuring equality in fighting for the rights and freedoms of all Ontarians, regardless of their background.

Among his many accomplishments, Mr. McMurtry will be most remembered for the late-night kitchen accord with Jean Chrétien and Roy Romanow to broker the deal that achieved the patriation of the Canadian Constitution and the creation of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms. And I want to be clear: Canadians will be forever grateful for Roy McMurtry's role in bringing in the Constitution and the charter.

All of us in this House strive to make a difference, but few of us will ever, ever accomplish the achievements that Roy McMurtry accomplished through his courage and his conviction and his passion to public service.

I want to welcome Mr. McMurtry's family, friends and colleagues to Queen's Park today. There is no question he was loved and he was cherished by those around him, and I want to thank you for sharing him with us. We're a better province and we're a better country because of Roy McMurtry's service to Canada.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Next, the member for Ottawa South.

Mr. John Fraser: It's an honour today to rise to pay tribute to Roy McMurtry, member of this Legislature from 1975 to 1985 for the riding of Eglinton. He served as both Attorney General and Solicitor General in the government of Bill Davis.

Serving in this Legislature is only one aspect of a remarkable life and career. He served as High Commissioner to the United Kingdom, chief executive officer of the Canadian Football League, Chief Justice of the Superior Court—I could go on.

I never met Roy McMurtry, but I've read a lot in the last few days—which is always a good thing when you get to do these tributes; you get to know somebody. Here's the sense I got: You knew when he was in a room, and not in an offensive or obtrusive way, and not just because of his size, but because of his manner. He knew how to bring people together to find a solution.

1100

He was there when we repatriated our Constitution and the Charter of Rights and Freedoms, and he played a pivotal role in getting it done. He was able to build Ontario's justice system by bringing everybody to the table.

I think he understood the hardest part of politics and life is how you use the power and influence and skills to do the things that need to be done, and to have the courage to do the things that people didn't understand or believe needed to be done, like the work to make Ontario courts bilingual at a time when our provincial neighbour to the east had elected a separatist government. C'était la bonne chose à faire pour assurer aux Franco-Ontariens un accès approprié à la justice.

And in a landmark decision in 2003, essentially legalizing gay marriage in Ontario—many of us can remember how controversial and how difficult that was. That took courage. Here's what he said about it, and I like this: "I knew the sky would not fall." He was right. It didn't fall.

I was talking to my friend and former Premier Kathleen Wynne about Roy McMurtry. She reminded me about something I think is really important. There are so many things. I could be here for the rest of the morning talking about Roy McMurtry, but I'll try to keep it short. His efforts to educate youth about Ontario's justice system and the work he did on the roots of youth violence and understanding the supports that young people need—here's what Kathleen said: "Roy understood how important it was to keep youth out of the criminal justice system that he knew and served so well."

Roy McMurtry accomplished so many things, but the thing that hit me the most—I don't know if people read it, but I saw the family obituary in the Star and it said at the top something like, "All his accomplishments are listed elsewhere." I thought that was a great thing, because the most important accomplishment was there and it was what they wrote. Here's what the family wrote: "He was a loving family man ... who delighted in the chaos of frequent family gatherings, especially at our beloved cottage."

I'd like to finish with something that his son Jim wrote. I mean, if we wanted to say one line about Roy McMurtry, maybe we would all want to have our kids say this about us: "My father fought for rights and freedoms; I was the proudest son." Thank you for sharing your father with us.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The Attorney General.

Hon. Doug Downey: As one of four brothers—we heard from his surviving brother, Robert, at the funeral. To hear of the family and his focus on the family—his accomplishments are many, but his family, he was so proud of. You can tell by the way they speak of him. He had six children, as we know. His wife Ria, through 66 years—all the adventures—just a remarkable partnership. But what we heard at the funeral was about the signing and the dancing and the focus on the grandkids, because that was the most important part to him.

He had many accomplishments. He had many careers. We should all be so lucky. As a youth, he carried water for the Toronto Argonauts, if you read his background, but I'll say he carried water for nobody else. He was his own man; he had his own convictions.

He spent a lifetime taking care of the disadvantaged, those who needed it the most, and he was at the front end of change in every stage that he served, whether it be as a parliamentarian or as a judge. Even when he was High Commissioner, he did things nobody else did. It is a remarkable career.

But what people don't actually realize is that he had a successful law career for 17 years before that, a full law career, attached to names like J.J. Robinette and Arthur Maloney, just absolute icons in the legal profession. He took cases from them. He ran about a dozen murder cases.

He did high-profile stuff. He did important work. And then he came to politics.

Now, Mr. Speaker, he got involved in politics in 1965. He was helping Dalton Camp in his bid. Historians know how that went. But I didn't realize the connection; I didn't realize that he was actually part of the Big Blue Machine, because it had to be through the Dalton Camp experience that he met Norm Atkins.

Norman Atkins was a bit of an upstart in his day. I had the pleasure of working with him on Hugh Segal's leadership campaign. He called it the "march to nowhere." We can come back to leadership campaigns. But I didn't realize—you see, Dalton Camp was Norm Atkins's brother-in-law, and Norm Atkins was a brilliant political strategist. They learned from John F. Kennedy's political world, and they came up—and so that's where Roy must have met Dalton Camp. And, you know, I had never thought of that connection.

There was a leadership in 1971, to be clear, for the Progressive Conservative Party, and Roy took on the job of lawyer for the party in 1970 because his friend Bill Davis was going to run for the leadership. Well, for those who know their political history, in 1971, when Bill Davis ran with Roy at his side, Norm Atkins and his crew were feeling sort of not appreciated in the Bill Davis world, so they ran with Allan Lawrence. And I'll tell you, Mr. Speaker, that leadership culminated in a vote differential of 44 votes. It was very, very close. And you know, when it's that close, it can be very bitter and very acrimonious, but Steve Paikin's book *The Life* talks about Roy's role in bringing those parties together, because he was the link with Norm Atkins and Bill Davis. So it's a tribute to his ability to bring people together even when they're deeply divided.

Now, he went on to run in a by-election. That didn't go so well, but all of us who have lost something along the way know to dig in and go deeper. In 1975 he got elected, and the record shows he was appointed Attorney General before he even took his seat in the Legislature. That's how well respected he was by Bill Davis. As we've heard, he served for nine years, 124 days as Attorney General, and simultaneously four years as Solicitor General. He was a workhorse. There is no doubt he was a workhorse.

He was friendly. He wasn't shy with the media, I'm told. And as Doug Lewis, my former law partner, describes him, he was always approachable and well thought of.

Now, Mr. Speaker, he was also a solid campaigner. I have not phoned him recently, but John Tory and I have talked about his campaigning. John Tory worked on at least one of his campaigns and has some great stories to tell. And my friend Peter Bethlenfalvy told me on the way in this morning that he in fact worked on his leadership in 1985. So his tentacles are wide, and he really was a model for all of us, Mr. Speaker.

I'm proud to say that although he carried water for the Argonauts, I carried water for him as a page. He sat right where Vic Fedeli is sitting when I was a page like these young individuals. And he was that: He was the guy who

would stop and talk to you, ask you how you're doing. But it's also a lesson to all of us that they're watching all of you, and it's something that he set a model for.

Now, as High Commissioner, it says in the books—I like to read books—that he was often asked to Buckingham Palace and was entertained there. I suspect they asked him to Buckingham Palace because he entertained there. He was a great storyteller. He had an ability, again, to tell stories and bring people together. But this is what he did as High Commissioner: He refused to take the traditional post of the chairman of the 170-year-old Canada Club. Why? It didn't allow women. That's pretty remarkable.

Now, the thing that makes me reflect on how we're doing is 1988, when he stepped down as High Commissioner—at the age of 56. It makes me feel like I'm not doing anything with my life, Mr. Speaker. But shortly thereafter, in 1991, he was appointed Associate Chief Justice by Prime Minister Kim Campbell and shortly after that by his friend Jean Chrétien to Chief Justice, where he served for a long time.

1110

We've talked about policy; we've heard about policy. But Roy McMurtry is one of the few individuals that I've ever seen, ever had the privilege to meet, who spanned all political parties, all partisan positions and was a change leader from the front of the parade. He really was remarkable.

I want to thank the family for sharing him with us. Thank you for being here.

Applause.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): I want to thank the members for those eloquent tributes as this morning we've come together to give thanks for the life and public service of Roy McMurtry.

QUESTION PERIOD

AFFORDABLE HOUSING

Ms. Marit Stiles: My question is for the Premier. Yesterday, I asked why the government was suddenly ruling out missing-middle housing options like fourplexes and risking losing billions in federal funding in the process. In response, the minister told us that they needed more details—more details before they would decide if they would accept the money.

The research has been done. The studies are clear and there's no time to waste. So I have to ask again: Why is the Premier risking billions in badly needed federal funding by ruling out higher-density options?

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing.

Hon. Paul Calandra: Actually, Speaker, that's in fact not what I said. What I said is that there were not enough details with respect to the announcements made by the federal government on its infrastructure programs. I also

said that we would be working very closely with our municipal partners—AMO; big city mayors; ROMA, the Rural Ontario Municipal Association—and we will be coming forward with a Team Ontario approach to ensure that we can access as much as of the federal dollars that have been put on the table.

At the same time, I've been very clear. The Premier has also been very clear that we don't think that we're in the best position to mandate what 444 municipalities should be doing across the province. We want to ensure that we meet our goals of building 1.5 million homes. That is why, of course, the Minister of Infrastructure has brought forward one of the largest infrastructure programs in the history of the province to ensure that we can get sewer and water in the ground. It is also backed up by the Minister of Education, who will be building more schools, and the Minister of Transportation, who is building more roads and transit. We're building communities, Mr. Speaker.

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

Ms. Marit Stiles: I'll tell you, Speaker: Team Ontario is about to lose billions because of this government ignoring not just us in the official opposition but ignoring everyone, from grassroots activists to investors at Scotiabank to the government's own Housing Affordability Task Force. Everyone agrees that people need more affordable homes now. The Premier used to agree, but now it seems like he's joined the chorus of NIMBY fearmongering by ruling out the solutions that we know are needed here in the province of Ontario.

Why is the Premier ignoring the experts, ignoring the people of this province and standing in the way of getting housing built?

Hon. Paul Calandra: Well, look, Mr. Speaker, to be clear, it's not me ignoring the NDP; it's pretty much the people of the province of Ontario who have ignored the NDP—for decades, frankly.

The reality is that we want to work with our municipal partners—there are 444 of them—who have very unique circumstances across the province of Ontario. We have set a goal of building 1.5 million homes, and across the province, we have heard one issue constantly gets in the way of building more homes, and that is sewer and water. That is why we brought forward a nation-leading program of \$1.8 billion to build sewer, water, roads and bridges across the province of Ontario.

But what also gets in the way are high taxes and regulation. So the high interest rate policies of the federal government because of high inflation, because of overspending and taxation, are stopping people from building homes. They are also stopping people from being able to afford homes. So what we're going to continue to do is double down on removing red tape, putting sewer and water and infrastructure in the ground, working with our municipal partners to build not only hundreds of homes but millions of homes in communities across—

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

Final supplementary?

Ms. Marit Stiles: Speaker, they're ruling out options. They're risking billions in funding. It's no wonder that we are no closer to getting those housing targets met. But don't worry, they've got a plan for that. First, they added long-term-care beds to the count, and now they're adding dorm rooms—dorm rooms. You can't even have a microwave in a dorm room. My goodness, that is not a home. What's next?

Speaker, people don't want padded housing numbers. They want a decent place to live. If the Premier can't get housing built, will he at least get out of the way so somebody else can do it?

Hon. Paul Calandra: I think that really highlights the difference between Progressive Conservatives, and Liberal and NDP, right? Student housing shouldn't count, according to the Leader of the Opposition. It should be no surprise to anybody, because we saw what the federal government did: unilateral cuts to post-secondary education that are putting the lives of hundreds of thousands of people across this country at risk. When we say we're going to invest in student housing so that students can have a home, they say it shouldn't count.

I have talked about the student and the family in my riding. He works at Circle K. He works at the Petro-Canada. He and his family live in a basement apartment miles away from their college. You know what he said to me? He'd like to live closer to the college. He'd like to live on campus. He would like options. For the NDP, he's a bother; he's a nuisance. For us, he's somebody who builds the province of Ontario, and we will stand by him every step of the way.

HEALTH CARE FUNDING

Ms. Marit Stiles: What are they going to count next? Jail cells? I mean, come on. People need housing. They need homes.

Speaker, every Ontarian should also be able to see a doctor. They should absolutely be able to see a doctor when they need it, but right now, 2.3 million Ontarians do not have a family doctor, and that number is expected to nearly double in 2026. That's going to be more than a quarter of the population in Ontario.

Despite the need, community health clinics haven't seen a base budget increase in 15 years. They were forgotten in this year's budget, too. While local clinics are being left to scrape by, the Premier's budget for his office has somehow doubled since 2018. Does that seem right to the Premier?

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Health.

Mr. Nolan Quinn: I thank the member from the opposition for allowing me to speak about Ontario's world-class health care system. Our government has taken bold action through the Your Health plan. Ontario is leading the country, with over 90% of Ontarians having a family doctor or primary care provider. Since 2018, we've registered over 12,500 new physicians in Ontario, with

10% of those being family physicians. But we do understand more needs to be done.

The NDP, when in office, cut 10% of medical enrolment seats, and the former Liberal Premier in 2015 removed 50 medical residency positions, leaving Ontario with hundreds less physicians practising in our province today.

We also just announced the York University investment, where it will be exclusively towards family physicians. We will continue doing what is needed for the people of Ontario to ensure that we have the best publicly funded health care.

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

Ms. Marit Stiles: You've got to wonder, Speaker, which of the 48 staffers wrote that response.

This question again is for the Premier. Today marks the 40th anniversary of the Canada Health Act, which enshrined into law the principle of universal public health care in this country.

Interjections.

Ms. Marit Stiles: Yes. It is something we can all be very proud of. I would think that today of all days the government would affirm their commitment to preserving the right to access health care based on need, not on the ability to pay. They've paid lip service to the Canada Health Act, but their actions show they're only interested in expanding those private, for-profit clinics.

Can the Premier tell us what directives he has issued to prevent unfair billing for primary care?

Mr. Nolan Quinn: I thank the Leader of the Opposition again for allowing me to speak about Ontario's world-class health care system.

Our government will not tolerate clinics taking advantage of a loophole created by federal legislation. We need the federal government to take action to ensure all people of Ontario and Canadians can access publicly funded primary care. The ministry reviews all possible violations that come to its attention, to ensure that all OHIP-insured patients who are charged for an insured service are reimbursed in full.

1120

If the NDP is serious about expanding access to primary care, we invite them to vote in favour of our budget that will connect hundreds of thousands of people to primary care in their communities for years to come.

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

Ms. Marit Stiles: Speaker, I'll tell you what: This government's platitudes mean nothing to the 2.3 million Ontarians who are struggling to find a family doctor right now, to those standing in line to register for a doctor or those waiting hours and hours in emergency rooms.

Times are tough for Ontarians, and this government is only making it harder by compromising that treasured health care system, that public health care system that we all believe so strongly in. The government is moving at an absolutely glacial pace, approving and funding integrated primary care teams. They either don't understand the ur-

gency, or they're hoping they can push everyone into for-profit health care to benefit their corporate friends.

So to the Premier: Which is it? Incompetence or insiders?

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Members will please take their seats.

The Minister of Colleges and Universities.

Hon. Jill Dunlop: Let's look at the history of medical schools. The Liberals and the NDP have voted against every single measure we've taken to increase medical seats in this province. Budget 2022 was the largest expansion in medical seats in over 10 years, and you voted against it. Budget 2023: again, another increase in medical seats, and guess what? They voted against it.

Budget 2024: a new medical school at York University that will be specifically for family medicine. I urge both of you, the NDP and the Liberals, to get on board, support budget 2024 and see access to more family medicine in this province.

HEALTH CARE

Mme France Gélinas: Ma question est pour la ministre de la Santé.

In Sault Ste. Marie, 10,000 people will lose access to primary care at the end of next month. Some 280 emergency room closures; 1,200 hospital services closures: This is the reality of rural and northern Ontario.

We deserve access to care, Speaker. Why is this government ignoring the crisis in rural and northern Ontario?

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The member for Stormont–Dundas–South Glengarry and parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Health.

Mr. Nolan Quinn: Again, thank you to the member of the opposition for allowing me to speak about Ontario's world-class health care.

Our government is investing over \$85 billion this year alone into our health care system, which is a 30% increase from when we took power in 2018. Ontario is leading the country, with almost 90% of Ontarians having a family doctor or a primary health care provider.

But we understand more can be done. That is why, in Sault Ste. Marie, we have two new primary care units that are going to be going on with \$1.1 million. Since 2018, we've registered 12,500 new physicians in Ontario, including the 10% increase in family doctors.

As I said, we know more needs to be done. In this year's budget, we went even further. The primary care expansion has expanded to a total investment of \$546 million over three years to connect 600,000 more Ontarians to care.

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

Mme France Gélinas: In Elmvale, in Springwater, people were hoping to gain access, but the minister said no to their proposal. This means that 80-year-old and 90-year-old Ontarians with multiple chronic diseases do not have access to primary care.

It doesn't have to be that way, Speaker. We have solutions sitting on the minister's desk right now, collecting dust. Will the minister start listening to rural Ontario and fund these proposals right now?

Mr. Nolan Quinn: Our government is taking bold action through the Your Health plan, and we are taking innovative steps to grow our workforce to better service the people of Ontario now and for years to come. Ontario is investing more in northern health than any other previous government, but we know we can do better. Our plan is investing in infrastructure, boosting health human resources and adding educational supports for the future.

Our government is also expanding the Northern Ontario School of Medicine. NOSM will soon offer 108 seats, nearly doubling the capacity of their MD program. They'll increase from 60 postgraduate positions to 123 by 2028.

Speaker, we will continue to work with our health care partners across the province to ensure that Ontario has the best publicly funded health care when and where people need it.

TAXATION

Mr. Sam Oosterhoff: I have a question for the Minister of Energy today. On April 1, we saw the federal Liberal carbon tax go up not 10%, not 15%, not 20%, but 23% for the people of Ontario, and we saw opposition to this increase from Canadians from coast to coast to coast.

Here in Ontario, we've taken a leadership position and say that we don't need more carbon tax increases on the people of Ontario. Yet we see that Bonnie Crombie, the leader of the Liberals here in Ontario, insists on fighting to raise the carbon tax. We see that families in Ontario in my riding of Niagara West can't afford to spend more on groceries, more on gas, more on every aspect of life, and I know that this is a government that isn't going to give up on fighting for those hard-working families here in Ontario.

I know that we're continuing to fight this tax every step of the way, and I'm wondering if the minister could share more with the chamber about why it's important that the government of Ontario and all members in this House step up to show leadership in fighting the carbon tax and defending hard-working families.

Mr. John Yakabuski: Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the member for Niagara West for continuing to stand up against this punitive, regressive carbon tax. And he's absolutely right: It has raised the cost not just at the pumps; it's on the grocery shelves—it's everywhere. Everything is going up as a result of the carbon tax. And we've been standing here and fighting for the people of Ontario and trying to reduce their costs, reducing the gas tax \$320 to the average family in the course of a year—that's going to save them money. We're removing the cost of licence plate stickers on the cars—that's going to save them money as well. All of these things, while the Liberal government continues to raise the carbon tax 23% on April 1.

Justin Trudeau had a choice. He could have sided with the people or sided with the ideologues. He chose the latter. It's time to side with the people and scrap the tax.

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

Mr. Sam Oosterhoff: I want to thank the parliamentary assistant for his response because it is really hard to imagine how anyone in the province of Ontario can support raising the carbon tax at a time when things are so expensive.

Speaker, the previous Liberal government drove away investments. We saw them double the provincial tax burden. We saw them increase the debt for this province and also punish Ontario families with more tolls and taxes in every corner of their life. And under Bonnie Crombie, we see that the Liberal members of this House also refuse to stand up against the federal carbon tax. We know that Ontario families can't afford more Liberal taxes. It's what they've come to expect from the federal government; it's what they saw from the provincial Liberals. But, Speaker, this is a government that is standing in contrast with that tax-and-spend burden.

Could the parliamentary assistant please explain to this House and to my constituents who are watching what we are doing to support the people of Ontario, what we are doing to reduce the cost of living for them and their families in contrast with the federal carbon tax increases?

Mr. John Yakabuski: Thank you to the member for his supplementary. This is what we've been doing all along to try to support the people of Ontario in the wake of Justin Trudeau's carbon tax, which is going up another six times before 2030 as well, Speaker. We've brought in—thank you to the Associate Minister of Transportation—One Fare, which is going to reduce the cost of people travelling on transit throughout the GTA by \$1,600 per year.

We've reduced the cost of doing business in this province by \$8 billion. That gets passed on to the consumers because businesses have had more freedom to operate here in the province of Ontario, creating more jobs. All this while Bonnie Crombie stands with her leader from Ottawa in supporting the carbon tax.

Speaker, we are doing everything we can to put money back into the pockets of people in Ontario. We know they're suffering under the carbon tax. It's time for the Liberals and the NDP to support what we're doing: Help us scrap the carbon tax.

TENANT PROTECTION

Mr. Peter Tabuns: My question is to the Premier. There are many landlords across Ontario who owe tenants a lot of money—money in the thousands of dollars. Big landlords regularly ignore the requirements to reduce rents when above-guideline rent increases expire, so tenants everywhere are paying illegal rents.

Will the Premier take steps to ensure landlords follow the law and reduce rents for tenants so they can pay their bills?

1130

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The Attorney General.

Hon. Doug Downey: We have a fix for that, Mr. Speaker. It's an independent tribunal: the Landlord and Tenant Board, Mr. Speaker.

And I can tell you that we are making tremendous progress with what we call the AGIs, the above-guideline increases. Independent hearings by independent members are hearing concerns. They're making decisions. They're getting the decisions out the door, 90% of the time within 30 days.

So I'll address it more in the supplement, Mr. Speaker, but we have a process. And it's a proper process to address any kind of concern like that.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Supplementary question? The member for University–Rosedale.

Ms. Jessica Bell: Back to the minister: This is a very serious matter. It is the difference between buying groceries or not for a renter, the difference between keeping up with your bills or not. Tenants should not be paying illegal rents to big landlords, but in Ontario today, they are.

My question is to the minister: Will you take action to curb AGI abuse, and protect tenants and get them the money that they are owed?

Hon. Doug Downey: I will, in fact, make investments to make sure that anything illegal, whether it be rents or otherwise, are dealt with by the independent tribunal. We have doubled the number of adjudicators, Mr. Speaker. We are almost at 80 full-time adjudicators, and they're hearing more cases than ever. They are making sure that people get their day at the tribunal.

We're investing in the back office. We've invested in upgraded systems that the Liberals left in shambles before we took over, Mr. Speaker. But we're beyond that. That's now history. We have a good system. We have good people. We have a system that's coming down, and we're going to make sure that people have their matters heard independently, fairly and quickly.

TAXATION

Mr. Steve Clark: My question is for the Minister of Economic Development, Job Creation and Trade. The federal Liberals are turning their back on the hard-working people of Ontario, whether it's the auto worker in Windsor, the miner in Timmins or the tech engineer in Waterloo—they're all concerned about the rising cost of living.

The absolute last thing that a government should be doing is making things more expensive by hiking taxes, but that's exactly what the federal Liberal government did last Monday when they increased the carbon tax. As we all know, the carbon tax is driving the cost of everything up across the board, penalizing Ontario's workers and squeezing businesses in every sector of our province.

Speaker, can the minister explain how, by cutting costs, our government is able to create the conditions for job growth and new investment?

Hon. Victor Fedeli: Speaker, the carbon tax is holding us back from unleashing the full potential of Ontario. But we've shown the Liberals the way: less red tape and lower taxes equals more jobs.

We have removed 500 pieces of red tape that the Liberals put in. Our fall red tape reduction package alone is saving people and businesses over 100,000 hours each year. As a result, 700,000 more men and women are working today than when we took office. Last year alone, we added 180,000 new jobs in Ontario and \$11 billion in new investments. Imagine—just imagine—what we could have achieved without the carbon tax.

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

Mr. Steve Clark: Workers and businesses have been clear. They're already struggling with price increases, and they can't afford the Liberal carbon tax. But instead of listening to them, the Liberals are listening to their radical environment minister and his out-of-touch activist friends who could not be more detached from the reality that working Ontarians are facing right now.

With the stroke of a pen, Speaker, the federal Liberals could scrap the carbon tax and bring down the cost of gas by nearly 18 cents a litre while simultaneously alleviating inflationary pressures, not just in Ontario but across our country. But instead, they've chosen to proceed with their 23% carbon tax hike.

While elected officials of all political stripes are standing up against the carbon tax, Bonnie Crombie and the provincial Liberals have not said one word.

Speaker, can the minister highlight the progress of Ontario's economy since we took office and since we've lowered costs?

Hon. Victor Fedeli: We all remember what the province's economy was like under the Liberals: They chased jobs and businesses out of the province, including losing 300,000 manufacturing jobs. We came to office, Speaker, and we completely reversed that course. We reduced the cost of doing business by \$8 billion every year. The result: \$28 billion in new auto investment, \$3 billion in new life science investment and tens of billions of dollars in more tech investment.

We refuse to let the Liberals jeopardize the progress that we have made. Scrap the carbon tax today. Work with us to create the conditions for growth in Ontario.

EXECUTIVE COMPENSATION PUBLIC TRANSIT

Mr. Joel Harden: My question is for the Premier. It begins with some unfortunate news for this House, however: There is something growing faster in Ontario than the number of six-figure staffers in the Premier's office. It's the army of vice-presidents that work for CEO of Metrolinx, Phil Verster.

My question to the Premier is very simple: Can he say to this House if he has confidence in Metrolinx right now and its executive leadership?

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

Hon. Prabmeet Singh Sarkaria: Mr. Speaker, Metrolinx and their team are undertaking the largest public transit infrastructure investment in the history of not only Canada but all of North America.

And do you know what? Those members, including the Liberals, who for 15 years did absolutely nothing to build transit in this province, voted against every single one of those transit projects: the Ontario Line—388,000 daily boardings projected; 28,000 fewer cars on the road once that line is built. And do you know what, Mr. Speaker? That member has voted against those public transit investments every single time. Let's look at the Yonge North subway extension, another project this government is delivering on: 4,800 tonnes of GHG emission reduction when that project is built. And guess what? That member has voted against it every single time.

We'll continue to build public transit across this province, and we'll be ambitious and continue to do what the previous Liberal government refused to do, which is build for future generations.

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

Mr. Joel Harden: My friend the transportation minister left an important fact out in that response, so I want to clarify it for the House: Ontario, sadly, under this government, has become the most expensive place to build public transit in the world—in the world, Speaker. Meanwhile, what we learned from the latest sunshine list is that under their watch the number of vice-presidents at Metrolinx has tripled—tripled. In 2018 there were 27 and today there are 82. They are billions of dollars over budget in their projects, they are constantly late, and it confounds reason to know that this government keeps expanding the paycheques of their executives. Normally, I would think a Conservative would say that you don't reward failure.

So, my question again to the honourable gentleman: Please, for the transit users who work in this province, why are you rewarding failure? When will you rein in the gravy train at Metrolinx? It's time for action.

Hon. Prabmeet Singh Sarkaria: We need to build public transit in this province. When that member and the previous Liberal government had an option to put forward legislation that would help us build public transit faster, guess what they did? They voted against it every single time—the Building Transit Faster Act. It's on the record; the members of the public, anybody listening, can actually take a look at that member's record, the NDP and the Liberal record on that.

We want to get shovels in the ground, and guess what, Mr. Speaker? We do have shovels in the ground, on the Ontario Line, on the Eglinton West extension, on the Yonge North subway extension. We've put the RFQ to market. The Scarborough subway extension: Shovels are in the ground. This is historic. And if the NDP and if the Liberals did what we experienced for the last 15 years, we'd have no shovels in the ground, and we'd have no public transit for this province.

So I ask the members of the Liberals and the NDP to support public transit in this province, to support investments that we are making so we can move the people—

Interjections.

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

PUBLIC SECTOR COMPENSATION

Ms. Stephanie Bowman: In 2018, the Premier ran a tough-talking campaign aimed at convincing Ontarians the previous government was wasting taxpayer money. He spoke about the growing sunshine list of public sector employees earning over \$100,000. One would think he was some kind of Robin Hood figure who was going to take from the rich and give to the poor. His record in office proves otherwise.

1140

Speaker, this government has made many mistakes: Bill 124, axing workers' rights, the greenbelt scandal, to name just a few. But now, the government has a mistake right in the Premier's office. The Premier has added so many new sunshine-list employees to his staff that it's costing taxpayers more than double what it did under any previous government.

My question to the Premier: Is he ready to admit that he is running a government that is full of friends, insiders and fat cats, to use his own words, and to clean up the bloated mess in his office?

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing.

Hon. Paul Calandra: Speaker, what we're doing is running a government that is delivering on behalf of the people of the province of Ontario.

The Liberals increased taxes and delivered nothing. They increased red tape and delivered nothing. Are there more people working in the province of Ontario? Yes, there are: about 700,000 more people working in the province of Ontario than there were under the Liberals. Do you know why? Because we're doing what they wouldn't do. We're actually investing in people. We have the largest transit and transportation investment in the province's history. We have the largest investment in hospitals in the province's history, the largest investment in new schools in the province's history. We have the largest investment in economic development ever. Do you know why? Because people want to come to Ontario and make those investments. Do you know why they want to do that? Because they have a confident Progressive Conservative stable majority government, and we're delivering for them: cutting taxes, making investments, more jobs. It's a good time to be a Progressive Conservative—

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

The supplementary question.

Ms. Stephanie Bowman: Certainly this government does have the biggest Premier's office in history. Once again, the standards this government holds itself to just don't apply to them.

This Premier has a long history of railing against governments wasting money, the so-called “gravy train.” Torontonians remember him railing against it as a city councillor, and Ontarians heard him do it during provincial campaigns. Yet during his six years in office, the Premier has not hesitated to create new executive positions for his friends, giving every member of the Conservative caucus except one a pay raise and doubling the number of staff in the Premier’s office making \$100,000 or more a year. I guess it’s hard for the Premier to rail against the gravy train when he’s up to his own waist in gravy.

Speaker, back to the Premier: How exactly is his gravy train deluxe different from everything he has railed against in the past, and how will he stop the gravy train deluxe this time around, when he has only himself to blame?

Hon. Paul Calandra: It’s easy for a former Bank of Canada governor to talk about that, when on their watch we’ve seen increases in interest rates that have put hundreds of thousands of Ontarians out of the ability to even afford a home.

The new leader of the Liberal Party’s first ask wasn’t for the people of the province of Ontario; the first ask was what? A million dollars to pay her salary. That is what this member is supporting.

Do you know what we’re doing? We’re cutting taxes for the people—

Interjections.

Hon. Paul Calandra: —and they’re all outraged. They’re all outraged. I can’t take it away. It was your leader who said it. I disagreed with her. I thought she should focus on the people of the province of Ontario. I thought she should seek a seat in the House and defend the policies, like the higher carbon tax, defend the policies of the budgeting that left this province in a state of almost-bankruptcy under 15 years of Liberals.

The leader of the Liberal Party knows what we’re doing. What we’re doing is making sure that we have an economy that works for all of the people. We’re fixing the mess that they left behind, and we’ll continue to do that job for the people—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Order.

The next question.

TAXATION

Mme Dawn Gallagher Murphy: My question is for the Minister of Energy. The federal carbon tax went up again, and Bonnie Crombie and her Liberals refuse to oppose it.

Speaker, we know that Ontario families cannot afford the carbon tax. When I was door-knocking last week in my riding of Newmarket–Aurora, people expressed concern over the high cost of living. It seems like Justin Trudeau and his ally Bonnie Crombie don’t understand how much harder life has become for Ontarians due to this carbon tax.

While the Liberals are pushing for higher taxes, our government is lowering costs for the people of Ontario. Speaker, can the minister please explain how our govern-

ment is keeping costs down for Ontarians fighting this terrible Liberal carbon tax?

Mr. John Yakabuski: I’d like to thank the member for Newmarket–Aurora, not only for her question, but her continued advocacy on this issue.

So 17 cents a litre is what we’re paying more for a litre of gasoline because of Justin Trudeau’s carbon tax. In a pickup truck like mine, which is a common way of transportation in rural Ontario, that’s over 20 bucks a tank. That’s what I’m hearing—she’s hearing it from her constituents; that’s what I’m hearing from mine.

When the cost of fuel goes up, the cost of everything goes up, because we need fuel to move everything in this province. We need it. So, the reality is that either Bonnie Crombie and Justin Trudeau don’t understand—which she asked, do they understand—or maybe they just don’t care.

On this side of the House, in this government, we care. We’re lowering the cost of living by reducing that tax. That’s \$320 a year for the average person. And we’re also removing the cost of licence plate fees. We will continue to fight this punitive carbon tax until it’s gone.

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

Mme Dawn Gallagher Murphy: Thank you to the parliamentary assistant for his response. It’s encouraging to hear how our government is consistently introducing measures to provide real financial relief for Ontarians. I’ve heard from many constituents who are pleased to see that our government is extending that gas tax cut.

Now more than ever, Ontarians need a government that will deliver true affordability, not increased taxes. Our government must continue to demonstrate leadership and support Ontario families during these challenging times.

Speaker, can the parliamentary assistant please elaborate on the steps that our government is taking to support the great people of Ontario?

Mr. John Yakabuski: Thanks again to the member from Newmarket–Aurora and, again, for everybody on this side for the work that we continue to do to try to convince the federal Liberals and the queen of the carbon tax, Bonnie Crombie, that this is simply wrong.

But they’re hearing it in boxcar letters all across the province. Everybody is saying the same thing. They are being hurt and harmed. Their families are being hurt by the carbon tax. But the Liberals just sit there like deer in the headlights, like it doesn’t matter to them. But it matters to the people of Ontario. I hear it all across my riding. This tax is regressive, it is punitive and it is not accomplishing anything of what it was intended to do.

It is time for the Liberals in this House to talk to their chieftain out in Ottawa and tell the queen of the carbon tax to have a discussion with Justin. It is time to scrap this tax once and for all. The people can’t take much more.

LONG-TERM CARE

Mr. Wayne Gates: My question is to the Premier. Seniors in hospital are being fined \$400 a day if they refuse to be sent to a long-term-care home they didn’t

choose, even if it's up to 150 kilometres away from their families.

This government repeatedly denied the use of this cruel practice under Bill 7. The Conservatives claim that Bill 7 gives hospitals the authority to charge seniors \$400 a day in order to force them out to clear out beds and create hospital capacity. But we know wait times in hospitals remain historically high, and one senior recently was slapped with—listen to this—a \$5,200 bill.

Was the Premier actually unaware of the charges being billed to seniors, or did he purposely withhold that information from the media?

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The Minister of Long-Term Care.

Hon. Stan Cho: Our government believes that a hospital is not a home. We repeat: A hospital is not a home. Under the same legislation that the member is referring to, 99.96% of those people he is referencing have gone from being patients in a hospital to residents in long-term care—17,339 people now have the dignity of calling a home a home.

1150

But I guess we shouldn't be surprised by the attitude from the member opposite, right? Because this morning, the Leader of the Opposition mocked long-term-care homes as counting as homes, mocked student housing as counting as homes and, one step further, equated them to being jail cells.

We see things very differently. Our seniors took care of us. That's why we're building a record capacity, fixing the mistakes that the Liberals made when they failed to build: 611 net new beds when they exited government in 2018. We will continue to not only build capacity, we're ending hallway health care in Ontario.

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

Mr. Wayne Gates: Minister, a senior had to pay \$5,200 to a hospital, as your party continues to ask question after question over affordability. There are not a lot of seniors in the province of Ontario who can afford a \$5,200 bill. I don't care if it's one or 10, they shouldn't have to pay that kind of money.

We've learned the minister has allowed nearly 300 seniors to be bullied and forced to move to a long-term-care home without their consent—think about that; without your parents' or your grandparents' consent—and he chooses to hide the information or is completely unaware that seniors are being fined \$400 a day under his legislation. And he still refuses to apologize to the seniors and their families they have hurt and intimidated, including the thousands of seniors that died of COVID in long-term-care homes under the government's watch.

Speaker, are the seniors simply cash cows, dispensable to this government, or will the Premier repeal Bill 7?

Hon. Stan Cho: The member doesn't want to listen to me, but maybe he will listen to his colleagues on the opposition benches: "Alternate level of care. It's a fancy word that means ... you really would like to be supported

someplace else, but you have no choice but to" be in a "hospital."

Here's another one, the MPP for Waterloo: "These are patients who should not be in a hospital. They should be in long-term care or in retirement or assisted living options."

So, Speaker, I have a question. I mentioned the 17,000 seniors who are no longer patients in a hospital, now residents in long-term care. What about the 8,838 in Ontario Health West, including Niagara region, who have gone from hospitals to now living in long-term care? Would the member like to go with me and tell those members, all 8,800 of them, that they're better off in a hospital? I'm not going to do that. If the member wants to do it, go ahead. Will the member apologize to seniors for ignoring them for decades upon decades, as this government is finally taking care of them and picking up on their failures?

TENANT PROTECTION

Ms. Aislinn Clancy: My question is for the Premier.

This weekend, I met with residents in my riding who live at a building at 250 Frederick Street. Please look it up. They're all over the media. They're being bullied by their bad-acting landlord. These tenants, mostly seniors, were handed N13s stating they have to vacate their units so that the landlord can do renovations.

In Ontario, people are losing their homes over a coat of paint and a dishwasher. This scare tactic works. It's used a lot by this so-called investor who works in London, has done the same thing in Hamilton and might be coming for any of our ridings next. He will scare you out of your home and jack up the rent so he can make sky-high profits. Since 2017, the use of N13s has risen by 300% and N12s have risen by 70%, affecting over 20,000 people—people who pay their rent and are getting kicked out of their houses with nowhere to go.

My bill, the Keeping People Housed Act, aims to stop bad-acting landlords from clogging up the LTB and displacing tenants illegally. Will the Premier support my bill and stop the hemorrhaging of tenants onto our streets?

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The Attorney General.

Hon. Doug Downey: I appreciate the question from the member opposite. If the member would like to help, she could support, the NDP could support, the Liberals could support, the Green Party could support—but they don't. They don't support any of the investments that we've made.

We have doubled the number of adjudicators. Last year we have taken in more cases than any time in the last 15 years, and we're up on case intake by 31%, but we're up on resolution by 45%, Mr. Speaker. So, we are fixing the system that they left in shambles, and we will take no lessons from the Liberals chirping over there.

I would ask the new Green member to please join us in making investments so that individual renters and landlords can actually get their cases heard fairly and quickly.

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

Ms. Aislinn Clancy: Well, I listen. I've listened to tenants and I've listened to lawyers who use the system, and I hope you'll do the same.

Wait times at the LTB have never been longer—over 427 days and up to two years for tenants, because it's a two-tier system; and it was 70 days in 2018. So try something else. It's not working.

My bill, the Keeping People Housed Act, if passed, would stop the misuse of the LTB by asking for proper paperwork before they get in the queue—a queue, might I add, that is 53,000 long.

Bringing back vacancy control would mean that bad-acting landlords aren't given pay increases when they kick seniors out of their homes. I thought, in Ontario, that when you break the law and you do a job badly, you don't get a raise.

Mr. Speaker, the Premier says that he cares about affordability, that he wants people to save up for a home, that he cares about justice. So don't you agree that it shouldn't be luck; it should be law to have a good-enough landlord?

Hon. Doug Downey: For all those fantastic landlords and fantastic tenants out there, I do applaud them for being in that market.

There are some bad actors on both sides, and the only way to resolve it is not political interference; the way to resolve it is to have an independent tribunal, have a hearing, with evidence, so that they can make a decision. That's what we're doing. We're taking no shortcuts.

The NDP and the Liberals, during COVID, said, "Stop all hearings. Stop everything." Well, we didn't stop everything.

We do have a backlog, but we are getting it down in a fair, equitable, fast way. We are putting the resources in. We doubled the number of adjudicators. We put a new back-end system in. We hired more administrators. And we are getting the job done.

SMALL BUSINESS

Ms. Natalia Kusendova-Bashta: My question is for the Associate Minister of Small Business.

Speaker, small businesses are the backbone of our economy, and this was so evident when the minister and I visited a small family-owned business in my riding called Palma Pasta. Congratulations to the Petrucci family for being a staple of Italian cuisine and Italian culture in Mississauga.

However, the federal government is making it even harder for small businesses to survive and thrive with its massive 23% hike in the punitive carbon tax, to \$80 per tonne. This job-killing tax is already increasing the cost on everything from heating to electricity to transportation and raw materials. Small businesses are already struggling under the weight of high inflation, supply chain disruptions and labour shortages. This new carbon tax increase is yet another burden.

Can the associate minister please further explain the impact the carbon tax has had on Ontario's small businesses?

Hon. Nina Tangri: Thank you to my amazing colleague from Mississauga Centre for raising an issue that's facing so many small businesses across Ontario.

Speaker, I have been hearing from entrepreneurs and job creators across our province about the devastating impacts the federal government's punishing 23% carbon tax increase to \$80 per tonne will have on their operations and bottom lines. The Canadian Federation of Independent Business warns that over half of small firms will be forced to raise prices and the other half will need to freeze or reduce wages. These are real, on-the-ground effects of this tax increase, with small businesses being forced to make difficult decisions that could impact their ability to support many families. This tax hike is not just a financial burden for these businesses; it's a threat to the livelihoods of hard-working entrepreneurs.

Unlike the opposition Liberals and NDP, this government and this Premier will continue being the voice of Ontario's small businesses and will continue to tell Ottawa to scrap the tax.

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

Ms. Natalia Kusendova-Bashta: Thank you to the minister for her answer.

The contrast couldn't be more clear. Under the leadership of the Premier, we are supporting small businesses across the province.

With many small businesses already struggling to repay their CEBA loans, the carbon tax is only adding further challenges. They need relief, not more taxes.

Speaker, the opposition used to be all talk and no action, but now, all of a sudden, they're staying silent when the federal Liberals are hiking this job-killing carbon tax, and so is the queen of the carbon tax, Bonnie Crombie. I think her new name should be carbon Crombie, because there isn't a single tax that she doesn't love.

1200

Our government has the backs of our hard-working entrepreneurs and job creators, and we've got the record to prove it, but we know that more must be done. Can the associate minister tell the House how our government is pushing back against the carbon tax and its negative impacts?

Hon. Nina Tangri: Again to the great member: Our government has been listening to the concerns of small business owners and entrepreneurs about the devastating effects of the federal carbon tax increase. Unlike the opposition, we understand that overly burdensome taxes and costs make it harder for these job creators to survive, let alone invest in growth. It's simple economics, Speaker.

CFIB estimates each business is owed approximately \$2,637 in rebates, and yet the Liberals and NDP have been completely silent. Well, our government has had the backs of Ontario's two million hard-working small business employees and owners from day one. That's why we will continue to send another letter to my federal counterparts demanding Ottawa finally return the \$2.5 billion it has withheld in promised carbon tax rebates to small busi-

nesses since 2019. We will keep pushing the federal government relentlessly—

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

CONSUMER PROTECTION

Mr. Tom Rakocevic: Imagine signing a contract for a preconstruction freehold home. You put down large sums of money during these tough times, and after waiting years, you're shocked to find out in the media that the project has been cancelled.

This continues to happen under this government, and the government regulator will only post cancellations for condos, but not freehold homes. This information is vital for consumers, so they can make the most informed choice when choosing a builder. Why is the government letting their regulator cherry-pick the information it discloses to consumers on the builder directory?

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Minister of Public and Business Service Delivery.

Hon. Todd J. McCarthy: I thank the member for Humber River–Black Creek for the question. Our government understands that the purchase of a home, particularly a first home, is one of the most important transactions that any of our citizens can engage in in their entire lives. That is why we work closely in my ministry with two of the 12 administrative authorities that are devoted to consumer protection when it comes to new home purchases. That's the Home Construction Regulatory Authority and Tarion.

Tarion provides deposit protection so that consumers can get their deposits back, despite the illegal activities of some home builders. We continue to work closely with Tarion to ensure that Ontarians get the very best protections when they're spending their hard-earned money in our great province.

Contrary to years of weak consumer protection by the former Liberal government, we have beefed up protections for consumers with Ontario's new home warranty protection program.

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

Mr. Tom Rakocevic: Speaker, it's not just information on cancellations that's missing from the builder directory. Consumers are still left in the dark when it comes to builder records. To this very day, there are still gaping holes in the directory where hundreds of thousands of dollars, in some cases, were paid out to new home purchasers due to poor construction after years of fighting. This lack of transparency is dangerous and leaves many questioning if they can trust the government regulator at all.

What is taking the government so long in fixing the builder directory, so consumers have the absolutely necessary information they need to make the best decision in purchasing a newly built home?

Hon. Todd J. McCarthy: Speaker, this government vowed to stop bad actors, illegal builders and illegal vendors from trying to make extra money off the backs of

hard-working Ontarians. That is why, just last year, we announced new changes that strengthened the regulatory tools available to directly address this issue.

The system works. The Home Construction Regulatory Authority acted on this matter, in particular Mariman Homes—and let's call that out, because it's a public matter. HCRA suspended the licence of that organization on December 5, 2023, citing in the proposal that what occurred there was illegal, or without proper authorization, building and selling. Reinstatement of that licence is contingent on proof to HCRA that there has been compliance with legal obligations with the capability of fulfilling obligations to consumers by June 30, 2024. The system works.

TAXATION

Ms. Effie J. Triantafilopoulos: My question is for the amazing Associate Minister of Transportation. Families in my community of Oakville North–Burlington need immediate relief from the carbon tax. When people are already struggling to pay their bills and keep food on the table, the carbon tax only adds further strain to their household budgets, and yet, the NDP and the Liberals think now is the time to raise taxes. Our government knows that the people of Ontario deserve better.

Speaker, can the associate minister please explain what steps our government is taking to fight the carbon tax?

Hon. Vijay Thanigasalam: Thank you to the member from Oakville North–Burlington for her advocacy and for that question. Unlike the NDP and Liberals, we are fighting to put more money back into the pockets of hard-working Ontarians. That's why Premier Ford announced our government is extending the gas tax cut to help make life more affordable.

The Liberals and NDP are ignoring the people of Ontario. The Liberals and NDP do not care that people cannot afford groceries. I invite the opposition—come to Scarborough. You will hear from families upset as they pay more at the pumps and see their shopping cost more than ever before.

Liberals want higher taxes, and they refuse to axe the carbon tax. We are the only party fighting to keep costs down. Our message is clear: Scrap the tax.

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

Ms. Effie J. Triantafilopoulos: Thank you to the associate minister for the response. Last week, the federal Liberal government and their NDP allies raised the carbon tax by a staggering 23%. Speaker, this defies logic. This is completely unacceptable. This disastrous tax is hurting families and businesses in Ontario. It's forcing people to pay an extra 17 cents on the litre for the price of gas. People in Ontario need relief, not another tax. The federal Liberals need to listen to the hard-working people of our province and scrap the carbon tax once and for all.

Speaker, can the associate minister tell the House how the Liberal tax hike is hurting Ontarians?

Hon. Vijay Thanigasalam: Thank you to the member for that question. Speaker, true leaders listen to the people they represent. I ask the Liberals and NDP to take a trip to Burlington, where folks are stretching every dollar because their gas and electric bills have shot up with the carbon tax. That's why, under the leadership of Premier Ford, we scrapped the highway tolls, we reduced the gas tax and introduced One Fare. Why? Because families need relief, yet Prime Minister Trudeau and Bonnie Crombie refuse to listen.

Mr. Speaker, their response to longer food lines? Raise taxes. Their response to higher fuel costs? Raise taxes. That is not leadership. Here in Ontario, our PC team will continue to put more money in the people's pockets, and we will say no to a carbon tax.

TENANT PROTECTION

MPP Lise Vaugeois: Seniors in retirement homes are considered tenants and fall under the Ministry of Housing. There's no required standard of care, and it has become very clear the moment a land speculator sets their eyes on their rental homes, the seniors can get turfed out.

What is this government doing to protect seniors living in retirement homes?

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing.

Hon. Paul Calandra: Obviously, the position of the NDP has changed during question period, colleagues, so apparently now a retirement home is a home for the NDP, because long-term care isn't a home, but now a retirement home is, so I guess we've got two minutes left to see what their position will morph into then.

What we're doing for the people of the province of Ontario, including our seniors, is not only investing in long-term care, we're investing in all types of homes—because I think the member hits the nail on the head. One of the reasons why we brought in as-of-right three across the province is because we heard from seniors that they wanted to be in the communities that they helped to build. That's why we build long-term-care homes in smaller communities across the province. That's why we're allowing garden suites in homes for people, because a lot of people have said, "Listen, we want our family member to be with us." We agree with that. That's why we are building more. We are meeting our targets.

But ultimately, we ensure that tenants are treated fairly. We are making investments in the long-term-care board to ensure that that happens. We will treat all Ontarians with the respect that they deserve, Mr. Speaker.

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

MPP Lise Vaugeois: Two hundred seniors who are residents of a Chartwell retirement home in Mississauga have received eviction notices, giving them three months to get out and find a new place to live. Many of these seniors are paying \$1,600 a month in rent. Some are in their nineties and some have been living in this retirement

home for 25 years. This renovation that they are experiencing is all about making profits for Chartwell.

Premier, where are these seniors supposed to go now, into \$5,000-a-month, Chartwell-owned retirement homes?

Hon. Paul Calandra: That is why, Mr. Speaker, we are so focused on building more homes for the people of the province of Ontario.

I share the disappointment of the member opposite with respect to Mississauga's complete inability to build more homes of all types for their community. We saw that in Mississauga, towards the end of last year. I think they had like 12 new home starts in that community. But we're making substantial investments across Mississauga to ensure that we can build more homes—all types of homes. It is why we're investing in as-of-right three. It is why we're making more long-term-care homes available. It's why we're building more affordable homes. It is also why the associate minister is working on the attainable housing program. Because what we want to do is build 1.5 million homes of all types across the province of Ontario. It's why we're investing in infrastructure, investing in transit and transportation, investing in health care, because all of that matters in helping build communities. That is what we want to do for all of the people of the province of Ontario, build—

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Thank you very much. That concludes our question period for this morning.

VISITORS

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The member for Brampton West has informed me he has a point of order he'd like to raise.

Mr. Amarjot Sandhu: I'm pleased to welcome member companies from the Ontario Road Builders' Association and the Ontario Asphalt Pavement Council and their board to Queen's Park today. The member companies are active throughout the province to keep Ontario competitive by building our transportation infrastructure.

Thank you for being here today and thank you for all your work across the province.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Point of order, the member for St. Catharines.

Mrs. Jennifer (Jennie) Stevens: I apologize; at the beginning when we did introductions, I did not welcome the Ontario Provincial Council of the Catholic Women's League of Canada and welcome the Niagara member. Thank you for coming to your House.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The member for Mississauga-Erin Mills, I gather, has a point of order, as well.

Mr. Sheref Sabawy: I would like to take the opportunity to welcome St. Aloysius Gonzaga secondary school, who are visiting Queen's Park from my riding of Erin Mills. Welcome to Queen's Park.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): That concludes our second round of introduction of visitors.

This House stands in recess until 3 p.m.

The House recessed from 1213 to 1500.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Hon. Michael D. Ford: It's my pleasure to welcome to the Legislature this afternoon Caroline Tolton from the Vimy Ridge Foundation, as well as Craig Oliver, Shelly Sing, Vic Sing and PJ O'Neill from the Royal Canadian Legion, District D. Welcome to your House.

REPORTS BY COMMITTEES

STANDING COMMITTEE ON SOCIAL POLICY

Mr. Steve Clark: I beg leave to present a report from the Standing Committee on Social Policy and move its adoption.

The Clerk-at-the-Table (Ms. Meghan Stenson): Your committee begs to report the following bill, as amended:

Bill 66, An Act to proclaim Heart Valve Disease Awareness Day and Heart Valve Disease Awareness Week / Projet de loi 66, Loi proclamant la Journée de sensibilisation à la cardiopathie valvulaire et la Semaine de sensibilisation à la cardiopathie valvulaire.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Shall the report be received and adopted? Agreed? Agreed.

Report adopted.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The bill is therefore ordered for third reading.

STANDING COMMITTEE ON SOCIAL POLICY

Mr. Steve Clark: I beg leave to present a report from the Standing Committee on Social Policy and move its adoption.

The Clerk-at-the-Table (Ms. Meghan Stenson): Your committee begs to report the following bill without amendment:

Bill 137, An Act to proclaim Planning for Your Silver Years Awareness Week / Projet de loi 137, Loi proclamant la Semaine de sensibilisation à la planification de l'âge d'or.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Shall the report be received and adopted? Agreed? Agreed.

Report adopted.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The bill is therefore ordered for third reading.

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

SUPPORTING MOBILITY, AFFORDABILITY AND RELIABLE TRANSPORTATION IN ONTARIO ACT, 2024

LOI DE 2024 POUR UNE MOBILITÉ ACCRUE, DES PRIX PLUS ABORDABLES ET DES TRANSPORTS PLUS FIABLES EN ONTARIO

MPP Hazell moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 184, An Act to amend the Metrolinx Act, 2006, the Public Transportation and Highway Improvement Act and the Shortline Railways Act, 1995 with respect to transportation / Projet de loi 184, Loi visant à modifier la Loi de 2006 sur Metrolinx, la Loi sur l'aménagement des voies publiques et des transports en commun et la Loi de 1995 sur les chemins de fer d'intérêt local en ce qui concerne les transports.

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

First reading agreed to.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): I'd like to invite the member for Scarborough—Guildwood to briefly explain her bill, if she wishes to do so.

MPP Andrea Hazell: This bill amends several acts.

The Metrolinx Act, 2006, is amended to add a new object for Metrolinx requiring it to promote and facilitate the integration of routes, fares and schedules of municipal bike-share systems. Section 29 is amended to require Metrolinx or a subsidiary corporation to ensure that any assets sold or disposed for the purpose of building residential units include at least 20% affordable residential units.

The public transportation and highway maintenance improvement act is amended to specify mandatory maintenance standards for Highways 11, 17 and 69.

The Shortline Railways Act, 1995, is amended to re-enact section 10 of the act, which was repealed by the Getting Ontario Moving Act (Transportation Statute Law Amendment), 2019. The re-enacted section establishes requirements that apply to shortline railway companies that wish to discontinue the operation of a railway line.

STATEMENTS BY THE MINISTRY AND RESPONSES

VIMY RIDGE DAY

Hon. Michael D. Ford: Good afternoon, colleagues. Just before I begin my formal remarks this afternoon, I want to thank two incredible members of this House, from Brampton North and Markham—Unionville, for serving as parliamentary assistants in the Ministry of Citizenship and Multiculturalism. I thoroughly look forward to continuing the great work on behalf of the people of Ontario with the

members from Markham—Thornhill and Mississauga—Erin Mills. Thank you.

It is an honour to rise in this House today to mark the 21st Vimy Ridge Day. Recognized annually on April 9, this day commemorates the members of the Canadian Armed Forces who were killed or wounded during the Battle of Vimy Ridge and reminds us of the courage and sacrifice shown by all who have fought to secure our freedoms and our country, whether it was on the slopes of Vimy Ridge, the beaches of Normandy, in Korea, the Middle East, or anywhere in between.

Speaker, 107 years ago today, on a cold and snowy Easter Monday outside the village of Arras in northern France, the four divisions of the Canadian Armed Forces assembled. Fighting together for the first time as one, they faced a formidable task: to dislodge the entrenched and fortified German forces from Vimy Ridge and to secure the crucial high ground for the Allies.

Prior to Canada's advance in April 1917, the Allies had made numerous attempts to capture the ridge, all of which ended with high casualties and the ridge remaining in German hands. The most notable of these efforts came in the fall of 1915, when both the French and British launched an offensive with the same objective faced by Canada two years later: to dislodge the enemy and secure the ridge for the Allies. This attempt was met with fierce resistance and led to over 150,000 Allied casualties.

Speaker, 100,000 men strong, and armed with meticulous planning, new tactics and lessons learned from the British and French, Canada's four divisions stood ready to do what had previously proven impossible. At 5:43, as dawn broke, on Monday April 9, 1917, a massive artillery campaign began firing. Heavy artillery hammered German defensive positions while light field guns fired a mere 100 yards in front of advancing soldiers, providing much-needed cover for their advance. Just before 6:30 a.m., three of the four Canadian divisions had secured their first objective, and by mid-afternoon, they had reached their second objective.

On the morning of April 10, fresh reinforcements were brought to the front to assist in the next wave of the attack. After an intense artillery bombardment, Hill 135 and the town of Thélus had been captured, and all that remained by day's end was the fortified German high point on Hill 145.

1510

After intense fighting on April 11 and into April 12, the Canadians were finally able to dislodge the Germans from their fortifications on Hill 145, brought on by yet another artillery barrage from the British. By sundown on the 12th, Vimy Ridge had been secured for the Allies and would remain in Allied hands until the end of the war. The battle was over. And the impossible had been realized.

Nevertheless, when the dust finally settled, the true cost of Vimy Ridge came to light, with the four divisions suffering over 10,000 casualties, including the 3,600 fatalities and the over 7,000 soldiers who were wounded.

And while the price paid for this victory was great, the importance of Canada's success at Vimy Ridge cannot be

overstated. Not only were they able to do what had previously proved unattainable, but news of this achievement spread up and down the Western Front. And before long, Canadians were viewed by allies and enemies alike as a formidable and independent fighting force. To quote former British Prime Minister Lloyd George, "Whenever the Germans found the Canadian Corps coming into the line, they were prepared for the worst."

Canada's story, not unlike the stories of other countries, is made up of moments and events that forever alter the nation's fabric. While not always obvious at first, upon further reflection, the significance of these points in time becomes increasingly clear.

It can be said and has been said that on the slopes of Vimy Ridge that day, Canada emerged as a nation unto itself and one that was distinct from our British cousins.

In his memoirs on World War I, a brigadier general and member of this Legislative Assembly of Ontario for the riding of Kingston wrote about the Battle of Vimy Ridge, saying, "In those few minutes, I witnessed the birth of a nation."

As a day of remembrance, Vimy Ridge Day calls on us to take a moment to pause and reflect on those who made the ultimate sacrifice to secure the ridge all those years ago, and on all who have worn the Maple Leaf and served the cause of freedom. The freedoms we enjoy each and every day have been paid for through the courage, sacrifice and loss shown by brave Canadians from coast to coast to coast. Vimy Ridge Day is a reminder that the act of remembrance is not confined to 11 days in November, but rather is an ongoing and year-round process.

Today, nearly 107 years since the Battle of Vimy Ridge, we no longer have any veterans left who were there and lived through the realities of those days. Nevertheless, we all share in the responsibility to keep their stories and experiences alive and to remind the next generation of their sacrifices.

In February, I was proud to host a Remembrance Day round table alongside the Minister of Education. Together, we were joined by representatives of the Royal Canadian Legion, Historica Canada, the True Patriot Love Foundation and the Vimy Ridge Foundation, as well as members of the Canadian Armed Forces and Cadets Canada—an organization that is very close to my heart, as I was a part of them for a number of years. As a group, we discussed the importance of keeping the essence of Remembrance Day alive, especially for youth and young people, as more and more time passes since these conflicts. We also discussed the need to reframe how remembrance is approached. And while a century has passed since Vimy Ridge, veterans continue to walk among us, having served in Canada's more recent engagements as peacekeepers in the Congo, Somalia, Rwanda, as well as in the ongoing fight against ISIS and alongside our allies in the war in Afghanistan. We have a shared responsibility to acknowledge the sacrifice and courage by those who are with us, in the same way we do for those who have fought at Vimy Ridge, in World War I and World War II.

As a government, we remain committed to raising awareness and to ensuring Ontario's young people can engage with this history in a way that reflects Canada's more recent military history, and is informative, engaging and impresses upon them the significance of moments like the Battle of Vimy Ridge, not just to the war effort, but to a moment that fundamentally impacted Canada's growth and development into the country we all live in today.

A little over two weeks ago, the House voted to pass the Murray Whetung Community Service Award Act following third reading, and it awaits Her Honour's royal assent. This new honour and the legacy of Mr. Whetung—one of over 7,000 Indigenous veterans who fought for Canada during the First World War and Second World War. Once established, the award in his honour will recognize an outstanding air, army and sea cadet from each of Ontario's cadet squadrons who have gone above and beyond for volunteerism and contributions in their community.

In November, my colleague the Minister of Labour, Immigration, Training and Skills Development announced an investment of over \$4 million to provide men and women of the Canadian Armed Forces who are transitioning to civilian life with access to skills training and resources to find new, in-demand jobs and careers.

Our government knows that we must continue to educate the next generation on the sacrifices and all that our veterans do, but also that we must empower and support those who have served courageously so that they too may find success and opportunity upon returning to civilian life.

Speaker, in closing, I want to leave this House with a line from Canada's most famous wartime poem, *In Flanders Fields* by John McCrae: "To you from failing hands we throw / The torch; be yours to hold it high."

On Vimy Ridge Day and every day, let us continue to carry the torch forward, to honour the memory and courage of those who fought and died for our freedoms, and to recommit ourselves to keeping the stories and the memories of those who have fought and died for our freedoms alive for the next generation and generations to follow.

Lest we forget.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Responses?

Mrs. Jennifer (Jennie) Stevens: I rise today to recognize and pay tribute to the brave Canadians who fought valiantly and sacrificed so much during the Battle of Vimy Ridge, a defining moment in our nation's history.

Speaker, 7,004 Canadians were wounded in the Battle of Vimy Ridge on another continent over a century ago; 3,598 Canadians died. When we take a moment and think of the weight of the sacrifice to Canada, a country, at that time, with just a fraction of our current population, it is staggering. It was a sacrifice that was felt in every corner of our country, as its weighty cost was felt across all communities, within all households.

1520

The price paid by these young Canadians for our freedom was indeed heavy. These were young individuals—

some lying about their age. They were not from professional military backgrounds. However, they were our brothers, our fathers, our sons. They were regular people from our streets and from our neighbourhoods. They were called upon to act with duty, to act with courage and to safeguard the homes so many left behind.

The Battle of Vimy Ridge, which occurred between April 9 and April 12, 1917, fought on the already war-scarred landscape of northern France, was a moment that now has become a symbol of Canadian courage in the face of conflict. It is why on April 9 each year, we take a moment to reflect, to take a moment to thank and, most of all, to remember—to remember and to feel the pain of so many.

Speaker, only a few years ago, our nation, our province and our municipalities celebrated the centennial of the Battle of Vimy Ridge.

I recall when Niagara spent nearly 10 years and countless hours of work in preparation for celebrating the 100th anniversary of Vimy Ridge—a piece of Canada's history that was painstakingly restored in Niagara in order to provide a public viewing. At the Lake Street Armoury in St. Catharines, an unveiling of the Vimy Ridge gun, a German artillery gun captured by Canadian soldiers during the battle of Vimy Ridge—the restoration, spearheaded by the Lincoln and Welland Regiment Foundation, involved countless hours steeped in the efforts of our region, showcasing Niagara's commitment to the honouring of our past. It is a source of pride to honour the citizens, honour the soldiers and the peacekeepers who served. In Niagara, veterans and community members alike stood shoulder to shoulder in our collective recognition for those important events. This is a story from my community about the efforts to recognize and honour those who made the greatest sacrifice at Vimy Ridge.

Each one of us here in this chamber has similar stories. Each community has made similar efforts. Honouring those who have made the great sacrifice is the greatest unifier.

Today, as we reflect on the significance of Vimy Ridge, let us also celebrate the unity and the resilience that have come to define us as Canadians.

Today, Canadian families with a present military tradition or civilian families—together, we all remember that Vimy Ridge defined our nation. Let us remember the lessons of our past, the bold actions and the pivotal moments that define our nation. Their commitment to peace, democracy and justice is the legacy of Vimy—a legacy we continue today as peacekeepers in our Canadian military.

As we honour the memories of those who fought and fell at Vimy Ridge, let us renew our pledge to one another. The imprint that the battle had on Canadian families continues to ripple through all of our communities even today, almost 107 years later.

In closing, as we take a few moments of silence, when you bow your head, try to say, "We will remember them," but try to feel the fear, the brotherhood and the unity of our heroes, our Canadian military. Let us acknowledge how

fortunate we are, as Canadians—for the breadth of the sacrifices of real lives at Vimy Ridge and the high price that was sacrificed. Let us pay gratitude to those who have since paid the ultimate sacrifice, to those who have served our military, and to all who continue to do so today.

As we look forward to the future, let us embrace the legacy of courage and honour, recognizing that Vimy's legacy is one of peace, solidarity and prosperity.

Lest we forget.

Mrs. Karen McCrimmon: Speaker, it's both an honour and a privilege to speak on Vimy Ridge Day. The bravery and incredible accomplishment of Canadians at Vimy Ridge has certainly earned international recognition for good reason. But I believe there's another key feature of the Battle of Vimy Ridge that makes it speak so strongly to those of us here at home: Vimy Ridge lives on in the memories of Canadians still, not just as a commemoration, but as a shining example of courage, perseverance and the Canadian spirit of teamwork and innovation.

In the horrors of World War I, the Canadian Corps knew that continuing to sacrifice thousands upon thousands of lives was not acceptable. There had to be another way, and indeed they created one. The four divisions of the Canadian Corps employed innovative tactics and techniques. Through detailed reconnaissance, map study and rehearsals, Canadian troops familiarized themselves with the terrain. Commanders gave the everyday soldiers new orders, encouraging them to take the initiative, and then gave them the support and information needed to do exactly that.

The meticulous planning and preparation undertaken by Canadian officers and soldiers together, prior to the battle, was crucial to its success. The Canadian Corps at Vimy Ridge pushed the Central Powers back almost five kilometres, the greatest single Allied advance on the Western Front to that date. Still, Vimy cost almost 3,600 Canadian lives and untold injuries, but that was far fewer than the 150,000 Allied lives that had already been lost trying to capture Vimy.

That spirit of innovation, finding a new way in a dark time, lives on in Canadians today. It's a blessing that we live with the freedom to do so—a freedom provided by the sacrifices of Canadians of the past. Their memory inspires us to be a strong, innovative, caring nation, standing together in the face of all that challenges us. We must always give thanks, and we must never forget the gifts that we have been given through their sacrifice.

Applause.

PETITIONS

SUPPORTIVE HOUSING

Mme France Gélinas: I'm quite happy to present this petition. Marc Carroll, a disability rights activist from Sudbury, has collected over 200 names. Marc lives with a disability, and he feels that our society will need more

supportive housing in order to be able to accommodate people who have disabilities, so he took it upon himself to write a petition and to go around and ask people to sign it. He's asking us to make sure that the supportive housing sector in Ontario gets the funds they need so that we have enough supportive housing to meet the 2.6 million Ontarians who live with disabilities, who would benefit. I agree with him.

I will ask Duncan to bring those petitions to the Clerk.

SOCIAL ASSISTANCE

Miss Monique Taylor: Of course, once again, I would like to thank Dr. Sally Palmer for the thousands of signatures that she has been able to collect on behalf of people who are on social assistance in this province.

As we know, people who are on social assistance are living in legislated poverty. On Ontario Works, they're at \$733 a month; for ODSP, they're at \$1,308 a month. The meagre increases that have been put on by this government are not near enough to ensure that people have the ability to live full, healthy lives. That's why the people who have signed this petition and the thousands before that are asking the government to double the social assistance rates. I think it's the right thing to do, and hopefully the government will also see fit to ensuring that happens.

1530

PROGRAMMES D'ALIMENTATION SCOLAIRE

SCHOOL NUTRITION PROGRAMS

Mme Chandra Pasma: J'aimerais remercier Kieran Murphy, un élève au Collège catholique Franco-Ouest, et aussi tous les élèves et tous les enseignants au Collège catholique Franco-Ouest.

I'd like to thank Kieran Murphy, a student at Collège catholique Franco-Ouest, who collected all these signatures from students and teachers on a petition which addresses the Student Nutrition Program and the First Nations Student Nutrition Program—

Hon. Andrea Khanjin: Point of order.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The Minister of the Environment, Conservation and Parks.

Hon. Andrea Khanjin: I know the standing orders were changed yesterday, and I just want a clarification. I believe it's a summary of the substance of the petition—not how the petition came into substance. So I just wanted some clarity on the standing order change.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): I want to thank the member for her intervention.

Are there any other contributions to the point of order that has been raised?

Mr. John Vanthof: Our understanding is that the standing orders—we oppose this specific change, by the way. It is our understanding that the standing order was meant to summarize the petition, not to change the subject matter of the petition and to make sure it was within a

certain time. There was no time limit specified—but that it not be repetitive. I would submit that this is our first day at this. I think we have followed the intent of the standing order change.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Do any other members wish to participate?

Hon. Andrea Khanjin: I just want to know how you interpret the term “brief,” Speaker, just because the standing orders do say “brief.” And it’s about the substance of the petition, not how it came to fruition.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): I want to thank the members for their intervention with respect to this point of order that has been raised.

I would point out that, indeed, the standing orders were changed. Standing order 42(b) indicates that, “A member may present a petition in the House during the afternoon routine ‘petitions.’ The member may make a brief statement summarizing the contents of the petition and indicating the number of signatures attached thereto,” but shall not read the text of the petition.

I would say that of the members who have presented petitions this afternoon, not one of them has read the text of the petition, as far as I can tell, based on what I’ve heard.

The issue is, is the submission brief or not?

I would ask the members to keep their introduction of their petitions or their presentation as brief as possible.

Petitions? The member for Ottawa West–Nepean.

Ms. Chandra Pasma: This petition, signed by 105 teachers and students at Collège catholique Franco-Ouest, is intending to address a concern that, in a prosperous country like Canada, nobody should be going to school hungry and that student nutrition has an important impact on physical well-being and the capacity to learn. Therefore, the students are petitioning the Legislative Assembly to double the budget for the Student Nutrition Program and the First Nations Student Nutrition Program. I thank them for this petition. I happily endorse it, and I will send it to the table with page Simon.

ASSISTIVE DEVICES

M^{me} France Gélinas: I have a petition here that comes from Ostomy Canada Society. Basically, the Assistive Devices Program in Ontario should cover 75% of the cost of assistive devices. For people who wear an ostomy—believe me, nobody wears an ostomy if they don’t have to—the amount that they get has not been changed in many, many years, which means that right now, they get about \$850 a year max, when most of them spend over \$2,000 for their ostomy supplies. They would like us, as legislators, to make sure that the Assistive Devices Program is true to itself so that they get reimbursed 75% of the true cost of having to live with an ostomy and buying the ostomy supplies.

I think this is reasonable. I fully support their ask and will ask Duncan to bring that to the Clerks.

MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES

MPP Jamie West: These are a continuation of the petitions that the member from Waterloo brought in on behalf of the Roth family. The Roth family, following the death of their daughter, Kaitlyn—there were some flaws in mental health. And so, the intent of these petitions—because we’re not allowed to read them anymore, I’ll summarize them. Because of the number of people who die by suicide and because of the mental health concerns when discharging patients, and the intake policies, what they’re looking for here—and there are many petitions here, Speaker; if you remember, yesterday the member had a huge stack of them. These are just the handful that I had left over. What they’re petitioning for is that the Associate Minister of Mental Health and Addictions earmark funding for training to ensure that something like this doesn’t happen again in the future.

I’ll provide it to page Lyra for the table.

ANTI-VAPING INITIATIVES FOR YOUTH

M^{me} France Gélinas: I would like to thank Mr. Cory Taschereau from Hanmer in my riding, who is really worried about the number of young people who vape. In some high schools, 80% of the kids vape. He doesn’t think that this is wise. He saw that we have very little knowledge about the long-term effects of vaping on children.

We know that the vaping industry really targets the kids. They target the kids with the flavours that they use. They target the kids with the way that they sell their products.

Mr. Taschereau is very worried. He knows that there are a number of public health agencies, such as public health Canada and Physicians for a Smoke-Free Canada, that are encouraging schools and others to do everything we can to keep vaping out of the hands of children. I think this is wise.

I would ask the House to consider passing my bill, the Vaping is not for Kids Act.

I support what the petition is trying to do. I will ask Nate to bring it to the Clerk.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Once again, I’ll remind members that the standing order indicates that the summary of the petition should be as brief as possible.

ÉDUCATION EN FRANÇAIS

M^{me} France Gélinas: J’aimerais remercier Claire Gauvin de Hamner dans mon comté pour cette pétition. Claire et les gens qui ont signé la pétition sont inquiets que le système d’éducation francophone n’a pas le nombre de professeurs requis pour rencontrer les besoins. En ce moment en Ontario, il nous manque 1 000 professeurs francophones, donc ce qu’elle demande c’est des recommandations ont été faites au gouvernement pour pallier cette pénurie et elle aimerait que ces recommandations-là soient mises en place.

Je crois que c'est une bonne idée. Je vais signer la pétition, et je demande à Nate de l'amener à la table des greffiers.

OPP DETACHMENT

M^{me} France Gélinas: I would like to thank Mike and Mary Ann LeBreton—they live in Alban, in the south part of my riding—for these petitions. They and thousands of other people have signed this petition because they are really worried that the OPP station in Noëlville will be closed. They basically look at—how could it be, with a government that said they are in favour of a strong police presence, that an area as big as French River would be without an OPP station? So they want equitable access.

A lot of women have signed this petition. Because of intimate partner violence that is rampant in some areas of French River, they need the OPP stations to stay open.

I fully agree with them.

I will sign the petition and ask my good page Nate to bring it to the Clerk.

LABOUR LEGISLATION

MPP Jamie West: Speaker, these petitions are about anti-scab-labour legislation. As you know, it was a bill I brought forward. Basically, what they're asking for is to bring back the anti-scab legislation that was lost when Mike Harris formed government after the NDP had brought in anti-scab.

The essence of the summary of it, basically, would be that labour disputes are less long, less hostile and dangerous to communities when you have anti-scab legislation. Obviously, they're not asking for no worker to be able to go in—because in workplaces like mine, you would need to do care and control of places. But they want to be able to have the withdrawal of labour, which is the only power workers have, as a right so that they can force negotiations to move forward more efficiently.

1540

I obviously support this petition. I'll affix my signature and provide it to page Simon, who snuck up on me like a ninja.

ADOPTION DISCLOSURE

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: I've been advocating for this petition for a while now, and it's because if an adult adopted person's next of kin is deceased, the current legislation prevents them from accessing their birth records and identifying information—specifically, for Indigenous people who need to have that information. It's very important to them.

This petition was created by John Vo. He lives in Etobicoke. Many others have signed. They are asking the Legislative Assembly that they can have access to post-adoption birth information when the next of kin or extended next of kin is deceased, so that they can find out their heritage of their family lineage.

I'd like to submit this petition to the Legislative Assembly and have Lyra deliver it to the table.

SUBVENTIONS AUX RÉSIDENTS DU NORD POUR FRAIS DE TRANSPORT À DES FINS MÉDICALES

M^{me} France Gélinas: I would like to thank Carole et René Menard de Hanmer dans mon comté pour ces pétitions.

Ils veulent vraiment que l'on répare les subventions aux résidents du Nord pour les frais de transport à des fins médicales. Il y a beaucoup de services de santé qui ne sont pas disponibles dans le nord de l'Ontario. Donc, les gens du Nord doivent voyager vers Toronto, vers Ottawa, vers London pour avoir ces services-là.

Le remboursement n'a pas été mis à jour depuis très longtemps, ce qui veut dire que pour plusieurs personnes, ils n'ont pas suffisamment les moyens de se rendre à Toronto, London ou Ottawa pour recevoir les soins dont ils ont besoin.

Ils voudraient que les frais de remboursement soient ajustés à la hausse pour permettre à tout le monde d'avoir accès à des soins spécialisés.

Je pense que c'est quelque chose d'important qui devrait être fait. Je n'ai aucun problème à appuyer cette pétition, et je vais demander à Emirson de l'amener à la table des greffiers.

SOCIAL ASSISTANCE

M^{me} France Gélinas: I would like to thank Ashlee Lefebvre from Capreol in my riding.

There are hundreds and hundreds of people who would like to see a doubling of the social assistance rates. There are many parts of my riding where we have a higher concentration of people on social assistance. It is extremely difficult for them to make ends meet at \$713, \$730—I forgot the exact number—to pay rent, to pay for food, to pay for transportation. They would like a living wage so that what they receive in social assistance actually allows them to live. I agree. I support this petition and ask my good page Emirson to bring it to the Clerk.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): That concludes our petitions for this afternoon.

VISITORS

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): I understand the member for Windsor-Tecumseh has a point of order he'd like to raise.

Mr. Andrew Dowie: I apologize; I missed the section of the routine proceedings for introduction of visitors.

I'd love to give a warm welcome to my mother, Mary Jo Dowie, and her friend Barb Newton, who are up in the members' gallery right now.

ORDERS OF THE DAY**BUILDING A BETTER ONTARIO ACT
(BUDGET MEASURES), 2024****LOI DE 2024 VISANT À BÂTIR
UN ONTARIO MEILLEUR
(MESURES BUDGÉTAIRES)**

Resuming the debate adjourned on April 9, 2024, on the motion for second reading of the following bill:

Bill 180, An Act to implement Budget measures and to enact and amend various statutes / Projet de loi 180, Loi visant à mettre en oeuvre les mesures budgétaires et à édicter et à modifier diverses lois.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Further debate? The member for Ottawa West–Nepean.

Ms. Chandra Pasma: Thank you very much, Speaker. When the debate ended this morning, I was speaking about the unprecedented situation we have in our education system right now because of the government's underfunding of education. There's really no part of our education system where that's more true than special education.

We are really seeing our kids with disabilities and learning exceptionalities being put in an impossible position within our school system because of the funding shortfall. Teachers and administrators are telling me stories about principals having to pull kids with special needs around the school with them all day in a wagon because there's nobody else in the school who's available to take care of them.

Earlier this year, we had a situation where a student eloped from his school, a student with autism, and no one realized he was gone for over 30 minutes, even though the student is supposed to have one-on-one support at all times, because the government's underfunding of special education means that schools are being put in a position of making impossible choices.

The Ontario Autism Coalition has warned that with this funding shortfall, it's not a matter of if, it's a matter of when some child is going to be seriously hurt because of the lack of supports, and yet this government put only \$18 million towards special education in this budget. That's equivalent to the deficit of only two school boards in the province: the Greater Essex school board, which has a deficit of \$10 million, and the Halton Catholic District School Board, which has a deficit of \$9 million—so it's actually less than that deficit. What about the other 70? Where's their funding to support students with special needs?

The problem with not supporting these students is that then they fall through the cracks. There are students who are sitting in a classroom but who are not getting any support with learning at all. One mom told me her son is looking out the window all day. Others have told me their child is being given a worksheet and some crayons instead of having the opportunity to learn.

We're also seeing this erupt in frustration and violence from children who are not getting the supports they need,

along with students who are not getting the mental health supports they need. I just want to read this message from an education worker from Hamilton, who said:

"My EA team is burnt out, we're attacked on a regular basis and we're short handed almost every day because there are not enough supplies to pick up open jobs. We are all juggling way too many high needs students, we are struggling to be effective in our roles because all we're doing is putting out fires." The Minister of Education "has done nothing to make schools safer and stability is a thing of the past at this point, things keep getting worse ever since the pandemic.

"The students are not okay and we don't have the manpower or the properly skilled professionals to meet their needs. We need mental health professionals, more social workers and more self contained classes for the students who are not able to function safely in regular class. We have had five staff sent to hospital this year because of the violence of just one of our spec ed students."

A teacher from Waterloo sent me this message: "I'm in a K-6 school. This week so far we've had a non verbal student elope and run off campus, three different students trash three different classrooms, one staff member get assaulted by a student, and two class evacuations. And it's only Wednesday."

And yet what did the government put in this budget to address violence in our schools? There's \$30 million for surveillance cameras and vape detectors, but nothing for additional mental health supports, educational assistants, admin staff, professional development for teachers and education workers on de-escalation and addressing violence. Apparently, our schools are just supposed to watch on video as students, teachers and education workers get attacked, without being able to do anything about it.

Another area that the budget fails to address is the teacher shortage. We are seeing teachers burnt out and struggling. They feel like no one cares what happens inside of our schools. They've dealt with the indignity and the insults of Bill 124 and the incredible disrespect of this government throughout the past four years as they've been doing incredible work throughout the pandemic, and so teachers are leaving the system, unable to take the conditions any more, able to earn more money in a less difficult situation outside of the sector or in a different province. And so we have unqualified teachers in our classrooms. We have classes that are congregating in the library for the day because there's no teacher for them. High school students are telling me there's an absenteeism problem because why bother going to school if you're not going to be taught anything for the day, and yet the government failed to even mention this in the budget, let alone even address it.

I could go on for another 20 minutes, Speaker, on just everything the government failed to do on education in this budget, but unfortunately, I'm out of time, so I hope I get lots of questions about education.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Bhutila Karpache): Questions?

1550

Mme France Gélinas: I would like to ask my colleague—when it comes to children with special needs, we see that the demand for mental health services for children continues to increase, the demand for children that need to be taken into account to meet their needs continues to increase, if you look at the services that are available.

And now, I will direct you into the French schools because kids in Ontario have a constitutional right to go to French schools. Have you seen any improvement in the accessibility of services to support the children with special needs in our French schools?

Ms. Chandra Pasma: Merci à ma collègue de Nickel Belt pour cette question.

It's a very important question because the mental health of our children really is suffering, and sadly, the resources just aren't there.

So 95% of schools in the province say they need more help with mental health than what they're getting. Only 9% of schools have regular access to a regularly scheduled mental health professional, and half of schools have no access at all, and unfortunately, francophone schools are overrepresented in that half of schools with no access at all.

When I speak with directors of education and school boards within the francophone system, they tell me it's incredibly challenging to recruit French-speaking mental health professionals and the kind of support they're getting from the government is just inadequate to address the task.

Unfortunately, French-speaking children get no assistance with their mental health, even though they're dealing with the same challenges that English-speaking children are dealing with, and it's completely unacceptable in this province.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Bhutila Karpache): Next question?

MPP Jamie West: The member spoke very eloquently about the importance of funding for children with special needs. I was recently speaking to a colleague of mine, who has two children on the autism spectrum and is struggling with the lack of accessible services and the lack of funding that's coming for that program specifically with the children in school feeling like they're not accessing the same quality of education other children would be able to.

Why would the government—I lose track of the hashtag that has been #40KIsNotOkay, #50KIsNotOkay, #60KIsNotOkay, I don't know if it's up to 70 now, but why has this program been broken for so long?

I remember in 2018, Doug Ford promised these parents they would never have to protest on the lawn of Queen's Park, but it keeps getting worse and worse, and why couldn't that be in this budget?

Ms. Chandra Pasma: Thank you to my colleague from Sudbury for that excellent question. Unfortunately, we're seeing it across the spectrum, that children with autism are not getting any kind of support from this government. They've completely broken the OAP. As you've said, over

60,000 children not getting services through the OAP, so those children are ending up in our school system without having had any kind of therapy or any kind of support, which means that they are less likely to be able to participate in the school day, they're more likely to need supports within the school system and, unfortunately, because the government has completely underfunded special education, they're not getting those supports there at all.

I've spoken to parents who've felt like they can't enroll their children in our publicly funded schools for that reason. I've spoken to other parents who say their heart is in their throat when they send their kids off to school every morning because they don't know if they're going to be safe.

We are failing these kids and unfortunately, it's a larger pattern on the part of the government towards people with disabilities. This is how they're treating kids in our provincial schools. This is how they're treating older adults in our developmental disabilities sector. This is how they're treating people on ODSP—

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Bhutila Karpache): Thank you.

Next question?

Hon. Andrea Khanjin: Just on the budget itself, I know there's a lot in the budget in terms of community infrastructure—we talked in the past about building new schools; there are more schools to be built—but other infrastructure needs in the community.

Something I hear a lot about through parents especially is the need for more sports and rec opportunities, especially as many communities are growing. It has a great impact on youth, on children, on students. It's great for their mental health. It's something for them to do outside of the classroom as well.

And the fact that there's actually money allocated to this budget on community sports and recreation, I just wanted the member to elaborate on what she is hearing about the need for sports and recreation in her community, and if her local municipalities have noticed the funding that is available for application in this budget?

Ms. Chandra Pasma: Thank you to the Minister of the Environment for that question. I completely agree that sports and recreation opportunities are incredibly important for children and youth. I know that in my community, in several neighbourhoods where there have been issues with youth violence, youth recreation opportunities, after-school activities have been incredibly important in addressing that. But unfortunately, we have a scenario in which the government hasn't been providing adequate support for that. In schoolyards across Ottawa, half the playground or more is taken up by portables because there isn't enough room in the school to accommodate the students, so that space is being lost for recreational activities. We are seeing school boards having to cut after-school programming and extracurricular activities because they're so badly underfunded they can't afford to offer them anymore. In fact, we're looking at the Toronto District School Board considering significant cuts to after-school activities that are very important to community

members. I think that if the government truly sees these programs as important to our youth, they should be adequately investing in our schools and our communities so that every youth has access to them.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Bhutila Karpache): Next question?

Mr. Andrew Dowie: I want to thank the member from Ottawa West–Nepean for her remarks. Just on your most recent point about schools running out of space, part of the budget has a capital plan of over \$16 billion in capital grants for the next 10 years, including a public high school in the city of Ottawa. I'm hoping you might be able to share with us what school that is and what community it will serve.

Ms. Chandra Pasma: Well, it's interesting the member for Windsor–Tecumseh mentioned the \$16 billion over 10 years for capital, but we know that the school repair backlog alone is more than \$16 billion. We don't actually know how much it is because the government stopped reported on it about four years ago. We just know that it's grown, and that \$16 billion has to recover repairs and new schools. We have new schools opening across the province with portables already in the schoolyard because the school is too small on the day that it's opened. So \$16 billion isn't actually sufficient to address the space needs of our children, to ensure everybody gets a high-quality education.

And with regard to high schools in Ottawa, the CEPEO, the Conseil des écoles publiques de l'Est de l'Ontario, has been asking for funding to support a public French high school in Centretown. They have land that the NCC has committed. All they need is the government to step up and commit funding, and unfortunately, the minister has refused to even meet with them, so I would encourage him to do that immediately.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Bhutila Karpache): Question?

Miss Monique Taylor: Thank you so much to the member from Ottawa West–Nepean. I was able to be here this morning for that portion of her debate. She talked about Community Living and struggles that people with disabilities are having when it comes to living in supportive housing and ensuring that those homes are available. We know that we have wait-lists already, and now we're hearing that they're starting to close their doors, they're considering closing their doors or they're changing to a fee-for-service program. The Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services has implemented a Journey to Belonging plan, which is into year 3, and there are still no answers from the ministry.

Would the member like to elaborate maybe once again to update the current members of the House on what she's been hearing for people who need supportive housing living and are seeing those houses close?

Ms. Chandra Pasma: Thank you to the member from Hamilton Mountain for that incredibly important question. There are many organizations across Ottawa that are struggling to keep their doors open and struggling to continue to provide these incredibly important services to

people living with developmental disabilities and their families. I know, because my older sister had severe mental and physical disabilities, how important these services are to these individuals and to their families, especially once an individual has disabilities that are severe enough that they can no longer be provided with care at home, and how important it is to these individuals that they have a sense that their home is their home. Unfortunately, with organizations like L'Arche having to close a home, which is an incredibly painful decision, the people who lived in that home have lost their home. They have lost their sense of comfort and routine. And even having closed that home, L'Arche still has a deficit of half a million dollars this year. Again, I just have to ask, who are we as a society if this is how we treat our most vulnerable members?

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Bhutila Karpache): Further debate?

1600

Mr. Stephen Blais: It's an honour to rise this afternoon to debate the 2024 budget.

Madam Speaker, blessed are our children because they will inherit this government's massive debt. Our kids will be paying for this government's record, massive spending and deficits likely for the rest of their lives. This Conservative government is now projecting a deficit of \$8.8 billion. Never in the history of Ontario has a government borrowed so much money to achieve so little.

In fact, the Premier is about to become the biggest-spending Premier in modern Ontario history. That's right; he's spending money and running deficits that would make Kathleen Wynne and Bob Rae blush. When compared to GDP, program spending will be higher than it was during any of the years that Kathleen Wynne was Premier. It will be even higher than 2010. Remember what happened in 2010—2010 was during the global economic financial meltdown. This was when governments of all partisan colours from one side of the planet to the next side of the planet were spending money to stimulate the economy. And this year's spending will be higher than that.

Remember, Madam Speaker, during the economic crisis that started with the failure of those big American financial institutions—let's remember that crisis, something that was affecting Ontario greatly. Something that the government of that day was spending money on, to save Ontario jobs, was the auto sector. We remember how bad the auto sector in North America, how bad the auto sector here in Ontario was affected during that great recession of 2008 and 2010, the last time spending got anywhere close to this high.

The reason I raise that as an important point is that, at that time, when Canada and Ontario came together to invest \$3.3 billion to save the auto sector in Ontario, to save tens of thousands of jobs here in the province—when program spending was that high to save those jobs and to save the auto sector, who was against it? It was the Ontario Conservative Party. They were against program spending that high. They were against saving the auto industry.

Lo and behold, 15 years later, now that they're in government, they're spending even more money. They're spending so much money that they don't know where it's all going.

So they voted against saving the auto industry. They voted against the spending to save the economy after the massive financial crisis of 2008 and 2010. And now they're spending even more money than they ever did back then. Frankly, they're making it rain across Ontario, and everyone is getting wet, because we don't know where the money is going.

I'd like to just suggest, Madam Speaker, that I will be sharing my time with my good friend from Ottawa South this afternoon.

This government is spending money like never before. They're spending money like it's going out of fashion. They're spending money like it's water. And what are we getting for it? Some 2.2 million Ontarians don't have a family doctor or primary health practitioner. Emergency rooms are closing across the province, sometimes for a couple of hours, sometimes for a day, sometimes for a weekend. You never know when the emergency rooms are closing—emergency room closing soon in your neck of the woods, Madam Speaker.

We remember a Conservative Party that was against high hydro prices. Well, now, hydro prices are higher than they've ever been, and this is despite the fact that this government is using billions of dollars of income taxes to try to keep them low.

So they're running massive deficits, taking income taxes that could be hiring doctors, income taxes that could be hiring teachers and building schools and building highways, and they're using that to save a couple of bucks a month on your hydro prices. And your hydro prices are still the highest they've ever been.

The cost of rent is going up. The cost of buying a home is going up. The cost of buying groceries is going up.

You can't even go to the Beer Store and buy a beer for the price the Premier said he would have.

You can't drink a beer without looking down your nose at another broken Conservative promise. That's how far off the fiscal cliff these guys have gone.

They're spending money like no government has ever done in Ontario. Some 2.2 million people don't have a family doctor. Hydro prices are higher than they've ever been. The budget is not doing anything to provide relief for families. So where is all the money going? Well, we know that some of it is going to the Premier's office because, lo and behold, the Premier, who decried the length and depth of the sunshine list in 2017 before he was Premier, has seen a massive, enormous, and some might say historic jump in the number of people on the sunshine list, and a bunch of them work for the Premier. His office budget has gone up; it has doubled since last year. His office went from 20 staff to 48 staff now, I think, in a year, and every single person who works for the Premier makes more as an individual than the average Ontario family does in a year—some of them make double the average, some

of them make triple the average, some of them make quadruple the average Ontario family.

That's not a government that's concerned about minding their purse. That's not a government that's watching the pennies or the dollars. That's a government that has lost all fiscal responsibility. They are out of control, and our kids are going to be paying their deficits for the rest of their lives.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Bhutila Karpoche): The member from Ottawa South.

Mr. John Fraser: It's a pleasure to follow my colleague and friend from Orléans.

He's right; never has a government in Ontario's history spent so much, borrowed so much, incurred so much debt to do so little.

Ontarians have to ask themselves: "Is my life any better? Is it any easier?" "Is my rent cheaper?" "Is my mortgage cheaper?" "Is it easier to get groceries?" "I've got a problem with my landlord. I'll have to take him to the tribunal. Oh, it takes 400 days now; it used to take 70 in 2018."

This budget does nothing for those people.

As my colleague just mentioned, there are two million Ontarians without a family doctor, so people are having to use their credit card instead of their OHIP card to access basic medical attention for their son or daughter or themselves.

Interruption.

Hon. Todd Smith: John, your phone is ringing.

Mr. John Fraser: Is there a phone there? It's somewhere.

Interjection: It's not yours.

Mr. John Fraser: It's not mine.

Interjection.

Mr. John Fraser: Stop calling me.

That's not fair. Put some more time back on the clock. It all starts at the top, folks.

Interjection.

Mr. John Fraser: Thanks for the call, Lisa.

Oh, pardon me, I withdraw.

Thanks for the call, the member from Nepean.

Hon. Todd Smith: You guys have a lot to talk about.

Mr. John Fraser: We do. We're kind of frenemies. Anyhow, I digress.

Now stop, Lisa, because I've got to finish. I'm going to have a big finish here, Lisa.

It all starts at the top. As my colleague just mentioned, since 2019, the Premier's office budget has almost doubled, to \$7 million. It has increased by \$4 million—it has actually more than doubled. There used to be 20 staff in 2019; there are now 48—sorry, that's 48 staff on the sunshine list. There are actually 80 staff. My colleague just talked about the average Ontario family income. Let's talk about the median Ontario family income—the people right in the middle. All of those people make more than that—a whole bunch of them make double; another group makes triple; there's another group that makes quadruple that. It doesn't make any sense.

People are having a hard time paying their bills, their rent, their mortgage. It's hard to put food on the table.

Do you know what the minister said the other day? "Yes, some people are using their credit card to get health care—just a few people"; they used to say there was nobody.

1610

And then, the Premier did what he does best, the thing that he really excels at, which is pointing a finger: "It's them over there. They have got to fix their legislation. It's the federal government. It's their problem." It's not their problem. So instead of pointing a finger, the Premier needs to lift a finger and actually realize that all you have to do is pay nurse practitioners. It's not complicated. It's simple. You could have done it a year ago. You just have to pay them. It's about who pays them. Treat them the same way as, well, pharmacists. Pharmacists can diagnose 12 minor ailments. That's their scope. Who pays them when they do that? The government. Who pays them when they do meds checks—that's a whole other issue altogether about financial mismanagement. The government. So what's wrong with nurse practitioners? Why is that so hard?

So the Premier has to stop pointing a finger at the federal government. I know it's easy.

They did mention the carbon tax 10 times in the first 10 minutes of the speech of the budget. They ask every single darn question in question period about it. But they have got their own carbon tax and they have got their own cap-and-trade.

It's like, do something to help Ontario families with affordability, and maybe, just maybe, life will get better.

Fix the rental housing tribunal so it's not 400 days for a tenant to get there—I know it's 70 or 80 days for a landlord to get there. That's not making lives easier for Ontario families.

Premier, maybe un-bloat your office. That's a bloated office—48 people. Remember the old show *Entourage*? I wanted to Photoshop that, but then I realized they didn't have 48 people in the picture. So it's like this small army of people, while people are hurting. I know I'm making a joke about it, but it's serious. If you're serious about helping families, you don't bloat your office up more than double; you don't have 48 people who are making more than the median Ontario family—some of them four times as much.

The Premier used to like to rail about the gravy train and the sunshine list and insiders and fat cats, but he has become the ultimate insider. When he said, "Stop the gravy train," maybe he meant, "Just stop it so I can have a station here, over on Wellesley there, on the sixth floor." I don't know; maybe that's what he wanted to do.

So I just would encourage the Premier to walk the talk; to slim down his office to what I would say would be a mean, lean fighting machine.

And on behalf of the people of Ontario, make sure that you address their issues of affordability—whether having to use their credit card instead of their OHIP card or that they have to go the rental housing tribunal, or any of those things that families need most.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Bhutila Karpoche): Questions?

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: I appreciate the opportunity to be here, because it's interesting, the member opposite, of course—both of them from the Liberal Party and also from the city of Ottawa.

I do have an opportunity later to address the budget bill, and I was looking at my Hansard from my maiden speech on April 18, 2006, against a budget of theirs. I remember saying at the time that it was a "buy less, pay more" budget that they offered. They actually cut funding from the farmers. They cut money from children and youth. They had an entire infrastructure budget, and they forgot the city of Ottawa.

If the members opposite would like to talk a little bit about the city of Ottawa and this historic \$600-million deal made with Mark Sutcliffe, our mayor, I would love to hear it.

Mr. Stephen Blais: I'd be happy to talk about the raw deal the city of Ottawa is getting from this province.

Let's break down the numbers. Last November, the city of Toronto signed a deal with the province to get \$1.2 billion over three years; Ottawa is getting \$197 million over three years. Basically, Toronto is going to get \$396 for every resident; Ottawa is going to get \$181 for every resident. That's per capita funding. That's corrected for population.

I guess my question back to the member for Nepean is, why does she think her constituents in Nepean are only worth 46% of the Premier's constituents in Etobicoke?

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Bhutila Karpoche): Next question?

Mr. Tom Rakocevic: I want to thank the members for their very thoughtful speeches that really got to the point of the matter.

Something that I heard a lot about in 2018 was this mantra that Ontario was the most indebted subnational jurisdiction on earth, and I want you to expand on their solution to that—by adding more debt to that subnational jurisdiction.

Being a veteran member in this Legislature, you've seen many budgets. Have you ever been so overwhelmed?

Mr. John Fraser: I think it's more enraged than overwhelmed.

I want to remind the member from Nepean that she voted against the auto sector, as well—one of the few members who's still here—and so did this member.

Do you know what? Never has a government in Ontario's history, in six years, amassed so much debt—no government in Ontario history has borrowed so much, spent so much, incurred so much debt as this government. It's to do, really, so little to not actually address those things that families need, like a family doctor or being able to go to the rental housing tribunal to make sure you're not getting—I can't use that word; "that your landlord is not getting one over on you" is the best way to put it. I could have said another word, but I didn't.

I'll stop there, Speaker.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Bhutila Karpoche): Next question?

M^{me} Lucille Collard: Thank you to my colleagues for the excellent points you've made today regarding the budget.

The budget is making some investments; let's not deny it. If you're a car owner, if you're into infrastructure—there is a lot of money pouring into there.

But the fact of the matter is that our community organizations are underfunded—community organizations that help support victims of sexual assault, that provide mental health support; women's centres and food banks, for our sake.

The Ottawa Food Bank just marked their 40th anniversary just last week—a food bank that was supposed to be an emergency measure, that has been operating for 40 years now.

What is the budget doing to help vulnerable people and people who need to count on food banks?

Mr. John Fraser: Well, from what I can tell so far, not a heck of a lot. If you take a look at food prices right now, if you're on social assistance, how can you afford groceries?

I was in the store last night, and I saw Bartlett pears for \$3.49 a pound. That's lots of money—apples for three bucks a pound; butter, eight bucks—

Hon. Doug Downey: It's the carbon tax to get them there.

Mr. John Fraser: No, it's not the carbon tax. There's another reason. There's another thing that's going on right now that this Premier refuses to address, and that's competition. That's what's happening. And if he really wanted to do something, maybe he'd write another letter—because he writes a hell of a lot of them—and say to the Competition Bureau, maybe we need to look at our major grocers, as to what's happening there. If he wanted to address affordability, he'd take a look at that. That's what he'd do.

So if you're asking me what the budget does for people on assistance and the vulnerable, well, it is the square root of—anyhow, I'll leave it there.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Bhutila Karpoche): Next question?

Mr. Rudy Cuzzetto: I was listening to the member from Orléans speak about how we're spending much more in this budget—and I agree; we are, because in 2017, under Charles Sousa and your government, you were spending \$152 billion, and today it's \$214 billion, without raising a tax, and giving money back to the people here in Ontario.

And if you remember George Smitherman saying—he was the Minister of Health at the time. He said he starved health care. Health care was \$59.4 billion, and today it's \$85 billion. Even your new leader, Bonnie Crombie, said on TVO that she would not have spent that much money on health care, but today we're spending much, much more on health care.

1620

Do you agree with your new leader saying that she would cut spending on health care as well?

Mr. Stephen Blais: I think that proves the point: They're spending massive amounts of money and getting nothing in return; 2.2 million Ontarians don't have a family doctor.

You've increased spending. Where is it going? You're running up deficits, you're charging the credit card, and there's nothing to show for it—

Mr. Robert Bailey: Subways.

Mr. Stephen Blais: When 2.2 million Ontarians don't have a family doctor, we've got the peanut gallery over there talking about how they're going to ride the subway. Subways are good. Transit is good. Do you know what? When you're sick, when you're dying, you need to be able to go see a doctor.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Bhutila Karpoche): Next question?

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: I'm glad that the topic today is health care in the budget. As mentioned before, 2.2 million Ontarians don't have a family doctor.

In my riding, I just had a call in early March from a woman who had a stroke in October 2023, and she didn't have a family doctor. And so, she has asked the professionals who were coming to her home to give her rehab, "What happens when I have a question medically? What happens if I'm not feeling well? I don't have a family doctor," and do you know what their advice was? "Go to the emergency room."

Speaker, this government has failed on health care and providing for people to be able to get doctors. But the NDP talked about a solution. They have provided answers to those questions, to provide the primary care doctors with resources—the staff, if you will—so that they can be alleviated from the administration burden of reports. That would actually create enough doctor hours to provide care for 2.2 million.

Does the member agree that the NDP has a real solution to a doctor shortage here in Ontario?

Mr. John Fraser: I guess it's a solution. I don't know whether it's real or not. I guess we'd have to see it working, because we haven't had an opportunity to for about 30 years.

But what I do want to say is that there's a solution that's right there, and I mentioned it earlier: The Premier, instead of pointing his finger at the federal government, just has to pay nurse practitioners. What's so complicated about that? Just pay them. I don't understand why he can't do it. I don't understand why the government can't do it, especially when they're spending a billion dollars on nursing agencies every year that they don't have to spend.

You want to talk about ballooning deficits? A billion dollars, paying people two and three times what we paid them when they worked for us, just because they're at agencies right now, because the government has mismanaged the health care human resources—a billion dollars; unnecessary MedsCheck—about a million dollars a week. Maybe we could solve the primary health care crisis by

actually not wasting money, and spending it on primary care.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Bhutila Karpoche): Further debate?

Hon. Andrea Khanjin: I'm really pleased to rise to speak to second reading debate of Bill 180, the Build a Better Ontario Act, 2024. Similar to the Minister of Finance, when you think about building a better Ontario, you think of those who came before us, but you also think of what led us here.

I would be remiss if I didn't wish my mom a happy birthday today, because I wouldn't be here without her, so: Happy birthday, Mom.

I was really fortunate. She made the ultimate sacrifice in our family in the sense that when I was four years old, our grandparents chose to move to Barrie, Ontario, from Cuba. When they arrived in Gander, Newfoundland, they called her and said, "By the way, we have your daughter in Canada," and the best decision she could have made was to allow them to continue to raise me in a different country, obviously not being able to see me as a young four-year-old. So I'm forever grateful to you, Mom, for allowing my grandparents to raise me here.

And now, finally, she's in Canada. She has spent the last decade or so here, so I'm really grateful for that. But I wouldn't be here without her, and as we reflect on building a better Ontario, I could not build a better Ontario without her, so I wanted to mention that.

But we also couldn't build a better Ontario without our veterans, and I also just wanted to give and pay my respect to the fact that it's the 107th anniversary of Vimy Ridge and the Battle of Vimy Ridge, and I want to thank those veterans who fought for our freedom and the reason we, as parliamentarians, are able to speak in this chamber and have the right to freedom of speech and freedom of expression, and this just comes on the 100th anniversary of the Royal Canadian Air Force as well.

My riding neighbours CFB Borden, and CFB Borden was actually a training ground for many of those military personnel who trained to go to Vimy. It was also the scene a few days ago, or just last week, where they raised a monument to commemorate the 100th anniversary of the Royal Canadian Air Force, so I have to thank them for their great sacrifices.

Leading back into discussion of the budget, my community of Barrie–Innisfil is a growing community, and this budget really reflects the fabric of those people. They work hard every day. Often they have to use Highway 400 to commute from A to B in the city—because the city's growing so much—in order to get to work or to drive their kids to school and all those things.

But what we're really trying to do is that, as much as we are creating a lot of attainable housing within the city of Barrie and Innisfil, we also want to spur job creation. Something I heard a lot about in our community, not just in Barrie and Innisfil but all across Simcoe county, is the need for a regional innovation hub. It was clear that the fact that the closest regional innovation hub was 90 kilometres south in Markham, and the closest regional

innovation hub north was 300 kilometres, in Sudbury—two great communities, I'm sure, but not a lot in common with what the needs are of Barrie–Innisfil, Simcoe county and our great area.

So a lot of folks came together—

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Bhutila Karpoche): I apologize for interrupting the minister, but pursuant to standing order 50(c), I am now required to interrupt the proceedings and announce that there have been six and a half hours of debate on the motion for second reading of this bill. This debate will therefore be deemed adjourned unless the government House leader directs the debate to continue.

Member from Chatham-Kent–Leamington.

Mr. Trevor Jones: Thank you, Speaker. Please continue.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Bhutila Karpoche): Thank you.

I recognize the minister once again.

Hon. Andrea Khanjin: Thank you. Again, Speaker, I rise to speak to Building a Better Ontario Act, Bill 180, the budget. Within the budget, you will see a lot of great things for infrastructure innovation, great for communities all across Ontario, but as the member of provincial Parliament for Barrie–Innisfil, which includes parts of Simcoe county, I was really thrilled to see in the budget the fact we are recognizing that we need a regional innovation hub within Simcoe county and Barrie. It's a huge win for our area. It can be seen on page 38 of the budget. It's dedicating \$1 million as start-up capital to see this project through in our local community.

Interjection.

Hon. Andrea Khanjin: And that, Speaker, is applause from my counterpart the member for Barrie–Springwater–Oro-Medonte. We work hand in glove on these types of projects, and this project wouldn't be possible without some of our many great partners in the region like my counterpart for Barrie–Springwater–Oro-Medonte. We've got our members from Simcoe North, Simcoe–Grey and also Bradford-East Gwillimbury. We're a really mighty team in Simcoe county, and we know that with the region growing, with many people living there, we also need to create the innovation for more job creation.

What we heard very clearly from all on innovation hubs, whether it's Nottawasaga in the member from Simcoe North's riding, is the fact that the businesses that are there have room to grow, they have room to innovate, but they don't have the tools they need. As I mentioned, the tools that were close to them for a regional innovation hub, we're looking at 90 kilometres south in Markham and 300 kilometres in Sudbury. How is someone in Simcoe county supposed to get the right innovation and supports they need to grow their business if those supports are so far away? Luckily, we worked as a team, Team Simcoe county and Barrie to bring these resources closer to home, to allow for that job creation to happen so people can live and work all in one place.

I would be remiss, Speaker, if I didn't mention the folks whom we've heard from already who are greatly

supportive of this project. We have Craig Busch, who led the Sandbox in Barrie. He was very supportive of getting this project off the ground, as well as the Henry Bernick Entrepreneurship Centre, with Mira taking the lead there with all the work that they're doing within Georgian College. They really contributed some great thought ideas to this project.

Speaker, I just wanted to quote a few great supporters of the regional innovation hub. We have many to come, but I'm only going mention a few because I have a short time to speak on this particular matter.

I want to thank Georgian College for stepping up to support this. Their CEO says, "We're thrilled that a regional innovation centre with a network approach will be in our area and look forward to continuing to collaborate with our partners to leverage our collective strengths, build capacity and, ultimately, expand our impact." That's a quote by Kevin Weaver, the president and CEO of Georgian College.

1630

He goes on to say, "Our Henry Bernick Entrepreneurship Centre is a well-established business accelerator in the region with a reach extending across Simcoe, Grey and Bruce counties. We're proud to be a key partner in the innovation ecosystem and this new centre will further strengthen the influence we and our partners can have on the growth and development of our communities, local businesses and economy."

That is really building the knowledge economy we have within our area, and it does start with great institutions like we have with Georgian College. They really see the great potential in having a regional innovation centre close to home.

But the other folks who see the great potential is the mayors that I get to work with in my riding. The Barrie mayor, the Innisfil mayor both see the great potential in this project. In fact, the Innisfil mayor, who knows that Innisfil is home to the DMZ—Speaker, that stands for digital media zone; it's an arm's-length of TMU's digital media zone we have just down the street from Queen's Park—says:

"We are excited to learn that the province is investing in Simcoe county's entrepreneurial ecosystem.... The establishment of a regional innovation centre will support programs like the DMZ Innisfil and will drive growth and innovation in Simcoe county which is essential for future economic prosperity."

Speaker, the mayor in Innisfil, she sees the growth we're having in our area, the fact that we want to keep a lot of that knowledge in our community instead of having it leave our community. By doing that, we're fostering it and investing in all of the economic and innovation potential we have in our region so we can continue to grow the jobs, and we've seen the successes already with the digital media zone, for instance. They have been so successful that one of their businesses that started there—it's called FreshSpoke, so congratulations, FreshSpoke; I've spoke about them in the House before—they've grown so big that the footprint they used to be in, I just

went to an opening of a different business there last week called Green Bowl that does a lot of upcycling of food, and they're trying to get rid of food waste. That's where the former business used to be. Now, they've gotten so big, they moved out of that location. Now, that location is home to a new innovative business that I'm sure will also be a great contributor to the regional innovation centre.

But, Speaker, this speaks to our government's vision and agenda for building complete, whole communities and building interconnected communities where everyone has a sense of belonging and has a place to be. Like we said, we're not only building regional innovation centres where we can again build that thought leadership and create more jobs. We're building parks. We're building Ontario parks. We're building homes. We're building ways for people to use transit more effectively. In Barrie, for instance, we have Barrie public transit, and many students in Barrie, when they graduate from high school, they choose to go to post-secondary in the greater Toronto area. Because they make that choice, they also want to save money. So, often, they stay at home and live at home, and they commute from Barrie and they go—whether it's to York University, TMU or Humber; you name it—anything that is on a transit corridor.

Part of the government's changes to, again, be connected with people and putting people at the centre of what we do is affordability. And because of our One Fare program, those students who are choosing to continue to live in Barrie or continue to live in Innisfil are able to use the benefits of One Fare, where they're saving about \$1,600 a year on their transit. That is good news for them in making sure that affordability is at the centre of what we are doing.

But part of the centre of what we are doing in terms of affordability is also making sure that we have those strong paycheques. That's where we invest in training. Just like the regional innovation centres, it's going to be such a big game-changer in local communities by empowering more of those businesses to grow, to strengthen those high-paying paycheques so that people can afford more things, and the cost of living.

In addition to that is investing in other training opportunities like skilled trades. In our community, not a day goes by where you can't see a truck, you can't see a crane. Our skilled trades and training community is vibrant and strong. But many of these individuals who work in contracting business or building business, they understand that gassing up a gas tank is going to cost them more, and they're grateful for the fact that we've been consistent as government for lowering the gas tax. In fact, as a household now, Ontarians are going to save \$320 for gassing up their vehicle. That's \$3.2 billion in gas taxes—

Interjections.

Hon. Andrea Khanjin: And, Speaker, if you're wondering what the background noise is as I'm trying to speak to what the residents of Barrie–Innisfil care so much about, it's the opposition. They're very opposed to lowering the price of gas. If it was up to them, these poor residents of Barrie–Innisfil wouldn't have a way to get to

work, and it would certainly drive up the cost of them getting to work. You can be assured that the folks that I speak to in my riding that I will fight day in and day out for their affordability, for them to be able to gas up to get to where they need.

Our government's been very clear that we are standing up against the carbon tax, which is no joke, Speaker. The fact that it still increased on April 1, raising the cost of home heating, natural gas, gassing up the gas tank is certainly out of touch with reality. It's so out of touch with reality that your own Bank of Canada and the Parliamentary Budget Officer said Canadians are actually paying more into the carbon tax than they're getting out, Speaker, which is a terrible deal. You can't take your money out of one pocket, transfer it to the other one and say it's the same amount: You're still taking money out of the same pocket.

It's not just the folks at work in the skilled trades economy who have to gas up their trucks to get to work and the fact that we're going to be lowering that price for them, but it's also our farmers.

Innisfil is home to many farmers. We're next home to the vegetable basket known as the Holland Marsh, and you have a lot of farmers who are also speaking out and saying that they can't afford the carbon tax either. These are people who bring food to table. They're the ones that feed our cities. They're the people that feed many of the folks that we're trying to help every day, and if their costs go up, that means everyone else's costs go up. So certainly, we will continue to stand up for them.

But in addition to the farmers in my community and, of course, those folks who work in the skilled trades original innovation centre, I would be remiss also, Speaker, if I didn't address health care.

In our community of Barrie–Innisfil, we are fortunate to have the regional innovation centre. We're really grateful to have the skilled health care force that we have, and thanks to Georgian College, we now are able to train nurses all four years at Georgian College, which will help us locally with retention.

One thing we've heard a lot of is the need for more primary care in Barrie–Innisfil, and I was thrilled that I was able to stand with my colleague from Barrie–Springwater–Oro–Medonte to introduce two new initiatives in our region. One would be a nurse practitioners clinic in Innisfil, something that is very much needed in addition to the family doctors that we do have. This will complement our long-term vision of building a hospital in Innisfil. Currently, we were successful, working as a community to get a \$1.2-million planning grant and this will build on that entire ecosystem, again delivering that level of care that is so needed.

This also builds on another need within Innisfil specifically, which is home care. I was really thrilled to see—and I know I shadowed some home care nurses in my community and was able to go with them to see a dialysis patient, for instance. For them, they wanted to see an extension of home care and this budget does that. We invested in home care in our last budget and this one, and

certainly we'll continue to address all elements of health care, including the fact that we're getting the nurse practitioners clinic in Innisfil.

Just north of us, in the member for Barrie–Springwater–Oro–Medonte's riding, but it affects all residents, they're investing in a mobile service vehicle which actually goes directly to Indigenous communities to help service those numbers. But this speaks to the Ontario investment we've already made, which is \$90 million, which triples the original \$30 million earmarked to expand interprofessional primary care teams, Speaker, and I'm grateful that we in Innisfil are able to benefit from those changes, thanks to the leadership of the Premier and the Minister of Health, to make sure that the residents and municipalities continue—we have a growing community—to have the health care needs that are close to home.

But, Speaker, in addition to a growing community in my local community of Barrie–Innisfil, there are a lot of great things I did want to highlight. One thing I did want to turn to briefly is a passion of mine that's been a passion since even before I was elected, and that is the crown jewel of Barrie, Lake Simcoe. It's something that I remember, when I ran for the Progressive Conservatives, was a key, core platform of mine on my many brochures when I went door-knocking door to door, and I was thrilled, when we first got elected as a government—I was honoured—to be chosen to be the parliamentary assistant for the environment. As a result, we've seen a lot more—millions in investments into Lake Simcoe. Two projects that are highlighted in this specific budget—Lake Simcoe has been mentioned in previous budgets before, but in this budget is something that has been on the books by the Lake Simcoe Region Conservation Authority for about a decade, and that is a phosphorus treatment plan.

Interjections.

Hon. Andrea Khanjin: I know the opposition are heckling now because they don't want to see progress. They would've let, probably, that phosphorus treatment plant sit and wilt on the books for years. Speaker, that's a shame because you know we can work together on these great projects, which—this one specifically is going to reduce five tonnes of phosphorus per year out of the Holland Marsh.

Again, I remember when I sat down with Mike Walters, the former CEO of the Lake Simcoe Region Conservation Authority. He was shocked that no government had picked up this project.

Again, thanks to my great colleagues the member for Bradford West Gwillimbury and my fellow colleagues in Barrie–Springwater–Oro–Medonte. With a team effort and a lot of your leadership in working with partners, we're able to make this project not just a line item in an annual report by the Lake Simcoe Region Conservation Authority, but make it a reality—not just with funding, but now there's a feasibility study that's going to be started to make this project come to fruition, and the amount of phosphorus that it will reduce from the lake, changing that ecosystem that is Lake Simcoe for the better, is grand.

1640

Lake Simcoe depends on—we're the ice fishing capital in our region, so we certainly depend on it on an economic basis. I remember, when we were doing consultations around the betterment of what we can do in terms of projects for Lake Simcoe health improvement, that a lot of what we heard is the fact of how much the lake is tied into the local economy. So you've got a lot of folks who are very vested in making sure that that remains our crown jewel. But it wouldn't be possible, again, without some of the funding that we were able to give out through the Ministry of the Environment, thanks to this government—millions of dollars we're putting towards the lake, in things like ensuring that we have lower chloride levels, which is, of course, the salt runoff off our roads.

Again, something I was able to work on is best management practices with some general contractors, who are the ones who lay down the salt, about best usage—of how we could reduce the amount of salt usage on the road so that we reduce the chloride levels in Lake Simcoe. We had some great feedback. We got some best management practices—things out of New Hampshire that we can build on, as well, things that really work.

That, again, shows you, working together in a community—again, I'm focusing on Barrie–Innisfil, but it shows you what really can happen in that community when we all work together towards a common goal to achieve great things, and that allows us to keep Barrie–Innisfil a crown jewel in our area for generations to come.

We're just getting started—there are certainly more announcements that come with my colleagues, that I get to work on for this project. We've had some really great successes, and again, it wouldn't be possible without many of our partners.

Speaker, this builds to a greater theme within our government, within Progressive Conservatives, and that is, whether it's the last park that was created—the last provincial park that was created was over 40 years ago, and that was under a Progressive Conservative government. Now, in this budget, we're building two new Ontario provincial parks, under a Progressive Conservative government. This builds on our former legacies, whether it's at the federal level, with Prime Minister Brian Mulroney and what he did with acid rain, or whether it was what Mike Harris did when he announced the Ontario's Living Legacy program, which added about 370 new parks and protected areas, bringing the total in Ontario to 650, increasing Ontario's protected areas to more than 95,000 square kilometres. Thanks to this budget and previous budgets, we're building on that legacy by protecting more green land through the green lands fund.

So far, to date, since this government was elected in 2018, we have been able to protect 420,000 acres of land, which is more than the Liberals did in their 15 years of government—we did in the first few years of government. But I digress.

This also builds on another Progressive Conservative legacy—the legacy of Bill Davis, who actually created the

first Ministry of the Environment and appointed the first Minister of the Environment, George Kerr.

So I think the overlying themes that you see, Speaker, is that it's not just the Minister of the Environment here who is doing things for the economy and the environment—but it's building complete communities, whether it's transportation that's building subways so we can get more cars off the road and save people a little bit on commute times and their quality of life, whether it's our EV strategy, which we're doing to create more jobs. Certainly, in my region of Barrie–Innisfil, there are a lot of people who work in the manufacturing sector, and they benefit from that EV ecosystem.

Speaker, this is a budget to be proud of.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Bhutila Karpoche): Questions?

Miss Monique Taylor: Thank you to the member opposite for her time on the budget and protecting a budget that, of course, she would have no choice but to do, as a member of the government.

She talked a lot about the carbon tax, and she failed to mention how Ontario actually got the carbon tax. It was due to her government's cancelling of cap-and-trade in Ontario, which forced us into the default program, which was the carbon tax.

Also, within the budget, we didn't see any funding to help people with heat pumps and making sure that they had affordable ways to heat their homes or compensate natural gas consumers for their higher rates that this government is forcing them to do through Bill 165. There's no plan for low-income consumers who heat their homes with natural gas, oil and propane. Electricity subsidies are increasing to \$7.3 billion.

Can the member please state how she actually, truly is helping people when it comes to energy rates?

Hon. Andrea Khanjin: Well, we will never apologize, on this side of the House, as the government, for actually lowering the cost of living for Ontarians by cancelling cap-and-trade, which has lowered their cost of living and energy rates. It was our government that came in and swiftly stabilized electricity rates and since then has been keeping them stable. It's our government that has actually embraced the fact that we need to diversify our energy needs in order to, again, embrace a clean energy grid.

In fact, we even have the Minister of Energy here, who signed a core agreement for net zero nuclear, something I know the opposition does not support but is the result of our clean energy grid that is an envy around the world.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Bhutila Karpoche): Next question?

Ms. Laura Smith: I appreciated the member on the other side's comments. I really appreciate her passion for her community in Barrie–Innisfil. She talked about Lake Simcoe and her love for her community.

Building healthy communities is something that our government has put a lot of effort into. Our government is investing over \$200 million with the Community Sport and Recreation Infrastructure Fund. I'm just wondering

what kind of impact that fund will be on the people in not only Barrie and Innisfil, but also Ontario as a whole.

Hon. Andrea Khanjin: I was thrilled to see the \$200 million for new community sports and recreation infrastructure in the budget. Again, being a growing community, we have a huge need. We've got a local YMCA that's getting off the ground. We're going to be building to replace the former YMCA. It's a joint project with my counterpart in Barrie—and working with the mayor. It's definitely much-needed.

Just recently, we were able to use the Trillium grant to upgrade the Morgan Russell centre. That is named after Morgan Russell, an officer for South Simcoe police who, unfortunately, we did lose to an incident that happened, which many people are aware of—they went to a home, and they were shot on scene. It's to commemorate his memory.

It just shows you the need and those positive memories created in our communities, through the community recreation funds, like the one we have in our budget—so that everyone can enjoy their communities more as they grow.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Bhutila Karpoche): Next question?

M^{me} France Gélinas: I was really glad to hear the member from Barrie–Innisfil talk positively about nurse practitioner-led clinics and the fact that one of those clinics has been funded for the community of Innisfil, in her riding—just for interest, the very first one was created in Sudbury, and we worked really hard to get this up and running. I'm happy for her community.

How can she explain that a community like Capreol has been asking for one more nurse practitioner since 2021, and yet the government has not even had the courtesy to answer them back? They have written a number of times—they have submitted last June. They have sent their budget again last fall. They came to the budget consultation that took place.

I'm happy that her riding will be seeing more. But there are 40,000 people in Nickel Belt without access to primary care. What's in the budget to help them?

Hon. Andrea Khanjin: I am frustrated at 15 years of inaction by the former Liberal government, who didn't build hospitals and in some cases cut many nurses so that hospitals could not operate. They left long-term-care homes in shambles. They didn't invest in training. We had a cap on the number of people who could go to medical school.

I'm glad to be part of this government. We're now opening the first new medical school in decades. We're training more nurses. We're hiring more nurses. We're building new hospitals, under the leadership of this government. We're building more primary health teams. We're investing in home care. All around, this government is finally fixing the 15 years of mess in our health care system, to finally bring it back to life and put the care back in health care.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Bhutila Karpoche): Next question?

Hon. Jill Dunlop: Thank you to the minister for her remarks. I am one of her colleagues a little farther up north, but we also share Lake Simcoe, a priority for us.

The minister was recently in my riding. We were at Awenda Provincial Park, where we were doing a joint announcement with the federal government on park expansion. It's incredible that, as she said earlier, we haven't seen an increase in the number of provincial parks in 40 years, and yet, under this government, we've seen two new parks and now an expansion.

I was hoping she could tell us a little bit more about the importance of the park expansion and new parks, and what she's hearing from the public.

1650

Hon. Andrea Khanjin: I want to thank the member and congratulate her on Wendat in her riding. It's a place I like to frequent a lot with my family for hikes. Now, thanks to the work of this government, in partnership with the federal government—is expanding those park opportunities at Wendat.

This builds on not just expanding our parks, like we have at Wendat, but this budget is actually going to build two new parks: one in Muskoka, which is really exciting—that one, again, is in early stages, but it will be a new operating park—and, of course, we have our first urban provincial park in Uxbridge.

When I was in Uxbridge talking to some high school students, they had some really exciting, bold ideas of what they want to see in their urban park. Just to put it into perspective, this is something that—many people who have gone to New York City have gone to Central Park—is going to be larger than Central Park. So this is not only going to be great for Ontarians, for students, connecting people to nature, but it's great for their mental health and great for our province.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Bhutila Karpoche): Next question?

Mr. Tom Rakocevic: I want to commend the member for her speech and for focusing on her own community.

My question is about value for money. My question is simple: Does the member believe that, at a cost of a billion dollars, this was good value for money for nursing, when instead of paying public nurses a better rate, they went out to agencies—at a cost of a billion dollars—to get one third of the hours they would have got from public nurses in our health care system?

Hon. Andrea Khanjin: Speaker, when I talk to the folks in Barrie–Innisfil, they want to know what their government is doing for them. They want to know value for money—in the sense of, "Okay, I paid my taxes. So what?" And they're glad to see that this is a government, from day one, that has never raised taxes. We've lowered taxes. In addition, we froze fees or lowered fees, and in some cases got rid of them altogether—like what I heard from a lot of working parents, when they had to remember when to renew their sticker. That's a thing of the past. That in itself is not just a convenience and value for money for Ontarians, which they expect from their government; it's also savings.

And do you know what is a big saving in terms of value for money? Getting rid of a carbon tax, cap-and-trade included, full stop.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Bhutila Karpoche): Quick question?

Mr. Deepak Anand: Like the rest of the world, Ontario continues to face economic uncertainty and pressure due to high interest rates and global instability. These pressures are being felt day to day by Ontario families, yet this government is continuing to work hard and strengthen Ontario. So, Minister, my question is, are you going to stop or are you going to keep going with this budget?

Hon. Andrea Khanjin: I imagine the residents of Barrie–Innisfil who elected me will want us to keep going. Certainly, they appreciate a government that is getting it done every day, whether it's getting it done to make their commute a little bit easier—Highway 400 all the way to Toronto, whether it's the Bradford Bypass, whether it's the 413, making life a bit easier; whether it's building new schools; whether it's building new hospitals; whether it's investing into skilled labour; whether it's investing in the next generation; whether it's investing in crown jewels like Lake Simcoe. They want to see a government that's getting it done. And we'll continue to do that.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Bhutila Karpoche): Further debate?

Mme France Gélinas: My constituents, like all of our constituents, were curious to see what in the budget was going to help them, whether it helps them gain access to health care, whether it helps them with the cost of living, whether there was anything in there to help them with finding a place to live. Unfortunately, it's pretty slim.

I would like to start with the mention in the budget about Highway 69. Highway 69 is the highway that goes from Toronto to Sudbury. For 69 kilometres of it—68, as my friend the MPP from Sudbury will say—we are on a two-lane highway with I don't know how many million trucks there are on this highway, but many, many.

Every year, I write a letter to the Minister of Transportation to ask, "How is the four-laning of Highway 69 coming along?"

In the budget, it says that they will continue their work on Highway 69. That's all that's in the budget.

In 2023, I wrote to the Minister of Transportation and I asked, "How is it coming with the four-laning of Highway 69?" And I got a response: "The ministry is taking the steps necessary to secure the federal and provincial environmental approvals required to complete the highway expansion. Once all the approvals are in place, construction will commence to expand these remaining sections."

"In the interim, the ministry continues...."

This year, I wrote to the Minister of Transportation and asked the same questions I've asked every year for the last 17 years that I have been here, and this is the answer I got:

"Thank you for your email regarding the Highway 69 four-lane expansion. I appreciate the opportunity to respond on behalf of the Ministry of Transportation."

This is Véronique Filion, communications coordinator, north operations, of the Ministry of Transportation, who answered me.

She went on to say, "The ministry is continuing to take the steps necessary to secure ... the federal and provincial environmental approvals required to complete the highway expansion"—the exact same answer I got last year.

She went on to say, "When there is new information, the ministry is committed to sharing the progress with our partners and stakeholders that have shown interest in the continued expansion of Highway 69." I hope I'm part of this selected group. I can tell you that my constituents sure would like to know.

She went on to say, "The overall Highway 69 expansion project, from Parry Sound to Sudbury, remains a priority for the provincial government and the work has been proceeding using a phased approach."

It is really hard to tell my constituents that year after year—every time when I ask, "How is it coming with Highway 69?" I get the exact same answer: that they are working on the federal and provincial environmental approval, and nothing has changed. Actually, I think I am going to ask for a danger pay upgrade to my pay, because I have to travel Highway 69 every Sunday night, and then Thursday night when I go back home, because this is a very dangerous highway. I cannot believe that a province as rich as Ontario, a province that has \$23 billion in the budget for road construction, comes back and tells us the exact same thing year after year and nothing changes for Highway 69.

I just took a trip across Canada. The minute you hit the frontier between where Ontario ends and Manitoba begins, you have four-lane highway all the way to British Columbia. Coming back from out west, you will go through Alberta, Saskatchewan, Manitoba—they all have four-lane highways. The minute you hit Ontario, you're on a cow path with a million trucks, with closures pretty much every second day.

If we have snow, I guarantee you there will be closures on northern Ontario highways. It's really bad—not to mention the number of serious accidents where people get hurt, not to mention the number of serious accidents where people die.

And yet, we have this huge amount—billions of dollars—in the budget, but all we get year after year for Highway 69 is that they are working to secure the federal and provincial environmental approvals. How many decades does it take to get those approvals, so that you can actually build a road? That's actually going to be my question next year, when I write the exact same letter to the Ministry of Transportation to see if anything will move.

But I want to focus a little bit on health care. In the budget, if you look at how much has been spent in 2023-24, which ended on March 31, versus what's going to be spent in health care starting on April 1, there's over a \$1-billion cut. There's a \$1-billion cut at the same time as 2.2 million Ontarians do not have access to primary care, and this number will double within the next few years.

1700

The Minister of Health put out a show of interest. They got over \$1 billion worth of ask. There are solutions that exist throughout Ontario to make sure that the 2.2 million Ontarians who do not have access to primary care gain access. Even in my riding—I represent small, rural, northern Ontario. We have solutions. The nurse practitioner clinic in Capreol has been asking for one more nurse practitioner since 2021. You figure with a budget of \$85 billion, there would be money to help people. There are no physicians, but we have nurse practitioners.

Did they get any money? Absolutely not. They didn't even get a response to the detailed budgets that they put forward. I take them; I bring them to the Minister of Health. I showed her: "You need to help those people. They have been without a family physician for a very long time. They need access to care." We have underemployed nurse practitioners right in the city of Greater Sudbury who would love to come and work at the nurse practitioner-led clinic in Capreol, and not a penny goes to help them. We're not asking for millions of dollars—a couple of hundred thousand dollars, not even a rounding error at the Ministry of Health, but yet no money comes, and we continue to have the problem with 40,000 people in Nickel Belt who do not have access to primary care. There are solutions that come from all over but that are not being funded.

There is money in the budget for more primary care. It will come in a three-year period when there's 2.2 million people that need help right now, and there's no guarantee that it will come to rural areas. There's no guarantee that it will come to northern areas, which deserve equitable access to care. Mind you, there are many people in Toronto also who do not have a primary care provider.

Then, there's home care. I want to share the story of Tina Senior. Tina has a severely disabled, beautiful little boy named Alex. Alex goes to school. He is J-tube fed, needs to have home care to come and feed him. Just like every other kid, he gets hungry. So Bayshore has the contract to come and feed Alex at school five days a week when the school is in session. They are paid for an hour and a half to come and feed him, because you have to hook up the J-tube, let him get fed, unhook the machine etc. Well, Bayshore comes for 15 minutes, they get him hooked up and then they go. They get paid for an hour and a half, but they get to stay for 15 minutes. Most of the time, the machine will start to beep, beep, beep. Nobody in the school knows how to handle a J-tube feed. They phone the mom.

The mom is an intensive care nurse at our local hospital. The mom is no longer—after 10 years at the intensive care at Health Sciences North, she had to quit her job because home care fails her son so many times a week that—she's not going to let her son starve. When your children are sick, nothing else matters. When her son needed her, she did what needed to be done, but that means we lost an intensive care nurse at Health Sciences North, and Bayshore gets paid for services they don't provide. Bayshore is the home care company. That happens all over.

I have Chantale in Capreol. The same thing: a cute little girl, Valérie, who has special needs—the same thing, needs home care. The home care fails her so many times—Chantale worked in home care for many, many years. She had to quit her job to make sure that her child will get the support that they need. Why is it that we continue to pay for-profit home care companies millions of dollars in profit every single year yet we cannot enforce the contract that they have? You're paid for an hour and a half, why are you only there for 15 minutes? You're supposed to show up to help Valérie in school. Why is it that you don't show up? And yet there are no repercussions. It just keeps on—and the mom who has been a very good home care worker for a very long time has to quit her job because the home care system fails her.

Tina has to quit her job as an intensive care nurse because the home care system failed her. And it goes on and on like this, yet we are quite happy to continue to give private, for-profit home care companies billions of dollars in profits, but we can't pay the PSWs who work home care more than 20 bucks an hour.

Do you know how you fix the problem in home care and long-term care? You make PSW jobs good jobs—75% of them should be full-time jobs, well-paid, with benefits, with sick days, with a pension plan, with holidays, and problem solved. There are many, many very dedicated PSWs even in northern Ontario who would love to do what they do best, care for others, but if they do this, they can't pay the rent and feed their kids, so they have to find other jobs.

When the hospital puts out one job, they will have hundreds of applicants. When Bayshore puts out one job, they have no applicants. Why? Because Bayshore won't give you a full-time job, won't give you benefits, won't give you decent pay—any of that. We could legislate that tomorrow morning, like we did way back for nurses working in hospitals. None of that is in the budget.

When we look at the Northern Health Travel Grant—the Northern Health Travel Grant is mentioned in the budget and we see right now, for people in my riding and all over the north that have to come to Toronto that you get \$100 to pay for your accommodations. If you can find a hotel room in Toronto for \$100, please let us know right now, because none of us have been able to find this. It will now be bumped up to \$175 a night. I will tell you that for most people on low income, coming to Toronto and having to manage a budget of \$175 a night is still impossible. It will mean, for people in northern Ontario, that they will go without care because they haven't got the money to pay for the transport and to pay for the hotel in order to get equitable access to care. This is wrong. The Northern Health Travel Grant needs to be reviewed. It hasn't been reviewed in decades—100 bucks made sense in 1983, it does not make any sense in 2024. Do we see a commitment in the budget or money in the budget to do this? Absolutely not.

There are many services that could come to the north. Multiple sclerosis in northern Ontario—northern Ontario has the highest percentage of population with multiple

sclerosis, and yet we have no clinic dedicated to multiple sclerosis in northern Ontario. People have to travel to the south in order to do this.

We had the one and only supervised consumption site in Sudbury that has saved many, many lives. Sudbury—like Timmins, like Sault Ste. Marie, like many communities in the north—sees a three-times death rate from opioid overdoses compared to southern Ontario, and yet there was no money in the budget for supervised consumption sites. Our site closed last Friday, and I can assure you that there were many, many people crying.

The member from Sudbury has brought many examples of members in his community that depend on the supervised consumption site to stay alive long enough to wait your turn on the never-ending wait-list for mental health and addiction. In my area, it used to be 12 months to gain access to children's mental health; we are now at 18 months to gain access to children's mental health. Do you know how many things go wrong during those 18 months? When your child is sick enough, has been to the hospital many times and been told, "He needs to start mental health therapy. We will put them on the waitlist"—and you phone every week and you are told that you still have 12 months to wait, 11 months to wait? Ten months? That's wrong. Do we see money in the budget for this? Very, very little.

1710

There's many more. The ambulance services in Foleyet—Foleyet is a community in the north of my riding, about an hour away from Timmins, an hour away from Chapleau, the two closest hospitals. The DSSAB, which provides ambulance services for the people of Foleyet, doesn't have enough money to keep all of their sites open. There is a good chance that the site in Foleyet will be closed, which means that, in case of an emergency, when you phone to get an ambulance, the ambulance will have to leave from Timmins and drive for an hour before they get to you in Foleyet. Why is there no money in the budget for the DSSAB?

Things that would be easy to fix: 911 everywhere in Ontario. Did you know, Speaker, that Ontario is the only province that doesn't have 911 everywhere? We are the only one. Every other province has an agreement with Bell to make sure that 911 is available everywhere. In my riding, there are about six different 1-800 numbers that you have to remember to be able to call. The services will be there, but the 911 won't. Is there money in the budget to do that little, wee change? No, absolutely not.

There are many, many other things that I would have liked to see. I would have liked to see money in this budget for a French university in Sudbury.

La population francophone parle d'une seule voix : on veut une université francophone à l'Université de Sudbury.

The francophone community speaks with one voice: We want a francophone university in Sudbury, by the University of Sudbury. Is there any money in the budget to make that happen? No, absolutely not.

I could go on. Internet and broadband: I have met with every Internet and broadband provider. None of them want

to come in to Nickel Belt because there is no money to be made. It doesn't matter if you pay for all of their infrastructure, they do not want to set up shop. There is no money to be made. You have to look at another way of moving things forward in northern and rural Ontario, because having a for-profit provider won't work. You have lots of money available that stays there every year for this.

And it just goes on and on. Cleaning of arsenic leaking into Long Lake in my riding: This has been happening since 2007. Having a stable workforce at the ministry so that we get that done and stop the leaching of arsenic into Long Lake—I could go on and on.

None of that is in the budget, but all of that were priorities that the people of the north wanted to see in the budget.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Bhutila Karpoche): Questions?

Mr. Billy Pang: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Through you to the NDP member:

You better watch out, it's normal to cry,
Life is unaffordable, I'm telling you why:
Carbon tax is coming to town.

I take this opportunity to extend an olive branch to our NDP member. An opportunity and a chance to stand alongside our government and distance themselves from the Liberals, who continue to push higher taxes on Ontarians. With the Liberal carbon tax jumping by a staggering 23%, our government made a decision to extend our own cuts to the tax on gas and fuel to help Ontario families and businesses save hundreds of dollars.

So, through you, Speaker, I ask the member of the opposition: Will they vote to pass our budget and support our government as we make life more affordable for Ontarians?

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Bhutila Karpoche): Response?

M^{me} France Gélinas: I appreciate the member singing me a song. I've never had anybody sing me a song before so thank you for that. It was kind of cool.

I live in northern Ontario so I want you to understand that in all the little communities—I have 33 little communities—you either have no gas station or you have one gas station.

That one gas station sells gas at whatever the market can bear. They don't give a damn—am I allowed to say that?—they don't care how much tax, they just sell it at how much they can. On a long weekend, when we have a lot of tourists, you pay over two bucks a litre for gas in many parts of my riding. It was just Easter and the price went up to \$1.87 in my riding.

It has to do with regulating the price of gas. Do what many other provinces and states have done: Regulate the price of gas so that you set a cap so they cannot go over this. That would really help the people of northern Ontario.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Bhutila Karpoche): Next question?

M. Guy Bourgouin: J'apprécie tout le temps ma collègue de Nickel Belt quand elle fait ses présentations, mais j'aimerais lui poser une question sur la santé parce que, moi, j'ai une communauté de 5 000 personnes à Hearst. Ils viennent encore de perdre un autre médecin.

On était déjà à 50 %. Sur 5 000 de population, on était à 50 %. Là, on apprend qu'il va y avoir un autre médecin qui prend sa retraite. Ça, ça veut dire qu'il va y avoir près de 60 %, 65 %, 70 % de la population qui ne va pas avoir de médecin de famille.

J'ai entendu dans votre allocution que vous dites qu'il y a 2,2 millions de personnes qui n'ont pas de médecin de famille. Moi, je peux vous dire qu'il y en a gros qui viennent de ma région qui sont dans ce 2,2 millions-là.

Mais la question que je veux vous demander : on voit les investissements que le gouvernement fait, mais on voit que rien ne change dans nos régions. J'aimerais savoir si le budget va adresser ces problèmes-là.

Mme France Gélinas: Malheureusement, je ne veux pas vous donner de faux espoirs. Bien que le budget pour la santé est de près de 85 milliards de dollars, il n'y a rien là-dedans qui regarde à l'équité d'accès pour les gens du nord de l'Ontario.

Quand tu as une population comme Hearst, où plus de 65 % n'ont pas accès aux soins et qu'ils mettent des demandes de l'avant—il y a des façons de régler ça. Il y a des façons de donner l'accès. Ils font des demandes de financement au ministère de la Santé et n'entendent rien en retour.

Ces gens-là ont droit aux soins. C'est un droit fondamental de tous les Ontariens et Ontariennes, même quand tu vis dans le nord de l'Ontario, comme moi et le membre.

Mais je ne veux pas lui donner de faux espoirs : non, il n'y a pas grand-chose dans ce budget-là qui va aider les gens de Hearst.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Bhutila Karpuche): Next question?

Mr. Deepak Anand: Before I ask my question, I want to acknowledge the member from Nickel Belt. We were together on SCOFEA for pre-budget consultations. Thank you for your passion for the communities and thanks to the community for coming forward and talking and sharing their concerns.

I always believe living in the north is living in heaven, but it comes with a price tag. That is why the government is investing approximately \$94 million over three years to enhance the health and well-being of Indigenous and northern communities with culturally responsible, safe care tailored to the community needs.

Another thing which the member just talked about was the labour shortage, and that is why we're helping Indigenous workers in northern Ontario train for rewarding careers in their community by investing \$7.3 million through the Skills Development Fund.

So my question to the member is: We're investing \$100 million in SDF. Do you think it is a good investment? Should we continue or should we add more?

Mme France Gélinas: When you come to northern Ontario and you go into a First Nations community—there's

a few of them in my riding—you can see the difference in the level of poverty. You can see the difference in the access to help. You can see the difference in the funding needed for their schools. So am I happy that there will be funding in the budget for Indigenous populations? Yes, absolutely, but when I look at the number of First Nations who have put forward requests for funding so that they can have the health infrastructure to meet the needs of their communities and then I look at the amount of money allocated to this, there's a big gap between the two. I will always support a small step in the right direction, but the path is long before we actually have equity of access for First Nations communities to health care.

1720

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Bhutila Karpuche): Next question?

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: Thank you so much to the member for Nickel Belt for highlighting all the things that, really, rural and northern Ontario are lacking that we take for granted in other areas of the province.

I also wanted to talk about the vulnerable children that she referred to. In my riding, I have adults with developmental needs, and they live at home with their parents, and their parents are aging, particularly the Rodgers family. I've been advocating for the Rodgers family for almost a decade now, to have their son have access to community living so that, as they age, they know that their son has a home that he will be able to flourish in and get the care that he needs.

Can you discuss what community living looks like in your riding in the northern part of Ontario?

Mme France Gélinas: We are very fortunate to have some really dedicated workers who work within community living. There's about eight group homes that exist in Sudbury and Nickel Belt. All of them are always packed to full capacity, and I have many families like the Rodgers, who care for a child with a developmental disability who is now an adult, who is now a 60-year-old adult, and they see themselves as, "We need to prepare for the next phase, when we cannot look after"—and there is no money in the budget to open up new group homes. There is no money in the budget to allow the group homes that exist to put on a few more beds and take on a few more residents. But there are many, many people with developmental handicaps who would love to know that, if their support's not there, they would have access, but there's nothing in the budget for that.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Bhutila Karpuche): Quick question?

Mr. Deepak Anand: It's a quick question, so I'll be quick. Madam Speaker, we are investing \$1.1 million in funding to Maamwesying North Shore Community Health Services. Along with that, something which is very close to my heart is investment into recreation. Through this budget, we're investing \$200 million in the Community Sport and Recreation Infrastructure Fund. To the member, my question is, what do you think of this investment? Should we continue these investments and do more of them?

Mme France Gélinas: The backlog in recreation infrastructure is so huge, absolutely. Recreation is part of—this is how you build a healthy community. You make sure that you have a place where the community can gather so that you can have fun events, you can get to know one another, you can get to share, you can get to do all sorts of things.

I can tell you that, in the community of Cartier, the community hall had to close. They don't have a place to gather anymore. I have many of the little communities that I serve where the hall where they used to meet together is in such poor shape that they cannot offer recreation anymore. They cannot offer a place for the community to gather.

I hope that this money will be available to them, but I know that the demand will be way bigger than what the budget offers.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Bhutila Karpoche): Further debate?

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: It is my pleasure to rise and debate today the budget measures act. Of course, all members of the assembly often say, "It is my pleasure to rise," but really, I leapt at the chance and the opportunity to speak to this year's budget for a number of different reasons.

First, I'll say this: On April 18, 2006, I gave my first speech in the Legislature, my maiden speech, on the budget measures act, right after I had been elected to the chamber. As a result, I was able to speak both to the bill but also about the recent election, my ability to go door to door and the new mandate that I had received.

I spoke at the time about my constituents in then Nepean–Carleton—as you know, I represent Nepean now—and about what is important to the people that I represent. At the time, I recall—and I looked back just to make sure I have chosen words for this remark appropriately, but it hasn't changed: The people of Nepean, indeed the people of Ottawa, expect their government to ensure that they have safe streets to support strong families and an economy where there's a great deal of self-reliance so people can make more money, and while they earn more money, they keep more money in their pockets.

I was able to deliver that speech many, many years ago to talk about those wonderful people that I represent in the community, and I can tell you today, I still get excited when I go to a local event. On the weekend, for example, Speaker, I spoke to number of young Jewish students who were talking about mental health, given some of the realities we're facing both in Canada and abroad.

Earlier in the week, I had the opportunity to have both the Premier and the Minister of Housing in the community to acknowledge the hard work that our city council has done under Mark Sutcliffe's leadership as mayor to announce \$37 million for Ottawa housing initiatives. I was able to talk to people like Big Brothers and Big Sisters in our community and, earlier today, to talk to people from Shepherds of Good Hope.

What is different from my community than all of yours is simply one thing: We are the seat of Parliament. Having said that, Speaker, we are so much more, and that's why I have always decided it was imperative to stand up for the

people of all of Ottawa to make sure that our voice is heard beyond the echo chamber that is the House of Commons and the Senate and the national press gallery—that there are people just like you and me that live there, that send our kids to school, rely on transit, want to make sure we can afford both groceries and our mortgage, and we give back. We give back in many different ways of philanthropy, through donations and, of course, through volunteerism.

I think of those folks. I think of Darrell Bartraw, whom we call Mr. Barrhaven, the man who puts on Canada Day every year and asks the province for a modest grant through Celebrate Ontario or Experience Ontario or Re-connect Ontario grants.

I think of these folks in the legion as we look at Vimy Ridge Day today in this assembly and acknowledge the hard-working people. I think of the folks at the Bells Corners Legion and the Barrhaven Legion who both have received Trillium Foundation grants over the years.

I think of the folks at Manordale and the work they do as a community association in supporting our seniors, making sure that they're recognized and that they're not shut in.

And I think of the people at the Roberts Smart Centre who need a new facility and have been fundraising to support Ontario's most vulnerable children and youth who have both mental health issues but also, in many cases, criminality issues and trying to support them so we can better ensure their recuperation and perhaps even re-entry into life.

These are some of the organizations that I support and have supported over the years, and of course they're also the people behind them that rely on the government of Ontario to continue to meet the needs that we have as we both grow but, at the same time, indicate to other Canadians, and Ontarians in particular, that we are not just a seat of Parliament; rather, we are the second-largest municipality in the province of Ontario. We are the largest agricultural city in the world. We are oftentimes the coldest capital in the world and our physical geography is larger than Toronto, Montreal, Calgary, Edmonton and Vancouver all told.

One million people—and they all don't live on Wellington Street or Elgin Street in Ottawa. They live in communities like Navan where farmers, each and every day decide that it's important for them to be able to work and get support from our government.

They work in places like Orléans where we are going to be having a lot of investments from the Ontario government into the ByWard Market in order to protect and preserve not only a great tourism asset but important communities.

We are investing in homelessness in Ottawa to ensure that the ByWard Market and other places in the city of Ottawa can best accommodate those who need assistance. These are the types of supports that our government in the province of Ontario has given most recently to the city of Ottawa in the form of a \$600-million deal that was signed

between the mayor, the Premier and, of course, our finance minister, Peter Bethlenfalvy.

1730

I can say, Speaker, that that is incredibly important to me, because as Ottawa grows, so does our diasporas. We have many new Canadians who have decided that Ottawa should be their home, and we couldn't be more proud to welcome people; we just want to make sure that there is adequate housing for them, that there is skills development and training for them, that there are seats in our universities and in our schools. That's why I was excited, in this most recent budget, to see that we are a city for all people and our province has acknowledged that. That is why we are investing so heavily and mightily into some of these core issues.

In this last budget alone—and I was pleased when the finance minister acknowledged one very important project I've been working on, the Barnsdale interchange off of Highway 416. I was proud that we're going to upload Highway 174 in the east end of the city.

I was proud that the Minister of Colleges and Universities and the Minister of Health were able to work together to invest in more nursing spots at Carleton University while getting practicum at the Queensway Carleton Hospital.

More schools are coming. They're coming to Orléans. They're coming to Kanata, and a Transitway in Kanata. There are more schools in Barrhaven, there will be more schools in Findlay Creek and there will be more schools in Riverside South and in Stittsville.

This was a great-news budget for the city of Ottawa. When you talk about building a better Ontario, we saw it with that key announcement of key priorities in my community that needed to be addressed.

And I couldn't be more proud, of course, than to say we are going to have the second-largest new hospital build in the entire country at the Civic unit. I was excited last week to receive from Graham Bird an update on the building of that facility. But also, as somebody who goes to the Civic hospital almost on a weekly basis to receive my bipolar supports from my psychiatrist, I'm very excited about what that means not just for the patients and not just for the doctors, nurses, custodians and others who work there, but for the people who are going to be building this state-of-the-art facility that is going to be second to none.

I know in the months and weeks ahead, as the Ottawa Civic Hospital celebrates its 100th anniversary and CHEO, which is the Children's Hospital of Eastern Ontario, celebrates its 50th—when I was community and social services minister, I was able to make a big investment there for their 1Door4Care. They are going to be celebrating these great milestones. That's going to be exciting.

We've got more long-term-care facilities that are being built in Ottawa—especially in Barrhaven, I might add, where I was with the Minister of Long-Term Care not too long ago, and I look forward to doing a ribbon-cutting, of course, with him. This is great news.

And it doesn't stop there, because we are working with Invest Ottawa to create more jobs in the global expansion fund and ensure that that is dealt with.

Finally, we're excited that we are going to be investing more into policing. As a city, as I said, that is growing, we are not immune to auto theft. We are not immune to other types of violence and gang activity. And so, having that in our community is going to be critical. Sadly, Speaker, as you're aware, my community just a month ago dealt, sadly, with a massive multi-murder situation where an entire family, with the exception of the father and a friend, were all sadly taken by one criminal.

So, Speaker, that's what we're doing. We're investing into a new nurse practitioner-led clinic. Things are getting so much better in Ottawa as a result of these investments that I have to say, in the 18 years I've been here, this is the most excited I've ever been about a budget, and I recognize it's not easy to be excited about a budget.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Bhutila Karpoche): Questions?

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: Speaker, when I looked at the budget, there was mention of \$16 billion in capital grants over 10 years to build, expand and renew schools and child care spaces, but that's pretty much it. They've left so much out of the child care sector. They haven't given concrete numbers on creating new child care spaces to achieve \$10-a-child-a-day child care. There's no effort to repair the funding formula for child care, which has left child care operators at risk of closure, and I've heard this time and time again—I've met with operators—that the funding formula needs to be fixed.

Quite frankly, Speaker, the fact that this government hasn't had a wage adjustment for the child care workers—the government previously announced increases in wages for early childhood educators of \$23.86, but they've made no comment on wages for non-ECEs, and we've called for salary increases to a minimum of \$25 for non-RCEs, and \$30 for registered RCEs.

Why has this government abandoned the child care sector, the operators and the families?

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Bhutila Karpoche): Response?

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: Thank you very much to the member from London—Fanshawe. I know she comes here with a lot of vigour to express her opinions. I appreciate them—I actually respect them—but I will disagree with her.

I've been privy to having the Minister of Education come to my community and open up child care spaces, much needed in a growing community. Do you know what they called Barrhaven sometimes? "Babyhaven," because we have a lot of children. I've been, as I've said, fortunate enough to have the minister come there and utilize his existing budget and what we've expanded here into making sure that that's a reality.

In addition, as I say, in a high-growth community, we're building a lot of schools, not only in Nepean but in Carleton and Kanata—Carleton and Ottawa—Orléans. In fact, I do believe somewhere in the inner core, they are

looking for new schools in some of the other school boards. So in Ottawa, that is what we're doing to address the shortages that have been long-standing.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Bhutila Karpoche): Next question.

Mr. Trevor Jones: I think we can all agree here in this House that safe communities and a secure Ontario are paramount. In my community of Chatham-Kent-Leamington, our office has heard it countless times that the safety of their neighbours, the safety of their families or businesses, is a top priority.

Through you, Speaker, I ask the member to please share what our budget of 2024 will do to keep our streets safe and protect our communities, especially those unique, special places like the ByWard Market, like the vibrant commercial precinct surrounding Parliament.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: That's an excellent question, and that was what the new deal for Ottawa was really all about. What made me excited—because you can't have a healthy city if your core is rotten and hurt and harmful, where people don't want to visit and they don't want to go to work. And so, what the member opposite is talking about is a couple of different measures:

(1) We need housing for homeless, which is part of this deal;

(2) We need support for the businesses that are down there, which is part of this deal; and

(3) We need to make sure that we are dealing with the criminal activity that is happening in the market and then spoketh out across the rest of the city.

So there is a significant investment there to support the Ottawa police, and, of course, it's not just about supporting the Ottawa police where it pertains to criminal activity—and safety, let me add—in downtown Ottawa. It's also there to support communities that are high-growth like mine and Orléans and other places, where their proximity to highways makes them targets for auto theft. That's something that we're looking at as well.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Bhutila Karpoche): Question?

Mr. Guy Bourguoin: Last year, we saw a record level of fires in Ontario. In fact, we all remember how smoke affected Toronto and everybody else in the province. Now, in the budget, we're reducing the budget for forest fires by an amount of \$81 million. The amount in 2024-25, for this year, is \$135 million, down from \$216 million.

We've seen hardly any snow this winter. I just came back from Fort Albany. The river is still so down, even the First Nations haven't seen it. I went by plane. We've seen where the fires stopped last year. It was like from here to University Avenue right in front here at Queen's Park. That's how close.

Communities are scared. They're concerned about forest fires. So how can you justify reducing the budget when we know we were 50 teams short for forest fires? This year the minister says it will probably be the same amount this year, yet we're reducing budgets. What can you say to these communities that are really concerned about forest fires this year?

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: Thank you very much to the member for asking his question.

Maybe one day he'll take me out for a plane ride. That sounds kind of exciting.

As long as you don't throw me out, I guess that would be great.

We certainly want to say thank you to all of our firefighters across Ontario for doing the great work that they do. I do know, in speaking with my colleagues over at the ministry of labour, skill development and whatever else they're responsible for, they are investing in order to support our firefighters where it comes to that.

But do you know what we have in Ottawa, Speaker? We had one in my backyard in the summer—tornadoes. I know that our government has been responsive to my community—not once, but twice—as we've dealt with tornadoes. These are some of the matters that are very important.

1740

I will tell you, though, in that first budget that I spoke to back in 2006, the Liberals cut the MNR budget, and I'm not sure it has ever gone back to where it should be. In fact, there was a time when our MNR officers actually had to sell cookies at a bake sale for the gas in their vehicles, under Dalton McGuinty.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Bhutila Karpoche): Next question?

Mr. John Fraser: Speaking of natural disasters, I do want to remind the member that we did have a derecho in Ottawa and the Premier has not made good on his promise for emergency funding for not just Ottawa, but for, as the member from Glengarry-Prescott-Russell would know, those people who were so affected. It would have been good to see that in the budget. It would have been a bit of a relief for them. I see some members smiling over there because they know that I'm right.

I would like to ask the member if she could explain to me why the Premier's office grew from 20 staff on the sunshine list to 48 staff on the sunshine list, all earning more than the median family income in Ontario—some of them double, some of them triple, some quadruple. How in any way on God's green earth is that helping Ontario families?

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: Speaker, it's unfortunate that the member opposite, also from Ottawa, chose to ask a question about a number of staff in Queen's Park rather than talking about the issues from the city of Ottawa—why we're here to fight.

If he wants to talk about the derecho—I drove through the derecho. It happened in my constituency. It happened in Barrhaven.

I can tell you, after dealing with what we dealt with in 2018, the Premier was right there flipping pancakes with me, as myself, councillor Jan Harder, at the time—now retired—and Darrell Bartraw, who I mentioned earlier. We fed over 10,000 people. I was a cabinet minister at the time, and I will never forget the generosity of the people of Ottawa.

As I said, we are more than Parliament Hill. We're more than the Big Smoke. We're more than places where laws are made. We are the place where people live.

And we, yes, had two tornadoes—the Premier was at the first one.

We had a derecho in the middle of an election; you'll recall it.

I can tell you this without a doubt: I don't stand up here unless I'm fighting for the people of Ottawa.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Bhutila Karpache): Next question?

Mr. Deepak Anand: Yes, the member is right; she is a continuous fighter for the people of her riding.

Madam Speaker, when we talk about this budget, we all know, like the rest of the world, that Ontario continues to face economic uncertainty and pressure due to high interest rates and global instability. These pressures are being felt day to day. Yet, our government is continuing to work hard to strengthen Ontario and Ontarians.

I want to ask a simple question to the member: What is there in this budget for your residents that you are proud of?

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: Thanks very much to the member.

We have been good friends a very long time, and so I know it won't come as a surprise to you, particularly because you hear me in caucus weekly, that Ottawa has always been and always will remain my number one priority—and the entire city, but in Nepean, I was so proud that we got the Barnsdale interchange; that it was actually mentioned in the budget speech by the Minister of Finance. I was very proud that they packaged a great deal for the city of Ottawa to talk about homelessness, to talk about policing, to talk about building new homes, to talk about new medical issues that we're going to be dealing with in terms of nurse practitioners.

I was so pleased to see that we're finally going to upload Highway 174. This is good for the city of Ottawa, not to mention—I'm not even getting into the new schools that myself, the member from Carleton, the member from Orléans and the member from Kanata—Carleton are going to get in our communities as a result of this budget.

Is it perfect? Meh—is anything? But do you know what's great? This budget. It's a lot better than any budget I've ever seen in the province of Ontario.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Bhutila Karpache): Further debate?

Mr. Tom Rakocevic: It's always an honour to speak in this House, and it's a particular honour to speak about the budget.

I have to say that the budget process itself is really steeped in theatrics. Every year, we come in at around the same time, and I have to say that it feels like a great big wheel of cheese is rolled into the chamber when the budget is presented.

I remember last year's budget was a little different, because it had this analogy of the minister travelling around all of Ontario, and I found that the reflections at the time were very one-sided in the description of what Ontarians were facing; it was as if nothing wrong was

happening in the province of Ontario, and we know this to be very, very far from the truth. I remember, at the time, just like now, the minister, after vigorous applause—the government benches were as rowdy as a Manchester bar during a soccer match, at the time of budgets.

There's cheering. It's so vigorous. The minister is sort of finger-pointing at people and all of this, and then he goes into his speech. We're all handed a piece of paper where we could follow along, and I'm sure most of us take the time to read ahead, hoping for those pearls that would help our community. Often, we find ourselves left so disappointed. That is not to say that every government doesn't have something to offer the people, because they always do something—but is it enough, and who are they truly helping and supporting?

I've often said that the individual members of this government are well meaning and well intentioned, but when they come together as a government, it's one of those few examples that the whole is lesser than the sum of its parts.

Budgets are a value statement. They are a statement of the values that a government has. They also talk about the value for money, and I think that this budget, unfortunately, is failing on both counts, because we've never spent so much to have so little—and when I say "so little," don't take it from me; take it from your constituents. The proof is in their own lives.

I know the government will take credit for things that they see as positive but will never ever take responsibility for the actions they often take that can lead to harm, whether wilfully or by neglect or by ignoring issues. The list is so long, yet the fact that after six years of a Conservative government and over \$1 trillion spent, so many of the most vulnerable Ontarians are left on waiting lists—I'm talking about youth, teenagers looking for mental health counselling, almost 28,000 of them still waiting, in some cases two and a half years, for counselling that could change their lives.

Health care: You want talk about a legacy? This government is doing everything they can, in any way, shape or form possible, to privatize the health care coverage that we see, and this is not delivering better value for money. In fact, we know that this government has spent a billion dollars on agency nurses to get a third of the hours that they would get from our nurses in hospitals, but they don't care because this is planned obsolescence. What their hope is, is to continue to privatize health care by making decisions that intentionally harm and really restrict hospitals from helping people in many ways.

Under this government—and they don't want to admit to this legacy—the average wait time in emergency rooms is 21 hours. We've had over 200 emergency room closures across the province, but the government doesn't want to accept that. They don't even want to discuss it. In fact, if you ask them a question in question period, they won't even answer it. They'll just answer something else. I know I've been often reminded over and over that there's a reason why it's called question period and not answer period, but the reality is, answers or that lack of answer is

insulting for people across this province, and it only harms them because the people cumulatively that are being harmed by the decisions this government makes are keeping score and they're waiting for their time to cast a vote, and you'll see eventually that those numbers add up and add up and you're not going to like the outcome of it. Value for money, auto insurance—one thing that this government loves to do is reannounce announcements. It's mind-boggling.

Auto insurance is a perfect example of that. There are parts in the GTA, in particular—Brampton, Vaughan, my riding, the Premier's own riding and Scarborough—where people pay sky-high auto insurance rates, people with clean driving records, and they've talked about this postal code discrimination they've faced. In fact, I have a bill that I've placed before the chamber to deal with that, to end this. In the summer, right after the election, the Premier himself said that this was something important to change, a priority. Two years later, at this budget, as I looked and, as I said, was reading ahead, what do we have on auto insurance? Looking through the budget, they're going to study it for another two years. This is four years.

1750

And the thing is, the last government of Ontario is actually not the independent members; it's this government. So when they look and they criticize about cleaning up a mess, there have been about five and a half—almost six—years now of their own mess that they're creating. In fact, the mess is so messy that they've spent—some would say wasted—at least a month of solid debate walking back bad decisions, and more than that.

And where do these decisions come from? And I've said it before in this House: I'm not going to blame individual members. In many cases, I can't even blame ministers, because the decisions made by this government come from two different sources: PR people and special interests. Those who criticize the doubling of the staff in the Premier's budget—maybe it's because there are just so many special interests that they have to cater to, that you need more staff to be able to do that in the first place. I don't know. But that's where the decisions get made. And sometimes the PR person has to whip this government into line and say, "The people are frustrated." That's why we see what happened with the greenbelt.

And the thing is, this government is not a government to be outdone. I'll give that to them, because the Liberals before them were investigated multiple times by the OPP for decisions they made, and ultimately paid the price. Not to be outdone, this government upped the ante and said, "How about an RCMP investigation?" And that's where we stand to this very day: investigation after investigation.

We've heard a lot about carbon tax, but do you know what I've noticed in this House? Where that quota of saying the words or the phrase "carbon tax" about a hundred times a day started was, it really started at the point of that greenbelt debacle, when they had to walk it back, because that was at that point of popularity that this government faced before the pandemic, where people were starting to question the transparency and what the

real decisions were behind this government. That's where we began to hear the phrase "carbon tax" over and over and over, almost like a channel change.

The reality is this: There are Ontarians who are really struggling, very vulnerable, and in times of hyperinflation like this that this government is not able to rein in—grocery prices skyrocketing—the list goes on and on and on. They seem to be willing to let industry themselves write their policies for them.

That is the case in auto insurance, because the only people lauding this government when it came to changes in auto insurance have been one of the biggest auto insurers, that literally came out and said—I guess I won't read the entire quote, but they essentially said that their decisions on auto insurance, the direction they're taking Ontarians in, is the right choice. The auto insurance companies—of course, they wrote it for this government.

The reality is this: Where they're taking auto insurers—and the Liberal government before them can tell you this. The auto insurers are going to tell you, "Do what we say, or we're going to leave, and then what are you going to do?" And what they say is, "Give less and less coverage to those in need, and we'll reduce rates." Do you know what happened after years of Liberal governments? Rates just continued to increase, just like they have under this Conservative government.

Now it's like the final nail in that coffin. Their choice right now, to tell people that they need to opt into necessary and essential coverages as a solution to bring down rates, is going to be extremely dangerous for many drivers, I would say, especially those in areas where they are being discriminated against because of where they live. They are going to be forced to make a tough decision: "Do I eliminate all my coverage just so that I have insurance, so I don't get pulled over by the police?", and then white-knuckle their steering wheels as they're driving, hoping that nothing bad happens.

This government is spending more money than we've ever seen—over a trillion dollars in the last six years. And when you ask everyday Ontarians—I'll tell you this: They'll tell you every day, and they tell me, that their lives are only getting harder.

If this government wants to help people, they know what they need to do: Make their investments count, protect our public systems, protect our public health care and stand up for everyday Ontarians, like they say they do, because right now, Ontarians are hurting in a way they never have had before.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Bhutila Karpoche): Questions?

Ms. Laura Smith: Through you, Speaker: I listened to the member from Humber passionately speak. I appreciate what he brought to the table—but he brought something that was very interesting to me. He talked about health care.

This government is acting quickly to alleviate the pressures facing health care systems in our province—one of which is going to be built: a health care system, a teaching facility right adjacent to a hospital at Cortellucci,

which is just about 10 minutes north from where the member from Humber is, and it's just a few minutes north from where Thornhill exists.

This creation of a new medical school in Vaughan is a positive step forward—retaining more doctors in the midst of family physician shortages. This is exactly the kind of action that this province needs to take in order to continue building healthy communities in the future.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Bhutila Karpache): Question.

Ms. Laura Smith: Through you, Speaker, I'm asking if the member can tell us whether they intend to vote in favour of the doctors of tomorrow who will be about 10 minutes up the road from his own—

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Bhutila Karpache): Thank you. Response?

Mr. Tom Rakocevic: Speaker, every budget has good and bad. And if you're going to ask the official opposition to support a budget, then consult us and make the budget as perfect as it can be.

We are sitting in a moment, right now, when there are over two million Ontarians who lack a family doctor today.

Solutions in the far future are not going to help the people of today.

The fact that this government is spending a billion dollars to hire agency nurses at three times the cost that it would be to just respect and pay public nurses the money they deserve is not fixing health care in this province. There are things that this budget is doing that are an improvement, but this is not the change that Ontarians deserve and need to fix health care in this province.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Bhutila Karpache): Next question?

Miss Monique Taylor: Thank you to the member from Humber River–Black Creek for his debate portion today.

Throughout this process, and throughout the pre-budget consultations, we heard from the citizens of Ontario very clearly about their needs and their wants and things that were necessary for themselves and their communities to thrive.

We heard from Community Living, who were begging for 5% to ensure that our most vulnerable residents with disabilities had a safe space to live. They didn't receive it.

We heard from social assistance advocates asking for Ontario Works and ODSP benefits to be raised, to be doubled, so that people could live in dignity and have food in their fridge—never happened.

We've seen 67,000 children on wait-lists for autism services—that's not there.

There are complete failures time and time and time again in this budget. Could the member please tell us—

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Bhutila Karpache): Question.

Miss Monique Taylor: Societies are judged on how they treat their most vulnerable residents.

What would he say the grade would be for this government's vulnerable residents score?

Mr. Tom Rakocevic: I thank the member for that question.

Even before this period of hyperinflation, our most vulnerable Ontarians were suffering, and now they are living in such dire need that it's unimaginable what many of their lives are like, and to not support them is going to lead to even more problems—more problems for them and more problems for this government and, ultimately, more spending in the end if you don't address proactively problems that people are facing.

If a person has a big bank account, if they're a company like a major company or a big money interest, they have a direct line to the people closest to the leadership of this party. But if you are one of the most vulnerable people in the province of Ontario, good luck in trying to get that phone call, good luck in trying to get someone to listen to your dire needs because ultimately, for the most part, they are not going answered by this budget.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Bhutila Karpache): The final question.

Mr. Deepak Anand: Thank you for giving me the opportunity to ask the final question, Madam Speaker.

The member is very passionate about York University.

You talked about it on March 26, and my question is—with this budget, we are bringing a medical school. If you support York University, you have a chance now to stand up and vote in favour of this budget and support the university you love. Would you support us?

Mr. Tom Rakocevic: Speaker, I hope of the member understands that Ontario pays the lowest per capita funding for post-secondary education in the entire country.

As I said, there are gong to be elements of the budget that are positive.

But the reality is, Ontario students pay the highest tuition, and Ontario universities are being forced to make tough decisions on how and what they spend their money on, under this government.

Here and there, they'll give a little money—a little bit here, a little bit there—but at the end of the day, they are underfunding post-secondary education in this province, just like they're underfunding education in this province. So much more needs to be done, and they're just not willing to do it.

Second reading debate deemed adjourned.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Bhutila Karpache): It is now time for private members' public business.

Report continues in volume B.

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Sarrazin, Stéphane (PC)	Glengarry—Prescott—Russell	
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Schreiner, Mike (GRN)	Guelph	
Scott, Laurie (PC)	Haliburton—Kawartha Lakes—Brock	
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Smith, David (PC)	Scarborough Centre / Scarborough-Centre	
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Smith, Hon. / L'hon. Todd (PC)	Bay of Quinte / Baie de Quinte	Minister of Energy / Ministre de l'Énergie
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Williams, Hon. / L'hon. Charmaine A. (PC)	Brampton Centre / Brampton-Centre	Associate Minister of Women's Social and Economic Opportunity / Ministre associée des Perspectives sociales et économiques pour les femmes
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Yakabuski, John (PC)	Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke	
Vacant	Lambton—Kent—Middlesex	
Vacant	Milton	