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(Hansard)**

F-5

**Standing Committee on
Finance and Economic Affairs**

Estimates

1st Session
44th Parliament

Tuesday 28 October 2025

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

Budget des dépenses

1^{re} session
44^e législature

Mardi 28 octobre 2025

Chair: Hon. Ernie Hardeman
Clerk: Lesley Flores

Président : L'hon. Ernie Hardeman
Greffière : Lesley Flores

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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

STANDING COMMITTEE ON
FINANCE AND ECONOMIC AFFAIRS

Tuesday 28 October 2025

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

COMITÉ PERMANENT DES FINANCES
ET DES AFFAIRES ÉCONOMIQUES

Mardi 28 octobre 2025

The committee met at 1500 in room 151.

ESTIMATES

MINISTRY OF ECONOMIC
DEVELOPMENT, JOB CREATION
AND TRADE

The Chair (Hon. Ernie Hardeman): The clock strikes 3. Good afternoon, everyone. The Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs will now come to order.

We're meeting to consider the 2025-26 estimates of the Ministry of Economic Development, Job Creation and Trade for a total of two hours.

We are joined today by the staff from Hansard, broadcast and recording and legislative research.

From the ministry, we are joined by the Honourable Victor Fedeli, Minister of Economic Development, Job Creation and Trade; the Honourable Nina Tangri, Associate Minister of Small Business; Deputy Minister JP Cadeau; and ministry officials and staff.

As a reminder, the ministry is required to monitor the proceedings for any questions or issues that the ministry undertakes to address. I trust that the deputy minister has arranged to have the hearings closely monitored with respect to questions raised so that the ministry can respond accordingly. If you wish, you may verify the questions and issues being tracked by the research officer at the end of your appearance.

Are there any questions from the members before we start?

Seeing none, I am now required to call vote 901, which sets the review process in motion. We will begin with a statement from the minister for up to 20 minutes. Minister, the floor is yours.

Hon. Victor Fedeli: Thank you very much, Chair. Thank you to the Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs, thank you to Associate Minister Nina Tangri and thank you to Deputy JP Cadeau.

Chair, I will be splitting my time with Minister Tangri.

I want to start, I think, with a general global economic condition, because obviously President Trump's tariffs are causing chaos and uncertainty across the globe. They have undermined long-standing trading relationships between Canada and the US and, quite frankly, relationships between the US and virtually everybody in the world.

With Canada, it's a relationship that has brought jobs, prosperity and investments on both sides of the border.

This is 150, almost 200 years. It's been a mutually beneficial relationship, but President Trump has been extremely clear: He wants Canadian jobs, and he wants Canadian industries. He fails to realize that Ontario-made products are absolutely essential to US supply chains.

Take a look at nickel as a really great example: 80% of all the nickel the US uses in their aerospace program comes from Ontario; 53% of all the nickel the US uses in their defence program comes from Ontario.

But it doesn't seem to matter to President Trump. He'll continue to undermine supply chains, drive up costs for consumers and damage the most successful two-way trading relationship in the world. It's very clear that Ontario can no longer depend upon the US, and we are doing everything to build a more resilient, self-reliant and prosperous Ontario.

Looking back, when we first took office in 2018, we had a really good look at the business environment in Ontario: high taxes, red tape, endless bureaucracy, skyrocketing hydro rates. It was very clear, especially from those in the auto sector, that Ontario was not the place businesses wanted to come in to invest and expand.

That's why we reversed all that. We reduced the annual cost of doing business today, this year, by \$12 billion—that's annually. In those early days, it was also in the multi-billions, which led to investments coming back into Ontario. We've taken over 650 actions to reduce red tape. We've lowered taxes. We've made it easier for businesses to set up shop and create new jobs. In fact, at a speech this morning in the life sciences sector, the Premier said, "You know, I think we're the only government in the world that's never, ever raised a tax." Those conditions that Premier Ford has set, that's what led to businesses to create a million jobs. Those are the conditions that we've created here in Ontario. That's what helped attract \$46 billion into the auto sector, \$6 billion into life science, tens of billions into tech. All of that progress, though, is under threat from south of the border.

When we were re-elected earlier this year, it was on a promise to protect and build on the progress we've made, and that's exactly what we're doing. We're putting supports in place to help businesses and workers as they navigate unprecedented global economic uncertainty: \$30 billion in tariff relief, a billion dollars in the Protect Ontario Financing Program, a \$1.3-billion expansion into the Ontario-made manufacturing tax credit, \$50 million in the Ontario Together Trade Fund, \$40 million in the trade-

impacted communities fund. Quite frankly, we're never going to turn our back on the workers and industries here in Ontario.

At the same time, we're ramping up our efforts to diversify our trade. Our Premier's instructions to me are very clear: "No more north-south; it's east-west for you." We're expanding those trade relationships, quite frankly, with like-minded partners. We remind businesses on a daily basis around the world that Ontario has everything they need to succeed.

I'll just pull a couple of recent ones. Since 2018, our two-way trade is up in Switzerland, with 132%; South Korea up 85%; India up 59%. Countries know that Ontario is a stable, reliable, dependable partner, the partner they're looking for.

But it's not just overall trade that's up; we've seen record levels of investment coming into Ontario from global companies. In 2024, just last year, 409 companies from around the world landed in Ontario, invested \$40 billion and hired 24,711 people. That's up 84% from the previous year.

When we embark on trade and investment missions, we pitch Ontario as the best place in the world to do business. That's why earlier this year, as an example, in Japan and Korea, in three days we landed \$400 million in new investments, and that's already created 300 jobs.

But it's not just around the world and it's not just here in Ontario, but it's also across our own country. That's why we're diversifying with our own provinces and territories. Those interprovincial trade barriers have stifled growth, harmed investment, and they've undermined our economic productivity. The cost is about \$200 billion a year. Everything in Canada costs about 15% more because of problems with interprovincial trade.

But Ontario is leading Canada in nearly every one of the metrics in removing those costs: mutual recognition, labour mobility, direct-to-consumer sales of alcohol. We've signed 10 MOUs with 10 different provinces and territories. We have Newfoundland and Quebec left, but you'll hear more as we head to Yellowknife on November 19 to sign the mutual recognition deal and other deals with our provinces.

Make no mistake: This is a once-in-a-generation threat from south of the border. The stakes could never be higher, and we're continuing to do everything to ensure our economy remains competitive. We're always looking at new ways to spur additional investment, build our economy. We're moving forward with rapidly speeding up the timelines to get job-creating projects approved. There are no more 15-year delays for companies who want to get shovels in the ground. We're going to continue to cut red tape, getting rid of unnecessary barriers that prevent businesses from growing. We're on-shoring production—I'm looking forward to talking about that today—so that we don't have to depend on other nations for critical goods we need. The Premier has said it many times: Every bolt, every nut, every widget that can be made in Ontario will be made in Ontario, by Ontario workers.

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These are unprecedented times in our province, but our government will not turn our back on Ontario's industry and workers. We're going to be there to support them, and we'll ensure the conditions are there for us to emerge from this crisis even stronger.

Minister Tangri.

The Chair (Hon. Ernie Hardeman): Minister?

Hon. Nina Tangri: Thank you very much, Minister, and thank you, Chair. Good afternoon, committee members. It really is a pleasure to be here once again to speak about the strength and resilience of Ontario's small businesses and the important role they play in helping us protect Ontario's economy.

It's also timely to have this discussion today, given that we're wrapping up Small Business Month. Entrepreneurs and small business owners are at the heart of our communities. They create jobs, build main streets and bring innovation and opportunity to every corner of our province.

Ontario's small business community is strong: 500,000 small businesses employ more than 2.5 million hard-working people in this province and comprise more than 98% of all employer businesses. They truly are the backbones of our economy, and our government is committed to ensuring they have every tool they need to thrive.

Under the leadership of Premier Ford, our government's 2025 budget is part of our plan to protect Ontario by keeping costs down, creating conditions for growth and ensuring our small businesses can compete and succeed, both at home and abroad.

We've taken deliberate action to reduce costs for businesses by lowering taxes, reducing electricity rates and cutting red tape. Together, these measures are providing Ontario employers with an estimated \$11.9 billion in cost savings and supports in 2025. This means more money in the hands of business owners, money they can reinvest in their operations, their workers and their communities. It means more jobs, more innovation and more opportunity for people right across Ontario.

Over the past year, I've had the privilege of travelling across Ontario, meeting with small business owners from every sector, from agriculture and manufacturing to technology and tourism. At every round table, one message rings clear: Small businesses are resilient, resourceful and ready to grow, and our government is here to help them do just that.

Our network of small business enterprise centres, or SBECs, continues to be one of our province's most valuable resources for entrepreneurs. These centres are for on-the-ground advice and practical supports to help business owners start, manage and grow their operations. Through seminars, workshops, training and funding opportunities, SBECs help entrepreneurs gain the skills they need to succeed in a competitive market. Last year, Ontario's SBEC network assisted 164,000 businesses, helping turn thousands of business ideas into real success stories.

We also support regional innovation centres, RICs, across the province, which focus on accelerating growth for innovative and technology-based businesses. Through

programs like the Business Acceleration Program, RICs offer entrepreneurs mentorship, advisory services and access to financing, helping Ontario's start-ups scale into global competitors.

Our government is also investing in digital transformation to help small businesses modernize and compete. This past July, we announced a \$7.5-million investment in the Digitalization Competence Centre, delivered by the Ontario Centre of Innovation. This includes \$2.5 million to establish a new retail modernization project grant to help expand programming to retail and to provide small businesses with cyber security training and education, helping more businesses adopt technologies such as online payment systems, inventory management software, customer relationship management systems and AI-driven platforms. This new funding builds on our earlier \$10-million investment and will continue helping small businesses develop digital modernization and adoption plans, or DMAPs, that support productivity, efficiency and growth through technology. The DCC has already made measurable impact. It is projected to help create and retain over 3,000 jobs and drive over \$600 million in increased sales revenues for Ontario's small businesses.

We're also supporting the next generation of entrepreneurs. Since 2021, our government has provided \$7 million in funding to Futurpreneur Canada, and just a few months ago, we announced an additional \$2-million investment in Futurpreneur, building on our existing partnership to help young people across Ontario access mentoring, business coaching and up to \$75,000 in start-up loan capital. These supports give young entrepreneurs the confidence and capital they need to turn their ideas into thriving businesses right here in Ontario.

Through the Starter Company Plus Program, we're helping even more entrepreneurs bring their business ideas to life. As announced in previous budgets, this program provides training, mentorship and grants of up to \$5,000 to help entrepreneurs start or expand a business. Since 2019, Starter Company Plus has trained and mentored over 5,500 entrepreneurs, resulting in over 3,000 businesses started, over 2,600 expanded, 66 purchased and the creation of over 6,400 jobs.

We're also continuing our support for students through the Summer Company Program, which helps youth aged 15 to 29 start their own summer business with access to mentoring, business training and grants of up to \$3,000. Over the past five years, the Summer Company Program has helped nearly 1,800 participants start businesses and helped nearly 1,500 students pursue entrepreneurship as a career option.

Both programs are delivered through our local SBECs, empowering communities to support entrepreneurship at the grassroots level.

We're also making it easier for small business owners to access government programs and services through our ontario.ca/smallbusiness online portal, a true one-stop shop for entrepreneurs. The site provides step-by-step guides to registering a business, obtaining permits and licences and accessing financial and advisory supports.

It's a simple, modern and convenient resource that saves time, because we know business owners would rather focus on running their operations, not navigating bureaucracy.

Our government is also investing in the future sustainability of Ontario's small business community. As part of the 2025 budget, we announced an investment of \$1.9 million over three years to establish a small business succession planning hub within the SBEC network. This new hub will help small business owners plan for transitions, ensuring that their businesses can continue to grow and remain locally owned for generations to come.

Through all of these initiatives, from youth programs and innovation to funding for digital adoption and succession planning, our government is delivering on its commitment to protect Ontario's economy. We are ensuring that Ontario remains the best place in the world to start and grow a business.

We're fostering innovation through programs like the Ontario Centre of Innovation's Ready 4 Market fund and Collaborate 2 Commercialize, helping early-stage companies bring their ideas to market faster. Through Intellectual Property Ontario, we're empowering entrepreneurs and researchers to protect and leverage their intellectual property, strengthening Ontario's competitiveness on the global stage.

Small business owners are the engine of our economy, and when they succeed, Ontario succeeds. Every dollar invested in our small business programs supports jobs, builds stronger communities and drives economic growth. Our government's mission is clear: to create the right conditions for success by keeping costs down, cutting red tape and empowering small businesses with the resources and supports they need to grow. Because when small businesses thrive, Ontario thrives.

Together, we are protecting Ontario by strengthening our economy, empowering entrepreneurs and business and building a province where every citizen in Ontario has the opportunity to succeed. It's good for business owners, it's good for communities and it's good for Ontario.

Thank you, Chair, and thank you to committee members.

The Chair (Hon. Ernie Hardeman): Thank you very much, Ministers, for the presentation.

We will now begin the question-and-answer segment in rotations of 15 minutes for the official opposition, 15 minutes for the third party, five minutes for the independent and 15 minutes for the government. As the line says, you must always remember to do your comments through the Chair.

We now will start the round with the official opposition. MPP Fife.

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Ms. Catherine Fife: Thank you, Minister, for appearing before the estimates committee today. I'm looking at particularly two vote items. Obviously, vote 901 is the ministry administration program. This is the program that provides financial human resources, planning, legal and other corporate services to ensure that you can carry out

the objectives that you've stated. And then the vote 902 item is economic development, job creation and trade, and this program supports economic growth and job creation in Ontario.

I have to respectfully say that there seems to be a bit of a disconnect around jobs: 800,000 people are unemployed in Ontario right now, via StatsCan. Child poverty has doubled since 2020, and we're looking at a poverty rate of 11.1% in Ontario. By all accounts, we are moving in the wrong direction, having seen nine quarters now of job losses in Ontario.

A major fund that you have under your ministry is the Protect Ontario Financing Program. On page 64, all of the transfers of this program are listed; however, the Protect Ontario Financing Program is not listed, though the website of the program is under this ministry. Can you provide an update on the Protect Ontario Financing Program? Because as I chair the tariff advisory committee, businesses in Ontario are looking towards the government to provide some sustainable contracts, procurement, financial support, either through loans and/or through grants, to retool and to become a more resilient economy. This was sold as the flagship program to do so and not seeing it here within this context leaves me with some questions.

I just wanted to give you an opportunity to clarify: Where is the Protect Ontario Financing Program? How are you measuring it? How are you deciding who gets the money? And how are you confirming that the return on investment is actually meeting the needs of employers and those who are losing their jobs in Ontario? Please go ahead.

The Chair (Hon. Ernie Hardeman): Before we start with the answer, I was supposed to say, to the deputy minister and to staff that's here, that if you are asked to speak, make sure you identify yourself before you start speaking so Hansard can record the great answer to the right person.

With that, we will now turn it back over to the ministry.

Hon. Victor Fedeli: I do want to speak a little bit about the total jobs. I think there was a number of months mentioned that I would just want to look at the increases, for instance, in employment. In the three months within that nine-month period that the member was mentioning—within the three months before Donald Trump put the tariffs in, the famous liberation day beginning of the tariffs, 87,000 jobs were indeed created in those three months: 23,000, 39,000 and 17,000. There were 87,000, including 37,000 jobs in manufacturing in those months alone. Last month, of course, we saw almost 9,000 new jobs in Ontario, of which virtually all were manufacturing. The month before, we saw 2,300 jobs in manufacturing be created; the month before that, 6,100 jobs in manufacturing be created. So I would certainly suggest that there are jobs being created; in fact, a million people are working today that weren't.

Ms. Catherine Fife: Actually, I'd like to let you comment on that, because the FAO estimates that the US tariff situation could result in 68,000 fewer jobs just this year, and 119,200 fewer jobs in 2026. But this trend started in

Q2, where employment declined by 38,000 workers, and that was the first quarterly loss in nearly three years. The unemployment rate rose for the ninth consecutive quarter, and it's currently at 7.9%. How do you explain the difference in numbers?

The FAO has been tracking these job numbers. Obviously, your ministry is tracking these job numbers, and when you talk about the investment and the jobs that are created, there's definitely a disconnect between what we are seeing on the ground and what the Financial Accountability Officer and the AG have confirmed.

Hon. Victor Fedeli: All of our information is given to us by Stats Canada, and we also back it up with the Conference Board of Canada numbers, which match entirely. That's why we know that in June, for instance, there were more than 20,000 jobs in Ontario created. That's how we know that last month there were almost 9,000.

Ms. Catherine Fife: But then how do you explain a 7.9% unemployment rate? The unemployment rate is going up because the jobs are going down.

Hon. Victor Fedeli: We know that over the last three months, 20,000 manufacturing jobs were created, as I said. We do know, as I mentioned earlier, there have been a million jobs created. That's what happens when you lower the cost of business by \$12 billion annually.

There are very challenging times, and, as you brought up, we have a Protect Ontario Financing Program. It's part of the \$30 billion in firepower that we have. We are actively reviewing the Invest Ontario Fund. You'll see some imminent announcements. It's one of many of the programs that we have in the \$30 billion.

It takes time to tailor the needs. Some of those companies that have applied, we have said to them, "We think we have a better program for you. We think you should perhaps move to this program." Others who have applied under the OTTF, we have suggested they move to other programs.

But you will see these announcements imminently. I can tell you of the Ontario Together Trade Fund that we are prepared to make announcements on the companies that are to be receiving those dollars.

Ms. Catherine Fife: Let's actually go to that Ontario trade fund, but I do want to clarify, Minister. The disparity in numbers between what's actually happening in Ontario and through your ministry—you can say that you're creating a million jobs, but we've also seen the population, the labour force go up, and since you came into office, we have nearly two million more people. Over 250,000 more people are unemployed today than were in 2018, and the unemployment rate is now fully 2% higher than when your government first came in.

Now, I'm not disputing that the dictator to the south has destabilized our economy and confidence in our economy, and that's also been proven through the Ontario Chamber of Commerce and their environmental scan. We know that economic confidence right now is actually at an all-time low. We also know the value, though, of small businesses, and the Ontario trade fund—when we do meet with small businesses, they're pretty clear on the kind of support

they're looking for. They also point out that there is a weakness in the plan, and so I want to bring that to your attention.

The Canadian Federation of Independent Business responded to this financing program just this last August. They said, "While this program will help many larger businesses, criteria such as at least \$2 million in annual revenue, a minimum \$250,000 loan requirement, and having to first explore all federal options will shut out most of our members in these sectors"—the fact that "smaller businesses don't qualify, and these programs don't take into account the many small businesses that feed into the province's auto ecosystem, such as restaurants, retail stores, and service providers like cleaners."

This is a stumbling block that I definitely want to bring to your attention, and perhaps this is a question for Minister Tangri. Have you given some consideration to retailing this program so that the bulk of small businesses can have access to the fund and can actually have some hope of staying open in Ontario?

Hon. Victor Fedeli: When I mentioned earlier about the Protect Ontario Financing Program and all of the applications we have received, what I said was that some of them we have moved to other programs or recommended they apply to other programs because we have things like the OTTF, the Ontario Together Trade Fund, where we have received considerable interest and applications, and those would be from small- and medium-sized businesses. We have moved even some of those applicants, suggesting to them that there are even better programs for them like the Eastern Ontario Development Fund, the Northern Ontario Heritage Fund or the Southwestern Ontario Development Fund. Or we have moved some of them to AMIC, the Advanced Manufacturing and Innovation Competitiveness Stream, that suits their needs even better. So there are a variety of programs for them.

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Ms. Catherine Fife: The feedback that I've also received is that there are some challenges in navigating these funds. This speaks now, then, to vote item 901. Do you have the resources—because it's not clear to me in the expenditures for this upcoming year—to actually help small businesses navigate and find the program that can or should be easily accessed by them?

Hon. Victor Fedeli: From our perspective, of course. We have more than a dozen offices in southern Ontario—so south of the French River—and the northern area of the province is covered by the Northern Development Office. We each have the appropriate amount of people.

I personally, MPP Fife, have never heard from anybody that we've been visiting or any of the chambers of commerce that we visit that tell us our people aren't adequate—in terms of numbers, I should say. We have great representation. I know that when we call people and tell them they're getting some kind of a fund, they always mention by first name the person who has been their caretaker from the ministry right from the beginning to the end—they do. I can tell you their names now because I've heard them so many times.

So I would say to you, unless Minister Tangri has anything to add, that they're being extremely well served, and I would congratulate all of those members who are helping them.

Ms. Catherine Fife: Of course, we're going to hear different things, right? When we're meeting with businesses and organizations and sectors—of late, the forestry sector has really raised the alarm on sustainable funding going forward, especially given the 45% tariff that they're facing. There doesn't seem to be the sense of urgency to meet this moment given the decline in jobs and the decline in economic confidence.

I will also say, Minister, that there are some legitimate questions that play around how funds are being distributed. There has been a call for transparency in how the Project Ontario Financing Program, for instance, determines who gets money and who qualifies for funding. We've asked questions around the accountability and oversight measures in place to ensure these funds are distributed responsibly and with consistency.

Certainly, the Minister of Finance had said at one point with regard to the Project Ontario Financing Program that, in order to ensure some accountability, they would "ensure an agile and flexible approach" and "a third-party financial agent will be procured to effectively and efficiently process applications that have passed the initial screening process."

I would be interested to know where that procurement process is. What's the timeline? Because given the jobs disaster in Ontario and also the Skills Development Fund cloud over that important resource to train and help people find employment—

The Chair (Hon. Ernie Hardeman): One minute.

Ms. Catherine Fife: —having some assurance that there's some integrity built into the process, I think, is really important. Do you agree as well? Because, obviously, we're going to have to build back some confidence after the Skills Development Fund scandal.

Hon. Victor Fedeli: On your earlier comment, I would say the 20,000 brand new manufacturing jobs in the last three months might take you to task on it.

But I'll answer your direct question—

Ms. Catherine Fife: I'd like to see those jobs—where they are.

Hon. Victor Fedeli: Those are from Stats Canada, by the way.

Ms. Catherine Fife: Sure.

Hon. Victor Fedeli: I will give you the answer to your direct question. We do have an external third party who is doing due diligence on the Ontario Together Trade Fund.

Ms. Catherine Fife: And who is that?

Hon. Victor Fedeli: It's Deloitte.

Ms. Catherine Fife: Deloitte—and did you go through an extensive RFP process to secure Deloitte?

Hon. Victor Fedeli: We went through an RFP process to secure Deloitte; we secured Deloitte, and they have been engaged with the applicants of the Protect Ontario fund—

The Chair (Hon. Ernie Hardeman): Thank you very much. That concludes the time for that one, and we will now go to MPP Cerjanec.

Mr. Rob Cerjanec: Through you, Chair: Thank you for your presentations. I'm looking at the total planned expenditures for 2025-26 and the allocation itself of base funding and the different areas in which they're allocated in.

As I've been travelling the province and speaking to start-ups, to students that are creating companies and have some really great ideas or folks that have found new innovation in their field working with industry, working with partners, I've heard quite a bit around innovation, the need for more innovation, the need for more support.

I'm wondering, when I'm looking at the planned expenditures, if, in the ministry's opinion, there should be some changes or, I would say, additions to innovation, to supporting start-ups and scale-ups, so that we can create Ontario-based businesses, jobs and opportunity in the province.

Hon. Nina Tangri: Thank you so much for the question. Our government has been listening to all of those entrepreneurs who want to start a business, to scale a business, especially to our young entrepreneurs. That's why we've added an additional \$2,000, for example, into Futurpreneur. Just a few days ago, I was at an event with them, seeing some of these amazing young entrepreneurs who are really stepping up and not just opening a business but creating many, many jobs.

Also, through our Small Business Enterprise Centres—we have 47 of them across the province, which makes it very localized. They have the ability to mentor, guide, help them in how to apply for permits and licences and help them find locations, suppliers and even customers. They have really stepped up. We actually gave them top-up funding last year for two years, and it's really working. I've had the ability to travel the province most of this summer working together with our Small Business Enterprise Centres.

One of the really successful programs I see is our Summer Company Program—these young students who have an idea, and throughout the summer we give them funding of up to \$3,000 through that network. They have had phenomenal success with that program, and some of them turn them into full-time businesses and careers once they have finished school or college and university.

So we're stepping up there for our young entrepreneurs. And in the research role, through Ontario's colleges and universities, they really, really are making a large effort through Minister Quinn's ministry.

Mr. Rob Cerjanec: How much of your ministry ends up interacting with Minister Quinn's ministry around innovation at the post-secondary level? Because every single innovation centre that I talk to on college or university campuses is appreciative of the support, but they identify more opportunities where there are gaps for students to be able to have the support to create new companies, essentially. What does that coordination look like with that ministry?

Hon. Victor Fedeli: I would say to you that one of the best examples was when we first were elected and we looked at what was happening with R&D. We know that research in Ontario is, quite simply, unparalleled. There's probably nobody that would argue across the country that this is the research capital. But the commercialization of it wasn't matching the research that was done.

We have invested in a new agency called IPON, Intellectual Property Ontario. We learned part of the issue was not having the ability to protect the intellectual property, and so with the establishment of IPON, managed both by MCU and by MEDJCAT, we saw a tremendous take-up because we were helping to fund their legal bills to get their patents, things along that line.

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Now, this last year, we've moved it all over to MCU. We think that's the proper place for this to be now. It's starting to mature. It's an independent agency; it doesn't need two ministries looking over their shoulder. So now, they report strictly to one minister, and no matter where we go, when we talk about IPON, we hear good things from industry. Whether it's at Elevate or the other conferences that we go to, they tell us that was one of the very good things that has come out of the government in relationship to these young start-ups.

Mr. Rob Cerjanec: Thank you, Minister. Through you, Chair—

Hon. Nina Tangri: I just want to add to that. Throughout my travels across the province, when I was back into this role—I'll give you an example, Communitech: phenomenal programs that they have, helping start-ups. I was able to see some of those. They were extremely grateful for the changes that our government made in supporting them and making sure that they were able to keep that intellectual property here, and it's allowed them to be able to go out and hire people to join them in their entrepreneurship way. We've seen all the way from Windsor to Ottawa and up in Thunder Bay great successes with the programs that we have available.

Mr. Rob Cerjanec: Thank you. Through you, Chair, I was recently at Communitech, and they are doing some excellent work, and other groups around the province as well doing similar work.

When I look at that ministry allocation of base funding, I want to bring it back to my initial question: Is it of, then, I guess, the ministers' opinions that the current approach that we're taking in terms of how we've divided up the pie, do we believe that's effective?

Hon. Victor Fedeli: We've completed a review of the small business centres, the Regional Innovation Centres. We've done a review recently and level-set everybody; in fact, we added a Regional Innovation Centre in Barrie just to fill that gap in. As a result—you mentioned Communitech. I would think of NORCAT, who are closer to my neck of the woods in Sudbury. In my own hometown is IION. These are where the young entrepreneurs go. Each has their own level of expertise. They're all extremely different.

We were at MaRS—I can't remember if it was yesterday morning or this morning. We were at MaRS—it was yesterday—in the life sciences sector, where we were talking about, for instance, to your earlier question as well, the University of Ottawa was the recipient of one of the wet labs. This is the kind of collaboration that we have and the kind of funding. You'll hear a couple of more, maybe three more, wet labs being funded. We put a \$15-million wet lab program out there.

I think there's really good collaboration, pretty pleasant collaboration among all the RICs and the ministry and tied into the academic institutions as well.

Mr. Rob Cerjanec: Thank you. Through you, Chair, what I hear quite a bit is about Ontario talent. We really do, I believe, have the best talent in the world coming out of our colleges and universities. I know this intersects a bit with colleges and universities, that ministry, but I think it's all interconnected at the end of the day around, how do we keep those students here in Ontario? How do we ensure that those opportunities are here and that those that have gone somewhere else in the world—to bring those students back. I'm wondering what thoughts there are from your ministry around doing that, and do we see a concerted effort right now too? Because I'm afraid we're giving away some of our best students to the United States and other places almost for free.

Hon. Victor Fedeli: I'm going to be joking for a minute: Well, don't worry; Donald Trump is going to tax them all \$100,000 for their H1-B visas, so you won't see them down there much longer. In fact—joking aside—we've seen professors from some of the Ivy League universities in the United States move here and relocate at U of T and others. So, we're seeing a little bit of a reverse of that.

But our job, to your point, is making sure that we're attracting businesses, whether it's businesses here in Ontario that can expand or businesses from around the world, so that these students have a job. We graduate, right now, 86,000 STEM grads every single year. In the last budget, we put 20,500 more positions, and those are permanent positions. So when that cohort graduates—when we're visiting with companies, they all tell us it's our talent; that they're coming to Ontario for that talent. We'll be able to tell them we now have over 110,000 STEM grads every year. That's going to keep these grads employed, because these companies are racing here to scoop them up.

Mr. Rob Cerjanec: Just a few weeks ago in the Kitchener-Waterloo region, I had the opportunity to meet with some folks, and that's something that I heard—bringing it back to the IP issue—of people still taking their IP to the US because it is more profitable, essentially, for them. So innovations and ideas created right here in Ontario are essentially walking out the door. Do you think, then, IPON needs more support?

Hon. Victor Fedeli: I think the pension funds—OMERS, teachers, all of the funds in Ontario and in Canada—need to look inward. All of them invest only 12% of their funds available in Canada. That's the kind of

thing that I think we need to spend more time encouraging; that they're missing what's right under their own noses here in Ontario and here with our tech sector and certainly our life sciences sector, the AI, the quantum—all of these are looking for investors.

Mind you, I've seen companies like Wabi with one of the largest raises in our history, so there are raises happening, and successful raises happening, but there needs to be more and more from our own country's public pension funds.

Mr. Rob Cerjanec: Thank you. Where are we on time, Chair?

The Chair (Hon. Ernie Hardeman): You have three minutes.

Mr. Rob Cerjanec: Three minutes? Okay.

You mentioned quantum. I want to pick up on that. When I look at Canada around the world when it comes to supercomputing, for example, we're not in the top 20 worldwide. Our capacity to be able to process the complex data really quickly, frankly, is not up to par. It's almost, in some ways, a global arms race, where we have countries like Brazil and Poland that are ahead of us in this capacity.

What efforts is the ministry taking to boost our quantum computing ability and supercomputer ability?

Hon. Victor Fedeli: We invested in Waterloo region in Mike Lazaridis' company Quantum Valley. It's a non-profit, and it's there to help boost the whole sector. In my own building, our office building at 777 Bay, is Xanadu, one of the quantum—they'll laugh when I call them this—darlings. We've been working with them as well. They have a quantum computer in our building.

We are continuing to grow. Last year, there were 70 new AI companies established in Ontario—that's up considerably from the year before—and 27 companies relocated to Ontario. That's up almost double from the year before. We saw almost \$3 billion in AI investment in 2024, also up almost 70% from the year before.

The Chair (Hon. Ernie Hardeman): One minute.

Hon. Victor Fedeli: So it's on the radar, but your point is taken that this is the arms race of the future. You're absolutely correct about that. We are prepared for it and continuing to prepare for it through our plan for energy and our plan for educating these graduates—part of the reason why we added more than 20,000 of them—and where we continue to support them in virtually every one of our things, like the Ontario Centre of Innovation and Ontario Vehicle Innovation Network, which is using a lot of AI. The list goes on and on.

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The Chair (Hon. Ernie Hardeman): Thank you very much. We'll now go to MPP Brady.

Ms. Bobbi Ann Brady: Thank you, Chair, and thank you, Minister Fedeli and Associate Minister Tangri, as well as all the staff here this afternoon.

Minister, you began by speaking about supply chains and tariffs, and it's clear that Ontario can no longer rely on the US and we must build a self-reliant Ontario. I can't think of anything more precious to invest in and to tariff-proof our economy than investing in agriculture and our

farm families, who really should be viewed as businesses. That's where I see the intersection here to estimates.

I look at your expenditures, and I'm curious if any of the ministry funds are being diverted to the ag industry and which areas of the industry those funds are reaching.

Hon. Victor Fedeli: I can tell you that we have opened up the mandate of Invest Ontario to agri-processing. We've seen really great success here in Ontario, whether it's Ferrero Rocher, with a half a billion dollars in their facility in Brantford; there is Barry Callebaut, with two \$135-million investments; we see Hilton Foods that we brought over from the UK—they have a \$130-million facility under construction right now in Ontario to make processed foods specifically for Walmart. We are working with companies in the soy industry. We are working with beverage companies. We've made announcements about an orange juice company in Mississauga, I want to say. So it's one of the focuses.

I'll take a second—Invest Ontario was life sciences, defence manufacturing and tech. It's now branched into agri-food, modular homes and defence as well.

Ms. Bobbi Ann Brady: I really respect the fact you are talking about processing, because we all know our farmers produce some of the very best food in the world. Yet too often, too much of that food leaves our province to be processed elsewhere, only to come across the border and end up on our grocery store shelves. In the case of beef, we're literally paying to export jobs and value-added opportunities that could stay right here at home.

I'm wondering if we can expect to see some investments—I know all about Ferrero Rocher; I drive by it almost every day. But can we expect to see some investments in building and expanding food-processing capacity here in Ontario? I think we could strengthen our local food supply chains, create jobs and keep more of that food we produce right here in Ontario, and perhaps we could look at expanding export markets as well.

Hon. Victor Fedeli: Short answer—yes. You are going to see at least three major investments in the areas you are speaking about in the near future—I hope they come in the near future; I expect them to—that we've been dealing with.

We agree there needs to be more processing here, but we also agree that exporting as the suppliers here in Ontario—the producers here in Ontario are asking us to help open up other markets that they're not in yet. So there's a little bit of both.

Ms. Bobbi Ann Brady: Okay, excellent. There was some talk about the Ontario Together Trade Fund, and I understand the farmers can apply under that fund, but it's a \$200,000 investment up front, I thought. I'm just wondering, at that price tag, what are some of the projects on the table?

The Chair (Hon. Ernie Hardeman): One minute.

Hon. Victor Fedeli: I can't tell you the specific names of the projects, but I can tell you there are agri projects in that list that will be announced soon. I just can't tell you the name of them yet.

Ms. Bobbi Ann Brady: Great. Thank you.

The Chair (Hon. Ernie Hardeman): We'll now go to the government. MPP Saunderson.

Mr. Brian Saunderson: Thank you very much, Chair, and I want to thank both Ministers Fedeli and Tangri for your attendance today and for the initiatives that you're leading and the direction you're taking the province.

We knew, when we went to the polls in February, that Mr. Trump was changing the temperature of the world economy. We knew the tariffs were looming and that the global economy is becoming volatile, uncertain; we're in unprecedented times. In fact, Minister, I know in the House here today, you referred to it as a tariff war. While there may be no bullets, the malice and intent of the White House is extremely hostile and puts our businesses and our trade relations under huge pressure.

In my riding, I have the Honda plant, which was the subject of the big announcement late last year. I have Pilkington auto glass, which for the first time since I moved to Collingwood in 2021, was firing on all cylinders in the last six years, supplying automotive glass to, I think, six different manufacturers. We have MacLean Engineering, leading the world in electrical mining equipment; Agnora Glass. We have boutique manufacturers and small businesses, and for every job in the larger sector, like Honda and Pilkington, there are six spin-off jobs.

So the threats that I'm seeing in my riding and we're seeing across the province are dramatic and existential, in some cases. When we went to the polls, we went to the polls on that very issue. I think that voters knew that we had a clear plan to address these issues and to make sure that we met this hostility with an aggressive plan.

I'm wondering, Minister Fedeli, if you can just explain the types of supports that we're putting in place to support these larger industries that are under stress as a result of what's going on south of the border, but also how that impacts down the food chain to protect jobs, not just in the bigger industries, but in the spin-off jobs and all the service jobs that support those.

Hon. Victor Fedeli: You mentioned Honda, so I want to acknowledge that you've been a really great "parliamentary assistant, auto sector." That's how I call you. I think there's probably no better representative of the auto sector than what you bring to the table, and always a very calm, reasoned and well-researched approach, so I wanted to say thank you.

The tariff supports come in a variety of sizes and packages. I think everything stems, though, from the fact that there's \$30 billion in firepower set aside. It's tariff relief. It's supports. It's various measures.

One of them we talked about earlier was the \$1-billion Protect Ontario Financing Program, and that is for businesses affected by section 232—that's what it's called—and that's the tariffs on steel, aluminum and autos. This billion-dollar investment will provide immediate liquidity support in the form of loans for those businesses. This is to help them keep the roof over their head and keep their employees working. That's what this fund is for. It is a larger fund, there's no question, but it's to keep the people employed. That's the real meaning of it.

Then there are others—I shouldn't say "as small as," because it's \$3 million, but there is the new 15% manufacturing tax credit, Ontario Made Manufacturing Investment Tax Credit. That's 15% of your new investment in a building, equipment, up to \$20 million. That's \$3 million. If you are a public company, it's a tax thing. If you are a private company, it's more of cash. Almost all of the OTTF recipients that I've talked with—certainly more than half, but really almost all that I've talked to—they fit in this. They're investing big money to pivot, to reshore and, I mentioned this, that is like a real relief to them. That's a nice little bit of extra that will help them hire people and make their projects successful.

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But on that OTTF—that's the manufacturing tax credit: The \$50-million Ontario Together Trade Fund is to help those businesses make what we call near-term investments. It's to help them export to new markets and it's to help them reshore their supply chains.

The Premier has said—and I've said it once already here; I'll probably say it two or three more times—every bolt, every nut, every widget, everything that can be made in Ontario, he wants made in Ontario. That's our task. And I'll tell you, it's a hell of a task.

That's why you find our gang in at the office early in the morning and you'll find them there late at night, because we're scouring through things on these files that we have of companies where they can make things.

A great example is one of the steel companies that makes tin. All of that tin, 100% of it, goes down to the States, gets made into tin cans and shipped back. You want to see the smoke come out of the Premier's ears when he hears things like that. We want to make those tin cans here and I hope we do. He says this all the time, daily—the same with aluminum cans. So, we are scouring and turning every rock over to find these companies that are ready to pivot, companies that have that know-how, companies that have that expertise. That's why we need the help of the municipalities and their economic development offices.

On that \$30 billion in horsepower, fire power, is \$40 million for the Trade-Impacted Communities Program. That money is for municipalities because they know their companies. They know them better than we know them. They know what we want. We want to make tin cans. We want to make these things; we want to make those things. The ec-dev offices know exactly what these companies make and can pivot to, and that's why we put that \$40 million in there as well. Some of those announcements will be coming very, very shortly. Some of those decisions have been made and are coming very shortly, and the same with the Ontario Together Trade Fund.

Mr. Brian Saunderson: Thank you very much and thank you both for visiting businesses in my riding.

Hon. Victor Fedeli: That was a spectacular company that we visited, by the way.

Mr. Brian Saunderson: We've got work to do there.

Hon. Victor Fedeli: Yes.

The Chair (Hon. Ernie Hardeman): MPP Racinsky.

Mr. Joseph Racinsky: Chair, through you to the Minister of Economic Development, Job Creation and Trade—my question is for you, but thank you, both ministers, for being here and ministry staff for taking the time as well.

If you look at the last days, weeks, months, the US has shown that they can no longer be depended upon as they once were. For so long they have been our closest ally and major trading partner, and the free trade that we've had has allowed us to really build a thriving economy. But now these tariffs have really undercut that relationship.

One of the ways we can build a more self-reliant and resilient economy is by trading more amongst the provinces—amongst ourselves—across the country. For far too long we've had internal trade barriers that have hindered this. Under the leadership of this government, with your help, the leadership of Premier Ford, Ontario has been a leader in Canada when it comes to breaking down these internal trade barriers. Can you please just highlight some of the actions we're taking to reduce trade barriers within Canada?

Hon. Victor Fedeli: Thank you very much. Thanks for the work that you're doing in the Legislature. Welcome. It's great to see you.

I've been on the internal trade committee for seven years, and I can tell you, we meet quarterly, or whatever it is. We have not changed a comma in the Canadian Free Trade Agreement that was signed on by all provinces and territories. We've not changed a comma, despite seven years of pushing. Premier Ford literally pounded the table one day and said, "That's it"—thanks to Donald Trump, I will say—"all our exceptions are removed."

Now, what does that mean? It means all provinces signed an agreement. They would take a pen and go, "I don't like this part over here" and "Well, I don't really like this part over here" and "I can't do that." So they all signed and then found all things that they didn't want to do. We've eliminated all that, and we're the first province in the country to ever do that. If you go on the Canadian Free Trade Agreement and look at the list of exceptions, you will see "Ontario: none; Quebec: 39." So we've got work to do in convincing our fellow provinces and territories. That was the first thing.

But I guess the real question is the why: Why would you do all this? It's because interprovincial trade barriers add about 14% to 15% of the cost of everything you buy every day, mostly because of shipping, trucking—different tire pressures in every province. Imagine having to pull into a province and going to a station to add air into your tires, or pulling in to deflate your tires. This is nonsense. It adds money. It adds time. The first aid kit in every province is different—the amount of bandages you need, the thickness of the gauze. It's nonsense. It's absolute nonsense. When removed, this will add about \$200 billion to our GDP. That's what this is all about.

So we've done three things: We have put in our legislation mutual recognition, labour mobility and direct-to-consumer alcohol. "Labour mobility" means if you're an architect in Manitoba and you want to come and work in

Ontario, the rules today basically take about six months to get your paperwork done, and then come and work. The rules when we're done will be, "Come and work in Ontario and take six months to get your paperwork to catch up to you." That's what labour mobility will be all about, in a nutshell.

"Mutual recognition" means the product that you make in one province may be different—the requirements may be different than in ours—but we take the attitude that, "Heck, this is one country; if it's good enough for you, it's good enough for us." So we will acknowledge that it's different, but recognize it as being equivalent, so you can now have the ability to ship things back and forth without the difficulty.

Then there's the direct-to-consumer alcohol, where somebody from Saskatchewan goes into a Niagara winery, loves the wine, buys a bottle or buys a case or whatever, takes it home, finishes it and wants more. The only way to do that is to actually come here to the winery and buy it. Well, that's ridiculous as well. So we will have direct-to-consumer alcohol. You can go online, phone, whatever it is that you'll be doing.

So you'll see us on November 19 meeting in Yellowknife to ratify as much of this as we can as 13 provinces and territories, and the 14th partner being the federal government. But this is a generational opportunity to ensure free trade and labour mobility exists between all of us in our country.

Mr. Joseph Racinsky: Thank you, Minister.

The Chair (Hon. Ernie Hardeman): MPP Kanapathi.

Mr. Logan Kanapathi: Thank you, Ministers, for that wonderful presentation, and thank you to all the staff and deputy minister for being here—ahem. I have a sore throat. Thank you for your leadership and for not only bringing small businesses, but all the way to big companies to Ontario during this challenging time. Thank you for sharing this good-news story for us.

My question is to the Associate Minister for Small Business. Small businesses are truly the backbone of the Ontario economy—

The Chair (Hon. Ernie Hardeman): One minute.

Mr. Logan Kanapathi: One minute? Oh, my—creating and driving innovation, and anchoring communities across the regions of the province. In my riding, there are 2,900 small businesses in Markham–Thornhill alone.

Could you please explain how our government is making it easier for entrepreneurs to start and operate their small businesses in our province?

Hon. Nina Tangri: Thank you, MPP Kanapathi. We spoke quite a bit about how to help entrepreneurs start their businesses through our small business enterprise network, but what Premier Ford wants to do and our government wants to do is to ensure Ontario's businesses have the right conditions to succeed. We've lowered taxes, we reduced electricity costs, we've cut red tape so that we can enable billions of dollars of savings. I'm talking \$11.9 billion in cost savings and support for Ontario's employers in this year alone—

Chair (Hon. Ernie Hardeman): Thank you very much. That's a very good answer, but we'll have to move on to the next one.

MPP Kernaghan.

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Mr. Terence Kernaghan: Thank you to the ministers and the ministry staff for coming here to present to committee today.

In particular, I was very interested in Minister Tangri's comments about succession planning tools with Small Business Enterprise Centres. In the last Legislature, I was proud to bring forward legislation for an employee ownership strategy. I think that's key and critical, given that Canada risks losing \$2 trillion worth of investment as the baby boom generation retires and all those small businesses are looking for what is next.

I think back to what the Ontario Chamber of Commerce said when they endorsed my legislation, saying that by moving forward with a provincial employee ownership strategy, "we can strengthen our economy, and our communities, for years to come." Because we know that employee-owned companies reinforce local communities. They keep that community quality and character, the neighbourhood identity.

In particular, you've mentioned there is \$1.9 million over three years. Is there going to be a plan to continue that funding or is that the going to be time limited for only three years?

Hon. Nina Tangri: Thank you MPP Kernaghan for the question. One of the things that we've heard loud and clear—for many years; this is not something new. Businesses who are—people are ready to retire or transfer ownership of their businesses, but often their children do not want to take over their business. That's one of the biggest challenges that we were facing, and the last thing anybody wants to see, especially in a small community, is the doors close and them going out of business, just because there is no one willing or able to take over that business.

We wanted to set up some kind of a succession planning hub. I think that we're able to announce now that the Kingston Small Business Enterprise Centre will be taking the lead as a pilot project right now, and they will be able to take a look—they're already doing it. Many of our small business enterprises are already doing this. You've heard from the Ontario Chamber of Commerce. There's lots of things out there that are helping to support that. They are going to be piloting a project where we are going to look at different ways on how we can support and help people understand that there are businesses out there that are very viable, very profitable, that are available, whether it's business-to-business partnering; whether it's supporting a key employee to take over that business or looking externally for more people to come in and want to do that.

We heard about farming a little earlier too. That is one of the biggest areas where we do see, unfortunately, where one of the children do not want to take over that farm. But we are hearing from many people who would love to be able to do that. So help doing that partnering is just critical.

That's one of the key projects that we're undertaking right now.

I said this is a pilot project for three years, but I can see us certainly working together and finding ways to support those businesses and help continue their businesses once they have retired or moved on.

Mr. Terence Kernaghan: Excellent. In speaking of partnering, the federal government has been taking a look at their succession planning for the last couple of years. Has there been work between the province and the federal government to make sure there's not reduplication of efforts, to make sure that we are doing this is the best, most cohesive and collaborative way possible?

Hon. Nina Tangri: Absolutely, yes. It just happens to be that my member of Parliament happens to be the secretary of state for small business as well, so we talk often about how we can work together on many, many plans. They are certainly working on some things we are piloting here, and through all of our networks, whether it's the Canadian Chamber of Commerce, the local Ontario chambers, all of our boards of trade, we're working together to find the best practices on how we can support our businesses continuing.

Mr. Terence Kernaghan: I hope you'll advocate with Secretary of State Valdez to remove the expiry date for the capital gains exemption for business owners who are selling into that employee ownership trust model.

Hon. Nina Tangri: Absolutely, yes.

Mr. Terence Kernaghan: I also wanted to focus on small business centres and Small Business Enterprise Centres, because there is a great level of uncertainty within those organizations right now. They have stated that their main issue is that operational core funding. In fact, often-times, small business centres have to take on people who aren't receiving that program funding, so the people who haven't qualified, but they're still trying to assist them. So many of these centres are in such a state because of the lack of operational dollars that have been given year over year from the government. They're being asked to do more with less. In Whitby, they actually had to hand the keys over to the office to the county.

Is there any intention from your government to increase these operational dollars so that our Small Business Enterprise Centres can continue the great work that they do?

Hon. Nina Tangri: Yes, and we absolutely support our Small Business Enterprise Centres that have been doing phenomenal work for years. As Minister Fedeli mentioned earlier, we've just completed a review of our small enterprise centres and, together with our team at the ministry, have been visiting with many, many of them. We listened, which is why we provided top-up funding to, I think, every single Small Business Enterprise Centre.

They were very, very grateful for that. It helped with their operating dollars, but it also helped them to provide more grants to more entrepreneurs, which has been very, very successful. We allowed them some flexibility as well, which is what they were asking for. We're continuing that work, continuing to work with them.

As I said, the ministry is working very, very closely with all our Small Business Enterprise Centres to make sure that they succeed in what they do.

Mr. Terence Kernaghan: I will certainly look forward to that top-up funding not being one time, but being continual, operational, year-over-year top-up rather than just a one-time-only payment.

In terms of foreign direct investment in vote 902, the government recently released numbers through an infographic on the minister's social media relating to foreign direct investment in Ontario. I wanted to request: Could the committee please receive copies of the data that was underlining the numbers in that infographic?

Hon. Victor Fedeli: The information came from the federal government, from GAC.

Mr. Terence Kernaghan: Okay. Excellent. It was not included with that infographic.

Also, we've seen that yourself, Minister, you've been on a number of trade missions in an effort to enhance foreign direct investment, particularly in Asia. Could the government outline how much money has been allocated for these missions and what is the typical staff complement? And is that the associated vote number?

Hon. Victor Fedeli: What was the last bit?

Mr. Terence Kernaghan: What is the associated vote number for that expenditure?

Hon. Victor Fedeli: The associated what?

Mr. Terence Kernaghan: The associated vote number in the expenditures for your trips to Asia as well as the allocation of staff.

Hon. Victor Fedeli: Just to clarify: I don't know what that means.

Ms. Catherine Fife: That's what the estimates are.

Mr. Terence Kernaghan: That's what the estimates are. We're voting on expenditures.

Hon. Victor Fedeli: Oh, what vote number it is.

Mr. Terence Kernaghan: Yes.

Hon. Victor Fedeli: Sorry.

Mr. Terence Kernaghan: That's what we're doing here.

Hon. Victor Fedeli: Hey, I used to sit on here.

First of all, we've been to, probably, this year, 16 different countries. By we, it's usually me and one other, sometimes two. But most generally, me and one staffer. That's who goes on these.

I would like you to know that we are judicious with every dollar. You will see that we fly economy almost all the time. You will never find any expenses, other than a flight and a hotel, just so you know. You will find no other expenses. We don't expense our meals. Even though there are accommodations for that, we don't use any of it. We are a very, very lean machine—but I want to say, an incredibly successful machine. Almost every mission results in a contract, term sheet, a letter of intent being issued, and somebody turning a shovel over in Ontario sometime soon after the mission.

We call them missions, but it's really—you take your jacket off, roll your sleeves up and it's a sales call.

Mr. Terence Kernaghan: Well, I'm glad to hear that there is some concern about making sure we're not wasting public money in terms of these trips, and that they are successful. Do you have the corresponding vote number for that within the estimates?

Hon. Victor Fedeli: Working on it while we talk.

Mr. Terence Kernaghan: Okay. Perfect.

I also wanted to ask, as well, given the instability with the dictator down south, we can also note that Mexico is a geographically close trading partner and is, additionally, a member of CUSMA. They have a strong auto sector. The Premier has asked to separate Mexico from the agreement. That, obviously, could become a concern because we've alienated a potential ally, a vital ally. Have any funds been allocated for a trip to South America or to Mexico?

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Hon. Victor Fedeli: We have an office in Mexico City. We have offices all around the world. I have not been back to Mexico this year, but we are going to South America in three weeks—maybe two weeks, three weeks. So there is a mission—that would be me and one of my staff—being joined by our senior economic officer, who is located in Mexico City. We will be in Brazil.

Mr. Terence Kernaghan: With the office that is there in Mexico, would you be able to provide details for the committee on what deals that office has been able to secure, given that you have a set office down in Mexico?

Hon. Victor Fedeli: We'll take that back to you.

Mr. Terence Kernaghan: Okay. Thank you.

I also wanted to ask, what changes were made to the economic development investment line that accounts for the \$356.2-million decrease year over year?

Hon. Victor Fedeli: Working on it.

Mr. Terence Kernaghan: Okay.

Mr. JP Cadeau: Thank you for the question. My name is JP Cadeau. I'm the Deputy Minister of Economic Development, Job Creation and Trade. I'll check and confirm with the team, but my instinct on this one is it's just a timing issue as it relates to the flows of funds to support various investments. There can be variability year over year, so I expect that's what it is. I'll take it back to confirm.

Mr. Terence Kernaghan: Thank you. I look forward to that information.

I want to look particularly on page 25. On page 25, we see a decrease of 6.7% to the economic development, job creation and trade program. What accounts for that 6.7% reduction?

Mr. JP Cadeau: My apologies; could I just ask you to repeat the question?

Mr. Terence Kernaghan: Yes. On page 25 of the estimates, we see a decrease of 6.7% to the economic development, job creation and trade program. What accounts for this reduction?

Mr. JP Cadeau: Again, a similar response, which is, it's just a timing issue as it relates to how sometimes these projects and flows of funds can sort of cut over from fiscal year to fiscal year. So my instinct is that would be the

answer but, again, we'll include that as part of our follow-up.

Mr. Terence Kernaghan: Okay. It obviously does seem quite concerning, given that we are in a trade war at this time.

I wanted to ask, on page 64, we see there's a reduction of 100% of the Trillium Network for Advanced Manufacturing. Did that program get moved to another division, or did it cease to exist?

Hon. Victor Fedeli: That particular program came to an end, and those funds were used in other projects that we have started. It could be any number of them.

Mr. Terence Kernaghan: Interesting.

I also wanted to ask, in the very few moments I have left: There's a 22% reduction, or a \$182-million reduction, to strategic investments. What does this reduction account for? Are there particular investments that the government no longer plans to make in this budget year?

Hon. Victor Fedeli: No. That one, I can tell you, is completely a timing issue. Some of the flow of dollars would be in a different year than when we budgeted for.

Mr. Terence Kernaghan: I see.

My next question is, there's a nearly 50% reduction to the industrial land development line in vote item 902-13 on page 64. Now, the government has stated that this program is used to secure new investment opportunities and ensure that industrial land is available to support large manufacturing investments. These programs provide municipalities and industrial land owners—

The Chair (Hon. Ernie Hardeman): One minute.

Mr. Terence Kernaghan: —with financial supports to advance due diligence activities to increase the development readiness of industrial sites for investment attraction. What's the reason for this reduction? Is the government concerned that this reduction is ill-timed, considering the need to reduce our reliance on the United States?

Mr. JP Cadeau: Thank you for the question. When we look at major investments, it's one of the most important things that investors look at, in terms of having shovel-ready sites. No, it doesn't at all reflect a reduction, but is just a reflection of the fact that—have spent funds, and those funds have been spent on things like diligence, all the necessary enabling components which are required to support industrial land development. I don't think it reflects a reflection; it just reflects a reality that the funds that we had allocated last year were spent to that effect.

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

We'll go now to MPP Cerjanec.

Mr. Rob Cerjanec: I wanted to dive in a little bit around the advanced manufacturing and innovation competitiveness funding. Can you tell us the proportion of the funding that has gone to Ontario-owned manufacturers versus multinational or foreign-controlled corporations, if you'd have that information?

Hon. Victor Fedeli: Just give me a moment and I'm going to have a look.

Mr. Rob Cerjanec: I assume we track it. That's why you're looking.

Hon. Victor Fedeli: Yes. I literally have them alphabetically by community, so whether I can start at Aylmer and work my way all the way down to—I'm past Vars and into Windsor and Woodstock.

I would say to you, without knowing the actual percentage, these primarily are for our Ontario companies. There may be some that would be for international companies that have landed here, but I would say the vast majority are Ontario-based companies, and we probably visited each and every one of them.

Mr. Rob Cerjanec: Thank you. Given that it seems to be primarily Ontario companies, if we were giving funding, whether it's through this stream or through other streams, do we have guarantees in place, then, that those recipients remain in Ontario and end up staying here and continuing to create jobs or maintain those jobs here as opposed to preventing those companies from leaving? There's nothing preventing those companies from taking that money and leaving?

Hon. Victor Fedeli: Yes. The funding is generally attached either to a building that they are building, equipment they have bought. It's not given in advance; it's given after the fact, after the dollars have been invested and after the people are hired. There is a holdback for some years. I don't know how many years—three or something?

Ms. Catherine Fife: Three.

Hon. Victor Fedeli: Three years. There's a holdback so that we can make sure there's some tie, and there are also clawback clauses. So we're very satisfied that we've protected the taxpayer.

Mr. Rob Cerjanec: Thank you. I'll shift a little bit in a somewhat related area. I know folks in the province right now, especially in the auto sector, are very concerned. I know some of this is definitely United States related, but it appears like some of this isn't United States related as well. In GM in Oshawa, we're seeing them losing a shift. CAMI in Ingersoll is stopping production of the electric BrightDrop vans there.

Specifically, around CAMI, are you able to take me through a little bit of what's going on with our investment there right now—how much has been given and what's our plan moving forward, specifically with CAMI in Ingersoll?

Hon. Victor Fedeli: Well, as with any of our contracts, there really are clear guardrails and there are parameters put in place to protect our taxpayers. General Motors knows that Ontario is integral to their success. They have told us that. I've been on the phone with them. The Premier has been on the phone. We've been on the phone together. They are exploring new opportunities for Ingersoll. So they have made commitments. We fully expect them to live up to their commitments they made to the workers here in the province. But as with all contracts, there are guardrails put in place.

Mr. Rob Cerjanec: Through you, Chair: If they don't, what accountability do we have in place there to clawback the money that we have already given to them?

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Hon. Victor Fedeli: Well, first of all, funding doesn't flow unless their milestones are met. If commitments are

not honoured, we have the contractual ability to have the money returned.

Mr. Rob Cerjanec: I think in this case, we probably would have given out most already, given that the plant was already retooled and operating.

Hon. Victor Fedeli: Again, there are always the holdbacks. There are always the delays. The equipment must be bought, all of that paperwork must be processed, all of the people must be hired and then the holdbacks are in place as well.

Mr. Rob Cerjanec: How much is it? What would be those amounts?

Hon. Victor Fedeli: We continue to work with General Motors to make any determinations of any dollars or any of the guardrails that may or may not have been met. We're continuing to work on that with them.

Mr. Rob Cerjanec: I'm looking here—through you, Chair—just on the press release issued by the Office of the Premier back in 2022. It looks like you were going to provide up to \$259 million in grant support for that, so I am very curious how much money has already gone out the door, specifically in this situation.

Hon. Victor Fedeli: You're absolutely correct that when the project was announced, we would conditionally contribute up to \$259 million, and that was to support a \$2-billion investment of General Motors. While we're crunching through the numbers together, our priority is to get the workers back to work, plain and simple.

Mr. Rob Cerjanec: So—through you, Chair—we don't know how much has gone out the door so far?

Mr. Dave Smith: Point of order.

The Chair (Hon. Ernie Hardeman): Pardon? You have a point of order?

Mr. Dave Smith: I have a point of order, Chair, yes.

The Chair (Hon. Ernie Hardeman): Point of order from MPP Smith.

Mr. Dave Smith: We're discussing the estimates of the 2025-26 budget, and anything from a budget prior to 2025-26 would be out of order for this committee. Pursuant to standing order 110(h), it would be in order for public accounts, but not estimates for 2025-26.

Ms. Catherine Fife: Point of order.

The Chair (Hon. Ernie Hardeman): Point of order? MPP Fife.

Ms. Catherine Fife: It is the collective interest of the committee to find out what the amount is. It should be allocated for in estimates because, obviously, that contract is now compromised. It's pertaining to a vote number. The member is seeking clarification as to what the ministry has estimated it will cost with regards to the contract going forward. So it's a valid question, as I see it.

The Chair (Hon. Ernie Hardeman): I would just advise the member asking the question to make sure we are speaking to the estimates, and we'll go back to you.

Mr. Rob Cerjanec: Sure.

Hon. Victor Fedeli: Look, let me just say to you that our legal team is working with the company, but our priority is getting the people back at work, working with

General Motors to look for a new product there. That's our priority.

Mr. Rob Cerjanec: Through you, Chair: I appreciate that is the effort of the government. It would be disastrous if it wasn't the effort of the government in this specific situation.

To rephrase my question, perhaps: In 2025-26, has the government of Ontario allocated any money for the CAMI investment still?

Hon. Victor Fedeli: I would say to you that our team is working with General Motors. We have two streams. We're looking into the investments. But more than that, we're looking into putting people back to work, plain and simple.

Mr. Rob Cerjanec: So I guess we'll take it that we don't know if we have?

Hon. Victor Fedeli: Our team is working closely with the company.

Mr. Rob Cerjanec: Okay. It doesn't feel very reassuring.

Chair, through you: Around some of the funds that we do give out as a province—so, let's say, through Invest Ontario, for example—I think there's a lot of concern right now within the public, certainly with the media and folks sitting in this Legislature, around the Skills Development Fund and the lack of what appears to be guardrails associated with that type of funding.

So I'm very curious: Within the Ministry of Economic Development, Job Creation and Trade, what guardrails are in place to ensure that with the grant funding that we're giving out through a whole wide variety of different programs, there isn't the type of interference that we've seen that's been reported on and revealed through FOIs? Can the minister assure us that there are specific guardrails in place and that the decisions that are being made are based purely on need and funding availability?

Hon. Victor Fedeli: I would say to you, first of all, that we have built-in safeguards to protect the taxpayer dollars. All of our ministry funding agreements include provisions and clawbacks to ensure that these companies meet their commitments. If job creation or investment targets are not met, Ontario's support could be reduced, could be withdrawn, could be clawed back. That's why we have third-party, independent auditors who work with Invest Ontario, as well, on their files and that is in addition—that is Deloitte. All of these companies have milestones that they need to meet, so there are checks and balances all along the way so that we haven't gone down a path that we shouldn't be down.

Mr. Rob Cerjanec: I appreciate hearing that from the minister.

Through you, Chair: When we're making decisions based on grant applications, can you please outline what is the process that the ministry takes when it comes to looking at the application, the scoring? I assume the ministry bureaucrats would be scoring those applications. Are we ensuring that the applications that we are funding, whether it's through grants or loans, are of the greatest

need and the highest impact to the people of Ontario and for the people of Ontario?

Hon. Victor Fedeli: We have just topped up Invest Ontario with another \$600 million. When we set them up years ago, the Treasury Board developed a matrix, basically a scoring matrix, that all of the companies follow, filling in the blanks. That is done, for the most part, independently—it's Deloitte, right?

Mr. JP Cadeau: Yes, in many instances.

Hon. Victor Fedeli: In many instances, it's, again, Deloitte, but they're scored on a matrix. Then the facilities, if they're existing, are generally toured; certainly, all of the financials are pored over by the team; and the decision would then be sent to Invest Ontario's investment review committee.

That committee then makes a recommendation, and that recommendation then comes to me for me to sign off on and then goes back to Invest Ontario. From there, they notify the company—actually, there may or may not be a step in between. They have levels. If it supersedes the level, it would go to the Treasury Board.

The Chair (Hon. Ernie Hardeman): One minute.

Hon. Victor Fedeli: If it doesn't supersede the level, it would go the company, who would then issue a letter of intent. The letter of intent, if accepted, comes back and a term sheet is developed, in conjunction with the company. If the term sheet is then accepted, we go and we turn a shovel.

Mr. Rob Cerjanec: What I am hearing is that it appears to be a much more rigorous process than we've seen right now with the Skills Development Fund. Would you be open or would the ministry be open to providing data to the public in this regard, just to ensure that Ontario taxpayers can be assured that the decisions that are being made are benefiting Ontario industry and business?

Hon. Victor Fedeli: I think I just did.

Mr. Rob Cerjanec: Well, the data itself, Minister.

We'll leave that there. I think there are probably 10 seconds.

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The Chair (Hon. Ernie Hardeman): Thank you very much. You're out of time.

We'll now go to MPP Brady.

Ms. Bobbi Ann Brady: In the ministry's vision, under "attracting investments to Ontario," it says, "The ministry has a suite of land development programs to showcase Ontario's inventory of available industrial investment-ready sites. A mega site brings new opportunities for long-term investment that can create thousands of good-paying direct and indirect jobs throughout the industrial supply chain that will benefit communities across the whole province."

Can either minister tell me a bit more about this suite of land development programs?

Hon. Victor Fedeli: We tried to consolidate most of this on Invest Ontario's land website. If you go to the website and register, you will now have the ability to go on anywhere in Ontario and look at available land. Each municipality populates that with Invest Ontario. So you

will see land, whether it's a small piece or a large piece, whether it's privately owned or publicly owned, whether it's municipal or provincial or federally owned. We're trying to put an assembly, if you will, of all the available suite of options so that when we're dealing with a company, we can pull up a laptop and tap a specific site and blow it up. We can see who owns it. We can see if it's for sale. So all of that is available. Primarily, now, we're consolidating it onto Invest Ontario's—it must have a fancy name, but I call it just the land website.

Ms. Bobbi Ann Brady: So that land would likely be shovel-ready land.

Hon. Victor Fedeli: Not necessarily. Some of it is serviced, some isn't, but all of those criteria are mentioned, so you know when you look at it. You will be able to click on it. Some municipalities want to put large tracts of land that aren't even serviced just so that a developer or one of the international companies or some company somewhere else in Ontario will look at it and say, "Yes, that looks like the kind of area I want to be at."

Ms. Bobbi Ann Brady: And that is for largely industry, not development—like, developers.

Hon. Victor Fedeli: No, no, no. That's for these companies that we're attracting.

Ms. Bobbi Ann Brady: Okay.

I represent Haldimand–Norfolk, and Haldimand county is home to Ontario's largest industrial park. I'm wondering, would that industrial park fit under one of these suites of land programs?

Hon. Victor Fedeli: If your municipality has met with Invest Ontario and registered and put the property on, it would be. There are 97 different municipalities that we're dealing with right now who are shown on the website. It's up to your municipality whether they have done that or not.

Ms. Bobbi Ann Brady: Just for clarification, though, are we looking at industry or are we looking at anything? Are we looking at putting up homes, or—

Hon. Victor Fedeli: It's meant as an industrial database. There are actually 179 sites that you can go and look at today from 97 different municipalities.

Ms. Bobbi Ann Brady: Okay. And you would agree that industry should stay on industrial lands for the best economic output or best economic environment in this province?

Hon. Victor Fedeli: Well, look, I would say to you, we're in a war. We're in an economic war, and we need to make sure that we use all the tools in the tool box. That's how I would answer you on that question.

Ms. Bobbi Ann Brady: Okay. I would just like to add that that largest industrial park right now in Nanticoke is being jeopardized with housing development. There is an application before this government.

The Chair (Hon. Ernie Hardeman): One minute.

Ms. Bobbi Ann Brady: And this province, this government, needs 75% more power by 2050. I feel that those Nanticoke lands would be better served with an energy project. I'm wondering if your ministry is having discussions with every level of government to determine and

weigh out the risks associated with people at an industrial park.

Hon. Victor Fedeli: I would say to you, the instructions to cabinet from Premier Ford are that every ministry should put an economic development lens on every project just to make sure that we're checking that box.

If you look at the Ministry of Health's announcement last week of FAST, where they're putting an oncology project that's available to be able to do clinical trials and other things, that is done in conjunction with the Ministry of Economic Development. They have—

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

We'll go to the government. MPP Rosenberg.

MPP Bill Rosenberg: Thank you, Ministers, and all the members for this afternoon. My question is for Minister Fedeli.

Our government made it a priority since the first day we came into office to create the conditions that incentivize business investment, job creation and growth. We reversed the Liberals' anti-growth policies and cut taxes and red tape. As a result, we've seen businesses across a range of sectors make investments right across our province. Many of these investments are from leading global companies that could invest anywhere else in the world but chose Ontario.

As our government continues working to diversify our trade, we are promoting Ontario as the best destination for companies to invest, expand and create new, good-paying jobs. Can the minister talk about some of the investments Ontario has landed recently?

Hon. Victor Fedeli: The short answer is yes. The longer answer is, thank you for the opportunity. It's great to see a fellow northerner here. Congratulations on your swing bridge. You were like a dog with a bone, and you caught it. Good for you. I'm really, really proud of the work you're doing for the north.

I've said it already that I'm going to say a couple of things more than once: 409 companies from around the world; \$40 billion in investment; 24,711 jobs. That's an 81% increase from last year. And I know when I'm travelling and we meet with a company in any country, or meet with the country themselves, they all say that in this really tumultuous world—with Russia's illegal war in Ukraine; the war that was in Israel; China's very big grip on the supply chain making so much uncertainty around the world—when they look across the ocean, they see this beacon of light, this beacon of hope that's Ontario.

They know that if they come to Ontario, there's going to be a stable, reliable, predictable jurisdiction—mostly the "predictable" is where they stop in comparing us to the States. That is almost universal, that that's what they're first feeling. They know that Canadians are nice people, they know that we're polite—we say "I'm sorry"—but they know that Ontario is where business happens. They know that Ontario is where we make things—planes, trains, automobiles and chips. Whether it's potato chips or computer chips, we make everything here in the province of Ontario, so they come here.

I'll give you some examples, because it's going to tie into MPP Kernaghan's comment earlier. When we were in Austria, we met with a company called Hasslacher, and here we are, a few weeks ago, cutting a ribbon at their second plant in Ontario. We've met with them a couple of times in Austria now; the last time was to talk about their expansion of a \$107-million building to make wood-laminated beams. They make cross-laminated timber in their first factory and now wood-laminated beams. We went to Austria, met them, met their family, had lunch at the house, and lured them into Ontario years ago and now into an expansion.

Ms. Catherine Fife: You need a new word that isn't "lured."

Hon. Victor Fedeli: It's "lured." Yes, I guess there's a better word than that.

Hon. Nina Tangri: "Attracted."

Hon. Victor Fedeli: Yes. I'm a business guy; we use language like that.

In Japan and Korea, as I mentioned earlier, we landed \$400 million in three days and put 300 people to work. Mitsui High-tec: \$102-million investment and 104 jobs. We sat across the table—this business needs to be done eyeball to eyeball, especially in Asia, in Japan, in South Korea, where a handshake means everything. This is how the business that we now conduct for the province of Ontario happens.

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Siemens in Germany—we courted them several times and ended up with a \$150-million investment. This is the kind of way we are handling business. So you asked about internationally; I've given you a real sampling of what our ministry is all about when we deal internationally. We go, roll up our sleeves and come home with a contract. That's how we roll.

MPP Bill Rosenberg: Thank you, Minister.

The Chair (Hon. Ernie Hardeman): MPP Smith.

Mr. Dave Smith: Thanks, Chair. I appreciate that. I'm working on a PhD. Today, actually, in class, we had a guest speaker. It was Kim Nossal. He wrote the book called *Canada Alone*. He describes how Canada has really seen a kind of isolation now because of the tariff threats from the United States. He's talked about how we need to diversify our trade amidst global economic uncertainty, and some of the challenges that we've had as a result of the US tariffs and what that has really done to shake Ontario's trade relationship with the United States.

We've had that long-standing relationship with them that really has brought prosperity to both sides of the border for generations. The United States has turned its back on Canada. But when I'm listening to some of the things you're talking about that your ministry is doing, you're out there trying to diversify that trade because we can't rely on the United States anymore.

Do you mind talking a little bit more about the steps you've taken as the Minister of Economic Development, Job Creation and Trade to find more trading partners outside of the United States and leverage that vast eco-

nomie opportunity that we have by diversifying what our actual trade is?

Hon. Victor Fedeli: Thank you very much for the question. Congratulations on your work on your PhD. That's really great news, really wonderful to hear. That's admirable. Best of success to you.

We agree, and I think the federal government agrees, that President Trump's tariffs are hurting businesses. I watched the Prime Minister, and I looked at his social media just the other day. In fact, I actually think I copied it and sent it to my team. So let me see if I have it very handy. If I do, I do and if I don't, I don't—yes, that Canada has what the world is looking for. We are therefore working to open new markets and create new opportunities for our workers and our businesses. I thought, "Great. This is great to hear. So are we."

We've been doing this since 2018. We're ramping up those efforts because, let's face it, 80%—two-way trade between Canada and the US is \$500 billion a year; \$500 billion a year, \$250 billion each way, almost 50-50. The rest of the world—\$125 billion. Do the math. I mean, I know they said there would be no math, but do the math. Some 20% is our business around the world and 80% with one partner across the border—one very volatile, unpredictable partner across the border.

So when Prime Minister Carney says Canada has what the world is looking for and we're going to look to open new markets, well, here's what we've done since 2018: Our trade with Switzerland is up 132% since we were elected; South Korea, up 84%; UK, up 75%; India, up 59%; the EU, up 29%. That's because we're there.

We have offices in the UK; we have offices in France; we have offices in Germany; we have two offices in different parts of India, South Korea, Japan, Mexico and all through the States. We just opened an office in Singapore and an office in Thailand. We have a senior economic officer in Singapore and an agent-general in Thailand. This is exactly where the Prime Minister is right now, where we were a couple months ago, announcing our new offices. He's in Southeast Asia. It's the fifth-largest economy in the world, about to become the fourth-largest economy in the world, and we've now got two offices there to help guide us through.

A big, big change you're going to see is in the defence sector. Think of the EU: \$1.3 trillion being spent in the EU, €600 billion in Germany alone—\$900 billion just out of Germany on their rearmament. They have agreed to release their debt brake and do this to rearm. We want to be in that business. We want steel from Algoma to be sold for tanks, for light armoured vehicles, for ships. We want optics from the various companies in Ontario who make optical equipment to be there in the EU and in Germany and in Southeast Asia, making and selling defence equipment. That's why we're at the table. We're sitting at the table with defence companies.

Yesterday we sat with TKMS, one of the two companies that's bidding on the submarine contract. We were in a room with a hundred of their prospective Ontario suppliers for their supplier day. This is how we're getting involved.

Next week, we'll be in Germany at the submarine company, TKMS, talking about the results of today and fighting for those 100 Ontario companies to win contracts. Then, we'll do the same with the South Korean company. As I've said to our fellow MPPs, our colleagues: We take off our jackets, we roll up our sleeves and we get down to work.

Mr. Dave Smith: Thank you. I appreciate that.

The Chair (Hon. Ernie Hardeman): MPP Triantafilopoulos.

Ms. Effie J. Triantafilopoulos: How much time do we have?

The Chair (Hon. Ernie Hardeman): Two minutes and 3.7 seconds.

Ms. Effie J. Triantafilopoulos: My question is for our Associate Minister of Small Business, and it pertains to procurement. In today's competitive marketplace, being able to compete for contracts, particularly in government procurement, can be a major challenge for small businesses. Large companies often have more resources and experience navigating complex bidding systems, leaving smaller firms at a disadvantage.

Can the Associate Minister of Small Business please explain what actions our government is taking to provide small businesses with better access to procurement opportunities, which, in turn, could help stimulate regional economies and create jobs locally?

Hon. Nina Tangri: Thank you so much, MPP Triantafilopoulos, for the question, because it's really important and something that our government is very, very proud of. The Building Ontario Businesses Initiative is going to help reduce those barriers and level that playing field for all of our Ontario businesses with respect to public sector investment, the broader public sector procurement, so that they can help sell more goods and products and services, create jobs in their local communities—which I think is just so important—and provide the support so they can innovate and compete.

When we talk about the province of Ontario, we spend roughly \$30 billion on goods and services so that we can deliver high-quality programs to the public. Through BOBI, the Building Ontario Businesses Initiative, we're leveraging that purchasing power so we can help Ontario businesses, particularly those in the technology and manufacturing sectors, so that they can sell more of their goods, their services and create jobs in their communities.

The Chair (Hon. Ernie Hardeman): One minute.

Hon. Nina Tangri: The Building Ontario Businesses Initiative Act, BOBIA, mandates that the public sector, all of those entities, must give Ontario businesses preference when they're conducting these procurements of goods and services. It's something our government has been working on for many, many years, not just due to the tariffs. It's anticipated that we're going to have about \$3 billion in contract awards that are going to be just given to Ontario businesses in 2026, next year. We're very excited about that. The act is working, the initiative is working, and we are encouraging all of our businesses, small and large, in Ontario to come to the government to procure.

Ms. Effie J. Triantafilopoulos: Thank you.

The Chair (Hon. Ernie Hardeman): Thank you very much. That concludes the time for the government. We have one minute and three seconds left, so we'll go to the New Democrats. MPP Fife.

Ms. Catherine Fife: Thank you so much, Chair, and thanks again to the minister and to the staff that are here.

I just want to circle back to the forestry sector because obviously there's a trickle-out effect for that sector and for every job that we lose. The sector has put forward some solutions, and I think that timing is of the essence on this.

We are also facing a housing crisis in Ontario. The government, to date, has not been amenable to the idea of a made-in-Ontario housing strategy where we actually build non-market, deeply affordable and attainable housing.

The forestry sector has lost 65% of their customers in the United States for wood that is used for housing.

Minister, would you pursue a Homes Ontario strategy to address the housing crisis, create a procurement and supply chain venue for the forestry sector and build some sustainability into the forestry industry so that we don't lose them during this time of crisis through the tariffs that have been brought on by the US?

Hon. Victor Fedeli: I am very happy to remind—or to repeat, I should say, my comment earlier that in Invest Ontario, we now—

The Chair (Hon. Ernie Hardeman): Thank you very much. I knew it was going to be a good comment, but time ran out.

That does conclude the time for the committee's consideration of the Ministry of Economic Development, Job Creation and Trade estimates.

Standing order 69 requires that the Chair put, without further amendment or debate, every question necessary to dispose of the estimates. Are the members ready to vote?

Shall vote 901, ministry administration program, carry? All those in favour? All those opposed? The vote carries.

Shall vote 902, economic development, job creation and trade program, carry? All those in favour? Opposed? The motion is carried.

Shall the 2025-26 estimates of the Ministry of Economic Development, Job Creation and Trade carry? All those in favour? Opposed? The motion is carried.

Shall the Chair report the 2025-26 estimates of the Ministry of Economic Development, Job Creation and Trade to the House? All those in favour? All those opposed? The motion is carried.

This concludes the consideration of the ministry's estimates. I'd like to thank Minister Fedeli and Associate Minister Tangri and everyone here today for their participation.

There being no further business, this committee stands adjourned until 3 p.m. on Wednesday, October 29, 2025, when we will consider the estimates of the Ministry of Labour, Immigration, Training and Skills Development.

The committee adjourned at 1704.

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