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Lundi
13 mai 2024

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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

Monday 13 May 2024

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

Lundi 13 mai 2024

The House met at 1015.

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

Prayers.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

VOLUNTEERS

Ms. Effie J. Triantafilopoulos: Speaker, the 2024 volunteer service awards took place last week to recognize thousands of volunteers across the province for their countless hours of dedicated service. This is Ontario's premier event, and I'm so pleased today to highlight the eight outstanding members from my community of Oakville North–Burlington.

Three individuals with five years of service are Pannaga Adiga with the Sringeri Vidya Bharati Foundation Canada, Thomas Aro with the 23 Division community policing liaison committee, Toronto Police Services, and Denise Noguchi with GlobalMedic, the David McAntony Gibson Foundation; for 25 years of service, Chi Kan Li with the 38th Mississauga Scout Group; for 35 years of service, Edward Anczurowski with the Knights of Columbus; and youth recipients Frank Liu, Jessica Wang and Michael Yu from the Oakville Chinese Network Society.

Speaker, I believe we can all agree that volunteers are the heart and soul of communities, driving positive change, fostering connections and making our province a better place for everyone.

Congratulations to these worthy recipients and thank you for all you do to support our community.

ANTI-RACISM ACTIVITIES

MPP Kristyn Wong-Tam: Today, I rise to address an issue affecting Jewish constituents and members of my chosen family. They shared their growing fears watching the rise of anti-Semitic hate. Their experiences are not just troubling, they are a call to action.

No Ontarian should live in fear, yet hate crimes have more than doubled since 2018, shaking the foundation of inclusivity and safety that every Ontarian deserves. The fear among Jewish Ontarians echoes the horrors and living memories of the Holocaust. From knowing what broken glass to graffiti of swastikas or echoes of the blood libel means, Jewish people have survived by recognizing anti-Semitism. Now this pain exists alongside a rise in anti-Arab and anti-Muslim hate that has all increased with the taking of hostages by Hamas and the bombing of Gaza.

Ontarians need compassionate leadership that heals wounds and fosters a province where everyone feels safe. Ontarians need more than words of solidarity; they need a funded and community-informed province-wide hate strategy to build deep social unity. This plan must include robust education to combat anti-Semitism and enhanced coordination between law enforcement to tackle actual hate crimes.

This Legislature must ask itself two questions: What can we do to effectively stop anti-Semitism and hate crimes in Ontario? And how can our divided communities start talking again and heal together?

Combatting anti-Semitism and all forms of hate requires everyone and every order of government to do their part. Let us rise to this challenge together.

HEALTH CARE FUNDING

Mr. Robert Bailey: It's an honour once again to rise in the Ontario Legislature to share more good news of an important investment by this government in Sarnia–Lambton.

1020

Mr. Speaker, just this past Friday, I was honoured to join Paula Reaume-Zimmer, the CEO of Bluewater Health Foundation; Mark Braet, the chair of the Bluewater Health Foundation; and Petrolia Mayor Brad Loosley to announce that the Bluewater Health Charlotte Eleanor Englehart Hospital in Petrolia has been given the green light by the Ministry of Health to move forward with a multi-million-dollar upgrade and expansion of this hospital, including the long-awaited expansion of the emergency and radiology department. Friday's announcement means that Bluewater Health will immediately begin the final detailed design work for the hospital expansion, with construction beginning as early as 2025.

As a hard-oiler and lifelong resident of the town of Petrolia, I can't overstate how important the redevelopment of the CEE Hospital project is to the residents of Petrolia and central Lambton. I am so proud that our government is making such a historic investment in CEE Hospital, ensuring its future for generations to come. I want to thank the government and the Ministry of Health for this important investment in Sarnia–Lambton.

H.O.M.E. PROGRAM

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: Speaker, I want to shine a light on a remarkable initiative in our community, the H.O.M.E. Program from London InterCommunity Health Centre. H.O.M.E., which stands for health outreach

mobile engagement, is a lifeline for individuals who are experiencing homelessness, are insecurely housed or are clients rostered at the centre. H.O.M.E. started with a wagon and a few dedicated staff. The idea continued to grow, and now they operate from a specialized bus equipped to handle the needs of their patients. In its first year alone, H.O.M.E. served 3,000 individuals just operating two days a week.

What makes H.O.M.E. truly special is a dedicated team behind it: nurses and social workers who go above and beyond, building meaningful relationships with those who they serve. This program meets a real need in our community. Accessing health care can be a nightmare for many, exacerbated by primary care physician shortages and long ER wait times.

London's housing crisis has been at the forefront of many conversations, from politicians to service providers, concerned citizens and those struggling to find stable housing. This issue affects everyone in our community. Often, the ability to receive health care means you have to be housed. Housing is linked to health care. That's why the H.O.M.E. Program is so important.

I want to thank the amazing team who work so hard to make the H.O.M.E. Program possible. Because of your work, you improve the health outcomes and health equity for the most marginalized and vulnerable people in our community.

OWEN SOUND SPORTS HALL OF FAME

Mr. Rick Byers: Colleagues, last Saturday, I had the pleasure of attending the banquet for the 2024 Owen Sound Sports Hall of Fame inductees. It was an amazing night honouring local athletes, builders and teams. Formed in 1981, the Owen Sound Sports Hall of Fame is dedicated to the people who have participated in local sports, either as participants or as builders.

This year's inductees were an amazing group of local sports heroes. Athletes included pioneering lacrosse and hockey star Richelle McMann, three-time Canadian lacrosse champion Ted Abbott, star softball pitcher and coach Jamie Simpson, National Lacrosse League player Adam Jones, 600-game NHL hockey player Adam Mair and Owen Sound Greys MVP James McLellan.

Builder inductees were soccer builder, coach and referee Colin Hodson; minor sport player, coach, referee, umpire, league administrator and fundraiser Norm Long; and minor hockey, baseball, lacrosse and bowling coach Jim Tennant.

Team inductees were the 1966 Owen Sound Crescent Club softball champions; the 1981 Owen Sound Kinsmen Junior A box lacrosse team; and the 2018 Shark Tank APA world champions.

Thank you and congratulations to all inductees for your great success and your great contribution to the Owen Sound community.

HEALTH CARE

Ms. Bhutla Karpoche: When Premier Ford announced his government's plans to privatize surgeries and

diagnostics, he promised that Ontarians would never have to pay with their credit card, only their OHIP card. We knew the promises were empty words. When you open the door to profit, care takes a backseat. The reality is that more Ontarians are paying out of their pocket for health care services that are covered under OHIP.

Kate, a small business owner in Toronto, had to pay close to \$8,000 for extra tests and eye surgery at a private clinic. She says, "At no time ever was I told that any of this was covered under OHIP. This was not a cosmetic procedure. This was a necessity. I could not function without it."

Maureen from London was told she would have to wait years unless she paid out of pocket for her surgery. She paid \$7,000. She says, "Being a senior on a fixed income, I am still trying to catch up with bills from this surgery."

Mike's wife was also told she would have to wait years for her surgery. Get this, when the clinic called to schedule the appointment, it turned out to be the same surgeon that did her first operation in the hospital four years earlier. He now had a private clinic. Mike says, "My wife got the surgery done at the for-profit clinic and it cost \$3,000 more than when it was done at the hospital. We have one question: Who is supposed to protect us from such scams?"

The race to the bottom of health care continues under this Ford government. Care should be based on need, not on ability to pay.

EDUCATION FUNDING

Ms. Jess Dixon: I'm standing today to talk about the rather exciting past few weeks I've had from the perspective of culmination of personal projects. I've said many times that I came here because of my focus on crime prevention, and I've really seen that recognized in the last few weeks.

Two weeks ago, we saw a \$150,000 investment in The Fourth R out of the faculty of education in Western, which puts a curriculum module into Ontario high schools that allows students—and middle schools—to focus on building healthy relationships, with a particular focus on gender-based violence. Then, just last Friday, the Minister of Education and myself were at the Tim Hortons Field in Hamilton to announce what I think is safe to say is a groundbreaking investment: \$875,000 into the Coaching Boys Into Men program, which will allow 23 separate violence-against-women agencies throughout the province to certify 400 coaches and teachers at over 200 high schools on, basically, how to give young men and boys the tools that they need to become willing allies in the fight to combat violence against women.

It was an incredibly exciting announcement. This has been a lot of personal advocacy on my part. I couldn't have done it without, at education, Justin and Kennan, but also, thank you so much to Sue Taylor, Dr. Peter Jaffe, Dr. Claire Crooks, Dr. David Wolfe and Ray Hughes. I'm looking forward to continuing working with all of you. Thank you so much again.

CIVICS EDUCATION

Mrs. Karen McCrimmon: Speaker, I had the pleasure to meet with civics classes at All Saints and Earl of March secondary schools in my riding. It's such a pleasure to meet such smart young people learning about the democracy that will affect the rest of their lives. They asked such good questions.

Students today are informed, active, and they know that what is happening in government is important. They know that asking the right questions is the first step to making change. Only with smart people asking smart questions do we get a government that is accountable, that is responsive to our needs and that invests in people for a better future for all.

There are people who intentionally make politics ugly because they don't want people paying attention. So please, like I told those students: Stay informed, stay active, keep asking those good question and, when the time comes, vote like your life depends upon it, because it does.

BATTLE OF THE ATLANTIC
DUTCH LIBERATION ANNIVERSARY

Mr. Ernie Hardeman: Mr. Speaker, each year on the first Sunday in May, Canadians come together to commemorate the Battle of the Atlantic. Lasting from September 1939 until April 1945, the Battle of the Atlantic was the longest continuous battle of the Second World War.

Canada played a critical role in this battle, which ultimately helped secure the Allied victory. Though Canada entered the war a small country with an even smaller navy, we quickly grew into a major fleet. Canadian ships escorted hundreds of convoys that set off from Nova Scotia and hunted U-boats in the Atlantic. Over 4,000 Canadian sailors, merchant mariners and airmen lost their lives in the battle along with over 100 civilians.

On May 5, I had the honour of attending the Battle of the Atlantic parade and commemoration ceremony, hosted by the Oxford County Naval Veterans Association. Unfortunately, it was looking like rain, so the parade didn't take place, but I was grateful to be there to commemorate those who lost their lives in this grueling battle.

1030

May 5 also happens to be Dutch Liberation Day. This day marks the liberation of the Netherlands by the Allied forces, made mostly of Canadian troops. Events like these encourage us to reflect on Canadian involvement in World War II and remember the courageous sacrifices of those who served to secure our freedom.

I'd like to express my gratitude to the Oxford County Naval Veterans Association for hosting this event in honour of our brave Canadian forces and veterans.

HOME HARDWARE

Mr. Mike Harris: It is my pleasure today to rise to congratulate Home Hardware as they mark 60 years of serving communities across Canada. In fact, the Premier

recently joined me to visit their headquarters in St. Jacob's—after we picked up apple fritters from the farmers' market, of course.

So how did that single store in St. Jacob's grow to become a national symbol? Well, here's how. They kept their commitment to help build their communities with helpful advice, quality products and great customer service.

“This milestone is a testament to over six decades of dedication and hard work by our dealers and team members across the country,” said Kevin Macnab, president and CEO of Home Hardware Stores Ltd.

Since opening in St. Jacob's, they now have more than 1,000 stores providing good jobs across the country. It's hard to picture small towns in Ontario without a Home Hardware. They have become a part of the fabric of our community and country. Home Hardware is consistently chosen as one of Canada's top employers and received the honour from Forbes again in 2024.

Congratulations on 60 years and thank you for the positive contributions to our community, Ontario and Canada.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): We have with us some very special guests in the Speaker's gallery today: His Excellency Rodrigo Malmierca Díaz, the ambassador of Cuba to Canada, and Mr. Jorge Yanier Castellanos Orta, consul general of Cuba in Toronto. Please join me in welcoming our guests to the Legislature today.

Miss Monique Taylor: I would like to first of all congratulate our Hamilton Mountain page on being the page captain today. Joining her to watch her performance are her parents. Stephen Hillen and Heather Lambert-Hillen are with us up in the gallery. Welcome to Queen's Park.

Mr. Mike Harris: I also have a very important guest in your Speaker's gallery this morning. My wife, Kim, is visiting us all the way from Kitchener today.

Ms. Catherine Fife: It's a pleasure for me to welcome a representative from the Ontario Association of Naturopathic Doctors, Dr. Joanna Thiessen, from George Street Naturopathic Medicine. Welcome to Queen's Park, Joanna.

Mr. Steve Clark: The Ontario Association of Naturopathic Doctors are here, and I want to introduce my friend Shawn Yakimovich from North Grenville.

Later on today, there will be a delegation here from the united counties of Leeds and Grenville: Warden Nancy Peckford, CAO Ray Callery and Alison Tutak.

But I also have three of my constituents in the public gallery above. I want to introduce Randy Hopkins, Doug Brooks and Alex Kelly. Welcome to Queen's Park.

Ms. Chandra Pasma: I'd like to join colleagues in welcoming the Ontario Association of Naturopathic Doctors, and in particular, Yousuf Siddiqui, Harsimranjeet Bhatia, Emma Pollon-MacLeod and Natalie Pond. I'm

looking forward to our meeting later today. Thank you for being here.

M^{me} Dawn Gallagher Murphy: I have the honour of welcoming 13 members of the Men's Probus Club of Newmarket from my riding, who have come to visit Queen's Park today: William McTavish, Paul Bath, Richard Biggs, David Brisley, Grant Campbell, Art Darnbrough, William Docherty, David Elms, Richard Furlong, Brian Keddy, Peter Vanderploeg, John Vanderwielen and Warren MacRobie. Welcome to your House.

Mr. Jeff Burch: I'd like to welcome Mayor Bill Steele from Port Colborne, Mayor Frank Campion from Welland, Mayor Terry Ugolini from my hometown of Thorold and all of the politicians that are here from Niagara for Niagara Week.

Hon. Doug Ford: Well, I just want to wish our great House leader a happy birthday. Happy birthday, Pauly.

Mrs. Jennifer (Jennie) Stevens: As mentioned before, it's Niagara Week at Queen's Park, so we have a lot of politicians here. Welcome.

I also have a lot of constituents from St. Catharines. I'd like to welcome Melinda Chartrand first, and also Ann-Marie Zammit and Sabrina Hill from St. Catharines. They're also representing ACTRA today.

And no stranger to this House, but a former St. Catharines MPP for 42 years, now Niagara regional chair, making his way in: Jim Bradley. Welcome.

Mrs. Karen McCrimmon: Mr. Speaker, it's a great pleasure to introduce Harsimranjeet Bhatia from the Ontario Association of Naturopathic Doctors. Harsimranjeet practises in my riding, and I look forward to meeting with them and the association later today. Welcome to your House.

Mr. Brian Saunderson: It's my great pleasure to welcome Aranka Jones, a constituent of Simcoe-Grey and a member of the Ontario Association of Naturopathic Doctors, to the House.

MPP Kristyn Wong-Tam: I'd like to welcome my intern, Winston Lee, who is here visiting with his mother, from Vancouver, Wini Yeung. Welcome to Queen's Park.

Hon. Stephen Lecce: I'm pleased to honour and introduce Melinda Chartrand, a trustee who is with us from the Centre Jules-Léger Consortium. Welcome to Queen's Park. Bienvenue and thank you for leadership for francophone students.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): With the indulgence of the House, I'd like to continue with introduction of visitors. Agreed? Okay.

Ms. Marit Stiles: Good morning, Speaker. It gives me great pleasure to welcome some fantastic members of ACTRA Toronto who are here with us today in the gallery. I'm going to only name a couple here, but I know that my colleagues are going to name some others. I do want to make mention of Amy Matysio and Kate Ziegler, ACTRA Toronto vice-presidents, and Alistair Hepburn, executive director. It is wonderful to see so many of my former colleagues here with us today. Welcome to your House.

Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon: A beautiful day—everyone here, it's always a pleasure to be with you.

I'd like to welcome the Ontario Association of Naturopathic Doctors, specifically dynamite Daniella Remy, optimistic Odette Bulaong and awesome Aranka Jones, my superb sister-in-law, who's here in the House today. Looking forward to meeting you.

Hon. Jill Dunlop: Good morning. I would like to introduce two of my constituents from Simcoe North who are here visiting at Queen's Park today and joining me for lunch: Dr. Douglas Donald and his wife, Anne Donald. Welcome to Queen's Park.

MPP Jill Andrew: There are over a hundred ACTRA Toronto members here today. I want to welcome them to Queen's Park. Some of them include Kate Ziegler, ACTRA Toronto vice-president and actor; Asante Tracey, ACTRA Toronto member and actor; Alistair Hepburn, executive director, ACTRA Toronto; and, of course, we see Theresa Tova here. We want to welcome you to your House. Thank you so much for your hard work in Ontario's creative industries.

Mr. Nolan Quinn: As a parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Health, I'd like to introduce the Ontario Association of Naturopathic Doctors, who have their lobby day today at Queen's Park and who—this evening, in the legislative dining room at 5 p.m.

1040

Also, a warm welcome to the CEO of OAND, Christine Charnock, and the board chair, Audrey Sasson, along with other executive members and staff. I'm looking forward to our meeting today.

Mr. Wayne Gates: It's Niagara Week here at Queen's Park this week. I want to welcome Lord Mayor Gary Zalepa from the town of Niagara-on-the-Lake. He is the only Lord Mayor in all of Canada.

Interjection.

Mr. Wayne Gates: Yes, that's quite the honour.

Tim Jennings, executive director of the Shaw Festival, and his team; April Jeffs from Brock University; Zach Dadson from Brock University—and I want to welcome all the wine and craft brewers who are here today.

Get out and enjoy Niagara wine and craft beer. It's the best in the province of Ontario.

Hon. Graydon Smith: I just want to welcome three of the most very important people in my life who I could not love more: my wife, Melissa; my mom, Barb Smith; and my sister Gwen Smales, in the Speaker's gallery. Welcome to Queen's Park.

Ms. Bhutla Karpoche: I, too, would like to welcome members of ACTRA in the galleries today.

It has been two years. It's time to end the lockout.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): We don't permit political statements during introduction of visitors; I'll remind the members.

The Minister of Public and Business Service Delivery.

Hon. Todd J. McCarthy: I would like to welcome to the House today Trevor Appleton, a great and dedicated local community citizen from my riding of Durham. Welcome to Queen's Park.

M^{me} France Gélina: I would like to welcome members of the Ontario Bioscience Innovation Organization.

They will be putting on a health technology adaptation lunch today in 228.

Also, welcome to the Ontario Association of Naturopathic Doctors, who will be in the dining room at 5 o'clock.

Also, we have members of the Nurse Practitioners' Association of Ontario here today.

Welcome to your House.

Hon. Prabmeet Singh Sarkaria: I want to introduce Mitchell Brum and Emily Carlucci, interns in my office who are visiting here today.

Mr. Sam Oosterhoff: To use a scientific term, we've got a whole whack of visitors from the Niagara region here this week—far too many to name, but I want to welcome them all to Queen's Park.

I encourage all members to come out this evening, from 5 to 7 p.m., for an amazing reception in honour of Niagara Week. You're going to have some of the best that Niagara has to offer.

I especially want to acknowledge Melinda Chartrand, who is here with Csc MonAvenir; also, April Jeffs, who is joining us; as well as the regional chair, Jim Bradley.

Welcome to Queen's Park, everyone.

MPP Jill Andrew: How in the heck could I forget John Cleland, ACTRA member, ACTRA national councillor, executive committee member, and my friend. Thank you so much for being here, John.

Hon. Nina Tangri: I'd like to welcome Dr. Campbell from the Ontario Bioscience Innovation Organization and her team for their health tech adoption lunch today in 228-230. So please join.

Ms. Marit Stiles: Speaker, as I'm sitting here, I'm realizing there are so many familiar faces in the room, I can't even keep up. But I would really be remiss if I didn't acknowledge the presence of the long-time national president of ACTRA, Ferne Downey, a dear friend of mine who's in the room today too.

Stand up, Ferne.

Mrs. Jennifer (Jennie) Stevens: I apologize; I'm going up for the second time, but I noticed Daniel Grubb from Brock University came in with April Jeffs as well as Zach Dadson.

I just want to welcome you, as well, today. Thank you for coming.

And Niagara Week—come on down to the reception, 5 to 7, down in the legislative committee room, and enjoy some Niagara craft beer and wines.

QUESTION PERIOD

HEALTH CARE

Ms. Marit Stiles: Last week, I was shocked to hear the Minister of Health say that the recruitment and retention of family doctors was “not a major concern.” That's her quote: “not a major concern.”

A quarter of patients in Sault Ste. Marie without a family doctor—not a major concern? Thirty thousand

patients in Kingston without access to primary care—not a major concern? These comments are not only insensitive, considering the 2.2 million people in this province without a family physician; they are dangerous.

I will ask the Premier, will he stand by the minister's dangerous and insensitive comments?

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The parliamentary assistant and member for Stormont–Dundas–South Glengarry.

Mr. Nolan Quinn: Since 2018, we've registered over 12,500 new physicians in Ontario, with almost 10% of those being family physicians. We've also registered 80,000 new nurses and 2,400 new doctors last year alone.

Speaker, last year was a record-breaking year for nurses. We registered over 17,500 new nurses last year. We've registered over 33,000 new nurses in the last two years, and we have another 30,000 nurses that are enrolled and studying at a university or college in Ontario.

But we are not stopping there. We want this year to be another record year. We're investing another \$740 million to address the immediate staffing needs, supporting the expansion of over 3,000 new nursing seats at Ontario colleges and universities.

Speaker, we'll continue to do what's needed to ensure that the people of Ontario have the best publicly funded health care when and where they need it.

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

Ms. Marit Stiles: Speaker, people are being diagnosed with cancer these days not in the comfort and safety of their family doctor's office but in an overcrowded emergency room. Emergency room physicians are diagnosing cancers more and more often because they are facing so many patients coming to emergency rooms who don't have access to primary care at all.

Imagine—imagine—being in an emergency room. You go there because you've had these problems; you've been putting it off because you don't have a family doctor. And then you sit there and you're told not only do you have cancer but that it's metastasized—in an emergency room.

I want to ask the Premier again to stand in this place and tell us whether he is going to continue to stand by his health minister's insensitive comments.

Interjections.

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

The member for Stormont–Dundas–South Glengarry.

Mr. Nolan Quinn: Speaker, Ontario is leading the way when it comes to cancer care in the nation, but we know there is more to be done. Ontario is also leading the country, with almost 90% of Ontarians having access to a primary doctor or primary health care provider. We do know there's more to be done. Since 2018, as we've stated many times in this House, we've registered 12,500 new physicians, with 10% of those being family doctors.

Just one year after our government launched our Your Health plan, we're making steady progress to connect more people to convenient care. We started the year with an investment of \$110 million to create 78 new and expanded interprofessional primary care teams. And in

this year's budget, we expanded that to \$546 million over the next three years to ensure that 600,000 Ontarians have access to primary care.

We'll continue to make the investments that are needed to ensure that all people of Ontario have access to the care that they need when they need it.

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

Ms. Marit Stiles: Speaker, follow along, I'd say to the government member opposite. Follow along: 2.3 million Ontarians without a family physician in this province. People are going to emergency rooms and finding out that they have cancer—not only that they have cancer but that it has metastasized. People are showing up in our emergency rooms—when they're open—sicker than ever before.

This government, if they are recruiting any physicians, we can't keep them. They are leaving faster than we can recruit them.

The Minister of Health said last week this is not a major concern for her government. I want to hear from the Premier himself, who is sitting right here today. I want to hear him speak to this. Do you stand by your comments? Do you stand by your minister's comments, or are you going to remove her from her role? Are you going to remove this Minister of Health from her role for those insensitive comments?

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The Premier.

Hon. Doug Ford: Mr. Speaker, the opposition leader wants to hear from me; I'll tell the opposition leader, as she sat in this House with the support of the Liberals, fired—let me repeat that: fired—1,700 people, and you support it: 1,700 nurses.

1050

Again, as our great member said, we have put in over \$300 million in investment for not only pediatric care but \$546 million for 600,000 Ontarians, to match them up with primary care. But that's not all we did. We're making sure we're building medical universities that, again, neither of your parties have ever built in 30 years. York University, they're going to graduate primary care doctors. The Brampton university, they're going to focus on primary care doctors. University of Toronto is going to focus on primary care doctors.

As our great member said, over 12,500 doctors have been hired and registered and working here in Ontario since we've been in office; 80,000 nurses—

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

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The member for Waterloo will come to order. The member for Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke will come to order.

The next question.

EDUCATION FUNDING

Ms. Marit Stiles: The Premier may want to talk to the family doctors who have a petition going right now to have that health minister fired.

Speaker, in spite of this government's claim of historic spending in education, the Ontario Public School Boards' Association has said that this year's funding is the lowest level of per-student funding in more than a decade. They warn that these funding shortfalls are going to be felt in classrooms.

Since this government came into office, it's not only family physicians and nurses and PSWs that we're losing, we are also losing and we have lost 5,000 educators.

My question to the Premier is, will he commit today to reversing these historic cuts to education?

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

Hon. Stephen Lecce: Mr. Speaker, we have hired 3,000 additional educators under our Premier's leadership and 9,000 additional education workers, as confirmed by the school boards in the province of Ontario. We've added a 22% increase in funding when compared to the former Liberals, billions of additional dollars in public expenditure.

But, Speaker, this goes back to the refrain of the Leader of the Opposition: In order to achieve—according to her, the benchmark of success is investing dollars, as if that is the only way by which we can improve outcomes for kids—one of which was delivering stability for four years of peace for children in Ontario. That delivers a better outcome for our kids.

Mr. Speaker, we reverted to merit-based hiring. Common sense should prevail, making sure the best educator is hired for when we teach our kids. We made a variety of curriculum reforms to instill math and literacy and core fundamental skills back into the curriculum. That's how we lift standards in Ontario.

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

Ms. Marit Stiles: Speaker, the minister should do the math. His budget doesn't take inflation into account.

Let me be perfectly clear: A budget that ignores inflation is a budget that ignores reality. This is a reality, Speaker, where the cost of a computer a year ago is not the same that it is today. The difference? Well, Mr. Speaker, that is called a shortfall—a \$1,500 shortfall for each and every student in this province, and our children and our parents are feeling it. In greater Essex, math and English help are on the chopping block. In Peel, specialized communications classes and literary coaches—gone.

So, my question again to the Premier is, how much more support are our kids supposed to give up?

Hon. Stephen Lecce: Mr. Speaker, we are increasing funding for the coming school year by \$745 million, another example of our government's long-standing commitment to invest more but also to expect more from our school boards—though we actually lift standards on reading, writing and math.

Mr. Speaker, we've added thousands of additional educators—thousands; 9,000, no less, additional education workers, even though the student population has largely been flat. Having said that, Speaker, funding per pupil is up to \$13,852. In our rural communities, it's over

\$15,000. In our northern communities, it's over \$19,000 per child. In our French school boards, it's over \$22,000 per child.

We are increasing investments, but we're also holding school boards to account to demand better outcomes on the fundamental skills. That's what parents expect in this province.

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

Ms. Marit Stiles: Speaker, it has never been this bad in the province of Ontario before. That is the fact. That is a reality.

When schools face cuts, it's the kids who are the most vulnerable who are going to suffer the most. That's the truth. Westdale in Hamilton lost their breakfast program. That's on this government.

These supports are not just add-ons; they play an absolutely essential role in our children's mental health, in their confidence. A kid who goes to school hungry is not going to be able to do as well. They're not going to be able to concentrate in class. We all know that as parents.

We're going to debate a motion later on today to get things right. Will the Premier, sitting right there, support our opposition day motion today to ensure that every child receives the high-quality education they deserve, regardless of their family's income?

Interjections.

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

Ms. Marit Stiles: Too busy scrolling on social media.

Interjection: Oh, come on.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Order. Order.

The Minister of Children, Community and Social Services.

Hon. Michael Parsa: Thanks to the Leader of the Opposition for the question. Mr. Speaker, with the rising costs of—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Order.

Hon. Michael Parsa: Mr. Speaker, with the rise of the cost of everything in our province, it's this Premier and this government that showed leadership. We increased the investment into the Student Nutrition Program by more than \$6 million across the province. That brings the total investment to more than \$38 million. That is an increase of more than 20%, for the leader of the official opposition.

The lead agency that provides the Student Nutrition Program in the city of Hamilton received an additional allocation of \$525,000 this year, bringing their total investment to more than \$3 million. We've also worked with other partners, and those partners are also stepping up.

Mr. Speaker, it was this Premier, it was this government—because the previous government, supported by the NDP, never supported students, never—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The member will please take his seat. The member for Hamilton Mountain

will come to order. The member for Waterloo will come to order.

Please stop the clock. I have to interrupt question period to say once again that it has long been the established practice of this House the members should not use props, signage or accessories that are intended to express a political message or are likely to cause disorder. This also extends to members' attire, where logos, symbols, slogans and other political messaging are not permitted unless the House grants unanimous consent. This Legislature is a forum for debate and the expectations in the chamber are that political statements should be made during debate rather than through the use of props or symbols.

I must ask the member for Hamilton Centre to come to order.

I must warn the member for Hamilton Centre.

I will now name the member. Sarah Jama, you are named.

The member is currently not eligible to be recognized in the House, pursuant to the order adopted on October 23, 2023. As a result of being named, for the remainder of the day today, the member is ineligible to vote on matters before the assembly, attend and participate in any committee proceedings, use the media studio, and table notices of motion, written questions and petitions.

Sarah Jama, you must leave the chamber for the day.

Ms. Jama left the chamber.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Start the clock. The next question.

LABOUR DISPUTE

MPP Jill Andrew: It has been over two years since 28,000 ACTRA members have been locked out of the national commercial agreement by the ICA. ICA walked out on negotiations. This illegal lockout has been propped up by this government's hiring of union-busting ad agencies to create ads that further stab ACTRA members in the back by using non-unionized replacement workers, pitting workers against one another.

Speaker, there are over 100 ACTRA members here today advocating. They're actually fighting for their livelihood. The question is to the Premier. Will the Premier and Ministers of Labour and Culture attend the We Rise Up Rally here at Queen's Park and hear how their illegal lockout is affecting ACTRA workers, help get ICA back to the table to negotiate, stop using union-busting ad agencies and support our Bill 90 to protect these workers, some of the most precarious workers in Ontario?

1100

Stand up and save the workers.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): I remind the members to make their comments through the Chair.

The Minister of Labour, Immigration, Training and Skills Development.

Hon. David Piccini: I want to thank the ACTRA members who are here today. I had a good conversation with a number of them prior to question period. Speaker, I think it's important to note—while I did mention to them,

and I will say to the members opposite—this dispute is currently before the Ontario Labour Relations Board, which is a quasi-judicial body, and I know that that member wouldn't ask me to interfere in that work.

Having said that—

Interjection.

Hon. David Piccini: If she'd let me finish, I'd get to my next point.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Order.

Hon. David Piccini: Thank you, Speaker—and that is, I recognize that Destination Ontario, Metrolinx and OLG do seek advertising services. I'm going to be calling, after question period, the heads of all three agencies, and I look forward to having a conversation with them, because I recognize that government does have a role here.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Order.

Supplementary question? The member for Sudbury.

MPP Jamie West: The question is also for the Premier.

Speaker, for more than two years, thousands of ACTRA Toronto performers have been locked out by the Institute of Canadian Agencies. For more than two years, the Conservative government has continued to use taxpayer dollars to buy government ads from the advertising agencies who have locked out these workers. And for more than two years, I have asked the Premier, several times, to stand with these workers and stop buying these ads. He keeps failing them.

It has been 25 months, more than two years. Enough is enough.

My question is, will the Premier finally side with the thousands of ACTRA commercial workers, stop buying government-funded ads from the advertising agencies who have locked out these workers—not just a phone call, but stop buying them, stop supporting them, get on the side of these workers?

Hon. David Piccini: Again, Speaker, I think it is very important to maintain the independence of the Ontario Labour Relations Board. I'm the arbiter of the system, not the adjudicator.

However, I recognize, as I've said in my first answer, that government and the subsequent agencies and the ads that they're hiring are having an impact, and that's why I'm going to be calling all three agencies following question period. We want a deal here between both bodies. I recognize the important work that Chair O'Byrne and the OLRB are doing, but I also recognize the perception here with these three agencies, and so we'll be speaking with them after question period.

TAXATION

Mr. Stephen Crawford: My question is for the Minister of Energy. During a period of rising costs and high interest rates, it's important for all governments to make life more affordable for the people of Ontario. But the Liberal carbon tax is making life more difficult for Ontarians.

I keep hearing from people in my riding of Oakville about how much their gas and grocery bills have increased on a regular basis since the implementation of this tax. They're concerned about how much more it will cost to feed their families and whether they can continue to take their kids to hockey, baseball or soccer practice. That's simply unacceptable.

The federal Liberals and their provincial counterparts need to listen to what we've been saying from day one and stop the carbon tax.

Speaker, can the minister please explain how the Liberal carbon tax is creating financial hardship for everyone here in the province of Ontario?

Hon. Todd Smith: Speaker, it's no surprise to anyone, especially the member from Oakville, that the federal Liberal government's carbon tax is making life more expensive for the people of Ontario and the people of Canada. That's why we're taking a different route. We're procuring clean energy.

Just last week, I was down at the Power of Water Canada conference in Niagara, announcing a new small hydro program, a new northern hydro program, for 10-megawatt facilities and larger. It's why I was in Cornwall with the great member from Stormont–Dundas–South Glengarry on Friday, announcing that we were refurbishing the Saunders dam, a huge facility connecting Lake Ontario and the Great Lakes system to the Atlantic Ocean and providing clean electricity for over a million homes in our province. That work has started to refurbish that facility. Last week was a busy week when it comes to procuring clean energy for our province.

The one thing that our Powering Ontario's Growth plan doesn't include is a carbon tax because we don't need it. All it does is punish the people of Ontario.

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

Mr. Stephen Crawford: Thank you very much, Minister, for the response. I really appreciate it.

The carbon tax is burdening Ontario families that are already struggling to make ends meet. But the Liberals in this Legislature, much like their federal counterparts, want to see this tax hike even higher. Ontario families and businesses need relief, and they need it now.

Unlike the carbon tax queen, Bonnie Crombie, and her minivan caucus, our government is focused on making life more affordable for the people of Ontario. It's time the federal government do their part to get rid of the carbon tax once and for all.

Speaker, can the minister explain what our government is doing to protect the people of this province from the costly carbon tax?

Hon. Todd Smith: We're not imposing a carbon tax. The NDP and the queen of the carbon tax, Bonnie Crombie, the leader of the Liberal Party, and Mr. Schreiner here, the leader of the Green Party, they're all in support of a carbon tax.

There's only one party in this Legislature that's opposed to a carbon tax, and that's Premier Ford and our team. Instead, we're doing the kinds of things that I talked

about earlier: procuring new clean, non-emitting generation. That includes refurbishing our nuclear facilities that we have across the province, including at Pickering and at Darlington and at Bruce, and building small modular reactors at Darlington.

Last week, we had the largest procurement in Canada's history for clean energy storage. Another 1,800 megawatts are being added right across our province to ensure that our system remains clean and reliable. Our plan, Powering Ontario's Growth, which is working—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Order. The member will take his seat.

I'll remind the members to refer to each other by our riding name or ministerial title, as applicable.

The next question.

HEALTH CARE

M^{me} France Gélinas: Members of the nurse practitioner association came to Queen's Park today. They came to share solutions with the Minister of Health for the 2.3 million Ontarians without access to primary care. They are ready, willing and able to care for thousands of orphan patients. Unfortunately, although all 24 nurse practitioner-led clinics are willing to help, they represent only four of the 78 teams announced by the minister.

Will the minister listen to the solutions brought forward by NPAO, open positions for nurse practitioners and give Ontarians access to primary care?

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The parliamentary assistant, the member for Stormont–Dundas–South Glengarry.

Mr. Nolan Quinn: Thank you to the member opposite for the question. We have invested significantly into primary care. We invested \$110 million, and we've topped that investment with another \$546 million over the next three years to expand to another 600,000 Ontarians to have primary care.

We've also expanded the Learn and Stay grant, which pays for tuition, pays for the books and pays for supplies for nurses and other health care workers who work in underserved areas after graduation.

We're also funding the largest expansion of medical school spots in over a decade, adding 1,212 undergraduate and 1,637 postgraduate seats across Ontario. Speaker, 60% of these spots will be dedicated to family medicine.

We're building a new medical school at York University, specialized in training family physicians.

We have a plan to rebuild Ontario's health care, and we won't stop until everyone receives the care that they need when and where, Speaker.

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

M^{me} France Gélinas: By the time some of those suggestions are put forward, it will be a decade. By 2026, four million Ontarians won't have access to primary care. But yet, we have nurse practitioners right here, right now in Ontario. Their scope of practice has increased substantially. They can order diagnostic imaging. They can

provide treatment. They have been very successful with that extra work, with these extra responsibilities. Yet, nurse practitioners in primary care, in long-term care, in correctional services have not seen a salary increase since this government has been in power.

When will the minister start showing respect for hard-working nurse practitioners and, at a minimum, close the salary gap between nurse practitioners in hospitals and other care settings?

Mr. Nolan Quinn: With our recent expansion, we already have a nurse practitioner working in the Minto area under MPP Rae's jurisdiction. We will continue to invest in Ontarians to ensure that they have the care they need. With the \$543 million advanced in this year's budget, we are going to expand it to 600,000 more people.

1110

Speaker, under the Liberals, propped up by the NDP, they cut the amount of residency school spots. We are 1,000 doctors short, combined between the NDP and the Liberals, when they cut their residency school spots by 10% and 50 spots under the Liberals. We will continue to ensure that the people of Ontario have the health care they need, when and where they need it.

Right now, currently, almost 90% of Ontarians have a family care doctor or primary care health team. But we know there's more that needs to be done, and we will continue doing what needs to be done to ensure that all people of Ontario have the health care they need, whether it's in the north, east, west or south.

TAXATION

Mr. Andrew Dowie: My question is for the Minister of Economic Development, Job Creation and Trade. The Trudeau Liberals continue to hike taxes and raise costs, despite businesses and workers pleading to them to stop. You would think that when people are struggling to deal with higher costs, governments would act to lower costs and provide relief, as our government has done.

Instead, the Liberal solution to higher costs is to make things even more expensive with their carbon tax. They're running the same playbook as Ontario's previous Liberal government, but it seems they haven't asked them how it worked out for our province, and particularly for my community of Windsor–Tecumseh. Can the minister explain to the Liberals why keeping costs low is crucial for economic growth?

Hon. Victor Fedeli: If the Liberals need any proof that lowering taxes and reducing costs create the conditions for economic growth, they can look right here at Ontario. In April, Ontario led the nation in job creation, adding 25,000 new good-paying jobs, including 5,800 new jobs in our manufacturing sector. Manufacturing employment is now at its highest level in 15 years. That's what happens when you lower taxes and reduce 500 pieces of red tape.

Can you just imagine if the Liberals came along with us and reduced taxes instead of adding taxes like they're doing? We are showing the Liberals the way, and we need them to come around to our side and scrap the tax today.

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

Mr. Andrew Dowie: Thank you, Minister, for the response. Ontario's economy is in a much different place today than it was under the Liberals; 700,000 more men and women are working today than before we took office. But businesses and workers in my riding of Windsor–Tecumseh have not forgotten how devastating the Liberals' high-tax policies were for our economy.

We need the federal government to recognize that the Liberal experiment of high-tax policies has repeatedly been tested and has failed each and every time. At 17 cents a litre, the carbon tax is already putting a strain on household budgets, while forcing businesses to make difficult choices. Can the minister explain why the Liberals should scrap their carbon tax and focus on measures that reduce costs, not raise them?

Hon. Victor Fedeli: Speaker, when we took office, we knew we had to lower costs so we could bring back the businesses who left under the Liberals. Companies around the world now know Ontario is open for business.

The new listing of all active cranes in North America just came out, and Toronto is leading North America. We have 221 active cranes. To put it into perspective, that is more cranes than all 12 major US cities combined.

That's the power of what's happening here in Ontario, and that's what happens when you lower taxes. We need the federal Liberals to follow our lead and scrap the carbon tax.

CONSUMER PROTECTION

Mr. Tom Rakocevic: My question is for the Premier. Speaker, the public still remembers the bread price-fixing scandal where grocers reached a secret agreement to inflate the cost of bread for more than 14 years. They said they were sorry, but since then big corporations' profits continue to reach all-time highs while Ontarians' monthly budgets get tighter, and shrinkflation means we're literally getting less for our money.

Speaker, something just doesn't smell right in Ontario's grocery stores. Can the Premier tell Ontarians what he's doing to hold big corporations accountable and put a stop to price gouging?

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

Hon. Peter Bethlenfalvy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, through you to the member opposite, for that question. I know the member opposite follows our budgets very closely. That's why, back in 2022, this government acted early to combat the affordability crisis by cutting the gas tax. With that measure, along with others—10 cents a litre, Mr. Speaker.

And guess what? Cutting the gas tax doesn't just help all those people who can't take subways or public transit, who have to take their kids to school or drive to work or get to the hockey rink; it helps the people who grow the food. It helps the people who grow: the great farmers in this great province.

Mr. Speaker, you also have to distribute the food to get to the distribution centres. That costs money, gas money, and we've reduced that. In fact, what you should do is go call one—I'll stop there—but one Jagmeet Singh up in Ottawa and get them to lobby the federal government to cut the carbon tax.

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

Mr. Tom Rakocevic: Speaker, this government has been way too close for comfort to the big corporations, but Ontarians are fed up with this government taking the side of mega-corporations that only blame inflation and the carbon tax as the sole reasons for the skyrocketing cost of groceries. The public sees through it.

It's time to stop cozying up to powerful billionaires and start taking a much closer look at their business practices. Speaker, what is the Premier doing to investigate price gouging and make sure Ontarians aren't getting ripped off on groceries?

Hon. Peter Bethlenfalvy: Mr. Speaker, not only has this government got the backs of all of the people working in this province to make life a little bit more affordable, but guess what? This government is not about increasing taxes. This government is about putting more money in the pockets of the hard-working people of Ontario.

This is a government that believes in cutting fees. Do you remember those licence plate stickers? Well, they're done. They're gone. Right, Premier? They're done, they're gone, putting 120 bucks for those who have to drive.

But it doesn't stop there. One Fare from this minister, one integrated fare for the daily rider—that's saving up to \$1,600 a year. That's real money so they can buy groceries, pay the rent, pay the mortgage and, yes, pay for gas, which is now over 10 cents a litre cheaper because this government took action and took action early.

We're going to be voting on the budget very soon. I would like to implore this member opposite and the whole team to support our—

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Member for Hamilton Mountain, come to order. Order.

The next question.

OFFICE OF THE PREMIER

Mr. John Fraser: My question is for the Premier. We all know that we have the most expensive Premier's office in the history of this province, by far. The Premier has doubled the budget and tripled the number of staff that have six-figure salaries. That's right, Speaker, tripled. Their average salary is more than double the median family income. That's right, Speaker, double the median family income.

At a time when Ontario families are just struggling to keep their heads above the water, this Premier and his office, they're swimming in gravy. Speaker, through you, when will this Premier stop the gravy train that is his office?

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Government House leader.

Hon. Paul Calandra: Speaker, let me tell you, the most expensive Premier's office in the history of this province was the one that preceded this government, the Kathleen Wynne Premier's office. You know why? Because it cost us 300,000 jobs. It cost us massive amounts of economic development. It cost us job creation. It cost us trade. It hurt our students.

Remember when our students were discovering math instead of learning math? That was under the previous Liberal government.

You know all of those doctors that aren't practising right now? That was because they closed the medical schools. Instead of thinking about it 15 years ago, they closed the medical schools. They didn't hire nurses; they laid them off.

We built long-term-care homes. We're building more hospitals. We're building roads, transportation—700,000 people have the dignity of a job who didn't under the previous Liberal government.

1120

That member can talk about gravy train all he wants, but the only thing we're doing is building an economy out of the ashes of what was left behind by the previous Liberal government.

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

Mr. John Fraser: Despite that answer, they're still swimming in gravy.

This gravy train doesn't actually end in the Premier's office; it runs right through it. When staff leave, it's like a return trip, this time as a lobbyist. The Premier's former chief of staff, Amin Massoudi, he was famous for that Vegas trip. We all remember. We don't have the story quite straight yet. Here's the thing: As if that greenbelt gravy wasn't enough for Mr. Massoudi, we learned last week that he tried to engage the town of Brighton in a lucrative contract to lobby the Premier's office. It was only after he got caught with his hand in the cookie jar that he declined the contract.

If the Premier won't stop the gravy train that is his office, could he at least stop it from running right through it?

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The member for Nepean, come to order. The member for Hamilton Mountain, come to order. The member for Ottawa South, come to order.

The Premier can reply.

Hon. Doug Ford: Mr. Speaker, I just find it very ironic coming from that member when he bankrupted the province. He lost 300,000 jobs. The largest expense ever—ever—was under Kathleen Wynne.

Just a little FYI, through the Speaker: I'm the only Premier in the history of this province who has never expensed a penny—not one penny. Not a chocolate bar, not a Coca-Cola, nothing. Zero. The only Premier in the history of this province who has never expensed anything.

TAXATION

Ms. Natalia Kusendova-Bashta: My question is for the energetic Minister of Energy. The federal carbon tax is raising the cost of everything: heating, eating, driving and even recreation. Yes, Justin Trudeau and Carbon Crombie want to tax your family for simply having some fun. Unsurprisingly, this is also forcing businesses to pay more taxes. It is clear that the carbon tax is punishing the very people it claims to protect: our families, our businesses and our future generations. That's simply not acceptable.

Can the minister please tell the House how our government is providing Ontarians with clean, affordable energy as we fight against this disastrous carbon tax?

Hon. Todd Smith: Thanks very much to the great member from Mississauga Centre for the question today. She's absolutely right; the federal carbon tax is driving up the price of everything in our province, and the Bank of Canada has confirmed it's even having an impact on inflation in our province.

The queen of the carbon tax, Bonnie Crombie, the former mayor of Mississauga, supports the federal carbon tax, the NDP want to have the largest carbon tax in the land and the Greens are in full support of a carbon tax as well. We're not. Premier Ford and our team are making life less expensive by cutting gas taxes, bringing in One Fare for our transit riders in Mississauga and other communities across the GTHA, cutting tolls and cutting taxes. We're about making life more affordable and making this a friendly business environment.

The carbon tax: The member talked about the impact that it's having on businesses. There is \$1.3 billion owed to small businesses as a result of the carbon tax in our province. That money has yet to flow to them.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Supplementary?

Ms. Natalia Kusendova-Bashta: Thank you to the minister for his response. It is shameful that the opposition NDP and the minivan Liberals continue to support this harmful tax as they see the federal Liberals reach deeper into people's pockets. They don't have a plan to improve affordability and the cost of living in Ontario. All they care about is pushing their agenda and raising our taxes, just like Carbon Crombie did every year when she was a mayor. No wonder that Mississauga's population actually shrunk under Carbon Crombie's leadership.

Speaker, Ontario families are feeling the squeeze. They want the federal government to scrap the carbon tax now.

Can the minister please explain what our government is doing to protect Ontarians from the costly carbon tax?

Hon. Todd Smith: Thanks to the great member, again, from Mississauga for that follow-up question. There's a reason that we call her the queen of the carbon tax—not that member, but the leader of the Liberal Party, Bonnie Crombie, who has raised taxes in Mississauga, and who is also in full support of a tax that is making life unaffordable for the people of Ontario. The NDP support that tax as well. The Greens support that tax as well. We don't.

We already have one of the cleanest grids in the entire world, but we can continue to clean that grid, grow that

grid, so we can grow businesses in our province by investing in nuclear, which we're doing at Bruce and at Darlington and at Pickering, but also refurbishing our hydroelectric fleets that we have across the province, energy-efficiency programs—a billion dollars in that program—procuring new energy storage. The largest procurement of energy storage happened here in Ontario last week—another 1,800 megawatts there.

We can get the power that we need, and we don't need a costly carbon—

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

CAREGIVERS

Mr. Wayne Gates: My question is to the Premier. Speaker, on Thursday, I introduced my motion to create a direct financial benefit to unpaid caregivers in the province of Ontario. It has support from several advocacy groups, from the Canadian Cancer Society to the Alzheimer Society to MS Canada.

I've heard directly from my constituents, including John, a caregiver for his wife, who lives with dementia. John told me he is going through hell, and he said caregivers deserve the recognition from this government.

Will the Premier and his party support my motion to help John and the other 3.3 million caregivers across the province of Ontario?

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Parliamentary assistant and member for Stormont–Dundas–South Glengarry.

Mr. Nolan Quinn: Our government is making the investments that Ontarians need to ensure that there are options for home care in Ontario. After years of neglect by previous governments—the Liberal government propped up by the NDP, which that member was a member of the party—we are investing over \$1 billion in home care, and in this year's budget, we've added another \$2 billion to our home care over the next three years. Our landmark investment in home care will ensure that those who choose to stay in their home will be able to stay longer with the care they need.

Speaker, as we announced this year in our budget, we are also expanding our primary care. We are investing \$543 million over the next three years to ensure that over 600,000 Ontarians get the care they need when they need it.

We'll continue to invest in our hospitals by committing close to \$1 billion to ensure that they have the tools they need to supply convenient care close to home.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Supplementary.

Mr. Wayne Gates: I'll just say that everybody, including everybody on that side, is affected by caregivers in the province of Ontario. Quite frankly, this isn't about Wayne Gates; it's about caregivers.

Back to the Premier: Our office has received support from people right across the province of Ontario on our motion, including Karen from Grimsby, whose sister is the primary caregiver for her husband, who lives with ALS.

Because of her caregiving responsibilities, she has lost their job, and now they are burning through their savings and struggling to survive.

I also heard from Nicole from Scarborough Centre, who can't work because of her caregiving responsibilities, but she is not eligible for financial assistance.

Speaker, again, will the Premier support my motion to help the 3.3 million caregivers with stories like this right across the province of Ontario?

Interjections.

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

The member for Stormont–Dundas–South Glengarry.

Mr. Nolan Quinn: Interestingly enough, yesterday was Mother's Day, so happy belated Mother's Day to everyone. I spoke to my mother, Karen, yesterday about her being a caregiver to both her parents and my father's parents. Those were some of her best years—that she took care of her parents—and she looks back at those years fondly.

Strong home and community care is part of the government's plan for connected and convenient care. That is why we passed the Convenient Care at Home Act, to streamline the home care system. In partnership with hospitals, primary care and Ontario health teams, Ontario is expanding and improving access to home and community care. We're investing \$2 billion over the next three years in home care. That is on top of \$1 billion over three years in the 2023 budget. We are taking bold and innovative action to ensure Ontarians can connect to the care they need, where they need it and when they need it.

1130

SKILLED TRADES

Ms. Laura Smith: My question is for the Minister of Labour, Immigration, Training and Skills Development. Ontario is seeing a historic labour shortage, with about 300,000 jobs going unfilled. Many of these vacancies are in the skilled trades. Speaker, the labour shortage is impacting the financial well-being of families across Ontario. It increases the cost of items they purchase every day. It disrupts businesses and their supply chains and threatens our economy's stability.

As our province continues to grow, we need all hands on deck to build Ontario, to ensure that our province stays the best place to live, work, play and raise a family. Our government must continue to show leadership and encourage more people to enter the skilled trades.

Speaker, can the minister please share what our government is doing to address the labour shortages in the skilled trades?

Hon. David Piccini: Thank you to the great member for Thornhill for that really important question. Our economic competitiveness does depend on our ability to address the over 100,000 jobs going unfilled in construction alone.

We also know that we're facing a silver tsunami. What does that mean? One in three journeypersons are over the

age of 55, and we've got to do more to attract new workers into the skilled trades.

It's not only a labour shortage issue, but it also affects our productivity as a province—something we have to work to address, because when we improve our productivity, we improve our competitiveness as a province.

So what are we doing? We've launched a \$1.5-billion skilled trades strategy. Through our skills development training stream alone, we've trained over 500,000 workers into a better job with a bigger paycheque. We've taken steps to get properly fitted PPE for women in the trades, leading to one of the highest registration years in Ontario's history for women into the skilled trades; and tackling barriers for marginalized and racialized Ontarians. We've also launched foreign credential recognition, streamlined pathways, and so much more I can't even fit it into the answer.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Supplementary.

Ms. Laura Smith: Thank you to the minister for his response and his proactive work for the people of Ontario.

The demand for skilled workers in the construction and manufacturing sector is set to grow significantly over the next decade. Many local employers have job vacancies and work opportunities that must be filled. It's never been more important that our government take action to ensure Ontario has the tradespeople needed to build our province.

While our government is making progress that helps prepare young people for in-demand careers, there's still more to be done. Speaker, through you, can the Minister of Education please tell the House how our government is making it easier for youth to get on a fast track to well-paying jobs in the skilled trades?

Hon. Stephen Lecce: Thank you to the member from Thornhill for this important question. We are excited because this coming September, all students will now be required to take at least one technological education course, the first jurisdiction in the country to do so.

To prepare for that, we've expanded co-op placements in education. Compared to the Liberals in 2018, there's been a 189% increase of students enrolled in co-op education. We are making the difference of trying to infuse working with learning, and that is the future of work.

In partnership with the Minister of Labour, we have announced the Focused Apprenticeship Skills Training program—FAST—which allows students to more than double their amount of co-op placements in grade 11 and 12, getting them an accelerated path in all 144 trades. This is going to meaningfully accelerate and supercharge the next generation of skilled workers in our province, and we're proud to work together to get the job done.

ONTARIO PLACE

MPP Kristyn Wong-Tam: My question is to the Premier. Amir Remtulla, who was the chief of staff to the late Mayor Ford, is also a registered lobbyist for the Therme Group. Ontarians and accountability watchdogs widely suspect that this government's Ontario Place plot is just another insider deal. Amir Remtulla has been an

insider for so long that he appears on the registry of the Premier's family furniture. And don't forget that he also lobbied this government for the De Gasperis greenbelt grab.

So on behalf of everyone wondering—yes or no, simple answer—did lobbying by Amir Remtulla help convince the Premier to subsidize the destruction of Ontario Place with hundreds of millions of dollars of taxpayers' money?

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): To reply, the parliamentary assistant and member for Brampton West.

Mr. Amarjot Sandhu: Thank you to the member opposite for the question. Mr. Speaker, we wouldn't be talking about Ontario Place had the Liberals and NDP not left this historic place in a state of neglect and disrepair.

There is no better time to bring this iconic destination back to life, making it a remarkable, world-class destination for people of all ages to enjoy. Our government believes in getting things done and built, not neglected like the opposition and the Liberals. That is why we remain committed to the people of this province that we will be doing a comprehensive redevelopment of Ontario Place and we will bring it back to life.

Some good news to share is that recently Infrastructure Ontario has issued a request for qualifications to begin the procurement process to identify a team that will design, build, finance and maintain the new state-of-the-art facility for the Ontario Science Centre.

We are getting things done.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Supplementary.

MPP Kristyn Wong-Tam: Speaker, this government's transparency on this issue is as thick as fog.

But as a former Toronto city councillor, I want to ask the Premier a question which I know he knows the answer to. When I look at Therme's Ontario Place plan, I cannot get over that the business model is flawed—something we've seen before. It reminds me of another bad plan about reckless development on the waterfront.

When Amir Remtulla worked for then-Mayor Ford, there was a nonsensical plan to build a downtown casino at Ontario Place. Building a downtown mega casino was championed by the mayor and his brother—now the Premier.

Once Ontario Place is rezoned for commercial and entertainment uses, there is little that anyone can do to stop them from flipping the land lease for another use, perhaps a casino operator.

What does this government really hope to see happen at Ontario Place when Therme's spa deal falls apart?

Mr. Amarjot Sandhu: Mr. Speaker, we have been transparent and open to the public when it comes to the future of Ontario Place. The fact is that we have hosted extensive public consultations. I'm pleased to share with the House that over 9,200 people participated in the consultation to share their input and ideas on the future of Ontario Place.

Mr. Speaker, we believe that the government has done its due diligence and now is the time to bring this iconic destination back to life, unlike the Liberals and NDP, who neglected this place.

Ontario Place has a special spot in the hearts and minds of the people of this province, and people only trusted this government because this government is building infrastructure—not only building hospitals, schools and Highway 413; we are bringing remarkable destinations and historic places like Ontario Place and the science centre back to life.

TAXATION

M^{me} Dawn Gallagher Murphy: My question is for the Associate Minister of Small Business. Small businesses are the backbone of our economy, employing millions of workers across various sectors. I am proud to be a part of a government that has the backs of business owners and stands to support them every step of the way.

But, Speaker, many of our small businesses, including in my riding of Newmarket–Aurora, are facing significant uncertainty and cost pressures due to the impact of the Liberal carbon tax. The recent federal budget only fanned the flames by adding even more taxes to Ontario's entrepreneurs, and that's not right.

Speaker, through you, can the associate minister please tell the House what small business owners across Ontario have to say about the costly Liberal carbon tax?

Hon. Nina Tangri: Thank you to the great member from Newmarket–Aurora for the question. Speaker, I've taken part in round tables with entrepreneurs and small business owners across this province, and I can say with certainty that the concerns they've expressed about the federal carbon tax are deeply troubling. It's disappointing to see that the recent federal budget did not take meaningful action to address all of these concerns. Instead, the Liberals have added additional taxes, which only compounded the challenges these small businesses are facing. I've heard time and time again that small business owners feel abandoned by the federal government and the Ontario Liberals and NDP, who have refused to stand up for them to their friends in Ottawa.

1140

Speaker, I know Bonnie Crombie and the Liberals have never seen a tax hike they didn't like, but we're not standing down. It's time for Ottawa to scrap the tax.

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

M^{me} Dawn Gallagher Murphy: Thank you to the associate minister for her response. I know that people in my riding appreciate our government's continued advocacy for Ontario's small business owners. Now more than ever, entrepreneurs and innovators are looking to governments to help them, not hinder them, as they continue driving innovation, job creation and economic growth. But it seems like the federal Liberals are copying the high-tax environment which saw their provincial counterparts wiped out from party status in 2018.

Speaker, through you, can the associate minister explain why the federal carbon tax is hurting entrepreneurs' and innovators' ability to start, grow and invest in their businesses?

Hon. Nina Tangri: Thank you again to the member for her question. The recent federal budget was terrible for entrepreneurs, with measures like increased taxes drawing harsh criticism from groups like the Council of Canadian Innovators.

Our job creators tell me these tax hikes will “stifle growth” and “demotivate Canadians from getting into business in the first place.” They're telling me that they're grateful that our government is pushing back against these job-killing measures and supporting our province's job creators. But with gas prices, interest rates, fuel costs and energy rates going up because of the carbon tax, they're having to make tough decisions when looking to start a business.

So, Speaker, you can thank the Liberals the next time a young, bright mind has a groundbreaking idea, a solid business plan and support from our province, but then decides it's too expensive to get their business off the ground. Still, this Premier and our government will continue to stand—

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

The next question.

CONSUMER PROTECTION

Ms. Chandra Pasma: It's been six years now since my constituents paid deposits to Greatwise Developments for new homes, and construction has still not started. A year ago, I raised this issue in the House and the government responded that they were putting bad developers on notice, making them think twice before taking advantage of homebuyers. And yet, while homes are going up all over Ottawa right now, this developer hasn't even prepared the land to start construction.

Why is the Premier allowing a bad developer to hold homebuyers hostage with no consequences at all?

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

Hon. Todd J. McCarthy: The question raises the important role of both Tarion, which provides deposit protection for new homebuyers of freehold homes, and, of course, the other administrative agency, which our government created in its first term, after inheriting a broken administrative authority system for new homebuyers from the Liberal government, supported by the NDP.

With the Home Construction Regulatory Authority, we can regulate home builders. We can weed out the bad actors. We can protect consumers. The combination of the two administrative authorities demonstrates that the system definitely works. It's about consumer protection specifically for those freehold homebuyers, making sure their deposits are protected and the bad actors are put out of business.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Supplementary.

Ms. Chandra Pasma: The Home Construction Regulatory Authority has done nothing 34 months after my constituents in my riding first filed a complaint. The Premier has refused a meeting request from my constitu-

ents. If this is what consequences look like for behaving badly, then no wonder developers are brazenly refusing to build, years after collecting deposits.

When will we finally see real action, not just words, from this government to hold bad developers accountable, so families like my constituents finally get a home in Ontario?

Hon. Todd J. McCarthy: Our government, under the leadership of Premier Ford, continues to lead this province toward the goal of building 1.5 million homes by 2031, and yet we had to act quickly. We inherited from the Liberals a system condemned by the Auditor General. It was a system that favoured the interests of developers over homeowners.

It was this government that acted, that stopped the sponsored industry dinners. It was this government that created HCRA, the Home Construction Regulatory Authority, and it was this government that limited Tarion's board to incorporate no more than a third of developers. We're getting it done for the people and consumers of Ontario, Mr. Speaker.

TAXATION

Mr. Kevin Holland: My question is for the Minister of Indigenous Affairs and Northern Development. The carbon tax is exacerbating financial strain for all Ontarians. Communities across northern Ontario continue to face heightened economic challenges, notably at the gas pumps as a result of this punitive tax. The cost of transporting goods is already much higher in northern Ontario and these costs are being passed on to the consumer.

But, Speaker, the federal Liberals are not listening. In fact, they just increased the carbon tax last month by 23%, with plans to hike the tax an additional six times by 2030. That's simply unacceptable.

Speaker, could the minister provide further details about how the carbon tax adversely impacts residents in northern Ontario?

Hon. Greg Rickford: The carbon tax royal love story keeps getting more and more complicated, and frankly, the king of the carbon tax Prime Minister Trudeau needs to rein it in. Now, we know he's got the support of the queen of the carbon tax over there and Jagmeet Singh continues to vacillate, but there's a new player, Mr. Speaker: Prince Carney, otherwise known as Mark Carney, has decided that this tax has run its course. Now, I suspect that that lines up perfectly with how Canadians feel about the tax and his prospect of replacing the Prime Minister.

Mr. Speaker, simply put, we have a more irenic solution, and that is to scrap the tax.

NOTICE OF DISSATISFACTION

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Pursuant to standing order 36(a), the member for Ottawa South has given notice of their dissatisfaction with the answer to their question given by the government House leader regarding the

Premier's office spending. This matter will be debated tomorrow following private members' public business.

DEFERRED VOTES

CAREGIVERS

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): We have a deferred vote on private member's notice of motion number 94.

Call in the members. This is a five-minute bell.

The division bells rang from 1147 to 1152.

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

Mr. Gates has moved private member's notice of motion number 94.

All those in favour, please rise and remain standing until recognized by the Clerk.

Ayes

Andrew, Jill	Harden, Joel	Shamji, Adil
Armstrong, Teresa J.	Hazell, Andrea	Shaw, Sandy
Bell, Jessica	Hsu, Ted	Stevens, Jennifer (Jennie)
Bourgouin, Guy	Karpoche, Bhutila	Stiles, Marit
Bowman, Stephanie	Kernaghan, Terence	Tabuns, Peter
Burch, Jeff	Mamakwa, Sol	Taylor, Monique
Clancy, Aislinn	McCrimmon, Karen	Vanthof, John
Fife, Catherine	McMahon, Mary-Margaret	Vaugeois, Lise
Fraser, John	Pasma, Chandra	West, Jamie
French, Jennifer K.	Rakocevic, Tom	Wong-Tam, Kristyn
Gates, Wayne	Sattler, Peggy	
Gélinas, France	Schreiner, Mike	

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): All those opposed to the motion will please rise and remain standing until counted by the Clerk.

Nays

Anand, Deepak	Hardeman, Ernie	Quinn, Nolan
Babikian, Aris	Harris, Mike	Rae, Matthew
Bailey, Robert	Hogarth, Christine	Rickford, Greg
Barnes, Patrice	Holland, Kevin	Riddell, Brian
Bethlenfalvy, Peter	Jones, Trevor	Sabawy, Sheref
Byers, Rick	Jordan, John	Sandhu, Amarjot
Calandra, Paul	Kanapathi, Logan	Sarkaria, Prabmeet Singh
Cho, Raymond Sung Joon	Ke, Vincent	Saunderson, Brian
Cho, Stan	Kerzner, Michael S.	Scott, Laurie
Clark, Steve	Khanjin, Andrea	Skelly, Donna
Coe, Lorne	Kusendova-Bashta, Natalia	Smith, Dave
Crawford, Stephen	Leardi, Anthony	Smith, David
Cuzzetto, Rudy	Lecce, Stephen	Smith, Graydon
Dixon, Jess	Lumsden, Neil	Smith, Laura
Dowie, Andrew	MacLeod, Lisa	Smith, Todd
Downey, Doug	Martin, Robin	Tangri, Nina
Dunlop, Jill	McCarthy, Todd J.	Thanigasalam, Vijay
Fedeli, Victor	Mulroney, Caroline	Thompson, Lisa M.
Flack, Rob	Oosterhoff, Sam	Tibollo, Michael A.
Ford, Doug	Pang, Billy	Triantafilopoulos, Effie J.
Ford, Michael D.	Parsa, Michael	Wai, Daisy
Gallagher Murphy, Dawn	Piccini, David	Williams, Charmaine A.
Ghamari, Goldie	Pierre, Natalie	Yakubski, John
Grewal, Hardeep Singh	Pirie, George	

The Clerk of the Assembly (Mr. Trevor Day): The ayes are 34; the nays are 71.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): I declare the motion lost.

Motion negatived.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Two members have informed me they have a point of order they wish to raise. We'll start with the member for Sudbury.

MPP Jamie West: Just a reminder to all my colleagues that the ACTRA rally will be starting at noon on the front lawn.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): It's one thing to remind members of a reception, it's another to remind members of a rally on the front lawn. Not a valid point of order.

The member for Ottawa South.

Mr. John Fraser: Point of order, Speaker: In keeping with beating my head against the wall, I seek unanimous consent that, notwithstanding standing order 45(b)(iv), the time for debate on opposition day motion number 5 be apportioned as followed: 56 minutes to each of the recognized parties and eight minutes to the independent members as a group.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The member for Ottawa South is seeking unanimous consent that, notwithstanding standing order 45(b)(iv), the time for debate on opposition day motion number 5 be apportioned as followed: 56 minutes to each of the recognized parties and eight minutes to the independent members as a group. Agreed? I heard a no.

CORRECTION OF RECORD

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Point of order, the Leader of the Opposition.

Ms. Marit Stiles: I just wanted to correct the record: Earlier today, in question period, I used the number 2.2 million Ontarians that don't have a family physician. The number is actually 2.3 million.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Members are allowed to correct their record.

There being no further business at this time, this House stands in recess until 1 p.m.

The House recessed from 1158 to 1300.

HOUSE SITTINGS

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): I understand the member for Chatham-Kent-Leamington has a point of order.

Mr. Trevor Jones: I do, yes; Speaker, thank you.

Pursuant to standing order 7(e), I wish to inform the House that tonight's evening meeting is cancelled.

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

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Ms. Chandra Pasma: I have the pleasure of welcoming to the House this afternoon: from the OECTA, Vice-President Chris Cowley and Peter MacDonald; and from the OSSTF, President Karen Littlewood and Dan Earle.

I'd also like to say hello and welcome to folks from AEFO, ETFO, the trustee organizations and the Toronto Schools Caregiver Coalition who are joining us online this afternoon to watch the debate on education.

Hon. Todd J. McCarthy: I wish to welcome to the House this afternoon, from the Ministry of Public and Business Service Delivery, Deputy Minister Renu Kulendran, the associate deputy minister John Roberts and the entire team from the ministry, including Daniela Spagnolo and Melissa Kittmer. Thank you very much for being here.

INTRODUCTION OF GOVERNMENT BILLS

STRENGTHENING CYBER SECURITY AND BUILDING TRUST IN THE PUBLIC SECTOR ACT, 2024 LOI DE 2024 VISANT À RENFORCER LA CYBERSÉCURITÉ ET LA CONFIANCE DANS LE SECTEUR PUBLIC

Mr. McCarthy moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 194, An Act to enact the Enhancing Digital Security and Trust Act, 2024 and to make amendments to the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act respecting privacy protection measures / Projet de loi 194, Loi édictant la Loi de 2024 visant à renforcer la sécurité et la confiance en matière de numérique et modifiant la Loi sur l'accès à l'information et la protection de la vie privée en ce qui concerne les mesures de protection de la vie privée.

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

First reading agreed to.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Would the minister like to briefly explain his bill?

Hon. Todd J. McCarthy: Protecting people in today's increasingly digital world is of vital importance throughout the province of Ontario. The Strengthening Cyber Security and Building Trust in the Public Sector Act, 2024, would amend the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act to establish and mandate the requirements of institutions under that act to submit privacy breach notifications and conduct privacy impact assessments and provide the Information and Privacy Commissioner with additional oversight.

The act would also enact the Enhancing Digital Security and Trust Act, 2024, to establish new regulation-making authorities to set requirements for cyber security,

artificial intelligence, and children's data protections for applicable public sector institutions.

The act would also provide the ability for the minister to issue directives for cyber security and children's data protections to applicable public sector institutions.

Mr. Speaker, I wish to thank my deputy minister and her team, and my chief of staff, Michelle Stock, and her team.

PETITIONS

SOCIAL ASSISTANCE

Mrs. Jennifer (Jennie) Stevens: It's my great pleasure to be able to present this petition titled "To Raise Social Assistance Rates" to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario. I want to thank Sally Palmer for getting these names collected from the residents of Grimsby.

In summary of the petition: It's basically about, the rates for Ontario Works have been frozen since 2018, and a small increase to the Ontario Disability Support Program—have left recipients struggling well, well below the poverty line.

We on this side of the House advocate for doubling the rates of OW and ODSP—as well as the individuals who are on this petition. There was an open letter, also, to the Premier and two cabinet ministers, with signatures—over 230 organizations that recommend that social assistance rates be doubled, both with OW and ODSP.

I cannot think of a better petition to affix my name to, and I'm going to be sending it down to the table with Glynnis.

TUITION

MPP Jamie West: This petition is entitled "Fight the Fees." In a nutshell, they talk about how expensive it has gotten to go to school. Rates for undergraduate students have gone up by 215%—and grad students have gone up by 247%. It basically makes it unaffordable for students to go to school—especially students in need, who are trying to get that bigger paycheque and better jobs in life. They also talk about how changes to OSAP and student finance have basically equated to about a \$1-billion cut in financial assistance.

So they have three requests. They want education to be free and accessible to everyone. They want a return to grants, and not loans, to reduce that amount of debt. They also want to ensure that these student union groups have the right to organize, like they fought for and won in the courts.

I support this petition. I'll affix my signature and provide it to page Aaldrian.

LAND USE PLANNING

Ms. Catherine Fife: It's my pleasure to talk briefly about a petition that I have regarding protecting farmland

and sustainable growth in Waterloo region. We do know that the province of Ontario is losing 319 acres every day.

What is happening in Wilmot is that 770 acres of prime farmland are proposed to be expropriated for a large mega-industrial project. There has been no—made public any environmental assessments. No politician at any level is giving any answers or any transparency, in a democracy. This is clearly an early notice that Bill 185 is on the books and boundaries don't mean anything anymore.

I fully support the petition and call on the Waterloo region and the provincial government to pause this irresponsible and unsustainable use of prime farmland.

POST-SECONDARY EDUCATION

Ms. Peggy Sattler: I have a petition that calls upon this Legislature to stop Bill 166. The petition notes that this government has made significant cuts to community mental health services and has also effectively dismantled the Anti-Racism Directorate, so this increases the pressure on our post-secondary institutions to provide student mental health services and to effectively tackle racism and hate on campus.

However, at the same time, the government has underfunded post-secondary education to such an extent that the mental health services are being limited and the anti-racism work is difficult to undertake because there are so few staff.

1310

Bill 166 opens the door to unprecedented political interference in our colleges and universities in this province. The protection of universities from political interference is highly regarded as a cornerstone of a democratic society, which is why the petitioners, who include many, many faculty, staff and students from Western University as well as members of the community, are calling on the government to stop Bill 166, to use the powers of the Anti-Racism Act to enable the anti-racism work that critically needs to happen in this province, and to restore funding to post-secondary institutions so that they can provide student mental health services and support from equity offices.

I fully support this petition. I will affix my signature and send it to the table with page Raisa.

SOCIAL ASSISTANCE

MPP Jill Andrew: This petition is titled "To Raise Social Assistance Rates."

I want to start off by thanking Dr. Sally Palmer, who has been ongoingly sending us petitions to help advocate for people who are on ODSPoverty and OW here in Ontario.

As we know in this Legislature, we are dealing with an affordability crisis.

I can tell you that in St. Paul's, there are several community members of mine—Cinco and his new wife, Liz, just got married in my community, and they are also folks

who depend on ODSP and OW, and they are significantly struggling.

This petition is essentially calling for the government to help people get out of poverty—and that’s what ODSP and OW rates currently are. They are calling for ODSP and OW to be at least doubled, and I stress the “at least” part, because even doubling ODSP can barely get you a one-bedroom with a window in St. Paul’s.

I’m certainly proud to affix my signature on this petition calling for a doubling, at least, of ODSP, OW, so folks can get by—and not just get by, but maybe one day even thrive. And that should include people with disabilities here in Ontario.

TENANT PROTECTION

Ms. Jessica Bell: I have a petition here called “Rent Stabilization Now.” This petition is calling on the Ontario government to establish strong rent control on all tenancies—including those first occupied after 2018—as well as vacancy control so there’s a cap on how much the rent can be raised between tenancies.

The purpose of vacancy control and strong rent control is to stabilize rent and reduce the incidence of eviction, which is unfortunately on the increase in Ontario.

I support this petition. I’ll be giving it to page Aaldrian.

OPPOSITION DAY

EDUCATION FUNDING SUBVENTIONS DESTINÉES À L’ÉDUCATION

Ms. Marit Stiles: I want to move the following motion:

Whereas the government has cut education funding by \$1,500 per child since 2018; and

Whereas this underfunding is preventing our children from getting the learning and mental health supports they need; and

Whereas this results in a challenging and unsafe learning environment; and

Whereas this has a disproportionate impact on our most vulnerable students; and

Whereas the burden is falling to parents to find and pay for the supplemental mental health and education supports that their children need;

Therefore, in the opinion of this House, the government of Ontario should substantially increase funding for public education in Ontario so that every child receives the high-quality education they deserve, regardless of their family’s income.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): MPP Stiles has moved opposition day number 5.

I recognize the Leader of the Opposition to lead off the debate.

Ms. Marit Stiles: Speaker, I would say it’s my belief, my hope, that everyone in this House, in this Legislature,

fundamentally understands the value of good-quality education for all. I’m sure they would also agree that schools are the building blocks of everything around us. Public schools and good-quality education are the engines of society. Everything starts in the classroom.

It’s also my belief that one of the features that distinguishes Canada is its quality public services, like education and health care. We are considered leaders in the world because of these public services—or we have been. As Ontarians, we’ve been proud that your ability to get the care that you need was never dependent on the size of your wallet or that your children could get one of the best educations in the world no matter what your parents earned. But today, under this government, things are not okay. This government wants Ontario students to settle for basic when our kids deserve so much better than that.

Today, I want to start by setting the record straight on how the Conservatives are really treating education in the province of Ontario. Because in spite of this government’s claim of historic spending in education, the Ontario Public School Boards’ Association has said this year’s funding is the lowest level of per-student funding in more than a decade.

The Minister of Education and the Premier have not, as they like to claim, increased funding for education. It’s simple. In fact, education funding has decreased every single year since they have been in government. In fact, education funding is down by \$1,500 per child since 2018. In fact, since 2018, this government has also cut at least 5,000 classroom educators. In fact, the only thing that’s historic about these funding levels is this Minister of Education’s crusade to underfund our schools and send more families into private education. That’s the truth of the matter: replacing our public education with a system where, yes, you, the people of Ontario, the parents, have to pay.

School boards are getting less money year over year. That’s a fact. This government simply doesn’t want to acknowledge all the struggles that our kids, that parents, that teachers, that other staff are dealing with. Well, here’s the reality: Extreme teacher shortages across all the schools in this province; 24% of elementary schools and 35% of secondary schools are reporting teaching staff shortages every single day. There are students who require additional supports that are being sent home from school, because there are not enough staff available to help them.

Every single day, parents are having to find and pay out of pocket for the supplemental mental health and educational supports that their children need. These were things we used to actually be able to count on our schools to provide. More kids today are experiencing depression and anxiety than ever before—ever before. Big school boards; small, rural district school boards: They’re all facing deficits. They’re all looking at having to make cuts—cuts to schools in rural areas, cuts to schools in big cities, everywhere in between.

This government is denying equal learning opportunities for kids everywhere—fact. Cuts are also affecting children’s safety. Violence in schools is on the rise. But

the Minister of Education's student safety allocation is only 14 cents per child per school day. Structural deficits created by this government are forcing everyone—boards, teachers, parents—to make difficult decisions that are going to impact their children, their learning and—you know what?—Ontario at large.

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Members opposite like to stand up here every day blaming this and that on the carbon tax. Can they stand up there today and say the carbon tax is why Ontario's education system is crumbling? Let's see; we'll find out. I think it'll be a bit of a reach, but you never know.

The thing is that when this government says that the education budget for the 2024-25 school year is Ontario's largest ever—and you're going to hear them say that in a few minutes, I suspect; they're going to say it over and over again—they're not taking into consideration inflation and the role that it plays in budgets. Members on this side will recall that this morning, I laid that out for the government, for the minister. A budget that ignores inflation is a budget that ignores reality.

A computer costs more today than it did a year ago. That's a shortfall. People know this. We are living it: a \$1,500 shortfall for each and every student in this province. When this government says their funding is the largest ever, we only need to read between the lines to see what the numbers are really saying. What they're saying is that kids and schools are being shortchanged.

The government, I will say, wants us to focus on vaping and cellphones. You know, I'm a parent. We care about these things—we sure do—but they are underestimating parents in Ontario when they think that they don't know that without investing in the qualified and caring professionals that students need in schools and in classrooms, cellphones will still be there, vaping will still happen and students' mental health and their well-being will be at greater risk than ever before.

Parents know what's happening, because along with all those mounting grocery bills and the rising cost of things that this government could actually do something about—the cost of school supplies, the cost of clothing, the cost of food, the cost of everything—now they have to decide, “Do I turn to a private tutor? How do I find support for my child who is struggling so hard with math and with reading in bigger and bigger classrooms with fewer and fewer supports?”

Speaker, yesterday was Mother's Day. Happy Mother's Day, belatedly, to all of those and to all the mother figures in our lives. Yesterday, I was thinking a lot myself about the joys of motherhood. I'm the mother of two daughters, now grown. But I was also thinking about the struggles. It's not easy. It's complicated being a parent.

I was thinking about all the supports we depend upon, like the nurses who, I will say, held my hand when I was struggling as a new mom; the early childhood educators who—as working parents, my partner and I had to leave our little ones every day, from the time they were less than a year old, at daycare. Every day, it was the trust you put in those people, how much you depend on them and how

little they are actually rewarded for that work in our society, everyone who supported my kids.

It is why I ran to be a school board trustee in 2014. I really wanted to make sure that our schools would be stronger. Many of my colleagues have also been school board trustees or educators themselves. I wanted to make sure they were better. I've got to tell you, under the previous government, under the Liberals, it wasn't so great either. Our schools were pretty lean.

As a working parent, you have to put so much trust in those caring adults who you leave your children with. You drop them off when they're little, in junior kindergarten, and you hope that Mr. Evans is going to make her day great. You say, “If she falls, he's going to pick her up. If she's struggling, somebody is going to be there to help her.”

But as they get older, things get even more complicated. Sometimes, as a parent, it can feel like you're just shouting into a black hole. So I ran because I wanted to ensure that other people, other parents, people who maybe had fewer resources than I did, maybe had more challenges and more obstacles, would have that strong system that they could depend on, that bedrock beneath them. But today, that's not how it is in Ontario; it's worse, and it's getting worse and worse. For families that can't afford private mental health services, their children simply go without those supports that should be guaranteed in our schools, Speaker. That is the reality.

Some may also recall that I was the education critic for a while for our party, and I have to say that in regular meetings that I have had for years with school board trustees—and I think this is the same for all of my colleagues here. We meet regularly with school board trustees and teachers and staff and parents—man, do we hear from parents—the frustration, the disappointment: “How can I help my child?” “Why can't somebody help me help my child?” They are so disappointed at this government's absolutely outrageous claims, and yes, their cuts.

I've said this before: All this government has to do is talk to one parent in this province and you will know that the status quo is not working in this province. It is not working. It is not working for our kids in overcrowded classrooms. It is not working for our under-resourced teachers. All that that minister has to do is talk to real people out there in the real world before they pass a budget that doesn't meet the needs of our kids or educators.

I ask you, Speaker, as I conclude, how much more support are our kids supposed to give up on? Is it the kids who are losing their math and English help in greater Essex; or in Peel, where they're losing their specialized communications classes, their literacy coaches; in Hamilton, where those children are losing breakfast programs? Shameful.

These are not add-ons. These are not extras. These are essential. Our children deserve better than basics. They deserve everything we can give them, no matter how much their families earn, no matter what their parents do. That is the foundation; it is the bedrock of our democracy, of our country and of our province.

Today's kids—they say this all the time, Speaker—they are tomorrow's future. If we deny them the good-quality education and services today, we are going to pay for it down the road.

So I ask this government, what do you have against good-quality education? Will you make our children a priority? Will you support this motion?

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Further debate?

Hon. Stephen Lecce: I want to thank the member opposite for the opportunity to respond and provide a substantive update to this House on the progress we are making to support students.

I want us to start off with a differentiating perspective on the philosophy by which we measure success in this Parliament. For New Democrats and for Liberals, the measurement of success singularly depends on the dollars expended to the ministry. But for real people—as the member opposite encouraged me to dialogue with—the measurement of success is actually benchmarked against outcomes that those investments deliver. I want to speak about the achievements we are making in this province. Notwithstanding a significant increase of dollars and significant increase of funding, there's also been non-monetary improvements that lead to better outcomes. The member opposite in her own judgment and experience as a former trustee will know that the single driving indicator of improvement on student achievement in the classroom is the quality of the teacher.

And thus is the thesis for today's rebuttal to the opposition: that it requires courage to stand up for what's right, even if it's difficult.

Case study number 1 where the opposition has failed this test for families and parents who we represent: When the question was posed of who hires educators in the province, was it a recommendation of the NDP to stand up for merit and qualification and experience? Not at all. They were the chief champions and cheerleaders of Kathleen Wynne's policy to revert to hiring in Ontario exclusively on union seniority, because the members opposite would never even contemplate a moment in their time where they're on an opposite perspective with their teacher unions, federations. They are the chief advocates for them in this place, and when they had the opportunity to stand up for merit-based hiring—because Progressive Conservatives believe, if you can believe it, colleagues, the best teacher should get the job in this province, not the person who has been in their union for the longest.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Order.

Hon. Stephen Lecce: It is illogical for you to be heckling me on this principle, because the parents watching—to the member of the opposition. She just mentioned retired teachers, which is the next example I want to cite, because they talk about absenteeism in this House, and it's not lost on me—

Mr. Terence Kernaghan: Don't say "absenteeism." Shame on you.

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The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The House will come to order.

The Minister of Education has the floor.

Hon. Stephen Lecce: The Leader of the Opposition was most helpful in reminding me about her intervention just minutes ago on the concept of not having a qualified teacher in the front of their class. And yet, when the trustee associations for whom the member opposite claims to be in contact with often, and all their members, all their former trustees—well, did you not get the memo, when the school board association of Ontario, the principals' association of Ontario wrote a joint letter with the government of Ontario urging the teachers' federation—a.k.a. the unions—to accept the recommendation to allow expert retired educators to work in class?

Again, the members opposite couldn't get themselves to the position of standing up for what's right because they'd rather, in this instance—case study number two of advancing a pension entitlement over a qualified educator.

Who are you standing up for? Honestly, who do you speak for? You stand with the unions instead of standing up for qualified educators, on retired educators, to make sure there is an actual certified member in front of children. You don't stand up for kids. You do not stand up for parents. You stand with unions instead of standing up for common sense. And that is case study number two.

I want to speak about the measurement of success. I want to speak about how we actually deliver results for children. It starts, of course, with ensuring that we increase the funding. There is no doubt—a 22% increase in funding since 2017, under the former Liberals. That is a proof positive of our investment.

The member opposite speaks about staffing—and yet, this is not the position of the minister. It's not something subject to debate. Ask school board associations the very same thing we did, who report on hiring and firing, as the employer. There are 9,000 additional education workers. Colleagues, we could disagree on the rate of increase; you cannot debate the fact that there are 9,000 additional education workers and 3,000 net new additional educators. We could disagree with so much; we can't disagree that there are more people in schools making a difference in our education.

I know members opposite would love to bring forth a different narrative, but these are the facts.

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Bhutla Karpoche): The opposition will come to order.

Hon. Stephen Lecce: We can debate the rate of increase; we cannot debate if funding is up in this province. It is at the highest levels ever recorded in provincial history, and that is worth reminding the member opposite, because the Leader of the Opposition, the member from Davenport, has systematically opposed the billions of dollars invested, the thousands of staff hired, the—Bill 98.

Even the Liberal Party in this Legislature, to their credit, had the wisdom of supporting a higher elevation of accountability and improving on governance of school boards.

We talk about effective governance leading to better outcomes for kids. The members opposite—the only

measurement of success is the billions of dollars invested, not the accountability we have to place on our school boards to improve the state of schools, to refocus on academics, to end the vexatious complaints and stop the inter-trustee governance beefs and get back to the business of governing and leading and improving outcomes.

Mr. Speaker, I am proud that funding is up; I am proud that staffing is up, but I am also proud, most of all—because that isn't the measurement of success. Kathleen Wynne spent billions of dollars in education—many of you were here—and you will know that the education outcomes in reading and writing and math systematically declined, notwithstanding the enhancement of funds. So we cannot measure by the dollar. We have to measure by the outcome. That's the difference between a Progressive Conservative and members opposite.

So let's look at the outcomes.

A 577% increase in mental health funding—that is a critical investment. We added \$117 million. Just put that in perspective. The Liberals were spending \$16 million to \$18 million per year. We're over \$115 million to date because of an ironclad commitment to invest in what matters: the wellness, the success and the health of children.

Mr. Speaker, we added \$659 billion to special education since 2017-18.

But beyond the investments—because obviously you cannot persuade a New Democrat; in the abstract, for New Democrats, there's always an omnipresent need for billions of dollars—we believe there's a need for accountability, for curriculum reform, and for qualified educators to be in front of the class.

So let's look at those benchmarks of success. If the members opposite were correct about their theory, that it is just catastrophic in Ontario, then why or how is it that we have increased graduation rates from 87% to 89% under our Progressive Conservative government—89%, from 85%, a significant achievement in the five-year average of graduation. That is how you measure success: Are more kids graduating with skills? Are more kids getting employed in the private economy? Those are the numbers we need to emphasize.

The Ontario secondary-school literacy test results are up 3% from the previous year. Math achievement, one of the big challenges we face in Ontario and in the country, has trended up in both English and in French in our EQAO assessments in grades 6 and 9. In the OECD, we are number 2 in the country on reading and writing and in math, and in the top 10 in science in the entire OECD and the top 15 in math.

We understand the need to constantly be reforming and improving. It's why we have updated 80% of the Ontario curriculum in the last four years—80% reformed. We didn't just reform it; we've now mandated future governments to benchmark, or rather to ensure the curricula we teach our kids are no longer reviewed in five-year cycles.

That provision, which would have made sure we have relevant curriculum and skills and competencies for educating young people, was opposed by the NDP. They actually opposed the Better Schools and Student Out-

comes Act, which elevates the voices of parents and the transparency on school boards. In what world could someone who claims to be an advocate for public education—in what world could the education critic or the Leader of the Opposition, as they heckle—how can they say they want less accountability for school boards? How can they want less empowerment of parents' voices in their child's education system?

Honestly, the overwhelming observation for me, as a more generational person in politics, is from a policy perspective. The irrelevance of the opposition is the disconnect between your values and those of real people. There's a difference between downtown Toronto perspectives and the entire province. For example, on cellphones and vaping and on cannabis, when we announced a plan, the opposition didn't support the plan. They didn't actually agree with the premise that there's a problem. They haven't said a peep on these issues for months and months and years. Instead of constructive, they opposed it in the abstract. They've said nothing really meaningful.

But 86% of parents, in recent public opinion surveys reported by the Star, said to do something about it. And the Leader of the Opposition has the audacity today to proclaim that this is some irrelevant issue, as if the distractions of education aren't at the core of some of the great difficulties kids are facing when it comes to mental health, bullying and academic achievement. They are not on the side of parents and they never have been. They will speak up and stand up for the special interests in this province, but they will never speak for the parents of this province who demand better for the children we represent: better outcomes on reading, writing and math and better achievement when it comes to academics. That is what we stand up for today.

Mr. Speaker, we announced early reading screening—every child, the only jurisdiction in Canada. We will screen children and senior kindergarten and grades 1 and 2 for literacy. Opposition from the members opposite—why? How can the members opposite oppose the Ontario Human Rights Commission's Right to Read report? When we announced a new language curriculum, they actually opposed it, siding with the teachers' union instead of with parents, science and data, who urged the government to come up with systemic, evidence-based interventions on literacy because the former government's language curriculum left some of the most vulnerable kids behind.

Again, is this about public policy, is it about data or is it about blind adherence to ideology? That is your theme. That is your common theme. It isn't about data. Objectively, how can you look at that and say, "You know, maybe the human rights commission, maybe leading educators in pedagogy, maybe they're wrong and I"—insert politician from the opposition—"am right. I am the keeper of knowledge"?

It is offensive intellectually to even have a debate. When the human rights commission urged government to act, we did. Within weeks of getting that report, we announced our intention. We introduced the curriculum. We brought it forth this September. It restores phonics,

cursive writing, critical thinking skills and screening assessments, opposed by the opposition but supported by all the evidence and all the leaders. We are actually getting ahead of the curve. Most jurisdictions are now going to be catching up with the reforms, having daily systemic instructional literacy and the return of phonics within our schools.

It isn't about doing what's right. The mission statement of New Democrats in this House could be, "Going along to get along with all the special interests of Ontario." They've never opposed their primary supporters and donors. They never do what's right for children. They never stand up for parents in this province, who demand that we eliminate distractions, that we get back to basics in the classroom, that we reform the curriculum and that we invest in modern schools—which is why, weeks ago, with the Minister of Finance, on behalf of our Premier, we more than doubled the funding of the actual brick-and-mortar facilities that educate our kids.

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We may have a modern curriculum, but we have to have modern schools too. And we doubled the funding, which was the number one ask of school boards. We more than doubled it: 136%. Again, on the day we did that, the opposition couldn't say a word. They couldn't even bring themselves to acknowledge the incrementalism of how that investment makes a difference in our communities.

When we cut the timeline to build by half in Toronto—because it takes 10 years to build in this city, among many other parts of Ontario—do you think that the opposition would have celebrated that, with the New Democratic mayor of Toronto and the Progressive Conservative government of Ontario and school boards of all political associations, we came together with a plan to cut construction timelines by half? But it wasn't about getting schools built faster or delivering more schools; it simply is about opposing, because that is the core competence of NDP members instead of standing up for what's right, instead of even coming together as some other parties in this House have done from time to time.

It reminds me, weeks ago, when I was standing with the Minister of Labour, and we announced a plan to introduce the FAST program, which is the accelerated apprenticeship program in Ontario, private sector unions rallied behind this concept. It is based on the German model. It is literally based on the German model, the leader in global experiential learning, to accelerate paths. They still have to take literacy; they still have to take language and math courses in grades 11 and 12.

But again, do you think the members opposite sit with private sector unions? Did they stand with parents and those that aspire for their kids to get a good job and get out of their basement? No, they did not, because it isn't about good ideas. It isn't about results. It isn't about measuring success according to what improves the life and the quality of a child as they leave our education system. It is singularly about advancing blind ideology over the pragmatic public policy of this government.

Again, there's a reason why in Milton, in Lambton-Kent-Middlesex—and I say this respectfully—you were

in a wholesale rejection: Because your ideas—the downtown New Democratic party of the contemporary NDP is so disconnected. You've lost your way from the values of working parents. Frankly, the numbers speak results. My goodness, you lost a seat to the Greens in Kitchener Centre. Why don't you reflect for a nanosecond on what that means? What does it mean when in rural communities, urban communities, suburban communities—you lost all your Brampton seats. What is the message, New Democratic colleagues? It's that you guys are out to lunch and disconnected and out of touch from the real priorities of people.

The opposition member trivializes the increase of federal tax. Honestly, it wasn't part of my plan, but how can you say this? How could your motion include components about supporting parents? When the Progressive Conservatives brought forth successive support-for-parent payments of over \$1.8 billion, it was the leader, then-opposition critic for education, who said we were wasting money; called the funding we gave parents, the \$200 or \$400 cheques, literal waste; condemned me for bringing forward such a concept of giving parents money through the pandemic and beyond because of the cost of living.

Do you see the irony of your motion and your voting record? Honest to goodness, you opposed our—when we launched the largest tutoring program in Canadian history, publicly funded, delivered by qualified educators, what did the opposition do? You opposed that, calling it a bribe. Pick a lane. Your actual motion calls for support for parents. You voted against—

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Bhutla Karpoche): Comments through the Chair.

Hon. Stephen Lecce: —\$1.8 billion of support, Speaker, systematically over multiple years. Then, you were the enthusiastic champion of making it more expensive—Speaker, for the opposition—for parents to bring their kids to school because the cost of gasoline has gone up 10 cents a litre; it has gone up 30 cents a litre as recommended by the federal Liberals.

Yes, we're standing up for parents. I know that is offensive to some of you that we actually believe it is—

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Bhutla Karpoche): Comments through the Chair.

Hon. Stephen Lecce: —in the interests of families and working people that we oppose higher taxes. That's exactly what we're going to do.

Bring that back in the next election. Please do us all the favour and continue to champion higher taxes and the interests of teacher unions instead of the interests of children. Please do us that favour and we'll see the results, because I think history will repeat itself, as it did in Lambton-Kent-Middlesex, as it did in Milton.

I'm just going to do a confirmation on timing from our government House leader's office. We've got a bit more time, so I'm going to keep going because I'm on fire, Speaker—because I'm fired up, I should say, because honestly it's alarming. I respect the members opposite; many of them are parents, former trustees. I believe, in their heart, they care about these kids. I hope they will

believe the same is true for those, even if we disagree on policy—

Interjection: No, I don't believe it.

Hon. Stephen Lecce: It's a fairly shocking admission from the members opposite that they somehow have the moral monopoly on advancing the interests of children when I just spent 18 minutes in this House demonstrating the opposition—the contrary perspectives of how they vote and how they actually are delivering results for kids. Because everything we have done has been through the lens of making this system better, improving outcomes. It's sad to see that. It is sad to see that, but it's clear families would disagree with that premise in a pretty whopping way.

The example in Milton, where you're not hitting double digits, is perhaps an alarming, sobering example. You've got to really get outside the bubble of the downtown NDP. When we built 27,000 spaces—announced this year—100,000 additional students spaces overall, the opposition opposed it. That's all within the core education funding. It's not reflected in the GSN, as it formerly was known, Speaker. But nonetheless in our capital plan, \$16 billion over 10 years, members opposite thought: “No, we're going to oppose that. We think doubling the funding to build schools is it not a good thing” for which they opposed it. It's just shocking, because most parents, the ones we speak to, want us to build schools and build them faster which is exactly what our government has done.

I was with the member from Etobicoke–Lakeshore on Friday, the member from Eglinton–Lawrence on Friday—literally in one day, both TDSB and Toronto Catholic schools, one each. We announced a brand new school, the Etobicoke city centre school, in Lakeshore. That was announced by the member from Etobicoke–Lakeshore: 30-million-odd dollars of investment, a historic achievement—not her first school. With the honourable member from Eglinton–Lawrence, we announced funding and the completion of the Dante Alighieri school that was opposed by the former Liberals that we actually funded and is now getting done. This is all in one day's work.

The members opposite should wake up and listen to the voices of real people, not to that poll that was done on cellphones and vaping where they sampled the 14% who opposed it. That's what they do. They're obsessing with the absolute minority instead of the overwhelming majority that agree with the government on the actions, the interventions and the investments and reforms we've brought forth.

The case study of our actions on capital, how we've changed the culture—we've never had more shovel-ready project submissions ever in Ontario history. We have 81% of our schools today—a massive increase—that are now being built using standardized designs. That didn't happen by coincidence, because school boards, as they said through Bill 98, they knew best. It is our job as the province to be the provincial arbiter, to make sure we have higher standardization and we actually achieve results. We have a patchwork of systems, a devolution of powers as recommended apparently by opposition members who

opposed me, the gall of the minister of the province's education to have a provincial standard on achievement. It is our right. It is the sovereign right of government to set provincial expectations on reading, writing and math and to reorient the school system back to that basics foundation. And we did that through the passing of Bill 98 for which we strongly support, and I think overwhelmingly parents want that accountability. They want their trustees to focus on academics. That's where we disagree as well. That is not what the members opposite would want us to champion in our school system.

So we brought forth submissions to bring in a provincial code of conduct to end the vexatious, ridiculous complaints that paralyzed our school system with inter-personal complaints from members of all political stripes, instead of focusing on academics. What, Speaker—how can that be controversial? How do the members opposite disagree with the premise of a provincial code of conduct, which was supported by the Ombudsman? Ontario's Ombudsman wanted me to go further in this public positioning, and we still didn't. We took a measured intervention that actually makes sense to support well-governed schools in English, French, Catholic and public.

At the College of Teachers, we cut the time to bring forth new educators—the certification—by half. How can that have been opposed by the New Democrats? In what world could you ask me on Monday: “We need more teachers; there's too many absences that are not being filled by qualified teachers,” but then on Tuesday or later in the day, vote against the very measures that would have allowed qualified teachers to be in front of the class? This is the bizarre irony that I am commenting on today. The constant, the thesis, of my response to the New Democrats is the illogical inconsistency of the opposition, who advances singular self-interest or special interest over the interests of children. That's what the last election was about: governing for the people; standing up for what's right, even if it's difficult; having the audacity, the chutzpah, to say to some of the big unions that back you, “We disagree, because it's not good for kids. It may be good for you,” but those are words that will never be expressed from members opposite. They couldn't dream of a scenario where that is achievable, but we do that every day, because it's the right thing to do, and we don't apologize for challenging the status quo.

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Yes, the great agent of change, the Leader of the Opposition, the person who opposed transparency on school boards, wanted it to be status quo. The person who opposed building schools in half the time because everything was hunky-dory, the person and party who opposed hiring new educators at half the speed—I mean, honestly, in two words, “status quo” is the core mission of New Democrats.

We are disrupting change by demanding better and holding school boards to account. We don't apologize for that. That's what parents want us to do. That's exactly what we're going to keep doing, which is why we brought forth reforms to hire based on merit and increase the funding and staffing.

I think, Mr. Speaker, what I will finally conclude with is that over the past months, we have benefited from two parliamentary assistants, new members brought in to the ministry: the member from Burlington and the member from Markham-Unionville, two highly skilled champions, parents, leaders, One's a former trustee; one worked in the post-secondary sector herself. These are people of principle who care deeply about kids. They care about kids. They are parents, okay? They got into this because they have experiences that have just totally fuelled their desire to see a better country and a better education system for the next generation.

I believe that they at their core—we at our core as a government—are committed to that change, and we're going to keep doing it, hopefully with, but frankly even without the opposition—the constant opposition of the members opposite as we increase the funding, increase the staffing and increase the opportunities for young people to graduate, get a job and achieve in this country. That is our mission, and we're going to be on it irrespective of members opposite. Stand up for the special interests instead of standing up for the parents' interests of this province.

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Bhutla Karpoche): Please be seated.

Further debate?

Ms. Chandra Pasma: I have to start by saying that as a parent of three school-aged children in the province of Ontario, that was an incredibly shameful display from our Minister of Education. For a speech that talked a lot about accountability, that is a person who takes zero accountability for what is happening in schools under his watch.

The minister says his philosophy of success is outcomes. Well, let's talk about his record, the outcomes for students and for schools in the province of Ontario, because what I hear daily from parents, from students, from teachers and education workers, from trustees, is that things have never been so dire in the education system in Ontario.

We have children who are struggling with serious mental health challenges, who are being told that they need to wait for a social worker and aren't getting to see one until the next school year. These are children who need help immediately, and nine out of 10 school principals say their school doesn't have the support they need to help children's mental health. In fact, half of schools have no access to mental health professionals at all, at a time of one of the greatest crises in student mental health in our province's history.

Children who have special education needs aren't even being kept safe, let alone being supported in their learning in school. We've had multiple children who have eloped from school, who are being put in incredibly dangerous situations. One student who is supposed to have one-on-one support all day long not only escaped from his school, but they didn't know he was missing for 35 minutes, because his school is so strapped for staff to support children with special education needs that there was not

somebody with that student. There was not somebody to pay attention for 35 minutes.

There are students who need support who are spending the entire day with the principal, going around from classroom to classroom, because the principal is the only person left in the school building to keep an eye on this child.

We have students who are experiencing violence on a daily basis, teachers and education workers who are experiencing life-altering injuries because of the level of violence, people who are being sent to school in Kevlar because the Minister of Education is failing to take action on violence in our schools.

We have 5,000 fewer educators in our classrooms than we did when this government came to power. That means larger class sizes for our children who are struggling with their academics coming out of the pandemic, and it also means more challenging working conditions for the teachers that we have left, because they're trying to juggle a class of 34 or 38 students, some of whom have mental health challenges, some of whom have special education needs, none of whom are getting the supports that they need.

It's not surprising, under these circumstances, that people are fleeing our education system. We have 46,000 teachers in the province of Ontario who are registered with the Ontario teachers' college but are choosing not to work in our education system because of this minister and his policies. A quarter of our elementary schools, a third of our secondary schools have daily staff shortages, and the minister wants to talk about qualified teachers? We are so short on teachers that those positions are being filled with unqualified people every single day. Instead of showing teachers any respect for the work that they're doing, the minister stood up and attacked our hard-working teachers once again. He can't even show them the tiniest bit of respect for the hard work they do and the conditions that they work under every single day in the province of Ontario. Those are the minister's outcomes. That is the minister's record.

Apparently not satisfied with having done that to our education system, not satisfied with having done that to our children—my children, your children, everyone's children across the province—the minister is cutting funding once again, for the sixth straight year.

To make matters worse, Speaker, he's not even putting the full amount that he announced towards our kids in education. They announced a nice big number, and then, if you read the small print, it actually says \$1.4 billion of that amount is not going to kids in classrooms; it's going to the government's priorities. As a result, we have \$1,500 less per child in Ontario than if funding had just kept pace with inflation and enrolment growth since 2018.

But even 2018 funding levels wouldn't be enough right now to address the incredibly serious challenges that we're experiencing in Ontario. As I mentioned, we have these really high rates of violence, which are making students, teachers and education workers, principals afraid to go to school in some cases. And what's this government spend-

ing on student safety? Fourteen cents per day per child—that's really going to help address the situation, Speaker. That's really going to make people feel safe in their schools. But it's okay, because there's a security camera that's going to capture the violence that nobody's doing anything about.

We have a student mental health crisis, but what's the government spending on mental health care for students? Twenty-two cents per student per day, and that's a cut from last year, because even this year's inadequate funding was 27 cents per child per day. So we already have kids waiting more than a year—kids who have no mental health support whatsoever in their school this year—and the minister thinks that's such a successful outcome that he's cutting funding for next year. It's absolutely crazy-making, Speaker, that we cannot provide supports for our children who are struggling in Ontario.

As a result, while our kids are already not getting the supports they need to learn, to be safe, to be supported, school boards are being forced once again to make cuts this year. They have already cut to the bone. They have already laid off teachers, educational assistants, child and youth workers—the people who help our children learn and keep them safe every day. And now school boards are being told they're going to need to make even more cuts this year.

We're seeing school boards cutting incredibly important resources—resource teachers, for one, teachers who support children who have special needs. We're seeing congregate classes cut. We're seeing every single school board in the province running a deficit in special education, and now they're going to have to cut even more supports for our children with special needs.

If this funding had just kept pace with inflation, we would have \$3 billion more in our school system than what this government is putting in. At a moment when things are so dire, what would that \$3 billion mean? What would \$1,500 more per child mean in our education system? Well, every single school that I go to, I ask the principal, "If you could have one thing, what it would be?" And do you know what every single principal responds? More EAs.

For a school of 400 students, \$1,500 per student would allow for the hiring of 10 more EAs. These are EAs who are currently running from crisis to crisis with a walkie-talkie trying to figure out which student needs help the most after the crisis has already erupted.

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Imagine what a difference it would make for that school, for the levels of violence, for kids who are not having their learning needs supported, if a school had 10 more EAs? It would mean more social workers and mental health nurses so that when a child says, "I need help," help is there and we're not making them wait. It would mean more child and youth workers to help supervise lunchrooms and hallways and make sure that we're actually intervening before things reach a crisis level. It would mean that every child in Ontario would have a better opportunity to go to school safely, to feel safe and supported

at school and to receive the high-quality education that I would like to think we all believe children in Ontario deserve, except that the government's actions demonstrate differently.

So I will conclude with a plea to the other members of the government. We have clearly heard that the Minister of Education is not going to support giving our children the resources and supports that they need for a high-quality education in the province of Ontario, but many of you are parents; many of you are hearing from your constituents what the outcomes of this minister's policy are.

So stand with parents; stand with kids; stand with the future of Ontario and support this motion today.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Bhutla Karpoche): Further debate?

Mr. Terence Kernaghan: It's an honour for me to rise today in support of education and in support of students. My background and the reason I entered this chamber is because I wanted to come here to support students with special needs who are not getting the supports that they require. It's because of the Liberal government. They peddled the myth of inclusion but it was a way for them to cut the budget on the backs of kids and place kids into classrooms without support.

When students don't get the supports they deserve, it affects that child and their future, it affects the whole classroom and it affects the community as a whole. Giving young people the best start in life should be our focus as legislators, and yet, the vote on today's motion will show the priority of all the members across this chamber.

During pre-budget consultations, the finance committee heard from people across the province who have been raising alarm bells about the alarming rates of violence and mental health needs in education. Kids are struggling—deeply struggling—as a result of this government's cuts and disinvestments. This government is just simply content to play the fiddle while the ship sinks. Kids are worth the investment, period.

The ETFO Thames Valley Teacher Local has shared statistics which London MPPs have shared with this government. The alarming rate of violence in our schools has shown that, in the month of October, there were 671 violent incidents across Thames Valley. In November, there were almost 700. The current daily average for violent incidents across Thames Valley from September to March of this year is 28.9 incidents per day in schools: almost 30 incidents of violence. These numbers only include reported violence of student on educator. They don't include student on student or the vast amount of numbers which are unreported as a result of this.

At the finance committee, I had the opportunity to ask the minister why school violence is not mentioned even once in budget 2024. I also asked that question to the president of OECTA, René Jansen in de Wal. I would like to quote them. He stated, "We have been raising" school violence "at the highest levels for" a number of "years. The fact that it doesn't show up" in budget 2024 "demonstrates that we have haven't been heard...."

School violence is not in the budget. After we've done everything possible and after it's been in the media, it still

doesn't make it in there. Karen Littlewood, the president of OSSTF, said, "There was a safety blitz that was initiated by the government last year ... we haven't seen what the data is. We know what our members reported when the inspectors came to the schools, but we don't know overall what the data was." Why is it, in Ontario's education system, that there has to be a freedom of information request to find out what students are seeing every single day within our schools?

This government would peddle poisonous ideas like teacher absenteeism when they are actually ignoring the fact that they are like the people who go out to dinner and skip out whenever it's time to pick up the bill. There are statutory benefit increases of the Canada Pension Plan and employment insurance which school boards are legally responsible for providing, and yet this government would have them pick up the tab.

School boards routinely make up for special education underfunding that this government has ignored, and educators in my community are making do with as little as \$100 per year for their classroom budgets.

It's time your words matched your actions, government. Stand up for kids. Stand up for education. Invest in young people now for their brighter future tomorrow. Even better, you'll be able to sleep at night—because I can't imagine how any government member can look themselves in the mirror and say that they stand up for children if they don't support the motion today.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Bhutla Karpoche): Further debate?

MPP Jill Andrew: The government has cut education funding by \$1,500 per child since 2018, and we've heard colleagues of mine mention that these are the lowest levels of per student funding in over a decade. This translates into lost human beings in our classrooms—caring professionals to actually do the work of ensuring that every kid in Ontario has access to an equitable and inclusive education.

The Minister of Education pats himself on the back and says, "Well, I care about equity." He threw some crumbs to some of our community members when he initiated the Afrocentric curriculum changes with regard to grades 7, 8, and 9, I believe it was, in 2025. But what happened with this program? Where are the human beings who are actually going to make sure that that curriculum is going to be deployed into our classrooms? There isn't funding for those human beings.

I also want to draw to folks' attention here students who are blind. This is an issue that was not on my radar, shamefully, but it's an issue that David Lepofsky raised with me as early as this morning and also last week when I saw him at the CNIB lobby day. CNIB is located in my riding, and they're always championing for kids who have visual challenges. I want to express what I learned, and that is that school boards across Ontario, all 72 of them, do not have enough TVIs, teachers for visually impaired students in classrooms. The government talks about wanting to increase literacy, wanting to increase mathematics. I agree with that. There's nothing wrong with having an

academically rigorous education in school. But as the AODA Alliance asked, how can blind students succeed in reading, writing and arithmetic if they cannot learn Braille and other core skills that only TVIs, teachers for visually impaired students, can teach them?

So when I think about the theory of intersectionality and that the cuts to education are impacting the most vulnerable students, students made marginalized, whether they're Black students, whether they're Indigenous students, whether they're special-needs students, whether they're queer, trans or non-binary students, who are systematically always being bullied, I've got to ask myself, how can the government care about equity and inclusion issues when he's not putting the funding necessary into school boards so they can actually hire caring adults to ensure that equity is at the centre of our curriculum?

Whether it's ensuring that students who are blind have access to learning Braille, whether it's ensuring that the Minister of Education is actually listening to the community—Black communities across Ontario have been calling for Afrocentric education, not thrown in like rice in a few grades; we've been calling for this, from K to 12, for years. I've got hundreds of stacks of postcards from teachers and students that indicate the advocacy of Black teachers, of students, of parents, of organizations like the Ontario Black History Society.

So when the government sits and says we don't listen to parents, it's actually pretty offensive, because that's all many of us are doing: listening to parents, listening to students.

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We heard last week at the CNIB reception of a parent of a blind child who had to witness her kid isolated, unable to play with his peers, because of his limitations. Disability, race, gender: These are not limitations. We've got to create a society and create classrooms with the correct material conditions so that they can actually thrive. That means paying for the humans who we need to take care of our kids and to teach them, so that they can be leaders.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Bhutla Karpoche): Further debate?

Ms. Natalie Pierre: Thank you for the opportunity to rise in this House and speak to my honourable colleagues. As other members are aware, Speaker, I am a mother, and I was an advocate for improved mental health services before I was elected as the member of provincial Parliament for Burlington.

As the member for Burlington, one of my proudest moments was just over a year ago, when our government made mental health literacy courses mandatory for grade 10 students, to help them recognize signs of stress and anxiety and tell them how to seek out help. On that day, Speaker, we also announced new learning materials for grade 7 and 8 students that will help them manage stress, recognize the signs and symptoms of a mental health concern, understand the relationship between mental health and mental illness, and counteract mental health stigma.

Speaker, I would not and could not support this government if I believed that either the Minister of Education or the Premier was not serious about addressing the

challenges of student mental health. Needless to say, both the minister and the Premier understand that mental health is health, and that it is essential for student achievement and success.

Our government strongly believes in mentally healthy classrooms and learning environments, and in effective and responsive school mental health supports. That's why the Ontario government is investing \$117.65 million in student mental health supports for this coming year. I know my colleagues have heard this number several times today, but I think it's worth repeating: \$117.65 million, amounting to an increase of 577% since 2017-18, when the Liberals were last in power. So it amazes me, Speaker, that the NDP would claim that our government is somehow underfunding student mental health, and it appalls me that they would make this claim for political benefit. Our government listens to parents. We are strongly committed to providing improved student mental health supports and ensuring our schools are safe and welcoming learning centres for all students.

Just last month, Speaker, Ontario introduced the most comprehensive plan in Canada to reduce distractions in classrooms and improve the health of children by strengthening the rules around students caught using or carrying vapes or cigarettes in school, and cracking down on cellphone usage during class time. Parents were loud and clear: They don't want their kids exposed to cigarettes or vaping products, and they want cellphones to be put away during class time. The experts told us that excessive cellphone usage has a negative impact on student mental health, as it can lead to depression and anxiety, and it can put students at risk of abuse, cyberbullying or invasion of privacy. We listened, and we took action.

Our government didn't just strengthen the rules, Speaker; we are also investing \$17.5 million in new wraparound supports, including:

- \$15 million to provide supports for students at risk of addictive behaviours;

- \$1 million to partner with School Mental Health Ontario to help parents and students learn to talk about the adverse effects of vaping and excessive cellphone usage; and

- \$1.5 million to parent-involvement committees and students to run local prevention campaigns to help deter vaping and cellphone distractions.

In addition, Speaker, Ontario is now the first province in Canada to have a province-wide social media ban on school networks and devices. Speaker, we made that announcement because students deserve a school environment that is safe from distractions and peer pressures so students can focus on learning.

All students deserve the opportunity to achieve lifelong success, and the investments we are making in student mental health supports will ensure that help is available when students need it.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Bhutla Karpoche): Further debate?

MPP Kristyn Wong-Tam: I appreciate the opportunity to rise and to speak on behalf of the great people of Toronto Centre.

As I was listening to the Minister of Education's debate remarks, I couldn't help but feel that if this chamber was actually filled with parents and students, what a tragedy it would be for them to come out to this House and to have the Minister of Education essentially vilify them. If you were a family, parents and students living in urban centres, that would hurt double as much, because he did take aim specifically at families and students living in urban centres, and specifically downtown Toronto.

As a parent from downtown Toronto, I can tell you that my worries are the same as every other parent in Ontario. I want to make sure that my kid and all children in Ontario have access to a high-quality public education. It's absolutely critical for us to invest in education because that's a great equalizer for every student, every child in this province.

It really goes to the heart of the values that this government believes in. Will you be investing in education to support our students? Will you be investing in the education system to ensure that teachers and administrators have the resources that they need in order for them to deliver the high-quality education that every student deserves?

The motion is actually very simple, Speaker. The motion is simply asking the government of Ontario to substantially increase the funding for public education in Ontario so that every child receives the high-quality education they deserve, regardless of their family's income. What could be more Canadian in Ontario than that?

But the government is doing exactly the opposite. For six years they've had a chance to increase funding to ensure that education receives the resources to allow success in Ontario, and they've done exactly the opposite. They have been defunding education, less and less every single year. They're leaning right in to shrinkflation, which means that your money is buying you less every year in households across Ontario, and the same thing is now happening in the government's coffers. Classrooms are oversized—30, 31, 32, 34, 38 students in a classroom. Now put in five or six students with developmental delays, global delays, autism and you've got a recipe for disaster, which is why we are hearing from educators, principals, parents and students themselves that the rise of violence is across Ontario.

These are choices being made by the government, choices that can be reversed if the government prioritizes student education as they say they do. But we know they don't, because if they did they would put their money where their mouths are. Otherwise, they'll stand up and they will insult the opposition, they will vilify unions and teachers, as they have done so on and on again, because they're scapegoating them for their failed government policies.

Speaker, I'm just going to end by sharing a story very quickly from Chelsea, who is a teacher of grade 8 students in my community. She wants the government to understand that teachers are drowning. They are not successful at this moment because they've been underfunded, and the

burnout is high. As much as they love their job—and they do, Speaker—they can't hold on forever. They'll be forced to walk away if this government doesn't reverse its course. The stakes are too high. I hope they consider.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Bhutla Karpoche): Further debate?

Mr. Billy Pang: Speaker, I welcome the opportunity to stand in this chamber and speak on the issue of great importance to Ontario families. During the last election, Speaker, I knocked on a lot of doors. Most of the residents I met were very supportive of our government, but sometimes I ran into people who accused us of making cuts to education. When I told them we were making record investments in public education and that our government has increased education funding every year since we were first elected in 2018, they said they simply hadn't heard that before.

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There's lots of misinformation out there, but here's the truth: We are making the largest investment in public education in our province's history. Let me reiterate a few numbers cited by the minister.

For the 2024-25 school year, we are delivering \$29 billion in total education funding. Core education funding includes an addition of \$745 million over the 2023-24 school year, which is a 2.7% increase. Mental health funding is up by 577% since 2017-18. Special education funding is being increased to \$3.5 billion. After a decade when the Liberals closed over 600 schools, we are doubling the funding to \$1.3 billion for the single-largest one-year investment in school building in Ontario history.

These are record investments in public education, yet the NDP somehow believes we are making "cuts." If we were to double that \$29 billion to \$58 billion, the NDP would still claim that we are underfunding education. The NDP's approach is to throw money at problems and then raise taxes to throw even more money at problems.

When it comes to public policy analysis, the NDP and the Liberals focus entirely on inputs. Inputs are important, but you also have to focus on outputs or the overall job the education system is doing.

When our government took office in 2018, the education was failing to prepare young people for the workforce. Thanks to the Liberals' discovery math introduced years ago, 52% of grade 6 students couldn't meet the provincial standard in math according to the 2018-19 results from the EQAO.

For that reason, we overhauled the math curriculum, and we are going back to basics to really drill down on core reading, writing and math competencies. I believe we are on the right track, and we can see that in the fact that 89% of high school students graduate within five years. That's up from 85% just a few years ago.

We still have some underperforming school boards, which is why our government passed the Better Schools and Student Outcomes Act, 2023, better known as Bill 98. School boards oversee a \$29-billion education system, so it's critically important that they are accountable to parents and taxpayers. Our government passed Bill 98 to enhance

the accountability and transparency of school boards, improve their governance and leadership, maximize the capital assets of school boards and ensure that school boards are focused on what matters most: student achievement and preparing young people for the jobs of tomorrow.

Passing Bill 98 was a key step toward getting Ontario's education system back on track. Our province is in the midst of a historic skilled labour shortage. We are going to need at least 100,000 additional skilled trades workers over the next decade to build housing for a growing population. Our government understands that the public education system has a critical role to play in addressing this challenge. For that reason, we are providing school boards with record funding, while at the same time updating the curriculum and demanding greater accountability from school board leaders.

Inputs are important, Speaker, but so are outputs. You can't simply throw more money at problems, just like the NDP seems to believe.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Bhutla Karpoche): Further debate?

Ms. Peggy Sattler: I'm proud to rise today as someone who served on the Thames Valley District School Board as a trustee for 13 years. I was elected in 2000, at a time when public education was under attack by a former Conservative government, and today I am proud to be part of the official opposition caucus that is once again fighting for public education against a Conservative government that wants students to fail.

Speaker, this government does not understand the importance of a strong publicly funded education system. They don't understand what happens to students and parents when education funding declines.

One of my favourite quotes about education is that it's the great equalizer and the great escalator. It ensures that every child, regardless of their background, is able to participate and benefit from the education system, and it also ensures that kids get the support that they need to reach their full potential. But what we have seen under this government is a \$1,500 decrease in per-student funding since 2018. OPSBA, the Ontario Public School Boards' Association, says in fact that this is the lowest per-student level of funding in 10 years.

What happens when education is underfunded, and especially at a time when community services are also being underfunded? It means that kids in our schools go without support. It means that kids with the highest needs, kids who are already marginalized, are hurt the most. It means violence is normalized in our schools. We're seeing a spike in violent incidents that we haven't seen before. It means teachers are leaving the profession. It means EA positions are not being filled, because the jobs don't pay enough, the jobs are dangerous and the jobs are not respected by this government. It means shortages in administration.

Speaker, we need to see this government come forward with funding that is going to enable all of our kids to succeed. I call on this government: Support this motion.

Invest in education, invest in our kids and invest in the future of our province.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Bhutla Karpoche): Further debate?

Ms. Catherine Fife: It's a pleasure—and an honour, actually—to be in this House fighting for public education today. Like my colleague, as a former trustee and former president of the Ontario Public School Boards' Association, public education is always worth fighting for. I will tell you that it made a substantive difference in my life. I would not be here today if I did not have a strong public education system to help me reach my potential.

What the Minister of Education doesn't seem to understand is that learning conditions and environments are working conditions. The fact that he doesn't seem to understand what's actually happening in our system is truly concerning, I would say. For instance, in Waterloo region, there are huge concerns around the use of non-teachers working in classrooms, which has skyrocketed because schools can't find enough supply teachers.

Five years ago, the Waterloo Catholic District School Board reported that around a hundred times a month they used non-teachers in their classrooms. Today, that number is 899 times every month—this is Patrick Etmanski, who is the president of the Waterloo Catholic teachers. They have said that this trend is so alarming, because students are often left without a teacher in the classroom. I can tell you, the failure to fill in our schools is changing the culture of the school. These are facts for the Minister of Education.

On the public side: “The Waterloo Region District School Board has had as many 600 days a month over the winter, and about 200-300 days a month ... when no teacher was available.” This is coming from Nathan Core, who heads the Waterloo region occasional teachers.

1430

The fact that the minister was talking about these downtown NDP schools—my husband teaches in a rural high school in Wilmot. These kids are still struggling with a student transportation model that fails every single day. Getting students safely to schools is kind of important, Madam Speaker, and it's not something that you do on the back burner, if you will.

This is what we're hearing from teachers who are in the classroom, who have the lived experience of what's actually happening in our education system. I would encourage the Minister of Education to actually get into a public school, Madam Speaker. This is what they say: “The job has changed in such a way that teachers are leaving the profession in numbers that we've never seen before.” It has never been this bad in this province on the education file.

I mean, you've been very systematic about undermining health care. Now, the post-secondary education is undermined. Child care—what a mess on the child care file. But we're actually reporting what's happening in public education schools. This deserves the government's attention. The fact that the minister refuses to acknow-

ledge that qualified, trained staff keep students safe is also very alarming for us.

I want to say that we have seen past Conservative governments systematically undermine public education. We are still feeling the effects of the Mike Harris government removing shops and the industrial studies programs as we face a skilled worker shortage in Ontario.

So we know where we stand. These are targeted resources—targeted, trained staff that improve the quality of the education system in Ontario. You will never do it unless you have the confidence and the belief in the very people in the system and, clearly, this Minister of Education does not.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Bhutla Karpoche): Further debate?

Mr. John Vanthof: It's an honour to be able to stand today and talk about increasing the funding for education.

Last constituency week, I went to visit a public school. We all like to visit schools. I'm not going to mention where this school was; it certainly wasn't in downtown Toronto. We had a half-hour discussion with the kids about them. It was a grade 5 and 6. They were talking about things like evacuations of classrooms when someone got violent. They were talking about how they didn't feel safe in the washroom.

When they realized that I stood here and that I could talk to the Minister of Education, I asked the kids, “If there's one thing that I could ask the Minister of Education, what would it be?” And one little girl put up her hand and she said, “A fan”—a fan, because there's only one window, and she went and she showed the window—“and sometimes, like, it's so hot in here that we can't work.” A fan.

They're trying to say that we've got adequate funding in our public school system and they're down to the point of a grade 5 kid—her class needs a fan. There are serious problems. We need to fix them.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Bhutla Karpoche): Further debate?

Mrs. Jennifer (Jennie) Stevens: I rise not just to defend our education experts and teachers in Niagara, not only to echo the concerns from so many parents, but to sound an alarm about the risks of underfunding education in Ontario, especially in the Niagara region.

Since 2018, the ministry has stripped away \$1,500 per child from our schools. Across Niagara, I've heard from so many of our amazing teachers who have to dip more and more into their own funds to support their students.

I come from a family of educators, and I know that in Niagara, we have some of the best teachers and some of the best EAs in Ontario. However, this is the legacy of this government: Educators must get used to doing less with less. Our most vulnerable students suffer disproportionately. Special-needs children are sent home because we lack the resources to support them. Parents who are already burdened are scrambling to fill the gaps that the government has abandoned.

So what solution does the Ford government propose? A superficial ban on cellphones in classrooms, the classic

bait-and-switch distraction from the real issue: considerable and suffocating underfunding of education.

An education leader and a teacher in Niagara, Jennifer McArthur, hits the nail right on the head when she says, “This focus on cellphone bans is a mere distraction from the escalating violence in our classrooms and the desperate need for mental health supports. It’s another glaring example of how out of touch the Ford government is with the realities of modern education. They sidestep real issues, offering token policies instead of substantive dialogue and effective solutions.”

And this is the harsh reality: While the Ford government gets you to focus on small policy tweaks, over 40,000 qualified teachers in Ontario are walking away from the profession, driven out by real issues related to funding shortfalls. Nine out of 10 principals declared a crisis in mental health support, yet what is the government’s answer? More security cameras? Come on. A focus on security, not actual funding for mental health or educators? This narrative of neglect, less funding and more distractions cannot continue. This is exactly why we need sweeping changes.

The government of Ontario should substantially increase the funding for public education in Ontario, so that every child receives the high-quality education they deserve, regardless of their family income. The time for excuses, the time for deflections and the patchwork of Band-Aids is over. It is time for this government to step up, to take the responsibility and to right the wrongs. The children in Niagara and in Ontario and the educators that teach them deserve much, much better.

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

Mr. Wayne Gates: Actually, I want to stay on this and talk about something that the minister said: That basically, on this side of the House, we don’t care about education or our kids. I think that was a terrible comment, quite frankly.

I have three beautiful daughters. I have a lovely wife. My wife was a teacher for 30 years. My daughter Tara-Lynn works with special-needs kids in the Catholic school board—very, very challenging, particularly with the underfunding. EAs are understaffed. My daughter, who I just messaged just now, works at St. Nick’s in St. Catharines. It’s a very low—the parents make very little money; you know what I’m saying.

Interjection: Low-income.

Mr. Wayne Gates: Low-income. And I just said to my daughter, “Is there anything you’d like me to say today?” And do you know what she said? “Tell them, every day we go to school, we’re understaffed. There’s not enough teachers. There’s not enough EAs.” And I sent her a message: “Is there any violence in your school? Anything like that we should be concerned about?” She wrote back and she said, “Every single day, an EA is being punched. They’re being sworn at. They’re being spat at every single day.”

And do you know what? That’s my daughters. So to stand up and say I don’t care about education is a lie, and

you guys shouldn’t lie in this House like that. It is unbelievable that he said that today. I am extremely upset about it, because I know what my daughters and my wife do. Do you know what they—

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Bhutila Karpoche): I’m going to ask the member to withdraw.

Mr. Wayne Gates: I’ll withdraw.

But I’ll tell you what my wife and my daughters do when they go out on a Saturday night for a social. Do you know what they do? If you’re going to give them anything, they’re the most boring people to be married to, because all they do is talk about their kids, because they love little Johnny. They want it better for little Johnny. They want to make sure he gets an education. How many times have my wife or my daughters taken a sandwich to school, or an apple, because there are kids there that don’t have that opportunity to have a sandwich? We know, with our cuts to our nutrition programs. So when you stand up, it’s not accurate, and I’m really upset about that.

The last thing that I’m going to talk about, because my time probably ran out—I don’t get a lot of time to talk—is they talk about how on side of the House, we’re not standing up for bringing retirees back into schools. Why don’t you hire more teachers who are coming out, who need a job? The reason why they’re retiring—the reason my wife retired is she’s tired. She’s exhausted. For her, it was not easy going to school every day. She decided to retire to take care of her family—her mom and her dad.

1440

You say, “Well, they only care about seniority.” Yes, you’re darn right we care about seniority. I support unions; he said he doesn’t. He thinks that they should be able to pick and choose who they want. The reason why you join a union is because you want to have seniority rights. So that was wrong.

The last thing I’ll talk about—that was supposed to be the last thing. This is the last thing. How many remember, two years ago, when they attacked the workers and the EAs with the “notwithstanding” clause? How many remember that?

Ms. Sandy Shaw: I remember.

Mr. Wayne Gates: I’m glad you remember.

I’m just going to sit down and say, “Support this motion,” because the most important thing is a publicly funded, publicly delivered education system in the province of Ontario. And stop trying to privatize it.

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

Mr. Joel Harden: It’s always a good thing to get up in the people’s House and talk about public education.

This is the question I want to ask in the three minutes I have this afternoon: I wonder how often the minister over there thinks about the people we are losing every day in our public schools. And I’m not just talking about the staff who may decide to leave. I’m talking about the kids who are excluded from class. I’m talking about the kids who feel like they don’t belong in our schools. And why? Because they need more support.

What's on the chopping block right now back home? Special education.

Albert Einstein, high-school dropout—how many other wonderful minds, even if they aren't geniuses of that calibre, are we prepared to lose because this minister can't figure out what inflation means? This minister can't figure out that the amount of money you spend in 2018 is not what you need to spend now to at least keep things moving. It's a wilful refusal.

The question, again, I will ask rhetorically now is, who are we losing as this minister decides to throttle the funds of public education?

I will submit to you, Speaker, we are losing autistic kids, we're losing dyslexic kids, we're losing kids with anxiety disorders—kids who are brilliant, compassionate, wonderful people, who need help at that stage of their life. We stand at risk of losing them.

My friend from Thunder Bay—Superior North has the role now, but when I had the honour of being the disabilities critic in this province, the amount of disabled adults I talked to who had interacted with the corrections system, who had a hard time holding down work because they felt like they weren't smart enough and they were told and they felt like they weren't worth anything—the staff in our public school system stand ready and stand prepared to help those kids, but they can't do it at a ratio of 24 to 1, or in JK, like 32 to 1, when half the class are on individual education programs. It's an impossible task.

If one actually is a Conservative, I would like to say that an important thing you're concerned about is waste. So how many kids and how many people in our system are we wasting wilfully because we refuse to invest in them?

We've got \$600 million for a parking garage for a spa, or we have billions in potential money that we hand over to real estate speculators and real estate investment trusts, but we do not have money for disabled kids, and we do not have money for the staff who are prepared to help them.

Who are we losing? That's my question this afternoon.

If we vote for this motion and we say as a House that public education requires investment kept up with inflation, then we are speaking the honest truth and putting our faith in the staff and the kids who deserve our help.

I thank the Leader of the Opposition for putting this on the floor.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Bhutla Karpoche): Further debate?

MPP Lise Vaugeois: I will try to be brief.

We heard a lot of very audacious comments this morning, where we heard that funding has increased, when, in fact, it has decreased. And then, at some point, the minister said, 'Well, actually, no, we do have less funding, but we're expecting more, we want more for less,' which, of course, means that no, you did not increase funding; you've decreased funding. Did you increase staff? No, you have decreased staff.

There's constant magic with numbers from this minister in particular. People need to look at actually how those numbers play out in the individual schools and individual classrooms, because teachers are suffering, kids

are suffering. Everybody I hear from, whether it's the board, administrators, teachers, parents, students, they're all frustrated. Classroom sizes are too big.

I want to think about the great Cindy Blackstock, who always says you show what you care about by where you put your money. The money is not being put in public education. I would love to see the mandate letter for this minister because, again, the people I know working throughout the system—and I have taught in the system and I have taught in the faculty of education. I do know something about pedagogy, and I believe this minister has no idea. What's in the mandate letter? I would really like to know what's in the mandate letter.

I know I need to be very brief. The transportation funding: There's a lot of magic with numbers there, because it says it's increased, but actually something else was put into that portfolio, so it's not comparable anymore. Students in my region are going to be walking very long distances on roads with no sidewalks, in 30-degree-below-zero weather, on streets that aren't plowed, and when there are sidewalks, half the time they're not plowed either. It is not safe. Children are having to cross the Trans-Canada Highway in order to walk to school. It is not acceptable.

It's time for me to stop, so I will just say I completely support this motion. It's time that the government acknowledge that they've been steadfastly cutting funding to education.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Bhutla Karpoche): Further debate?

M. Guy Bourgoïn: Je vais essayer de mettre le plus de points que je peux dans le temps que j'ai. C'est important que je parle aujourd'hui, parce que quand on pense que le ministère dit qu'ils ont, tu sais, des millions—lui, il parle de gros chiffres, mais la réalité des faits c'est qu'ils investissent moins de 1 500 \$ par étudiant.

Moi, je peux parler par expérience, puisque j'ai mon épouse—et j'ai ma fille qui travaille dans le milieu de l'éducation comme aide-enseignante. Ma fille est qualifiée. Elle a été préparée pour être capable de protéger les enfants. Quand un enfant est en crise, c'est ma fille qui va aller traiter avec cet enfant-là en crise.

Mais je peux vous dire, madame la Présidente, que les temps sont difficiles, puisqu'elle pense même quitter son emploi—qu'elle aime. Elle est dans son milieu et elle veut continuer à travailler, mais à cause d'un manque de financement, de bonnes heures de travail—elle a un bon salaire, mais il n'y a pas d'heures. Elle a un bon salaire.

Mais ce qui est important de dire, par exemple, c'est qu'on a besoin d'un gouvernement qui reconnaît le travail qu'ils font, et qu'il devrait les rembourser.

Je vais laisser la parole à ma collègue qui vient d'arriver. Elle aussi veut parler en français sur le sujet.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Bhutla Karpoche): Further debate?

M^{me} France Gélinas: C'est important de comprendre que, dans les écoles francophones, le manque de ressources veut dire que si tu as un enfant avec des besoins spéciaux, on va te dire : « Inscris-le pas dans une école

francophone. Envoie-le dans une école anglophone, parce qu'ils ont plus de chance d'avoir les ressources dont ils ont besoin pour s'occuper de tes enfants. »

Les enfants francophones ont droit à une éducation en français. Mais quand le gouvernement refuse de financer nos écoles de façon appropriée, ça veut dire que nos enfants, nos francophones, n'auront pas la chance d'aller dans une école française.

Ça, c'est sur vos épaules. On peut changer ça aujourd'hui en passant la motion que ma chef a mise de l'avant.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Bhutla Karpoche): Further debate? Further debate?

I recognize the leader of the official opposition on her reply.

M^{me} Marit Stiles: Je voudrais remercier mes collègues.

I want to thank my colleagues for their comments this afternoon. I want to note in particular the experience that every one of the caucus members on this side brought, the care, the thought that went into their comments.

I will say that I found it very difficult to hear the Minister of Education stand up and wave away the many significant issues and concerns that we have raised here today. There is no denying the state of our schools today. There is no denying that our kids are studying and working in overcrowded classrooms. There is no denying that our education workers and our students are experiencing more violence in classrooms than ever before.

I heard some of the members opposite, when one of my colleagues mentioned Kevlar, scoff at that. This is a reality. This is a reality that education workers in this province are facing every day. I heard the members opposite in the government talk about the fact that they were so proud of all of the hiring they're doing. My goodness, where are they?

We, I think, have made a very clear case for the fact that our students are suffering, that our parents suffering, that they are bearing the literal cost of these additional resources. Right now, parents cannot put up with anything else.

We, in the opposition, will not put up with this government's creating of a crisis in our education system. We will fight tooth and nail to save that public education system. It is the cornerstone of our democracy. We will stand for it.

I really do hope that the members opposite, that the government, support this excellent motion. Why would we not throw everything we can to support our public education system in this province?

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Bhutla Karpoche): MPP Stiles has moved opposition day motion number 5.

Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? I heard a no.

All those in favour of the motion will please say "aye."

All those opposed to the motion will please say "nay."

In my opinion, the ayes have it.

Call in the members. This will be a 10-minute bell.

The division bells rang from 1452 to 1502.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Bhutla Karpoche): MPP Stiles has moved opposition day motion number 5.

All those in favour of the motion will please rise one at a time and be recognized by the Clerk.

Ayes

Andrew, Jill	Gélinas, France	Schreiner, Mike
Armstrong, Teresa J.	Harden, Joel	Shamji, Adil
Bell, Jessica	Hazell, Andrea	Shaw, Sandy
Bourgouin, Guy	Hsu, Ted	Stevens, Jennifer (Jennie)
Bowman, Stephanie	Kernaghan, Terence	Stiles, Marit
Burch, Jeff	Mamakwa, Sol	Tabuns, Peter
Clancy, Aislinn	McCrimmon, Karen	Taylor, Monique
Fife, Catherine	McMahon, Mary-Margaret	Vanhof, John
Fraser, John	Pasma, Chandra	Vaugeois, Lise
French, Jennifer K.	Rakocevic, Tom	West, Jamie
Gates, Wayne	Sattler, Peggy	Wong-Tam, Kristyn

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Bhutla Karpoche): All those opposed to the motion will please rise one at a time and be recognized by the Clerk.

Nays

Anand, Deepak	Hardeman, Ernie	Pirie, George
Babikian, Aris	Harris, Mike	Quinn, Nolan
Bailey, Robert	Hogarth, Christine	Rae, Matthew
Barnes, Patrice	Holland, Kevin	Rickford, Greg
Bethlenfalvy, Peter	Jones, Trevor	Riddell, Brian
Bouma, Will	Jordan, John	Sabaw, Shereef
Byers, Rick	Kanapathi, Logan	Sarkaria, Prabmeet Singh
Calandra, Paul	Kerzner, Michael S.	Saunderson, Brian
Cho, Raymond Sung Joon	Khanjin, Andrea	Scott, Laurie
Cho, Stan	Kusendova-Bashta, Natalia	Skelly, Donna
Clark, Steve	Leardi, Anthony	Smith, Dave
Coe, Lorne	Lecce, Stephen	Smith, David
Crawford, Stephen	Lumsden, Neil	Smith, Graydon
Cuzzetto, Rudy	MacLeod, Lisa	Smith, Todd
Dixon, Jess	Martin, Robin	Surma, Kinga
Dowie, Andrew	McCarthy, Todd J.	Tangri, Nina
Downey, Doug	McGregor, Graham	Thanigasalam, Vijay
Dunlop, Jill	Mulroney, Caroline	Thompson, Lisa M.
Flack, Rob	Oosterhoff, Sam	Tibollo, Michael A.
Ford, Michael D.	Pang, Billy	Triantafilopoulos, Effie J.
Gallagher Murphy, Dawn	Parsa, Michael	Wai, Daisy
Ghamari, Goldie	Piccini, David	Williams, Charmaine A.
Grewal, Hardeep Singh	Pierre, Natalie	Yakubski, John

The Clerk of the Assembly (Mr. Trevor Day): The ayes are 33; the nays are 69.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Bhutla Karpoche): I declare the motion lost.

Motion negated.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Bhutla Karpoche): I will give members a moment to leave the chambers before proceeding.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

BUILDING A BETTER ONTARIO ACT
(BUDGET MEASURES), 2024

LOI DE 2024 VISANT À BÂTIR

UN ONTARIO MEILLEUR

(MESURES BUDGÉTAIRES)

Mr. Bethlenfalvy moved third reading of the following bill:

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

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Bhutila Karpoche): I return to the minister.

Hon. Peter Bethlenfalvy: I would just like to highlight I will be sharing my time with the member for Mississauga–Malton, as well as the member for Oakville. Madam Speaker, I'm pleased to be here before you to discuss Bill 180, Building a Better Ontario Act (Budget Measures), 2024.

Madam Speaker, our government is always keeping the needs of Ontarians firmly in sight. Every day across the province, people are headed to their place of work or the businesses they own. Patients are headed to their health clinic. Students are headed to their classrooms. Young families are headed to daycares or their play dates. Seniors are headed to meet their friends at the park for some exercise and some socializing. It is these people, Madam Speaker, who we keep in our sights and for whom we've prepared our 2024 budget and the measures found in Bill 180. That's because they're going about their lives despite the challenges of our times.

Despite a challenging global economic situation, our government is moving forward with our plan and building a better Ontario for them. People in governments around the world today are seeing and coping with high interest rates and global instability. Like people everywhere, governments have to make plans and decisions in light of these rates and this instability.

I stand before you today and say that, with this reality in mind, our government remains on a path to build for the long term while keeping costs down now for Ontarians. This is reflected in our budget with our proposal to extend the gas and fuel tax cuts to continue helping families and businesses when the cost of living is simply too high.

1510

It is also reflected in our work to support our historic and vital investments in infrastructure across the province through the Building Ontario Fund. It is reflected in our changes to the Liquor Tax Act to help supply and support Ontario's world-class winery sector.

Mr. Sam Oosterhoff: Hear, hear.

Hon. Peter Bethlenfalvy: I'll have the record note: That's the member from the Niagara region, which is going to benefit from those changes to the alcohol modernization plan that we have.

We also have benefits in place for the many people of Ontario who want to see changes to the Pension Benefits Act to help better set up Ontario workers when it comes to saving for their retirements.

Speaking of workers, Madam Speaker, successful governments are always attuned to the needs of workers. Day in and day out, we're working for workers, including with our efforts to prepare workers today for the jobs of tomorrow, hence why we are investing an additional \$100 million in 2024-25 in the Skills Development Fund Training Stream, just as we are continuing to implement the

\$224-million Skills Development Fund Capital Stream. Because we support our workers and continue to do all we can to further the development of Ontario's world-class workforce, just as we are doing all we can to build out Ontario's skilled trades pipeline for in-demand careers. Here, we are supporting a variety of programs that attract more young people into the skilled trades.

Thanks to our investment of an additional \$16.5 million over the next three years through the skilled trades strategy, we are fostering the skilled trades workers of tomorrow. We need to keep encouraging employer participation in apprenticeships, because it is with their help that we will continue to provide more young people with an entry into meaningful, lifelong careers.

Now that I'm on the subject of careers, we are committed to creating and remain committed to creating good-paying jobs as well as fostering business investments that will deliver tomorrow's economic success today. This is why our budget allocates an additional \$100 million to the Invest Ontario Fund, bringing its total to \$600 million to help attract investments and new jobs in key sectors such as advanced manufacturing, life sciences and technology.

Madame la Présidente, nous demeurons résolu à créer des emplois bien rémunérés, ainsi qu'à favoriser les investissements des entreprises porteurs de la prospérité économique de demain, et ce, dès maintenant. C'est pourquoi, dans notre budget, nous octroyons 100 millions de dollars additionnels au Fonds pour Investissements Ontario pour le porter à un total de 600 millions de dollars, ce qui contribuera à attirer des investissements et de nouveaux emplois dans des secteurs clés comme la fabrication de pointe, les sciences de la vie et la technologie.

Creating good-paying jobs and fostering businesses is why we are boosting the growth of Ontario's end-to-end supply chain for EVs and EV batteries. With the historic Honda investment, we've attracted over \$43 billion in new investments in the vehicle manufacturing and the EV supply chain system in under four years. Who can forget the 12,000 permanent jobs these investments will create, jobs of the future—a future that will be here sooner than we think and that will support Ontario workers and families for decades to come.

But we don't have to wait decades in order to see results. This past Friday morning, for example, Statistics Canada released its monthly employment numbers, which showed Ontario added 25,000 jobs in April alone. And that's including 5,000—5,000 jobs, Madam Speaker—in the manufacturing sector. This is the fourth consecutive month that employment in Ontario has increased. Our efforts to create more good-paying, meaningful jobs are paying off, and we're not stopping there.

But of course, we can't simply create jobs out of thin air. We need the help of millions of Ontario employers and job creators to get the job done. So, for our businesses of all sizes, we are enabling an estimated \$8 billion cost savings and support this year alone, including \$3.7 billion for small businesses, all thanks to key actions taken by this government since 2018.

So, let's revisit what I just discussed: —we're attracting investments—check; —we're creating new jobs—check; and we're supporting businesses large and small—check.

Check, check, check, Madam Speaker. This Premier promised Ontarians that he would open Ontario for business once more, and here we are, breaking records and building our future today. And that's exactly what this budget is about: building a better Ontario for all.

With this budget, our government continues investing to create jobs and economic growth. And despite a challenging global economic situation, our government also continues to invest in care, health care, education and other vital public services as well.

For example, there is our continued investment of \$6.4 billion since 2019 to build 58,000 new or upgraded long-term-care beds across the province by 2028. Then, there's our investment of \$155 million in 2024-25 to increase funding to fast-track construction of the next tranche of long-term-care homes by November 30, 2024. I know the member from Bruce-Grey-Owen Sound is nodding his head in support.

These and many others are some of the steps our government is taking to build a better Ontario, just as we are doing with our plan to build and expand and renew schools and child care spaces. We're doing it by investing \$23 billion over 10 years for capital, including education capital of \$16 billion in capital grants.

With Ontario's population growing as rapidly as it is, we need to continue to build the spaces so that students can have a place to learn close to home. And we're building those new schools, we're building those child care spaces and we're continuing to support many right across the province.

We're also getting it done for our older students who are looking to begin the next chapter of their professional lives. With our 2024 budget, we are supporting small, northern and rural colleges and northern universities by providing \$10 million in targeted supports. We're doing so because Ontario schools and universities are shaping our next generations and fostering a sense of community like no other, so we're there for them too.

While we're on the topic of community, we also know that keeping active and having access to recreational opportunities is key to having a thriving community. That's why we are launching a new \$200-million Community Sport and Recreation Infrastructure Fund to strengthen communities right across Ontario. By investing in new and upgraded sport and recreation facilities, we are supporting the mental and physical health of families, youth and seniors for generations to come.

Madam Speaker, so far, I've discussed our plan for Ontario and the 2024 budget, which the measures in Bill 180 will help move forward. I've discussed jobs and investments, long-term care, education and recreation. In all these cases, we are doing more.

More needs to be done because previous Liberal governments failed to do the work they were elected to do, Madam Speaker. They failed to build roads. They failed to build highways and transit. They failed to build robust

health care, schools and homes. Worst of all, they failed our people. They stood by and racked up unimaginable debt while countless jobs and investors left Ontario for greener pastures. We knew since day one that we had a lot of work to do, work that is helping bring this province to the place it needs and deserves to be in.

1520

This is especially true now that our population is growing at exceptional rates. More is needed so we can thrive and secure our collective future. Our population is expected to increase by more than five million people over the next 20 years—five million more people.

They're going to go to places like Essex, which is such an attractive place to live and to work and to raise a family. People need public services, affordable places to live and health care when and where they need it. That is why we are continuing to build a robust health care system that puts people at the centre of care.

And we are delivering on the most ambitious plan for hospital expansion in the province's history, including building a new hospital in Windsor and, while we're at it, more health care in Niagara and more health care right across the province.

But you know, we're not going to stop there, because there is so much more to do. Over the next 10 years we're going to invest \$50 billion in health care infrastructure capital, including close to \$36 billion just in capital grants to the health care sector. There is no government quite like this government. We are changing the landscape of health care here in Ontario for the better by putting money where it is needed the most. That's why we're also committing \$620 million over 10 years to allow health care system partners to address urgent needs and extend the life of hospital infrastructure, infrastructure that will ensure that our children and their children after them have the services they need to build a life, just as we did.

Jobs and investments, education, health care, fostering communities and a whole lot more: We are getting it done. These are public goods and in one way or another they are ultimately connected by provincial infrastructure. That is why a key part of the 2024 budget is our focus on highways and other critical transportation infrastructure. That's why we are targeting gridlock and saving commuters time by advancing critical highways like the new Highway 413 and the Bradford Bypass. While I'm at it, aren't we doing something in Windsor and Essex by widening Highway 3?

Mr. Anthony Leardi: Highway 3.

Hon. Peter Bethlenfalvy: Highway 3; I knew I had it here. I keep looking over my left shoulder and all I can see is Windsor and Niagara and other parts of southwest Ontario and mid-west Ontario and the 416 and more Windsor over here. And of course the 905 over there and right across this great province. Because we need to build, rehabilitate or expand our existing in-demand highways like the 403, like Highway 7 and the iconic Highway 401.

It's why we are supporting the construction of the 416 and Barnsdale Road interchange in Ottawa and other key projects right across the province. We're improving roads, highways and bridges, as well as carrying out the largest

transit expansion anywhere in North America. Once again, Madam Speaker: check, check, check.

It's all happening and it's happening right here in Ontario. It's happening with our improvements to GO train and GO bus services, connecting light rail transit and advancing four priority subway projects in the greater Toronto area.

It's happening in the north, where we are bringing back the Northlander and restoring passenger rail service to southern Ontario. This is in addition to our \$1-billion investment to support all-season roads, high-speed Internet connectivity and community supports for the Ring of Fire region, a region which has the potential to reshape the economic realities of our province and our world for good.

Because it's clear that despite a challenging economic situation, our government is rebuilding the economy by accelerating Ontario's plan to build, the most ambitious capital plan in Ontario history, perhaps even Canadian history—investments of more than \$190 billion over the next 10 years to build and expand highways, transit, and of course, homes. Housing supply is a priority, full stop. And it's why we are increasing funding for housing-enabling municipal infrastructure that will get more homes built and get them built faster.

First, there's our \$1-billion investment in the new Municipal Housing Infrastructure Program. And then there is our quadrupling of the Housing-Enabling Water Systems Fund to \$825 million, which will fund municipal water infrastructure projects. There's also our \$1.2-billion Building Faster Fund that rewards municipalities that meet or exceed their housing targets, and this includes \$120 million for small, rural and northern communities that have not been assigned a housing target due to their unique needs and circumstances.

At the end of the day, we are making these investments and changes because we know that supporting our municipal partners is the best way to get more homes built and get them built faster. And we're not going to stop the work needed in order to get it done. We're going to keep going. We're going to double down and keep going because shovels in the ground, getting dirt flying, building—that's what the people of Ontario are counting on us to do.

Madam Speaker, before I begin my wrap-up, there are a few things I'd like to mention. I've said this in the past, and I'll say it again: I dedicate this budget to my father, who, since I first introduced this legislation, has now celebrated his 94th birthday.

Interjections.

Hon. Peter Bethlenfalvy: Thank you.

I also would be remiss if I did not give my sincere thanks to the people who help me day in and day out to craft these budgets, and that includes my parliamentary assistants, the member for Oakville—thank you very much; the member for Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound, who has left me, but he has gone on to greener pastures, so he says; and of course, the new member to help out, the member for Mississauga–Malton. Their support, hard work and dedication to see this budget through has helped shape the

results of our incredible efforts, and I'm lucky to have such an incredible group of colleagues to support me in our mission to build a better Ontario.

Indeed, the work we are doing here in this chamber will shape the future of this province. And so we must act and invest carefully and responsibly, just as we are doing by investing in Ontario's economy without raising taxes—and we're doing that without raising fees, as well—and making it easier for the people of Ontario and the businesses of Ontario to do their work, to raise their families, to have a good job in this province. That's because the workers, the patients, the business operators, the young families, the students and the seniors of Ontario are all counting on us.

This budget and these budget measures demonstrate how we are delivering on our plan to build, how we are building a better Ontario.

Truly, this budget comes at a time when Ontario, like the rest of the world, continues to face economic uncertainty.

Ce budget et ces mesures budgétaires montrent comment nous nous y prenons pour réaliser notre plan pour bâtir, comment nous bâtissons un Ontario meilleur.

Assurément, ce budget arrive au moment où l'Ontario, à l'instar du reste du monde, continue à faire face à l'incertitude.

Despite this uncertainty, we are continuing to deliver on our plan to build, investing in the infrastructure to get more homes built faster, attracting better jobs with bigger paycheques, keeping costs down for families and businesses, all the while retaining a path to balance.

Madam Speaker, I will close by saying this: Our government is about now and the future. We are doing a lot. We know there's more work to be done, and we continue our prudent, responsible approach in building a better Ontario.

I encourage all members in this vaunted House to join our government in voting in support of Bill 180, in support of Ontarians now and well into the future.

1530

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Bhutla Karpoche): I recognize the member from Oakville.

Mr. Stephen Crawford: It's a great pleasure to be able to rise today to speak on third reading of Bill 180, Building a Better Ontario Act. Thank you to the Minister of Finance for sharing your time; I'm also sharing my time with the member from Malton.

I will say to the people of Ontario that the province of Ontario is in very good hands with our Minister of Finance overseeing our budget. Speaker, it's also been an honour to work with the staff that have put the budget together at the Ministry of Finance. We have a great team of people that have worked day and night to put this budget forward, so I want to thank them for all their hard work in building this budget.

As the minister so eloquently explained, with the 2024 budget, our government continues its vital work and delivers on our plan to build. I would like to focus my debate remarks today on the notable pieces of work that Bill 180 is helping to move forward. When taking a step

back, we can see how important these measures are—how they are important to the machinery of government and making sure our policies and programs are able to develop and evolve as smoothly and as soon as they can.

Our proposal related to the taxation of gasoline and diesel fuel is undoubtedly one of the most visible and most talked about of our government's initiatives contained within the 2024 budget and these budget measures. We have proposed legislation that, if passed, would extend existing gasoline and fuel tax cuts until December 31, 2024. The Ontario government temporarily cut the gasoline tax by 5.7 cents per litre and the fuel diesel tax by 5.3 cents a litre—from July 1, 2022, it has already extended these cuts several times until June 30, 2024. The extension before us today, if approved, would ensure that Ontario tax rates remain at nine cents per litre until December 31, 2024.

This measure has been helping the people of Ontario. For example, if the extension is passed, households in Ontario will save an average of \$320 over the two and a half years since the tax rate cuts were first introduced. As the minister has said, our government understands that the average Ontario family and the average Ontario business is feeling the sting of high inflation and interest rates. To help ease this sting, our government seeks to continue to support Ontario families at the pump with this latest cut to the tax on gas and diesel fuel.

Now, Speaker, I turn to another measure, this one aimed at supporting Ontario's vibrant and growing film and television industry. As the members know, the film and television industry continues to create high-value jobs and attract investment throughout the province of Ontario. This is why we are proposing to simplify the Ontario Computer Animation and Special Effects—or OCASE—Tax Credit. The OCASE tax credit is an 18% refundable corporate income tax credit. This is available to Ontario companies that undertake computer animation and special-effects activities for eligible film and television productions here in Ontario. The proposed changes to the OCASE tax credit would help companies get their tax credits faster, delivering on our government's commitment to explore opportunities to simplify tax credit support for computer animation and special-effects companies.

A component of alcohol taxation is another specific item in the budget, Bill 180. Our government, as everybody knows, is for keeping costs down and supporting Ontario's alcohol and hospitality sectors. That is why, with Bill 180, we are proposing to eliminate the wine basic tax that applies to the sales of Ontario wine and wine coolers at on-site winery retail locations. The new rate would take effect as of April 1, 2024. It is to keep costs down and support the province's alcohol and hospitality sectors that our government stopped the estimated 4.6% increase to the beer basic tax and LCBO mark-up rates that were scheduled for March 1, 2024. You see, this increase would have resulted from rates being indexed to inflation. This is an increase the government has consistently stopped over the last six years since we attained power in 2018. Halting this increase results in approximately \$200 million in relief to Ontarians.

As pointed out when our government announced this change in February, the freeze will be in place for two years, until March 1, 2026. As noted in the 2024 budget, the province will also conduct a targeted review on the taxes for beer, wine and alcoholic beverages sold in Ontario. The aim of this review is to promote a more competitive marketplace for Ontario-based producers and consumers.

Speaker, let us move on to another measure, this one having to do with the government's continued progress with regard to Ontario's pension plan landscape. Here, I am talking about our efforts on implementing a permanent target-benefit framework. Ontario workers deserve sustainable pensions. That is why we are taking action to implement a target benefit framework that would help protect the retirement security of workers in the skilled trades and other occupations. This framework would help Ontario employees move from employer to employer while keeping the same pension. Specific to the measures in the 2024 budget bill, I can add that they followed stakeholder consultations over the last year.

Now, the Ministry of Finance is preparing the regulations that would be necessary to implement the target benefit framework, which the government intends to come into effect on January 1, 2025. Target benefit pension plans are intended to provide a worker with a monthly stream of income in retirement, with predictable contributions from employers during a worker's time under their employment. Implementation of a permanent target benefit framework would pave the way for employees to offer workplace pension plans, increasing opportunities for Ontario workers to save for their retirement. As a concluding point on the framework, I can say it is a demonstration of yet another way our government is working for the workers of the province of Ontario.

Speaker, now I turn from our strides aimed at building the retirement funds of workers to focus on our strides in building infrastructure in the Building Ontario Fund. Specifically, this budget measure would establish a new stand-alone statute for the continued operation of Ontario's new infrastructure bank, the Building Ontario Fund. The Ontario Infrastructure Bank, now the Building Ontario Fund, was announced in the 2023 Ontario Economic Outlook and Fiscal Review as an important tool to help attract capital to Ontario to build essential infrastructure. The Building Ontario Fund is exploring opportunities to support large-scale projects in many sectors, including post-secondary housing for students, long-term care, energy generation and municipal infrastructure sectors. This fund will help meet the infrastructure needs of a growing Ontario as the government moves forward with Ontario's plan to build.

Speaker, there are a few additional measures I would like to touch on that are in this bill. Proposed are all minor legislative amendments to clarify or improve administrative effectiveness or enforcement, or to maintain the integrity and effectiveness of various statutes administered by the Ontario Minister of Finance.

No two bills tabled in this Legislature are exactly alike, because they are always a reflection of the time in which

they are crafted. The same goes for governments and their budgets. Our economic and fiscal situation, they are a reflection of our times. Each year's budget reflects information inputs from the year before and, through its forecasts and outlooks, projects into the future by several years. A budget, after all, is a point on the continuum, a very important one, with Ontario's fiscal year running from April 1 to March 31 every year.

With these points in mind, I'd like to take a few minutes to flesh out some of the economic proof points of the times Ontario finds itself in now, as shown in the 2024 budget. Ontario's economy in 2024 is expected to be negatively impacted by high interest rates from the Bank of Canada. The outlook for Ontario's real GDP growth in 2024 has deteriorated significantly over the last year. The budget also shows that following estimated real GDP growth of 1.2% in 2023, growth is projected to be 0.3% in 2024. This is down from 1.3% at the time of the 2023 budget and 0.5% at the time of the 2023 Economic Outlook and Fiscal Review. Real GDP growth is projected to then increase to 1.9% in 2025 and further rise to 2.2% in 2026-27. Compared to the 2023 budget and the 2023 fall economic statement, this represents slower projected growth. Bear in mind, for the purposes of prudent fiscal planning, these Ministry of Finance projections are slightly below the average private sector forecast.

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Meanwhile, employment in the province is projected to rise by 0.8% in 2024, slowing from a 2.4% increase in 2023. A positive is that the unemployment rate over the outlook period is projected to remain below the historical average.

Geopolitical developments pose a significant risk to Ontario's economic outlook and can influence the government's revenues. Commodity markets and supply chains continue to be impacted by global conflicts and tensions. Rising tensions are continuing to weigh on international trade in goods and services, which could impact Ontario's trading relationships in North America.

I now turn to fiscal matters. For 2023-24, the government is projecting a deficit of \$3 billion. The government does retain a path to balance in the 2024 budget, projecting deficits of \$9.8 billion in 2024-25 and \$4.6 billion in 2025-26 before reaching a surplus of \$0.5 billion in 2026-27. As the minister alluded to in his presentation, we are the only major government in Canada that actually has a path to balance.

As noted in the 2024 budget, Ontario is not alone: Ongoing economic uncertainty related to inflation, high interest rates and rapid population growth is creating the need for investments in both public services and infrastructure such as schools, health care facilities and, of course, housing. This makes for challenging economic and fiscal circumstances for governments around the world.

Unlike many governments, one key aspect of Ontario's fiscal situation is very favourable. You see, Ontario's bonds provide investors with exceptional liquidity, and a wide range of bond offerings, including green bonds, have sold at record levels. In fact, Ontario is the largest and

most consistent issuer of green bonds with \$18 billion issued since 2014-15. In February, Ontario issued its second green bond for 2023-24 and 15th green bond overall for \$1.5 billion. I might add: This was the first green bond issued under the new Ontario Sustainable Bond Framework. This framework released in January allows for a broader range of potential Ontario bond offerings in the future, including ones related to emissions-free nuclear power, which I know our Minister of Energy has talked so much about in the House.

Ontario will continue to finance most of its borrowing program in the long-term public markets in Canada as well as internationally. Ontario completed long-term public borrowings of \$42.6 billion in 2023-24. For this fiscal year, Ontario's long-term borrowing is forecast at \$37.5 billion and, the following year, forecast at \$37.7 billion. This is only \$0.1 billion and \$0.7 billion higher than the forecast in the 2023 Ontario Economic Outlook and Fiscal Review. The government remains committed to reducing the debt burden and putting Ontario's finances back on to a more sustainable path.

Ontario has kept its debt-burden-reduction targets unchanged from the 2023 budget, and Ontario's interest on debt-to-revenue ratio is at the lowest level it has been at since the 1980s. That, by the way, is after coming to power in 2018 and inheriting the largest sub-sovereign debt in the entire world.

As I conclude my remarks today, let me just say that our government is proud of all we have accomplished to make life easier for the people and the businesses in Ontario. We have done all kinds of things. They range from creating new ways for individuals to receive medical care in their community and making it easier to get parking permits and book ServiceOntario appointments. As the Minister of Finance mentioned, we would enable an estimated \$8 billion in cost savings and support for businesses, including \$3.7 billion for small businesses alone. We are investing in vital public services and in infrastructure, investing to get more homes built faster and investing to attract better-paying jobs right here in Ontario.

Ontario five years ago had zero investment dedicated to electric-vehicle manufacturing. Today, Canada, most of that being right here in Ontario—in fact, almost all of it—has over \$43 billion committed to electric vehicle manufacturing, placing Canada number one in the world for auto investments. We're attracting the vital services and infrastructure and investing to get more homes built faster and investing in better-paying jobs.

We will also focus on keeping costs down for both families and businesses. They're equally important. We need to attract investments in businesses here in the province, which we are on the path to doing after years of Liberal mismanagement and manufacturing jobs fleeing the province as the government didn't even support manufacturing in this province. In fact, they said Ontario is going to go the way of the service economy; manufacturing is a thing of the past. Well, nothing could be further from the truth. We are undergoing a manufacturing renaissance here in the province of Ontario with over 300,000 manufacturing jobs created in the last six years.

It's also important to keep costs down for families. Families are having a tough time with inflation, high gas costs, the carbon tax, interest rates. Working with the people we are eliminating licence plate sticker renewal fees, lowering the gas tax, putting through the LIFT credit—the highest tax cut in Ontario's history for low-income earners—these are just a few measures we've put through and will continue to put through in the years ahead.

We are dedicated to continuing to work and keep costs down for families and businesses. I might add the key here to that point: We've been able to maintain economic growth, low historical unemployment, all while on a path to balance our budget, and that's with inheriting the largest sub-sovereign debt in the world in 2018. So we're on a very, very good path of fiscal prudence but also, where we are spending money, investing it to get a return on investment. That is absolutely key.

I encourage all members to vote in favour of Bill 180, Building a Better Ontario Act (Budget Measures), 2024. I will now cede my time to the great member from Mississauga–Malton.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Bhutla Karpoche): The member from Mississauga–Malton.

Mr. Deepak Anand: It's always a privilege to rise and speak to third reading of the Building a Better Ontario Act (Budget Measures). 2024.

Before I start, as always, I'm thankful to the supreme God for giving me the health and well-being so that I can stand here and represent the residents of Mississauga–Malton. Thank you to the residents of Mississauga–Malton for giving me an opportunity. Thank you to my volunteers, my family, my extended family. Above all, thank you to all the staff members. Thank you for your support. That's why I'm able to deliver this message.

Everyone in this House would agree, Ontario is a great place to live. Over the last several years, our economy has not only grown but has flourished, propelled by the ingenuity and the resilience of Ontarians under the leadership of Premier Ford—and our Minister of Finance has done an incredible job.

This economic expansion has been accompanied by a surge in population as we have seen individuals and families recognizing Ontario's boundless opportunities. An example: the reason I, along with my family, came to Canada in 2000 as a new immigrant—by the way, yesterday was my birthday, 52 years strong. I just want to take a moment to thank—

Mr. Sam Oosterhoff: You look 39.

Mr. Deepak Anand: Thank you so much for that compliment.

Fifty-two years strong. Thank you to Malaika for this beautiful gift, which I am wearing, as you can see. Thank you to my children for amazing things.

As we celebrate this growth, we are aware of the responsibility it comes with, the responsibility to ensure that every resident enjoys access to essential services and a high quality of life. To fulfill this responsibility, our government is making strategic investments across key

sectors that underpin the prosperity and well-being of our society.

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Our investments in health care infrastructure, workforce development, patient-centred care reflect our unwavering commitment to health care that is accessible, efficient and responsive to the needs of all Ontarians.

Similarly, in transit, education, housing, we're not simply keeping up with the demand, but we are proactively laying the groundwork for a more inclusive and sustainable future. From expanding public transit networks to investing in affordable housing and modernizing our education system, in every decision, this government is guided by a vision of Ontario that is equitable, resilient and forward-thinking.

We recognize that economic growth must be accompanied by enhanced public safety. That is why, in this budget, we are making sure that we are committed to creating safer streets and communities by investing in law enforcement, crime prevention and community-based initiatives. By addressing the root causes of crime and fostering collaboration between government, law enforcement agencies and community organizations, we are making sure we're building a safer Ontario.

As we embark on this journey of progress and transformation, let's remember that the true measure of our success lies not only in economic indicators, but in the tangible impacts. Across our province, these are the priorities and initiatives Ontarians want to see their government focus on, and we remain focused.

Madam Speaker, Ontario is part of a global economy, and there are global economic challenges that we cannot ignore. The cost of living continues to rise, placing an increasingly heavy burden on the shoulders of Ontario's hard-working families. The Bank of Canada's decision to maintain elevated interest rates and the federal government's carbon tax heighten this financial strain, compounding the challenges faced by the households across the province.

This is a typical tale of two different governments: a government at the federal level that is increasing the costs by adding the carbon tax, and a government here in Ontario that understands and believes the challenges faced by Ontarians. That is why we're reducing the gas tax by 10 cents. That's the contrast we're going to continue to talk about in the next few minutes.

But before I talk about it—this budget didn't come by itself. There's a whole team who worked hard to prepare this document. This document is the voice of the people of Ontario.

Thank you to the Minister of Finance, who crisscrossed the whole province for the budget consultation. Despite his busy schedule, he was there to listen to the people of Ontario—their challenges, their issues, their suggestions.

And of course, the member from Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound, who has done an incredible job—he was the PA and part of this budget consultation, along with the

member from Oakville. They both deserve a big round of applause.

Interjections.

Mr. Deepak Anand: Thank you.

Of course, the members of the Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs all came together, irrespective of which party they belong to, to listen to the people of Ontario.

And definitely, we need to say thank you to our staff members, who were there to support us all along the way.

It was not an easy task, but we accomplished it. And you can see that the result and the fruit of that accomplishment is this budget.

From groceries to gasoline, the affordability of everyday necessities is diminishing. In the face of these challenges, we are making sure that the urgent need to provide relief to Ontario families is in this budget. That is why we're proposing to extend the gas and fuel tax cuts until December 31, 2024, through the passage of this spring bill. This would save Ontario households an average of \$320, since the cuts were first introduced on July 1, 2020, putting more money back into the pockets of hard-working Ontarians.

Together, let's work towards a future where prosperity is within reach of all Ontarians, regardless of their economic circumstances.

The vast natural resources, for example, in the north present a wealth of opportunities for sustainable development and job creation. By investing in infrastructure, innovation and skills training in the mining industry, we aim to unlock the full economic potential of the region while safeguarding its environmental integrity for our future generations. Ontario has dedicated a billion dollars to support critical legacy infrastructure such as all-season roads, broadband connectivity and community support for the Ring of Fire region. At the heart of our strategy lies a concerted effort to attract investment and create jobs. Madam Speaker, this government understands and believes that, in order for a prosperous Ontario, we need to increase the revenue of Ontario so that we can have the money to invest back into the services for the people of Ontario.

Our government is committed to investing in critical infrastructure and innovation to support the growth of northern Ontario. From modernizing transportation networks to expanding broadband access and investing in R&D, we are paving the way for increased connectivity, productivity and competitiveness in the region. Madam Speaker, that is why our government is investing \$15 million to enhance the Critical Minerals Innovation Fund, which was launched in 2022. The additional funding of \$5 million per year for 2024-27 will continue to help Ontario's mining sector undertake research, development and commercialization of innovative technologies, techniques, processes and solutions related to the critical minerals, something which we heard during the budget consultations, and we're delivering the results. This is part of our plan for building a better Ontario, now and into the future.

And all this work, when we talk about attracting these investments and building everything, building the products and the services for the people of Ontario, we need to have sustainable, competitive energy to support our growth. That is why our government firmly believes that the clean, safe, reliable and emissions-free nuclear energy must play an even larger role in our future energy supply mix. That is why nuclear energy has long been recognized as the cornerstone of Ontario's electricity system, providing a stable and low-carbon source of power that is essential for meeting our energy needs while reducing greenhouse gas emissions.

In line with this region, the government remains committed to supporting the continued, safe operation of nuclear facilities such as the Pickering nuclear generating plant, as well as the refurbishment of Darlington and Bruce nuclear generating stations. These initiatives not only ensure the continued reliability and the safety of our nuclear fleet, but also contribute to job creation and economic growth in communities across the province.

Madam Speaker, by embracing clean and sustainable energy solutions like nuclear power and small modular reactors, we can ensure a reliable and resilient energy supply. We can ensure that there is energy available for the future generation while advancing our goals of environmental stewardship and economic prosperity.

Look at the numbers, for an example, Madam Speaker. If you really compare, as I talked about the tale of two different governments—I want to add to this: When the government was formed in 2018, there were 7.17 million people who were employed. To date, in the last three years itself, our government has helped support the job creators to create the jobs and we have seen the total employed are now 7.91 million people working, which is 700,000 people more compared to 2018. And now, again, if you compare it with the 15 years of Liberal government, where we saw 300,000 jobs going out, we have 700,000 jobs coming in, and that is another contrast between the two governments.

And it's not that the people don't recognize it. That's why we saw in the by-election results in Milton and L-K-M—we saw the by-election results where people said, "Keep going. The people of Ontario want to make sure there is prosperity and the government continues to support that progress for the people of Ontario." Why? There are a lot of people from across the world who want to come to Ontario and make their home, like me and my family. So, to everyone who is thinking and considering a move to Ontario, I'd like to say thank you for taking that decision. You're welcome here. If you want to invest, this is a place where you come; if you can dream it, with your hard work you can achieve it. That is why, Madam Speaker, it is very important that this budget talks about creating progress and prosperity.

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Another example is that revenue in 2018-19 was \$153.7 billion. Today, if you look at 2023-24, revenue is \$201 billion. For this increase in revenue, I want to say thank you to all the hard-working Ontario workers for supporting Ontario's progress and prosperity, and thank you to the

government for making sure that we continue to make the investments. In 2018-19, the total expenses were \$161 billion. If you look in 2023-24, the government invested over \$194 billion to serve the people of Ontario. This strategic approach not only enhances the reliability and resilience of our infrastructure, but also contributes to the progress of the economy and the people at large.

Madam Speaker, talking about investments, we're investing in 15 new projects through the \$15 million Hydrogen Innovation Fund, which supports projects that pave the way for reliable, affordable, clean electricity generation and alternatives to conventional electricity.

Back to the north, we are continuing to support the northern economy through the Northern Energy Advantage Program, which will provide a rebate for eligible mining, forestry and steel operations in northern Ontario. So to all those who are thinking of investing, Ontario is a place where you can make your investments, and you're not only growing the economy of Ontario, you're growing the economy of your organization as well. If you are thinking of investing, Ontario is the economic engine of not only Canada but of North America, and soon will be the economic engine of the world. That is why we are making sure that we are investing into the programs that it needs to help and support this progress.

It's not just the money, it is the people—the people are the biggest asset of this province. That is why, Madam Speaker, one of the key pillars of our progress is a sustainable workforce. We are delivering a plan to build by investing to attract better jobs, build roads, highways, public transit, while keeping costs down for the people of Ontario.

We truly believe that we have supported the long-term targeted and strategic investments in Ontario manufacturing. For example, one of the ways that government is lowering costs for Ontario manufacturers is through the Ontario Made Manufacturing Investment Tax Credit. For example, when you invest \$100, a 10% refundable corporate income tax credit for eligible investment in building, machinery and equipment for use in manufacturing or processing will be delivered. It's a vicious cycle—when you come here, you invest and you support Ontario, the government of Ontario is going to support you, and together we are able to support the people of Ontario. Introduced in the 2023 budget, the credit will provide Ontario businesses with estimated income tax relief of approximately \$1.1 billion over the first four years of the incentive, from 2023 to 2026.

Madam Speaker, we have supported this. We have made sure, through these initiatives, the output is that we are able to attract Volkswagen's \$7-billion investment in St. Thomas. What will it do? It will create 3,000 good-paying jobs. The \$5 billion extra in energy investment—what will it do? Employ 2,400 more workers. The Umicore investment in Loyalist township will create 600 direct jobs.

Why is it required, Madam Speaker? When all these investments come, it gives opportunity and growth for the people of Ontario to work hard. When they work hard,

they become financially more independent. When they become financially more independent, they're able to give back to the community.

As we are talking about the community and we are talking about making sure that we have people, our workers—Madam Speaker, Ontario's workers are central to Ontario's plan to build. They're our greatest asset, and that is the reason why the government of Ontario is investing in the people of Ontario.

In 2023 alone, employment in Ontario increased by 2.4%, driven by an increase in both full-time and part-time positions. Through these initiatives, we're making sure we will help and support and promote financial stability and peace of mind. Something which we are doing is prioritizing sustainable pensions for our workers, supporting a target-benefit framework to safeguard retirement security in the skilled trades and other fields. If passed, the spring bill amendment will bolster this framework, allowing employees to maintain their pensions while transitioning to different employers.

And our infrastructure commitment is not just a promise, it's real progress, improving connectivity, fuelling economic growth and bolstering quality of life. Strategic investments in transportation are easing congestion, enhancing safety and opening doors for businesses and communities. We are laying the foundation for more efficient and resilient infrastructure, ensuring that Ontario is ready for future generations.

All told, as part of our historic 10-year infrastructure plan, we are investing more than \$190 billion in highways, transit, broadband, and housing-enabling and other infrastructure all across our province.

We are committed to easing the burden of commuters. Our new One Fare program, for another example of how we are here to support the affordability crisis for the people of Ontario: The new One Fare program simplifies transit payments for riders connecting across Ontario, saving the average daily rider \$1,600 per year.

Another great example is, right now, as we are going through the summer, there are a lot of university students who are going to be doing their internship. For somebody who is living, for example, in Mississauga and is doing an internship at the Legislative Assembly, they can hop onto Mississauga transit, go to the GO station, take the GO train or bus, come to Union Station, take the TTC subway, while making sure all of it is paid by one fare. These are real solutions to a problem and support the people of Ontario.

Madam Speaker, there are so many good things in this budget, but I want to sum up by saying that the measures contained in the spring bill are aimed at rebuilding Ontario's economy, building infrastructure, highways and transit, working for workers, keeping costs down and better services for all of us. We have a plan and a long-term vision, and we're taking real action rooted in strong fundamentals.

I firmly believe, Madam Speaker, this government can and will get it done and that is why the people of Ontario want us to keep going and build a better, prosperous

Ontario. So I encourage everyone to come together and vote in favour of Bill 180, the Building a Better Ontario Act.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Bhutla Karpoche): Questions?

Mr. Wayne Gates: The minister talked about health care in Niagara. It was under your government that we closed six hospitals in Niagara: St. Catharines General, the Hotel Dieu, Niagara-on-the-Lake, Welland, Fort Erie and Port Colborne, and in 2014, it was your government and your candidate that said no to GO two-way, all-day, all the way to Niagara and no to the new hospital. It was brought in by other people.

Investing in health care, I believe, is one of our foremost priorities. So I'm going to ask the government—I don't care who answers it. In Fort Erie, you have decided to close our urgent care centre which provided 24/7 care for 40,000 residents in Fort Erie. They've now cut it down to 10 hours a day. I'm going to ask the government: Are you going to reopen the Fort Erie Urgent Care Centre that, quite frankly, the Premier promised to keep open in the last election?

Mr. Stephen Crawford: Thank you to the member opposite. I can tell you this minister and this government care a lot about the Niagara region. We have dedicated a lot of resources and time. In fact, we have the great member from Niagara West, who is a member from the government here, who has been advocating for great health services here in the Niagara region and throughout Ontario. And we have a new hospital being built in Lincoln in the Niagara region which is going to be of tremendous benefit to the people of Niagara.

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I can tell you, we've also been supportive of all the wine producers and the craft beer manufacturers in the Niagara region which have been very thankful for the support we have given them in this budget to make them more competitive, to get their products sold to market and helping consumers and businesses in the Niagara region. We will continue to be supportive of the people and businesses in the Niagara region.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Bhutla Karpoche): Next question?

Mr. Logan Kanapathi: Thank you to the minister and to the wonderful PA for the presentation. I know this budget is very fiscally responsible and has so many things to offer for Ontarians.

I'm going to stick with one specific area. It has been said many times before December but I will say it again: Ontario is home to some of the world's best and brightest doctors and medical professionals. I know this government, not a long time ago, opened the door for foreign-trained nurses for the first time in history.

Through you, Speaker, I ask the member from Oakville and PA to please tell us what our 2024 budget does to continue to provide the people of Ontario with the medical professionals they need in order to receive the quality of care that they deserve.

Mr. Stephen Crawford: Great member from Markham–Unionville for a great question. He is abso-

lutely correct in that we do need more medical professionals here in Ontario. That's the case not only in Ontario but, indeed, throughout Canada and, in fact, all throughout North America. So, we are incentivizing them with northern stay grants to have doctors who are educated stay in remote communities so that they can service those communities.

We have announced that we are creating a new medical school in York University, close to your community, right in Vaughan, Ontario. Minister Lecce is here, I see—great for you and that community.

We need to educate and foster more doctors right here in the province of Ontario, and this is the first government in many decades that is actually doing that.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Bhutla Karpoche): Next question?

Ms. Sandy Shaw: My question is for the minister. By any measure, Ontario carries the largest debt burden in Canada. It's the most indebted province in Canada. By your own measures, I might add, you are supporting an unsustainable debt burden. Your net debt-to-GDP is now higher than when Kathleen Wynne left office.

You have a \$9.8-billion operating deficit. Your total debt and deficit is projected to be \$439 billion. You've increased it by almost \$150 billion. The amount that you're spending, the interest on the debt, continues to climb.

At the same time, you are spending the least in Canada on per-capita spending when it comes to health care, when it comes to education.

How do you square the fact that you are the most indebted province in Canada but spend the least on the things that people care about?

Mr. Stephen Crawford: I'm glad the Minister of Education has brought financial literacy into the schools because the members opposite definitely need a lesson or two in that; I can guarantee you that. The Ontario government, when we inherited power in 2018, had the largest sub-sovereign debt in the world. And, unfortunately, that's not a debt that's going to disappear overnight.

What is making progress is the deficit that has been going down year over year. We actually had a surplus two or three years ago. We have a path to balance—the only major government in Canada with a path to balance. We will be balanced in two years.

With all the things that the opposition is promising, could you imagine if they were in power, the fiscal mismanagement, the debt we'd have piled on?

We have a great path right now. It's a path of investment in building Ontario, but also being fiscally prudent. I'm proud of our track record with respect to the debt and deficit.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Bhutla Karpoche): Next question?

Ms. Christine Hogarth: First of all, we are building infrastructure. And first of all, I have to thank the Minister of Education for being in my riding on Friday to announce a new public school for our growing community. In that area where we're growing and building, we're building

another 825 student spaces and another 88 child care spaces, which is just huge for families. Thank you again to the Minister of Education for this infrastructure build.

Also, what we're looking for in some of our communities is—we have aging infrastructure when it comes to community centres, and we need that extra little help. We see a lot of our malls are changing. A lot of our seniors would walk around the malls, but our malls are being redeveloped into townhouses and different types of housing—affordable housing—because of our initiatives from our government. Once again, thank you to the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing for helping us build more housing, but for that we need some help with some community space.

I'm asking the parliamentary assistant, if you can help me: Explain what's in the budget to help with community space for our growing communities.

Mr. Deepak Anand: First of all, I'll say thank you to the member from Lakeshore, Etobicoke–Lakeshore—there are two Lakeshores—for your advocacy for the people of Etobicoke–Lakeshore. You're so right. Who does not remember going to community centres or the libraries to play and have fun? Those who are parents—I do remember when my kids were young, I used take them to the Fletcher Creek community centre. It used to be fun. We would hang out as parents, the kids would have fun. They learned swimming and essential things for their lives. These centres have been serving our community for generations.

That is why, as said earlier, this is the government that believes in investing for the people of Ontario. We are investing \$200 million to new community sport and recreation infrastructure. All the caucus members—

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Bhutla Karpoche): Thank you. Next question?

Mr. Joel Harden: Any of the members opposite can answer this question. I'm wondering why Ottawa didn't get the funds we needed for mental health supports. Let me talk in particular about something we brought up in pre-budget consultations. Counselling Connect: This is a program that runs at about \$600,000 a year. It provides, within 48 hours, immediate help of up to three psychotherapy sessions for people in immediate crisis. This was a plea that the Pinecrest-Queensway Community Health Centre made to the government: "Could the province assume responsibility for this?" What we got instead, unfortunately, is a province of Ontario office in our city that's going to cost three times the amount this particular program costs—we'll take the office; we'll use whatever means we have to lobby the government.

I would ask any of the members opposite: Why not take on that responsibility provincially so we could get every single person in our city—and, why not, every single person in Ontario—access to mental health support within 48 hours?

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Bhutla Karpoche): Response? The member from Oakville.

Mr. Stephen Crawford: Thank you, Speaker, and thank you to the member opposite from the great region of

Ottawa—love the capital region. What I can tell you is that we, as a government, have always been there for our most vulnerable and will continue to be. In fact, we've invested over \$400 million more over three years to support mental health services. We have a phenomenal minister who understands these issues very, very well, the Associate Minister of Mental Health and Addictions.

With respect to Ottawa in general—I know you did touch on Ottawa—Ottawa is a region we've been extremely committed to. As you know, the government recently had the Premier down there to make a big announcement for a new funding agreement for the region of Ottawa and changing some of the cost situations with the government there. Ottawa is a region we're very committed to as well as, of course, as you touched on, the mental health and addictions, which we'll continue to support.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Bhutla Karpoche): We don't have any more time for questions and answers.

Further debate?

Ms. Catherine Fife: I'm so pleased to be here today. I'm going to say it like I mean it: I'm really pleased to be here today. This budget, budget 2024, we have been very vocal about the gaps that we see in this budget and I'm going to talk about some of the amendments, but I've been listening to some Pink Floyd recently, and I'm going to try to get some Pink Floyd quotes on the record because it's very applicable to this current culture of this government.

I'm really doing this for my own amusement, but at third reading, we need all the help we can get, especially having gone through an extensive pre-budget consultation process where myself and my colleague from London North travelled around the province, and our colleagues met us in Hamilton and northern Ontario. Although, I must point out to the government members who are so happily here, as well, that no Toronto pre-budget consultations were scheduled. This government left Toronto off the pre-budget agenda. And I have to say, I know that there is some bias towards the GTA area; certainly earlier, the Minister of Health was talking about how we're just downtown New Democrats, even though I'm from Waterloo and we've got people from Windsor; we've got people from northern Ontario; we've got people in the Ottawa area.

1620

Toronto matters. It really, really does, and the fact that this government intentionally removed Toronto delegations from the budget process was very problematic, because this is the economic engine of Ontario. The connectivity with our various communities truly does matter, and if you are trying to design and craft a budget that meets the needs of the people who we are elected to serve, then you need to include Toronto. I wanted to point that out.

I also wanted to say that we did try to make this budget bill better during committee. We introduced two significant amendments. We're, of course, limited, just so you know, in what we can do. This obviously is not the budget that I would have designed, by a long shot. But I

do want to say, we did try to make it better and, very quickly, we introduced a couple of amendments.

One of the amendments proposed an emergency room emergency fund, because we have had so many emergency closures across this province. When those small rural hospitals are shutting their ERs down—in Durham, there was emergency room closures, as well—I think there were 203 over the course of the last year. That's another record in the province of Ontario—check—for this government. We've never seen these kinds of closures for emergency rooms ever in the history of the province of Ontario, and it is impacting the health and safety and well-being of the people that we're elected to serve; make no mistake about that.

So what we did is that we created a new schedule to create an emergency room emergency fund, to keep ERs open that would otherwise be shut down due to the lack of funding. And do you know who actually recommended this? They came to committee, and I want to thank the good folks from Minden, because that community got blindsided as this government allowed and permitted and fast-tracked the closure of their emergency room in Minden. It's heartbreaking for that community. They have been tracking the deficits of the hospitals in this province, and you would have to be literally with your head in the sand to not know how dire the situation is for our acute-care hospitals in Ontario. So we proposed this; of course, it went nowhere.

And then one of the schedules, of course, renames the infrastructure bank to the new Building Ontario Fund. The infrastructure bank was introduced originally in the fall economic statement; it's copying the federal Liberal infrastructure bank, which has been an abject failure. So instead of this government actually looking at a mechanism that would assist with infrastructure development, do you know what they did? They just rebranded it. They just called it a new name.

We tried to really get at the heart of what this new Building Ontario Fund would look like: What are the parameters? What's the framework? We don't have a lot of confidence in this government's ability to create legislation, or even regulations, well, and so what we did is we introduced an amendment that would ensure that the Ontario Infrastructure Bank—or the Building Ontario Fund, now—would not allow for public dollars to be used for private, for-profit projects that would otherwise get built. This makes a lot of sense, because, as my colleague has pointed out, this province is in massive debt and with an ongoing \$9.8-billion operational funding shortfall, which was not predicted even in the fall economic statement.

So people are paying the price for your poor policy decisions, for your poor legislative decisions, and the costs for Bill 124 in total, the FAO predicts, are at \$13.7 billion. I'd like to point out that that is money you put your hands in the pockets of Ontarians for, because this government talks about pockets a lot. You put your hands in the pockets of Ontarians when you introduced Bill 124, an unconstitutional piece of legislation which caps wages at

1%, then you called everybody who was working during that pandemic—the nurses, the front-line health care workers, the doctors—heroes, but you capped them at 1%, which is a contributing factor to the out-migration of those health care professionals in Ontario—100% for sure it is.

So what we wanted to make sure with this new Building Ontario Fund—how would the implementation happen? Because reduced public financing for long-term-care facilities or affordable housing that are normally privately financed that would not otherwise get built is an issue. And public financing is a big part of our Homes Ontario plan, because this government has to get back in the business of building truly attainable affordable housing. The Ontario Chamber of Commerce has encouraged this government to build that kind of housing, not market share. This is truly affordable attainable housing, because that is the stabilizer for the economy, right?

And we now know, after five and a half painful years of this particular government, that housing starts are down. It is very disturbing to see these numbers decrease in the face of people living in tents and temporary shelters across this great province. That crisis is real.

If you were serious about stabilizing the housing market, you would get back into the business of building non-market housing. We have a plan. We presented it to you in the face of a really positive solution, one part of the solution to address the housing crisis. This government said no. They're very good at saying no to us, as they just did earlier, on the education funding.

However, it would not be worthwhile to allow costly private financing to displace affordable public financing. So, we tried to get some clarity on this, because, I have to tell you—I mean, there's a lot of talk about the gravy train in this place, but we're really focused now on the gravy stains, because you keep leaving a path of destruction and, quite honestly, really poor fiscal decisions which we are going to end up paying the cost for.

So we tried to make the bill better. It didn't go very well for us, because it's a supermajority here at Queen's Park. We did put a dissenting opinion, though. This is a record-long dissenting opinion; I believe it's nine pages long. I do want to thank my staff in my office, Karissa Singh, who is my legislative assistant, and Steffi Burgi, who is an OLIP intern—they're doing amazing work—but also Caitlin Hipkiss, who is our researcher.

Interjections.

Ms. Catherine Fife: Yes, that's good. Thank you very much.

Say what you want; we punch above our weight in the research department, I can tell you, usually out of necessity. But we put in a dissenting opinion that has never been this long, because the grievances are so real.

And really, Madam Speaker, when you go through the process of engaging the public on what they would like to see in the budget and then you essentially ignore everything that they asked for, this is insulting, and we can do better as legislators. We're so far apart on so many issues, but there's no willingness even to compromise on those investments that would save the health care system money

down the line, for instance. And this includes access to medication or even oxygen. We heard from several organizations about the cost of oxygen and the availability of oxygen as medicine, and this government refused to even entertain increasing the availability and reducing the cost to people who require oxygen to live. I think it's very symbolic, Madam Speaker. We can all agree, I would hope, that oxygen is one of those key factors in staying alive—but not with this government.

The other thing I do want to say is that during the consultations in Oakville, we were at the Holiday Inn ballroom. We're all set up there, and the Canadian council of universities started their deputation to us. It was a big ballroom; there was a lot of room for people to come and watch us listen or talk—more listen, I would say—and then a leak started to happen in the ballroom. As the council of Canadian universities kept moving forward with their presentation, the leak got more profound and more water started to come in. And just at the moment when the CEO of the Canadian council of universities mentioned the infrastructure deficit on our campuses, the ceiling came down and we had to suspend the pre-budget consultations—again, very symbolic. However, the ignoring of the original leak proved to be very meaningful at that very moment.

1630

I just wanted to reference the fact that, today, this is actually a historical time in this Legislature. It goes all the way back to the Mike Harris years—1996, when the first omnibus bill was brought into this Legislature, and it was by the previous Premier, Mike Harris, who had his slogan, “Make Ontario Great Again.”

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: Oh, no.

Ms. Catherine Fife: I know, right? It's quite something.

That was the first introduction of the omnibus bill. These omnibus bills are very problematic, because you can actually have some good things in them, but then you always have a poison pill and so we obviously have to vote against it. They actually were referenced during those 1996-97 years as bully bills.

It's funny, because Alvin Curling stood in his place in this House—

Interjection.

Ms. Catherine Fife:—I think it was right here—for 18 hours to fight what many people thought was a threat to democracy, the omnibus bill. So that's a part of history today.

I want to actually thank Steve Paikin for posting that, because I find that sort of stuff interesting.

Our own Peter Kormos also was successful in, I believe, doing 21 hours of a filibuster at the time. Of course, we can't do that now; if we did, we would be here all the time, I have to tell you, because the legislation—including even this latest Bill 185, this so-called “build more housing, cutting red tape” bill, which is going to create so many problems for our municipalities across this province.

I'm going to circle back to health care.

During the pre-budget consultations, we heard from so many organizations, and the language that they were

using, I personally have never heard before. They said, “We've hit the wall. We are well past the tipping point. There is a tsunami of broken people in our communities. We do not have the medical staff to take care of them.” On the mental health file, never have I seen the anxiety around the lack of mental health resources to be so profound.

In our northern and rural communities, these problems are highlighted, I would have to say. We still, obviously, are fighting for culturally appropriate health care so that people have a connection with their doctor. But in northern communities, it is very dire.

I want to thank our northern members, including our amazing health critic from Nickel Belt, who has been just tracking the money—because it doesn't matter all of the press releases that you quote; when you start believing your own press releases that you wrote, this is a problem. But at the end of the day, it really does matter where the money is going. And of course, the figure that's contained within the budget also includes the compensation for Bill 124.

You're very proud of saying, “This is a historic amount of historic funding.” I've never heard the word “historic” used in such an unhistoric way—and incorrectly, I might add.

Where we are right now is a standoff with doctors in Ontario—and where we are right now is, we have a Minister of Health who is not concerned, she says, about the diminished supply of doctors. This is a very dangerous standoff, I just want to say. We've seen this play out, actually, even in our education system, where the out-migration of teachers from that sector has been—I would say, obviously, we've never seen that many teachers—usually teachers are moving into the system with great enthusiasm, because it's a calling; teaching is a calling, to be an educator. But now, even following this debate and listening to the minister really diminish those concerns that exist in the system, and then not acknowledge the impact of the learning and working conditions of our classrooms and how that is impacting people staying or leaving the field—this is basic common sense: If your work experience is dreadful, if you aren't able to actually meet the needs of your complex students in your classroom because of underfunding, because of a lack of human resources, that is going to impact whether or not you stay in the profession. This is not a complicated concept here.

This is an article from Allison Jones from the Canadian Press: “Arbitration with province's doctors over compensation in dire shape”—and this is the Ontario Medical Association. Listen to some of these things that the minister has actually said. I'll set the stage for you:

“Recruitment and retention of doctors in Ontario is ‘not a major concern,’ the Ministry of Health suggests in arguments it is making in arbitration with the Ontario Medical Association over physician compensation.

“The argument from the province comes as the OMA, which represents Ontario's doctors, has repeatedly warned that more than two million residents don't have a family doctor and thousands of physician jobs are going unfilled.”

This reminds me of that Pink Floyd lyric; you know the one—I always listen to Pink Floyd. Nobody believes that,

but this is it—“Did they get you to trade your heroes for ghosts?” That’s pretty relevant, eh? I mean, Pink Floyd is amazing, I have to say. But literally, you’ve called these people heroes, and yet when you sit down with them in arbitration, the conversation becomes less respectful, I would say.

“But the talks are going so poorly that an arbitrator is now being asked to determine compensation levels for the first year while the two sides work on the 2025-2028 period”—so they’re pushing this down the line. There are no solutions here, because there’s no respect, and you’re not going to get to a stabilized place with doctors in Ontario if you do not respect those doctors.

It goes on to say, “Things are in such dire shape that that’s the fastest way to get money out the door to stabilize family doctors’ practices”—by pushing it down to 2025-28. And this is coming from Dr. David Barber, the chair of OMA’s section on general and family practice.

In between, in these articles, there’s old titles, and one of these titles says, “Want More Family Doctors in Ontario? Pay Them Better” and “Can’t Find a Family Doctor? It Might Be Because They’re Busy Doing Other Specialties”—you know where they’re going? They’re going to the private sector, because this government has said, “Listen, it’s the Wild West out there right now, and we’re really friendly towards these medical businesses versus public health care.” It’s very clear where the resources and the talent are going.

So David Barber, who is the chair of OMA section on general and family practice:

“The government’s arguments in its arbitration brief are unlikely to improve relations, he said.... It’s really quite insulting.”

How can this government, after all of this time, after seeing what happened in the education system, after seeing what happened to the nurses, not acknowledge that doctors will walk? They will go to other sectors. They will go to other provinces. If we have 2.2 million Ontarians right now who do not have a family doctor, in five years we’re going to have 4.6 million Ontarians that do not have a family doctor.

Why I should have to explain that family doctors are the gatekeepers to the entire medical system—that is the way our system is designed. You don’t want more people going to the emergency room to access basic medical health care when those hospitals, those acute care centres, are already overrun, in a state of chaos and in a state of crisis—and also running a deficit. There is a cost to not dealing with doctors in a respectful manner, and this cost is increasing costs in other parts of the system, instead of just having a respectful dialogue around arbitration.

Barber goes on to say, “The numbers are one thing, right, but ... the government’s approach here is their briefing essentially says there’s nothing wrong. I get there’s posturing, but this is actually quite dangerous posturing on the side of the government.”

1640

This is coming from the Ontario Medical Association, calling your rhetoric on the state of medical care, the state

of doctors in Ontario—they are calling your actions as a government dangerous. And it’s dangerous for so many reasons.

“The average physician income adjustments compared favourably with other settlements where retention and recruitment is not a major concern,” the ministry wrote. And this is a direct quote: “We will illustrate that there is no concern of a diminished supply of physicians. Across Canada, Ontario has the best record in attracting medical graduates to train in Ontario. Further, Ontario has enjoyed a growth in physicians that far outstrips population growth.”

This is what the government is saying at the Ontario Medical Association arbitration. Can you believe this? Can you believe that the government has one in four people in a few years who is not going to have a doctor, and the Minister of Health is saying, “There is nothing to see here. There is no concern.”

In order to address a problem, you need to at least acknowledge that the problem exists. In Kingston recently, there was a lineup of 200 to 300 people just trying to access urgent care. In Kitchener-Waterloo, 70,000 people do not have a doctor—between 60,000 and 70,000 people. And this is with the chamber of commerce working 100%, every single day, trying to recruit more medical professionals into our region. Because—I shouldn’t have to explain this—when you have access to medical facilities and when you have access to really great schools, this social infrastructure draws investment into our communities. They are dependent upon each other.

So this rhetoric that’s coming from the Ministry of Health during what most people would acknowledge, especially if you don’t have a family doctor, is a crisis, is such a dangerous game, and it feels like a bit of a game from the Minister of Health.

I’ll just tell you an example of how it impacts people. It’s certainly impacting the people in Minden, right? People aren’t going to buy a house in Minden if they don’t have access to an emergency room. I want my parents, Allan and Sheila, to move from Peterborough to come to Waterloo. They can’t move because they can’t find a doctor. This also impacts quality of life.

You know, you don’t see this in the commercials that the taxpayers pay for: “It’s all happening here.” Yes, it’s all happening here: 2.2 million Ontarians don’t have a family doctor. That’s not something that the government wants to acknowledge or even pay attention to, it seems like, because, according to the Minister of Health, this is not of great concern to her. I’m telling you right now, this is a huge concern for the people of this province, and for very good reasons.

Ontario right now is short more than 2,000 doctors—2,000 doctors, right? Sure, start a medical school. That’s great. It takes almost 10 years from beginning to end to become a doctor in Ontario. Very few doctors want to go into family medicine anymore. They are looking where the money is.

The government has sort of carved off a whole market share on eyes, on hips. So you’ve created a whole new

market for for-profit health care. You have created a very competitive sector where, if you've got the money, you can get to the front of the line. When the Premier once said, "You'll never have to use your credit card"—this is factually incorrect. People are using their credit card to access health care in Ontario. In fact, we continue to bring stories to the floor of this Legislature because we believe truly in maintaining what we have left, anyway, of the universal health care system, and it shouldn't depend on how much money you make, especially with a growing population—the demographics in this province, more and more seniors on fixed incomes. Them going to access health care and getting a bill is very stressful. We hear about it all the time in our office in Waterloo.

So this is where we are. Our health critic says the government needs to work with doctors to address the issues that are driving physicians out of family medicine. Amen. That's exactly what needs to happen. "Over two million people don't have a doctor.... Instead of trying to solve this problem, the government wants to ignore it." We agree with the Ontario Medical Association that this is a very dangerous game to be playing on health care.

It is interesting; I have actually never seen this before, but the Ontario Union of Family Physicians have started a petition to call on the minister to resign. I've never seen doctors become this political, ever, in Ontario, so that is historic. I guess I can say that. That's the correct use of the word "historic." This is what they say: The Ontario Physician Services Agreement—they entered into arbitration between the Ontario Medical Association and the Ministry of Health, and then they go on to say:

"We have now learned through the publicly released details of the ... arbitration briefs that the government has no intentions on taking appropriate steps to address the family medicine crisis in Ontario. In fact, the Minister of Health ... response to the worsening crisis in family medicine is to outright deny there is any crisis at all. Her comments state 'there is no concern of a diminished supply of physicians' and that 'retention and recruitment is not a major concern.' This is a slap in the face to Ontarians, particularly to the 2.3 million in Ontario who do not have access to a family doctor and for those who have recently or will soon lose their family doctor due to inadequate funding and increasing administrative burden. The Ontario College of Family Physicians projects that by the year 2026, one in four Ontarians will not have a family doctor."

You can avert this crisis, but you need to get back to the table and you need to be more respectful. They go on to say that "these comments are insensitive and dangerous. They also signal that the Ontario government has abandoned addressing the health care needs of Ontarians and is akin to denying to recognize Ontarians' basic right to access universal health care." So they are calling for the immediate resignation of the Ontario health minister. "Our current health care system is simply unacceptable. Ontario deserve better." We agree, 100%, and until you redesign the system, doctors are key to accessing the health care system in Ontario, full stop.

I do want to move on just very quickly to education, because we did have a really painful debate, I have to say. To listen to such a—we're so far apart on the education file. It's like you've never stepped foot in a public school; you've never talked to a parent whose child has special needs and has had to be sent home because the staff are not there. When we talked about special education staff having to wear protective equipment like Kevlar, you laughed. Every year since 2018, I have to say, it's like death by a thousand cuts.

I also want to point out that traditional conservatives acknowledge that inflation pressures are real. Inflationary pressures are not fictional. The FAO has clearly outlined the gap in really addressing the costs of education in the education file. But boy, you know, as someone who got involved in politics because of education, I will always show up for education, because it is always worth fighting for. People have said that it is the great equalizer. I have to say, I fully, 100%, agree with that.

The fact that the Minister of Education, earlier today, would not acknowledge that learning conditions and environments are working conditions—when we talk about educators—teachers were not mentioned in the budget bill, by the way. Whatever increase is in there is really allocated for Bill 124 costs, so you created a problem and now you have to pay more for the problem. You also created more problems because of Bill 124, and that was the out-migration of staff.

1650

I fully support what our leader said during this debate when she said students in Ontario "deserve better than basics." They deserve all of our attention and all of our energy and strategic investment in ensuring that children in the public education system can reach their potential. But when you see how many people—there are huge concerns around the number of non-teachers working in classrooms. These numbers have skyrocketed under the leadership of this minister. That's nothing to be proud of, I must say. Schools can't find enough supply teachers, so they're using non-teachers to be in those classrooms.

In the Waterloo Catholic District School Board, about five years ago, it was maybe 100 times a month, very random, over the course of those 30 days. Now that number is 899 non-teaching staff in those classrooms. That's nine times more since that point.

In the Waterloo public, it was 600 days a month over the winter to use non-teachers in the classroom, and on average it's about 200 to 300 days a month now when no teacher was available. And I think that this is the key piece here, that educators—I call them educators because they are educators. I don't call them union bosses and insult them to their face. That's actually not good for morale, I just want to say.

There's that Pink Floyd, Another Brick in the Wall: "We don't need no education"—

Ms. Sandy Shaw: "We don't need no thought control."

Ms. Catherine Fife: "We don't need no thought control," yes. I'm just really channelling Pink Floyd a little bit today.

This is what they said: “The job has changed in such a way that teachers are leaving the profession in numbers we’ve never seen before.” They are leaving the profession because of the conditions of the system.

And these are young teachers too. I just want to say that my husband, Dale, teaches at Waterloo-Oxford. He’s a mentor. He’s a department head. He has got some young teachers there, and they cannot believe the pressure and the responsibility around the mental health piece in particular, because not all teachers have a degree in psychology. That’s not why they’re there. There used to be social workers. There used to be child and youth workers. There used to be educational workers who were trained to adapt to this new world.

And there’s no doubt that social media has impacted this. There’s no doubt that social media has an impact on mental health. But having cameras around the schools is not going to solve the problem of unravelling some of that tension and that anxiety. And so, we value quality trained staff. We know that quality trained education staff keep kids safe.

Let’s be honest: The education system, in so many ways, fills those gaps for so many children. The fact that this morning our leader was talking about a breakfast program that’s being cut in Hamilton—boy, Hamilton is hurting. There is some pain there. There’s an adjustment after that industrial sort of push. They are modernizing, but the gentrification in some of these communities, where people can’t afford to live in their neighbourhoods where they have lived for years, is real.

When I was a school board trustee, I used to go to these breakfast programs—because not even the Liberals would fund the administrative cost. They would fund the materials, but they would never fund the operations. It had to be volunteers. I guess the Liberals and the Conservatives still haven’t got the idea that when children are hungry, they are not going to learn. It’s not going to happen.

When I was a trustee, I remember going to one breakfast program one year, and there were stair-step kids. There were three stair-steps: grade 6, grade 4 and grade 2. They were there at that breakfast program a half hour early, and they were hungry. The ladies who volunteered to distribute the English muffins and the cheese said that they would wrap them up for their lunch and for their supper.

The thought that this breakfast program is going to be cancelled—I mean, surely this is a good investment. It’s a good strategic investment to ensure that children have the appropriate nutrition, that they can reach their potential. If you’ve ever seen me hangry, you would also agree that it impacts behaviour, as well, and it does impact classroom management when kids are hungry. There’s no doubt about it.

Just to finish off on the teacher shortage—why are we facing a teacher shortage? It’s about the working conditions. People are completely burnt-out because the job continues to get harder and harder. Teachers are burning out, quitting or retiring. And the teachers who stay are

taking more sick leave, but the supply shortage means fewer teachers are available to fill in for those who are off sick—so the failure to fill, I can tell you, in high schools across Ontario is changing the whole culture of how we talk about wellness in our workplace and how we respect the people who are on the front lines, for sure.

I do want to say, I have examined where the money is going in this budget, and one of the most egregious areas that we’ve seen an increase in, which really surprised me a little bit, was the Premier’s office, his cabinet office.

This piece is from earlier in April, and it reads, “‘His Own Gravy Train’: Cost of Staffing Doug Ford’s Office More Than Double Kathleen Wynne’s”—well, so much for streamlined and tightening the belt and reducing the expenditures, and even being careful, even going through the optics of being careful about where money is going. This government is not even concerned. Their hubris on this issue is profound.

“The cost and size of the Premier’s office in Ontario has ballooned” under this government. “Despite promising to be careful with public money, Ford’s office is much larger and more expensive than his Liberal predecessor....” Well, isn’t that interesting? It is about priorities.

Budgets are supposed to be moral documents which tell the people we’re elected to serve about the—it demonstrates our priorities. For some reason, now the Premier’s priority is his own office, in the face of breakfast programs closing up, in the face of record use of food bank use, in the face of record demovictions and renovations, in the face of above-guideline rent increases that are displacing seniors out of their homes and out of their communities. And for the 77% of renters in Ontario, it further destabilizes the economy, because a vast majority of their take-home pay is now going towards rent, which is arbitrarily being raised, and that is not good for the economy.

There is a serious productivity issue in this province. When people are constantly concerned about how they’re going to afford food, how they’re going to afford their rent, how they’re going to make sure that their children have the supplies that they need to go to school, this destabilizes the economy.

There was an opportunity in this budget to stabilize. That’s what we should be focused on right now, because it is so precarious out there, especially for the part-time workers in Ontario.

I haven’t seen too many members on the government side defend the Premier for his vastly expensive office, so I’m going to be curious to see what some of the members say about this, because this is not your traditional fiscal conservatism: “The cost of staffing the Premier’s office ... has more than doubled since 2018, according to public salary disclosure data, spending that has far outpaced” the former Premier Kathleen Wynne.

“Public salary disclosures of those making \$100,000 or more, also known as the sunshine list, for 2023 show the total number of staff in the Premier’s office ... along with the number of people earning six figures, has grown since 2019....

“The increase in spending is a departure from the government’s initial declaration that Ford was ushering in a ‘new era of fiscal responsibility and respect for taxpayers.’”

When people show you who they really are, you should really believe them. Their actions, obviously, are more important than the press releases.

“The Premier said that under his stewardship, his government would search for savings while remaining mindful of how Queen’s Park was spending public dollars.”

1700

Yes, that’s what was said. But in 2019, the first full year in office, they had 20 employees who made the sunshine list, and there was a cost of \$2.9 million in total compensation. In 2023, the number of Premier’s office employees on the sunshine list more than doubled to 48—48—with a combined compensation of \$6.9 million.

The Canadian Taxpayers Federation, a group that I’m always surprised that I’m quoting—just as I am surprised to be quoting Pink Floyd—they say, “‘That’s unacceptable,’ said Jay Goldberg.... ‘Is the Premier’s office two or three times more effective than they were just a few years ago?’” I think not, especially with some of the legislation that you’ve had to reverse, even in Bill 185.

You’ve spent a vast amount of energy and money reversing decisions, right? You got caught on the greenbelt. There was a mea culpa, but you still found a way to dig away at the greenbelt, especially around Highway 413 and the Bradford Bypass. It’s happening in Windsor. It’s going to happen in Ottawa. It’s certainly happening in Waterloo, Waterloo region, where this government is condoning and encouraging the expropriation of 770 acres of prime farmland—so much for respecting farmers. If you see the testimony for these farmers—

Ms. Sandy Shaw: They’re mad.

Ms. Catherine Fife: They’re mad. They’re sad. They’re confused. They thought it was very un-Canadian to displace—some of the most productive farmers in Ontario are in Wilmot township. The farming sector contributes \$47.8 billion to the economy of Ontario, and this government wants to pave over those 770 acres.

One of the farmers said, “Listen, I don’t even know what to say to you.” He goes, “I don’t even know if I should plant my seeds this year,” because the organization from the United States that came to do the dirty work, Canacre, said, “We’re going to offer you \$29,000 an acre, and if you don’t sell to us, we’re going to take it.”

What does that sound like? Does that sound very democratic to you? I would say no. Are we getting any answers from the various levels of government? I would say no. Although, the Premier said he fully supports it, and they put the call out for these kinds of expropriation, mega industrial sites. You can’t eat an EV battery; I’m telling you right now. This is sort of the greenwashing that we’re seeing, what’s happening in Wilmot township.

And farmers, let’s be honest, vote for the Conservatives, traditionally. They have. But, boy, do you know what? When you break the trust with a farmer and that relationship is compromised and then you are part and parcel of the stealing of his or her land, they’re not going

to vote for you anymore. And they have long memories, I’ll tell you this much. I know a farmer. He’s a dairy farmer. He’s our House leader. He’s got a long memory.

So, for some reason, now the Premier needs \$6.9 million just to run his office? This is what Jay Goldberg says: “I think that we’re paying a lot more but we’re not necessarily getting more.” Well, isn’t that the truth?

“The increase—136% in five years—also eclipses what Wynne’s Premier’s office spent on staff.” And then they go into what the previous Liberals—and I do remember the outrage, because I was here and so was my colleague from Niagara and so was my colleague from London, is that if the previous Liberal Premier had done this, the Conservatives, who all sat here, would be furious. There are some people who would be—

Interjection.

Ms. Catherine Fife: That’s right. Seriously, in the face of it, it just defies all logic that the Premier’s office has to double, and then you have doubled down on bad decisions and bad legislation that you’ve actually had to reverse, beginning with the greenbelt and the boundary expansion. What else have we got? There are a couple more there that they have had to reverse.

Interjection.

Ms. Catherine Fife: The MZO’s—yes, of course. And what’s that one?

Mr. Joel Harden: Bill 28.

Ms. Catherine Fife: Bill 28—oh, yes, you had no trouble trampling over the charter rights of employees as well. Somebody earned their extra money in the Premier’s office with that good idea, when we actually pretty much had to shut down the entire province.

And then also, this is a government that has given—almost everybody has parliamentary assistant status. A few people have got King’s Counsel status. These are good titles if you can get it.

Just for reference, we as MPPs, our salaries here have been frozen here for 14 years. But we come here every day and we work really hard. But for some reason, the Premier has found a nice little workaround on these salaries.

This is the final line: “At the same time, nearly every member of the Ontario Progressive Conservative caucus has been named as a cabinet minister or parliamentary assistant, topping up their MPP salaries by thousands....”

“Goldberg said the ‘runaway spending’ is a sign that costs at Queen’s Park need to be reined in.” Well, I think this is something that we could totally agree with, across party lines. If the Premier wants to reduce his staffing in the Premier’s office, we fully support that. We will work hand in hand with you to help make that happen.

What we will not do is allow the government to say everything is great in education, when we see how many students are being removed from their educational experience, especially special-needs students; when we still have a broken transportation funding model. Kids should not be on buses for an hour and a half one way just to save a few bucks. So if the Premier wants to divert some of that \$6.9 million to a breakfast program, we’re 100% in support of making that happen.

It does tell a story, and this is really the important part of having a budget and transparency. I am worried about transparency, I will just say, because a new bill was just dropped today that's going to be looking at the FOI process. One of the only ways that we as legislators have been able to access information from this government has been through freedom-of-information requests. It takes a long time. We've really benefited, I think, from the Canadian Press, when they actually disclosed how many nurses are needed in Ontario and how many doctors are needed. The government wanted to prevent people from knowing that information. If you were on this side, you would be incensed by that, because these are numbers that should direct where funding goes, that should direct resources to ensure that we can stabilize the health care system, for instance. That's where we are with that, Madam Speaker.

And even though we bring solutions, like the caregiver motion that my colleague from Niagara had brought forward—you don't want more people going into the emergency room with acute health care needs. You want to make sure that people can stay in their home as long as possible. People need financial resources and support to do that, because the long-term-care system is 100% a mess in Ontario.

For me, whenever I talk about long-term care, I have to talk about Jim MacLeod and his wife, Joan. Jim just called me on Saturday morning, and, you know, your heart breaks—it really does. He said, "I'm really sorry, Catherine, to call you on a Saturday morning, but what's happening? Why can't they call Bill 21 at committee?" You've said that if it's not a perfect bill, then let's find a solution. Let's find a compassionate solution. If we all agree that separating seniors who have been married for years in the last years of their lives—Joan and Jim MacLeod have been married for over 65 years, but they've been separated for the last five and a half. Jim is a tough guy. He comes from the insurance sector. He used to chase money. He's used to the fights. He's a strong guy. But let's be honest: They're running out of time.

In the last shuffle, the member from, I think, Mississauga has now been transferred over to that file. Listen, whenever you want to talk about it, whenever you want to try to fix it, we'll come to social policy. The bill needs to be called, though, because spousal reunification is good for the health care system, first and foremost. If you want to make the economic argument, keeping spouses together, having them care for each other in long-term care, is good for both those people, but it's also good for the entire system.

But also, we take this oath when we get elected. We say a prayer every morning. We talk about using our power wisely. We talk about putting the people who we're elected to serve at the centre of that conversation.

We can fix this. We can fix and design a long-term-care system with care campuses, so that Jim doesn't have to drive all the way to Hilltop, which takes about half an hour every day, to see his wife Joan. He should just be able to walk down the hallway, where she has different needs,

because he's more independent, because people don't age at the same time. This is not new information.

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But it does come down to priorities, I would say. And I personally will be reaching out to the new committee member from Mississauga Centre, MPP Kusendova, who now is on that committee. Maybe two women can get this done; I don't know. But I am just urging the Minister of Long-Term Care to call the bill, to find a solution. If you want to rewrite it, call it a different name, I don't care. I just want the government members on that side of the House to understand that this is an urgent issue because they are running out of time to be together. And it's time.

From the Pink Floyd album *Dogs*, there is this quote that says, "You have to be trusted by the people that you lie to." It is a very powerful quote for a song lyric, because I feel—and I don't know if you feel this way—that people are starting to lose faith in this place.

Oh, the other reversal was the Hazel McCallion Act, where they were going to make Mississauga stand-alone, and now they've just sent the bill for efficiencies and I think it's at about \$6.9 million right now. You can't even make this up. The story was very interesting, because this was all happening in the Premier's Office, and the transition committee that is earning six figures—all of them—could not get a call back from the Premier's Office. So I would say the \$6.9-million budget you've got going on there, you're not getting good value for; let's be honest. So that was one of the other reversals.

But this line is very powerful, because I am genuinely concerned about our democracy in Ontario. Moving to make the freedom-of-information process less accessible is problematic. Think about all of the times we have had to go to court to get mandate letters or fight unconstitutional legislation like Bill 124. You didn't even just lose one time in court on Bill 124, when it was deemed unconstitutional; you did it twice. You doubled down on an unconstitutional piece of legislation, which really—I think the impact of this Bill 124 is going to be felt in this province for a long time, because trust was compromised.

And there are some people who, I think, have become comfortably numb—also another Pink Floyd lyric—but we are not that. We're coming here each and every day to propose some solutions, be they on housing, in the face of the epic failure on the housing file, I would have to say—I mean, even on housing, one of the first steps that should happen is that at least those people who are renters—give them some consistency. Give them some surety, if you will. But when we're seeing these above-guideline rents just become the norm, then that destabilizes even the renters.

On health care: As we pointed out, the fact that the Minister of Health is on the record saying that there is no concern around the lack of doctors—I mean, is it intentionally starting a fire? I remember back in the 1990s, in 1995, when Snobelen said, "I want to create a crisis," because, boy, when you create a crisis, you can get away with a lot of things, Madam Speaker. You don't have to create the crisis, though, anymore, because the crisis is

real. The crisis is successful years of underfunding and policy inconsistencies, which has destabilized both health care and education.

And then when I go back and I look at the advertising money that this province is spending, including—very good connector piece—with ACTRA today, where the government is employing non-unionized advertisers in the face of a two-year lockout for ACTRA. How can anybody in this very expensive Premier's office think that this is a good idea? How can you defend that expenditure when you are intentionally undermining the very people that are a part of that creative economy, which is also very undervalued by this government?

Finally, I just want to say, on the post-secondary education file, I have two universities in my riding, the University of Waterloo and Wilfrid Laurier. I also have Conestoga College. That sector was looking for real leadership from budget 2024. They were pretty clear that there are no vast reserves, as has been suggested by the minister. This is what they said: "The budget is a death knell for the post-secondary institutions, and so many are at risk of going under, under this government's watch."

So if you step back and you look at how this government has made very specific and targeted funding announcements for specific communities and projects which benefit the very prominent people of the development sector, for instance—you are prioritizing that work in the face of the fact that we are seeing breakfast programs cancelled, for instance.

The mental health piece: When I met with the Associate Minister of Mental Health on the need for more alternative destination clinics so that people are not going to emergency rooms when they are in crisis—I hope that we can agree that a hospital room, a busy, chaotic hospital room, is not the best place to go when you are in crisis. Alternative destination clinics—your own minister supports them, but the money is not there.

So the way that you actually demonstrate that you understand these issues and that you actually care about these issues is that you have targeted resources allocated, and I would even say enveloped, in this budget for mental health.

I didn't get a chance to talk at length about municipalities, but there was nothing in this budget to make them whole. Right now, we are seeing councils hire former staffers out of the Premier's office so that they can gain access to the Premier's office. This is today's story, where people are making money by selling—opening the door to the Premier's office, a little seat at the table.

Everybody in this province should have a seat in this House and access to their government representatives. They should not have to buy access, Madam Speaker. They should not have to, especially municipalities, because there's a lot of rhetoric around how they are our partners and we're working with them; meanwhile, you undermine their planning decisions at every single turn.

I think I will just leave you with one of the greatest quotes from Pink Floyd, which says, "Did you exchange a walk-on part in the war for a lead role in a cage?"

The silence that we hear from the government members on some of these truly, I would say, unethical funding decisions, around funding priorities around where the money is going, really tells the true story of what's happening in that Premier's office, even as the staffing allocation explodes.

We, on this side of the House, truly believe that the province of Ontario is worth fighting for. That is why we show up here every single day. Our goal is to hold the government to account, especially through this budget process, to make sure that you know that you are missing key areas to make the lives of Ontarians better in this province. And I have to say, it shouldn't surprise you at all: There is no way that we will ever be supporting a budget that misses the mark so profoundly.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Bhutla Karpoche): Questions?

Mr. Anthony Leardi: In our area, in the greater Essex county area, there is a police force that has a program called ROPE. That's the repeat offender parole enforcement program. It is funded in part by the province of Ontario. And just four days ago, the police in Windsor arrested a fugitive from justice. This person was convicted of 14 Criminal Code offences, but the day before sentencing, he skipped out on bail and went missing. But as a result of this program, partially funded by this government, the police, under the ROPE program, captured him, and now he's back in justice and he's going to face his sentencing. This is made possible under the budget of the province of Ontario.

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When are the NDP going to abandon their "defund the police" position and help us fund the police?

Ms. Catherine Fife: I'm so pleased that you asked me that question, because 1,326 sexual assault cases got thrown out of court in 2022 because you are underfunding the court system. This tough-on-crime government are allowing literally rapists to walk free. So that program that you were just talking about—you spent all that money rambling up this convicted criminal, but if that guy goes past 18 months, he walks. That's the system that you're so proud of.

Interjections.

Ms. Catherine Fife: Well, what are you going to say to the 1,326 people who assaulted women and who walked? "Oh no, it's right there in the justice policy." You should look at the numbers, because I know you know everything.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Bhutla Karpoche): Next question?

Ms. Sandy Shaw: Thank you to our amazing official opposition finance critic, the member from Waterloo. You talked a lot about how the Minister of Health said that there's no concern about family doctors in this province, but we are seeing evidence that new doctors are turning away from primary care: 108 of 560 spots in Ontario for family medicine training positions are going vacant. That's 20% of those spots that are sitting vacant.

Dr. Risdon from McMaster said, “We are hearing from medical students that family medicine is a much less desirable career choice.”

We also heard from the OMA that students “don’t want to enter practice in a broken system.” We must address the problems and promote family medicine as a rewarding and impactful career choice.

So, the evidence is there. New recruits are turning away from this system while the minister is saying that there’s absolutely no concern. Would you like to add to this to say that the evidence is here that the system is broken?

Ms. Catherine Fife: Thank you very much for the question. I did spend a lot of time talking about the Minister of Health’s comments around having no concern around the doctor shortage, because it’s unbelievable, right?

You cited some stats around people making distinctive choices not to go into that sector because the working conditions are so tense and so hard, and they’ve been made more difficult by this government. But I always think about the existing resources in health right now. My concierge at my building, a block away, is a renal specialist from Pakistan. He would like to be a practising doctor in Ontario. So I would urge the government to look at all avenues to ensure we have the appropriate health care professionals working in Ontario.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Bhutla Karpoche): Next question?

Mr. Andrew Dowie: I want to thank the member from Waterloo for a very compelling 60-minute speech and bringing back some great memories from the Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs, particularly the incident in Oakville, which, I think, can’t be matched by any other experience.

I think every member in this House wants as much health care for their constituents as possible. That’s why I’m so happy to see new investments in health care, particularly in my riding, Windsor–Tecumseh. One of the reasons I’m here is, basically, the NDP candidate in my riding did not support the hospital, so the community responded.

These include \$2 billion in over three years in home and community care, ensuring that people get the care they need right at home, and an unprecedented increase of 4% in funding for hospitals to ensure that they have the supports that they need to provide critical care to the people of Ontario.

I haven’t mentioned the new medical school in Canada that is focused on training family doctors.

So, Speaker, my question to the member from Waterloo is this: Our government is making historic investments to help Ontarians in health care. Will you join us in supporting those investments in this budget?

Ms. Catherine Fife: This is what’s happening on the financing in health care. Thanks to the member from Windsor–Tecumseh, because we do work well on the committee together. We hear the same things. But if you compare the 2023 interim actuals with the plan in this budget, the government plans to spend \$1 billion less on

health care at a time when we’re seeing longer hospital wait times and ER closures and a family doctor crisis.

The base funding that was included in this budget is already allocated to Bill 124. It’s already spent.

This is—22 hospitals in Ontario are running deficits. So this budget allocation, unfortunately for all of us in all of our ridings, misses the mark so profoundly. It truly was a missed opportunity to hear the acute message that we heard from acute care and allocate the appropriate funding. That did not happen.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Bhutla Karpoche): Next question?

Mr. Joel Harden: I will always appreciate that the member from Waterloo refuses to be comfortably numb in the face of the evidence. A lot of us got out to see nurses in our communities, because it was Nursing Week last week.

I had occasion to visit with a bunch of nurses for breakfast last Friday. What really disturbed me is a lack of investment, in particular—it’s across the nursing sector—for community health centres. We talked to nurses who are working—because they can’t get enough hours, can’t get enough compensation from the community health centre, they’re working shifts at our hospitals and making 30% more doing the same work.

I’m wondering if this is something you’re hearing in the pre-budget hearings across the province. Why wouldn’t we not be comfortably numb and help those nurses?

Ms. Catherine Fife: I think I started something with Pink Floyd. But anyway, this is exactly what we did hear, and we did hear about solutions like employing nursing practitioners, particularly in northern and rural communities, expanding their scope of practice.

I was pleased to see the government do that with midwives a little bit. So why not expand the scope so that actually we can meet the needs of health care? I will say my future daughter-in-law—I’ve told you my son is getting married. She’s a nurse at Grand River Hospital—

Interjections.

Ms. Catherine Fife: Yes, 25. I hope to be grandmother very soon. But she is a nurse in the NICU at Grand River Hospital and the morale there is so poor, because the conditions for working in a hospital right now are so tense. Also, she is working alongside an agency nurse who is making three times as much as her. So she’s a new nurse out of McMaster, like two or three years. She is looking for other work. And what a shame to lose that talent, because she is an amazing nurse. She is going to be an amazing daughter-in-law, too. I think so.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Bhutla Karpoche): Next question?

Mr. Rick Byers: Thank you to the member for—her comments touched on a number of areas. And I might come back a little to the health care investment, the health care sector, to try and get a few Pink Floyd references in there at the same time.

I want to outline the fact that the government has increased funding for health care from \$75 billion to \$85 billion in the last two years. We believe that will give the

government a better “pulse” of the health care system, being a Pink Floyd reference.

Secondly, our infrastructure investment of \$48 billion over 10 years for hospitals: I certainly think that will allow the government to get a “foot in the door” on the infrastructure.

And finally, all the things that we are doing—three new medical schools, increased nursing education, increased role for pharmacists: Aren’t these things that would allow the member to support the budget?

Ms. Catherine Fife: I appreciate the member from Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound trying to be a little creative on this. I do want to say there is a structural deficit right now in health care funding. The Minister of Health should fully know this.

With every passing year, that hole gets bigger and bigger, right? This comes back to inflationary costs. But the fact that hospitals right now are—22 are running deficits. It should be a red flag for this government that the funding is not keeping pace.

But also, when you inject that 30% for-profit part, that 30% is a huge carve-out in a multi-billion-dollar budget item. So what I would have to say is that I guess I’m going to have to see you on “the dark side of the moon,” because things are not going very well in the hospital sector.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Bhutla Karpoche): Further debate?

Mr. Matthew Rae: It is my pleasure to rise this afternoon to talk about our budget bill, third reading. I want to thank, before I begin, obviously, the Minister of Finance for his tireless work for the people of Ontario and his work in this budget. I also want to thank the member from Oakville as well for his work and the member from Mississauga–Malton for his work on this budget as well, and obviously thank the previous parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Finance, the member from Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound, for his work on this very important document.

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It’s a pleasure to share how our government is taking every step and every action to build a better future for residents in Perth–Wellington and right across Ontario.

Just under two years ago, the people of Ontario sent a message to Queen’s Park. They told us to get on with the work of building Ontario, and they sent a message that our Progressive Conservative Party, under the leadership of Premier Ford, is the only party that will get it done for Ontarians in every part of our beautiful province.

Speaker, with this budget, our government is showing up for Ontarians. We’re investing in critical infrastructure, and we’re building homes, hospitals and highways, to name a few things.

Our government knows how important it is to address the housing supply crisis Ontarians are currently facing. We understand the pressure and anxiety our younger generations feel when anticipating their prospects for home ownership.

At the same time, we recognize the financial pressures faced by home builders in this province—in part, as we talk about often in the government and in the majority

middle on the other side of this House, is the carbon tax, which is supported by the federal Liberals, obviously, and the NDP in Ottawa that continues to prop them up. The current leader of the federal NDP, obviously, Speaker, as you know, is from this place, and their provincial colleagues do nothing to call on the federal Liberal government to scrap this tax. But I digress.

That’s why our government has stood up and taken steps to help Ontarians overcome these unnecessary burdens. We’re working directly with our municipal partners to ensure that the next generation of Ontarians is not left behind, but is instead lifted up and supported in their dreams of home ownership across this province.

Last year, we announced the Building Faster Fund, a \$1.2-billion investment in the next generation of Ontarians. This investment rewards municipalities for progress towards their housing targets, ensuring that as mayors and councils across Ontario make commitments to building in their communities, our government is there to support their growth.

Over the past several months, I’ve had the distinct pleasure to travel throughout southern Ontario to congratulate some of these mayors and their respective councils on their progress. Thanks to our collective success, I was proud to announce millions of dollars in provincial funding through the Building Faster Fund in Welland, Peterborough, Innisfil, Kawartha Lakes and Georgina. I know Premier Ford, Minister Calandra and Associate Minister Flack were also pleased to be able to make these important announcements across Ontario, highlighting the important work our municipal partners are doing to get homes built across this province.

I will mention Frank, the mayor of Welland, is obviously, after this debate this evening, at a reception downstairs, or up here, I believe, on this floor, in the Legislative Assembly—a reception for Niagara Week and the great work our member from Niagara West does to highlight those needs in this place and advocate for those communities.

Speaker, our government champions the Team Ontario approach, and we know that when we all come together in unison to take action on the housing supply crisis left by the former Liberal government, a better and brighter future is possible for the next generation.

In the same vein, we know more work needs to be done. With more than 2,000 people coming to Ontario each day last year, we need an all-hands-on-deck approach to ensure infrastructure is being built to support the new homes, highways and hospitals Ontarians need.

That’s why in this year’s budget, our government announced an additional \$1 billion in the Municipal Housing Infrastructure Program, along with \$825 million for the Housing-Enabling Water Systems Fund.

I meet with plenty of municipalities across Ontario, whether it’s in northern or southern Ontario, and the number one concern we continue to hear in municipal affairs and housing is getting pipes in the ground and ensuring that those pipes lead to homes. I always tell my municipal colleagues that I’m happy to come and open any

new pipe or any new sewer main across Ontario, because I know at the end of the day, that will lead to more homes being built—because you cannot give a building permit unless you have a toilet in that apartment, in that condo, in that townhome or single detached house—ensuring that we have those infrastructure needs met, to ensure we get more homes built across Ontario.

In my own community and in countless others across Ontario, our municipalities, councils and residents alike all support our efforts in increasing the housing supply, and they want to be part of that effort. However, in many rural cities and towns in particular, they've reached or are very close to reaching their current water and waste water supply capacity, posing a significant barrier to the construction of new homes and welcoming new residents. Our rural municipalities want to welcome these new Ontarians and new Canadians who are coming to our shores, but they need support to build the vital infrastructure that they need then to build the homes at the end of the day.

Our government will be there to support them in that effort. With our government's investments in budget 2024 and our continued efforts to move forward with a Team Ontario approach, municipalities throughout Ontario will have the tools they need to get shovels in the ground.

We have also embraced a multi-faceted approach in Ontario's economic development and transportation: historic investments in our auto sector, such as NextStar in Windsor, Volkswagen in St. Thomas and, more recently, Honda in Alliston, just to name a few, and I know the Minister of Economic Development and the Premier continue to work day and night to attract more manufacturing and more business development and investment to Ontario after the very dark period of 15 years under the Liberal and NDP government, Speaker. It offers a glimpse into the productive and forward-looking prospects for innovation and employment in Ontario. We're also taking steps that are necessary to build out our energy capacity and our world-class transportation networks, to ensure that these investments are supported as they scale beyond local arrangements into regional drivers of growth and development.

We know these investments would not have taken place under the previous Liberal government, which drove Ontario's auto industry into the ground while the NDP sat idly by. I know, as recently came out—I believe today—in the news, that Ontario now has the most people working in auto manufacturing and manufacturing in Ontario since December 2008, Speaker. We have come a long way from those dark periods under the former Liberal government, but the job is not done.

I mentioned energy. We talk about energy often in this chamber. I know the Minister of Energy is up day after day talking about energy in this place and the hurtful impacts of the carbon tax. We talked about the previous time in the previous Liberal government; the dark clouds rolled over the part of the independent benches where the Liberals sit. We all know too well the mismanagement and fiscal strain that party imposed on taxpayers, and that's why our government has taken a different approach. We're building

out a clean, green nuclear fleet, and we're protecting the interests of Ontarians today and for years to come. We're ensuring the province has the energy capacity not only to support the rapidly increasing number of households in this province, but also to ensure we remain an attractive investment destination.

Our government is building the first grid-scale small modular reactors in Canada, while also supporting the refurbishments of the Bruce, Darlington and Pickering Nuclear Generating Stations. I know our government will continue to take these actions, despite the provincial NDP not supporting our nuclear industry, which is honestly very shameful. All those good union jobs, as well—many live in my riding of Perth—Wellington and work at Bruce Nuclear. These investments represent our government's responsible outlook on energy security and affordability, standing in stark contrast to what the past Liberals and NDP have demonstrated when they were in power.

Since 2018, our government has taken every measure to keep costs down, and budget 2024 is no different. While Liberals and New Democrats continue to drive up the cost of living with a punitive carbon tax, our government is extending the gas and fuel tax cuts until the end of this year, saving Ontario households on average \$320 since it was first introduced in July 2022. I say "on average" because, as many will know in this place, if you live in northern or rural Ontario, you have to drive to go to the grocery store, to take your kids to hockey or soccer, to go to school or work. So I know that is saving my constituents even more over the course of this tax break.

While the federal Liberals, supported by the NDP federally and supported by their provincial colleagues and Bonnie Crombie—as we hear often, the queen of the carbon tax—continue to increase the cost of fuel, we'll continue to ensure that we keep costs down so that those people can go to work and take their kids to school and extracurricular activities.

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We're also assisting Ontario's colleges and universities with a historic investment of \$1.3 billion in new funding, and we're extending the tuition freeze for at least three more years, ensuring that our young people are supported as they embark on the next chapters of their lives.

At the same time, we're reinforcing our efforts to alleviate pressures on our health care system while also attracting and retaining future doctors, registered and practical nurses and nurse practitioners.

In this year's budget, our government announced the creation of a new medical school at York University—the first of its kind in Canada—which will be primarily focused on training family physician doctors. I know this is very needed in my community and communities across Ontario, and it was wonderful to hear this announcement.

But it just builds on our most recent budgets in 2023 and 2022, where we are expanding every single medical school in Ontario—those seats, Speaker—the first time we are doing that. We are not going to take lessons from the former Liberal government, where they cut medical school seats when they saw the same needs occurring for Ontar-

ians—that people need a family physician. We'll continue to invest in our education system to ensure that we're training the next generation of doctors, ensuring that they have the skills and education they need to support a growing population in Ontario.

We also recognize that, within Ontario's health care system, patients receive care differently depending on their needs and their communities. In Perth–Wellington, many of my constituents rely on primary care teams to ensure that they get the care that they need.

This past February, I had the distinct honour and pleasure to announce more than \$822,000 in funding for the Listowel-Wingham and Area Family Health Team to expand primary care access to 2,000 residents across Huron and Perth counties, as well as more than \$560,000 to the Minto-Mapleton Family Health Team to expand primary care to 1,600 residents.

As those who were here this morning in question period will know, we've already hired a nurse practitioner in the Minto-Mapleton Family Health Team, and they are taking new patients on, taking those patients out of the hospital system. They don't have to go to the ER anymore to ensure that they receive their primary care. They can receive it in the community where they live. It's these important investments that our government is making through this budget.

Speaker, I always want to highlight the fact that family health care teams have existed in the province of Ontario since 2005, but it took our government, under the leadership of Premier Ford and our Minister of Health, to expand these primary care teams. The previous Liberal government had 15 years to expand them. They did not. They did not expand primary care teams in Ontario anywhere. I really want to acknowledge that. They did not expand them. They let them languish.

Our government is doubling down on that effort. We're investing over \$540 million to expand primary care teams across Ontario. I was pleased to see when the minister made this announcement earlier this year that she is committed to ensuring that everyone who wants primary care will receive that access in the coming years, which is vitally important. These historic investments mean that family health teams in my riding and across rural Ontario will be able to hire additional staff and expand their capacity to serve their communities, and I take incredible pride in that fact.

In budget 2023, we accelerated the commitment of \$1 billion over three years to stabilize the home and community care workforce while supporting an expansion of home care services. In this budget, we're investing an additional \$2 billion over three years to boost increased compensation for personal support workers, nurses and other front-line care providers, as well as to stabilize these expanded services. These investments our government is making are crucial to allowing Ontarians to age in place in the comfort of their homes and the communities that they helped build.

It's particularly important in rural Ontario, where residents are sometimes faced with travelling a long distance to access care. Our government understands the

unique ways of rural Ontario. That's why we've taken steps to ensure those who don't live in the big cities and towns still have access to high-quality services and benefit from economic development opportunity.

Just this past January, our government announced the beginning of consultations to help inform the development of a new rural economic development strategy. Part of that is rooted in the expansion of, obviously, high-speed Internet services that allow rural Ontarians to fully access the opportunities of the Internet age, as well as playing a role in technological innovation in our agri-food sector. We have invested \$63 million to the Southwestern Integrated Fibre Technology, or SWIFT, projects, and we're delivering high-speed Internet access to more than 64,000 additional homes, businesses and farms across the region. Our government understands the value that both the economic and cultural aspects of Ontario's agriculture sector brings to the table.

This past February, I was honoured to announce over \$360,000 in funding for local meat producers to support the expansion of their processing capacity. These investments further our efforts to ensure food security and sustainability for Ontarians while also supporting the reshoring of value-added agricultural production and processing to Ontario.

In March, I announced a further \$781,000 in funding for local agricultural producers through the Food Security and Supply Chain Fund. Speaker, VDB Grains in my riding received \$70,000 which will allow them to move from diesel fuel to solar photocell technology to reduce their energy needs and operating costs, and, obviously, reduce their carbon footprint. So we're supporting also reducing emissions in our agri-food sector without, again, a punitive Liberal federal carbon tax.

These investments further reflect our government's commitment to supporting the agri-food sector in Perth–Wellington and across rural Ontario. And as agri-businesses and farm operations invest in new innovative technologies, they reduce costs while also embracing more sustainable practices.

In this government, we know how important the agricultural sector is to keeping families fed. We know that we must take the necessary steps to ensure food safety and security well into the future. In that spirit, we are also continuing to protect and restore the Great Lakes through the annual investments of \$6.4 million to support innovative projects. This is in addition to more than \$24 million we are investing in the Lake Simcoe Phosphorous Reduction Strategy to ensure the Holland River and Lake Simcoe can continue to support some of the most productive agricultural land in Canada.

Speaker, whether it's our historic efforts to build millions of homes for the next generation of Ontarians; our investments in energy, health care or infrastructure; or the actions we have taken to restore rural Ontario, this budget is clear: It demonstrates a clear understanding of the needs of Ontarians. At a local level, I am proud to deliver these investments and support my constituents who have advocated tirelessly and worked with us to ensure the people of Perth–Wellington are well served.

I also know that the Liberals and NDP continue to miss out on important opportunities to demonstrate their interests in delivering for Ontarians. We have taken every measure to ensure Ontarians in all parts of the province are supported and that they are appreciated.

Earlier this month, we heard loud and clear just how much they appreciate our government. Speaker, residents in Lambton–Kent–Middlesex gave our government their full confidence, as did the residents in Milton, sending two Progressive Conservative representatives to Queen's Park.

Speaker, all the pundits said Bonnie Crombie's Liberal carbon-tax lovers were going to win Milton; they didn't. The good people of Milton sent great advocates here in MPP-elect Hamid and MPP-elect Pinsonneault as well. I look forward to working alongside my two new colleagues and their local champions, who will continue to work for their communities while the Liberals and NDP make every effort to deny Ontarians the support they need.

Speaker, the people of Perth–Wellington support this budget. The people of Ontario support this budget. I urge my colleagues in the opposition and those in the independent benches to do the right thing and support this budget as well.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Bhutla Karpoche): Questions?

Ms. Catherine Fife: I wanted to know if the member from Perth–Wellington can acknowledge that when people at committee, for instance, are asking about child care or asking about health care or asking about their parents being separated in long-term care or access to take-home cancer drugs or access to autism services, and he comes back and says, "Well, the carbon tax"—I don't know if you understand how insulting that is for people who have genuine concerns about the well-being of their family, and you come back and talk about the carbon tax.

I mean, you did talk about health care somewhat. You didn't reference how the Minister of Health says that she's not concerned about the diminished supply of doctors. This has to be worrisome for you, because rural communities are suffering.

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And you certainly didn't reference the doubling of the costs of the Premier's office and staff.

Meanwhile, they continue to make very poor policy decisions that impact your—

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Bhutla Karpoche): Thank you. Response?

Mr. Matthew Rae: Thank you to my colleague for the question.

I would argue that the federal Liberal carbon tax is a very real concern for the people of rural Ontario. They pay it every time they fill up their vehicle. They pay it on the food they buy. They pay it on the clothes they purchase. They pay it on everything—literally everything. It is something I hear constantly. I hear it from the agricultural sector, as well, and from our home builders.

I had a meeting with a local trucking company which transports the vast majority of bricks in the province. Their federal carbon tax on April 1—just the increase was \$60K.

They're already paying the carbon tax, and that's going to be the increase with the most recent 23% increase.

When will the provincial Liberals and the provincial NDP call their federal cousins and demand they scrap this tax?

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Bhutla Karpoche): Next question.

Mr. Sam Oosterhoff: I want to ask a question about the cost of congestion on goods and services that are brought to so many places across this province.

In Niagara, we see that in this budget is funding for a vital doubling of the Skyway, a key link between the GTA and so many international borders. We know that this is a proactive step, to ensure that we don't have a reactive approach to infrastructure projects, that we don't see people stuck in traffic because previous governments failed to think ahead about where population growth was going.

I'm wondering if the member could speak a little bit about the impacts of congestion and how this is a government that—after so many years of failing to address the backlog in our infrastructure projects here in the province of Ontario—is finally taking measures to ensure that traffic is able to get going and goods are able to go to where they need to go.

Mr. Matthew Rae: Thank you to the great member from Niagara West for that very important question. I know he's advocating for the variety of transportation needs in the Niagara region, as well.

Obviously, that is across Ontario, northern and southern Ontario—the needs for more infrastructure for our transportation networks. Whether that's the expansion of Highway 7 in the region of Waterloo and Guelph area; whether that's down in Essex with the expansion of Highway 3; whether that's the expansion of essentially the entire 401 now, it's ensuring that we get more people and goods moving to international markets, domestic markets, ensuring that people can spend more time at home with their families—enjoy those aspects of their lives.

We'll continue to make those investments, including, which I didn't mention in my remarks—but also doubling the Ontario community infrastructure program. We doubled that amount and maintained that amount, providing sustainable funding to our municipalities so they can build infrastructure.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Bhutla Karpoche): Next question.

Mr. Wayne Gates: It was very interesting today to listen to that member talk about how he cares about Ontario.

Yet, this morning, your entire caucus voted against 3.3 million caregivers—just terrible.

Also, you mentioned how you support agriculture, but 319 acres of prime farmland is being destroyed by your government every single day.

The budget says there will be money to help support enrolment increases of 2,000 registered nurses, 1,000 registered practical nurse seats, but we learned today that Ontario would need 33,200 more nurses and 50,000 more personal support workers by 2032.

When will this government pull their heads out of the sand and take more aggressive action to address the front-line staffing crisis we face—a lot of it because of Bill 124, which you supported?

Mr. Matthew Rae: Thank you for the question.

Our government has been taking a lot of action on retaining and training health care workers. The Learn and Stay grant, for example; the investments I mentioned in the primary care expansion—which, again, the members opposite voted against, which I think is shameful.

The Liberals—again, I refer to the fact that they had 15 years to expand primary care teams, and they did not do that. It took our government to expand it and continue to expand it, which our primary care nurse practitioners are very appreciative of.

We expanded the scope of nurse practitioners, as well, as mentioned earlier—also, midwives—ensuring that we have that there.

We reduced red tape for foreign-trained health care professionals to allow them to enter the health care profession more quickly, and I know some are practising in my area, which is very great to see. If you have the education, you should be able to practise in Ontario.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Bhutla Karpoche): Next question.

Mr. Trevor Jones: Speaker, in Chatham-Kent–Leamington, few things are more important to people than safe communities and a secure Ontario. Our government is investing \$46 million over three years to enhance front-line patrols and improve response times. We understand our communities' concerns.

The member from Essex asked a clear question to the member from Waterloo and she refused to answer it. So, Speaker, through you, I'm going to ask the member for Perth–Wellington to share what his community thinks about our budget and how it keeps communities safe.

Mr. Matthew Rae: Thank you to my colleague for the question.

I know community safety is important to all of our communities, whether it's in the GTA, but also in rural Ontario. Many people probably won't realize, but a brand new Ford F-150 truck is over \$100,000 and they are also in the port of Montreal. So I know the investments we're making here to prevent auto crime—in rural Ontario, as well; it's not just a GTA problem, unfortunately—will have a big impact in ensuring that we catch those criminals and stop this auto theft, for example, and ensuring that we make those investments in our front-line workers.

I know that our government will always stand with our police forces.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Bhutla Karpoche): Next question?

M. Guy Bourgoin: J'aurais une question pour le collègue. I would have a question for him.

Transportation is something that is very important for my riding, especially on Highway 11. This weekend, I was at a sports and trade show and everybody I was talking to was talking about an accident that came close to my

colleague here—truckers just having almost head-on collisions. And because there is no passing lane, these truckers go very close together and then when something happens, sometimes they try to avert. It was a near-miss; you have to see the video to believe how close that came.

But I didn't see in the budget anything—because we've been advocating for the 2+1 divided highway; we've been asking to clear the snow after eight hours. But mostly, people are asking now for more passing lanes on Highway 11, which we need because now we're seeing more transport and to avoid the situation that happened in Matheson. But also, remember Chad's Law; one of my constituents almost died in a head-on collision with a truck because they were passing a double lane. There are no passing lanes, so they take chances where they shouldn't be taking chances.

I'd like to hear from the colleague, when are we going to start seeing investment on Highway 11 to see passing lanes to protect people from northern Ontario on our highways?

Mr. Matthew Rae: Thank you for the question.

I know in this budget in particular, we're investing \$27 billion over 10 years in infrastructure to connect communities, fight gridlock and keep goods and people moving. In 2024-25 alone, we're investing almost \$4 billion towards projects that will expand and rebuild eight provincial highways and bridges. I know, in the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing, we work often with our colleagues across Ontario.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Bhutla Karpoche): Very quick question?

Mr. Deepak Anand: Very quickly to the member of Perth–Wellington—first of all, great work done: What is your message to the people of Ontario and the Minister of Finance about this budget?

Mr. Matthew Rae: Thank you to my colleague for that very important question.

My message to the people of Ontario and the Minister of Finance, and really our entire government and cabinet, is, keep doing what we're doing. Continue to make those investments in health care. Continue to make those historic investments in education, doubling the capital allocation for education and getting schools built. The former Liberal government closed 600 schools, many in rural Ontario. It decimated rural communities. We're building schools in rural Ontario now.

I know we'll continue to attract those investments. I don't have a Volkswagen or a NextStar Honda, but I know many of the auto manufacturers in my riding supply parts for those facilities and employ good workers in those facilities, as well.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Bhutla Karpoche): Thank you.

Third reading debate deemed adjourned.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Bhutla Karpoche): It is now 6 p.m. The House stands adjourned until tomorrow morning, 9 a.m., on May 14, 2024.

The House adjourned at 1759.

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Smith, Hon. / L'hon. Todd (PC)	Bay of Quinte / Baie de Quinte	Minister of Energy / Ministre de l'Énergie
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Vacant	Lambton—Kent—Middlesex	
Vacant	Milton	