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Service linguistique et des publications parlementaires
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111, rue Wellesley ouest, Queen's Park
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CONTENTS / TABLE DES MATIÈRES

Thursday 31 October 2024 / Jeudi 31 octobre 2024

**Building Ontario For You Act (Budget Measures),
2024, Bill 216, Mr. Bethlenfalvy / Loi de 2024
visant à bâtir l'Ontario pour vous (mesures
budgétaires), projet de loi 216, M. Bethlenfalvy**

| | |
|---|-------|
| Ms. Stephanie Bowman..... | 10139 |
| Hon. David Piccini | 10141 |
| Ms. Sandy Shaw | 10141 |
| Mr. Rudy Cuzzetto | 10141 |
| Ms. Bhutila Karpoche..... | 10142 |
| Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon..... | 10142 |
| Hon. Graydon Smith..... | 10142 |
| MPP Wayne Gates..... | 10143 |
| Ms. Sandy Shaw | 10146 |
| Mme Dawn Gallagher Murphy..... | 10146 |
| Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong..... | 10146 |
| Mr. Deepak Anand | 10147 |
| MPP Jamie West..... | 10147 |
| Mme Dawn Gallagher Murphy..... | 10147 |
| MPP Jamie West..... | 10150 |
| M. Tyler Allsopp | 10150 |
| Mr. Peter Tabuns | 10150 |
| Mrs. Daisy Wai..... | 10150 |
| Mr. Tom Rakocevic..... | 10151 |
| Ms. Stephanie Bowman..... | 10151 |
| MPP Kristyn Wong-Tam..... | 10151 |
| Mr. Anthony Leardi..... | 10154 |
| Mr. Chris Glover..... | 10154 |
| Ms. Sandy Shaw | 10154 |
| Ms. Natalie Pierre | 10155 |
| MPP Jamie West..... | 10155 |
| MPP Zee Hamid | 10155 |
| Mr. Mike Schreiner..... | 10155 |
| Hon. Stephen Crawford | 10157 |
| Mr. Peter Tabuns | 10157 |
| Mr. Dave Smith | 10157 |
| Mr. Tom Rakocevic..... | 10158 |
| Mr. Dave Smith | 10158 |
| Hon. Stephen Crawford | 10158 |
| Mr. Tom Rakocevic..... | 10161 |
| Mme Dawn Gallagher Murphy..... | 10161 |
| Ms. Sandy Shaw | 10161 |
| Mr. Tyler Allsopp..... | 10162 |
| Mr. Chris Glover..... | 10162 |
| Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong..... | 10162 |
| Second reading debate deemed adjourned..... | 10163 |

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
OF ONTARIO

Thursday 31 October 2024

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE
DE L'ONTARIO

Jeudi 31 octobre 2024

Report continued from volume A.

1503

BUILDING ONTARIO FOR YOU ACT
(BUDGET MEASURES), 2024

LOI DE 2024 VISANT À BÂTIR L'ONTARIO
POUR VOUS (MESURES BUDGÉTAIRES)

Continuation of debate on the motion for second reading of the following bill:

Bill 216, An Act to implement Budget measures and to enact and amend various statutes / Projet de loi 216, Loi visant à mettre en oeuvre les mesures budgétaires et à édicter et à modifier diverses lois.

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

Ms. Stephanie Bowman: I rise today to speak to Bill 216, the Building Ontario For You Act (Budget Measures).

I want to start by saying a positive thing about this bill: The funding for in vitro fertilization for people struggling to start a family is positive news. I know that families, including families in my riding of Don Valley West, would value that support. If only it weren't tangled up in a spooky web of failures on the part of this government and their failed fall economic statement.

Let's talk about the big picture. Ontario's real GDP growth, as outlined in the fall economic statement, is projected to ease from 1.4% in 2023 to 0.9% in 2024. That's shrinking, Speaker. The decline in GDP growth this year compared to last year means job losses or layoffs in many families, and loss of sales and revenues from many small businesses.

Under Doug Ford, Ontarians are enjoying a standard of living equivalent to Alabama and yet we are still falling behind. This year alone, that state is going to grow more than 2.5 times faster than Doug Ford's Ontario, 2.6% versus 0.9%. So there's no better time to cut the small business tax rate than now to drive investment, save jobs, and yet this fall economic statement included no tax cuts for small businesses.

As the Ontario Chamber of Commerce pointed out in its February Ontario Economic Report, "Small businesses are less confident ... than larger businesses ... due to challenges with repaying debt, fluctuations in consumer spending, inflationary pressures, and workforce-related challenges such as mental health." So what would they do with a tax cut? They would pay their employees more and

invest in our economy. That would help us grow the economy and grow the pie for all Ontarians.

Furthermore, we know that there have been 36,000 job losses in the construction sector in Ontario alone this year. Over 8,000 more jobs disappeared in the manufacturing sector. We've got a government that talks about living within its means, but what did they do? They took a budget of \$214 billion from the spring and added \$4 billion in spending—most of it in the form of \$200 cheques; I'll talk more about that in a moment, Speaker.

Instead of giving families the permanent tax cut that this government promised in 2018, they're asking them to be happy with a one-time rebate. Speaker, that rebate costs money—about \$3 billion, as I said—and given that the budget is not balanced this year, the government will be borrowing money to pay for it. It will cost the taxpayers of Ontario about \$100 million in interest costs alone to hand out those cheques. Speaker, there has never been a government that has spent so much to deliver so little.

Over 200,000 people are still waiting for surgeries and diagnostic procedures, and over 11,000 died last year alone waiting for surgeries. Another 11,000 people died since 2018 due to opioid overdoses. We have a \$16-billion school repair backlog and a \$52-billion infrastructure deficit at the municipal level. It's not a pretty picture in this Premier's Ontario.

Some 2.5 million people don't have a family doctor while his friends who own nursing agencies got a billion dollars of taxpayer money last year alone. He spends millions of taxpayer dollars on ads to tell us great things are, but since he became Premier, unemployment is up 1% under this Premier, with 120,000 more people out of work.

Rent is up by 83%. Food bank use is at an all-time high. The debt is up by over \$100 billion under this government—hardly fiscally responsible. We owe more money per capita than ever before. Again, just to repeat it because it bears worth repeating, the government did not keep their 2018 promise to deliver an income tax cut for families.

The Conservatives brag about creating manufacturing jobs, but let's look at what StatsCan data shows. Surely, the government side won't start discrediting StatsCan. StatsCan tells a different story than this government. Only 5,000 new manufacturing jobs have been created since they took office. The FES, the fall economic statement, shows that 32,000 fewer manufacturing jobs would be created between 2025 and 2027 versus that shown in the spring budget. So this government knows that job growth is slowing, meaning more families are worse off under this government, but you wouldn't know it from their chest-

beating and Super Bowl ads. It's hard to believe a word they say.

Here's the real picture. This government has tunnel vision. Despite record spending, Ontario's economy and people are worse off. Growth continues to slow and GDP per capita, a metric of financial well-being, is falling while debt per capita is rising. In fact, Ontario has two times the Canadian average of debt per capita because of this government's misplaced spending priorities. It's not a pretty picture.

Every day, we feel the failing record of this government: record numbers of ER closures, record numbers of people without a family doctor, record-high rents. While the government says, "Believe us, things have never been better," Ontarians know things have never been worse.

1510

The fall economic statement is a disappointment to families and small businesses getting that one-time payoff that will help with rent for one month but not the next. What they need are tax cuts. If the government is so proud of its collection of excessive tax revenues, why don't they deliver a tax cut, like that proposed in my private member's Bill 195, which would put up to \$17,900 back into small businesses' pockets?

Instead of delivering the services we need, this Conservative government remains laser-focused on privatizing public services to line the pockets of their insider friends.

It can't have been a good morning for the Minister of Finance today after the Toronto board of trade and the Globe and Mail both criticized his fall economic statement. No wonder: There is some temporary relief in the form of a \$200 cheque for families who need it, but those billionaires who don't need it are getting it too.

The board of trade said it would have preferred that \$3 billion dollars go toward investments that improved productivity. As I said, that's declining. We're getting worse off in this province.

The Globe and Mail says, "If there was any remaining doubt that Ontario's Progressive Conservative government has lost all claim to fiscal prudence, it was removed by the province's economic and fiscal update on Wednesday." I couldn't agree more.

The government seems to want people to believe that rebate cheques are free, but the reality is that this government is spending more money than it is collecting from taxpayers. Common sense tells me that's very expensive for something they're touting as free.

Let's talk about housing since the minister didn't want to. This is one of the most pressing issues facing the people of Ontario today. You'd think it would be worth mentioning. Even the National Post rightly pointed out that the minister "did not mention housing during his speech in the Legislature on Wednesday" and that "Ontario lowered its projections for how many new homes will get built, casting doubt on whether it can reach its goal of building 1.5 million homes by 2031."

"Casting doubt" is an understatement. As our Ontario Liberal leader, Bonnie Crombie, said to the media yester-

day in the government's private press room—another example of this government's waste, costing \$300,000 and duplicating the OLA one here in this building—there is "no conceivable way" the government can meet its housing target. That's despite changing the rules of the game and the generally accepted definition of a home being a stand-alone, attached or rental unit. Does the government think Ontarians are not smart enough to understand that a temporary bed in a dorm is not a new housing unit? I hope not.

Our leader Bonnie Crombie went on to say, "This government came in with" a goal of "1.5 million homes" to be built, "150,000 a year," but "there are no incentives to build homes. Developers aren't building homes. I'll tell you what's happening—construction workers are leaving the province of Ontario, and they're going to Alberta and they're going to BC because they are building homes there."

BC and Alberta are getting homes built for their residents, and surely the government members know that interest rates are the same there as they are here. When this government plays another one of its favourite games, the blame game, and says, "Oh, it's not us; it's high interest rates," they lose and the people of Ontario lose.

Why are we losing here on getting housing built? Only one reason: because of this Conservative government; because of their mishandling of the housing file; because they didn't pass my colleague from Don Valley East Dr. Adil Shamji's housing bill to build fourplexes; because they didn't pass my colleague from Kanata-Carleton Karen McCrimmon's bill to make it easier to convert commercial buildings to residential by removing height restrictions; because they won't listen to their own experts, including those on the Housing Affordability Task Force; because of their misplaced priorities, which are too many to mention.

But let me name a few:

- closing down the Ontario Science Centre, a beloved institution in the Don Valley community, so that their insider friends can have a waterfront spa, another misplaced priority that will cost taxpayers billions;

- because they were too busy accepting brown envelopes from their insider friends, who were set to make \$8.3 billion off the greenbelt giveaway, now being investigated by the RCMP;

- because they were too busy creating ministries and promotions for their members to give them all pay raises and creating the largest, most expensive cabinet in Ontario history;

- because they were too busy hiring the most staffers of any Premier's office in Ontario history—they have the most staffers on the sunshine list—to help the Premier get his misplaced priorities done for his insider friends.

The Premier himself admitted that the tough cost of living is one of the reasons he gave promotions to three of his MPPs, topping up their salaries by more than \$16,000 a year. Now, we have 73 of the 79 MPPs—92% of his MPPs—as ministers, PAs or associate ministers.

I would love to hear the Premier or the Minister of Health brag about that the way they brag about how many people in Ontario have a family doctor, when they should be thinking about the 2.5 million people who don't; when what they should be doing in this fall economic statement is addressing the health care catastrophe, as the OMA says, that they created when they ran nurses out of our health care system with their unconstitutional Bill 124 and continued to ignore the advice of the OMA on how to solve the family doctor crisis, while they hire yet another expert to write them a report that they likely will ignore.

They need to get with the program, do their job and fund the creation of a centralized referral system like the doctors have asked for. They need to pay those family doctors what they're worth, so they want to stay here and practise. They need to listen to the experts in all fields, including health care, who are telling them what they can do to provide relief today for the 2.5 million people who don't have a family doctor.

The Minister of Finance might also need a history lesson, maybe an economic one or maybe both. First of all, he is mistaken when he says there was no balanced budget under the Liberals. In fact, there was a surplus in 2006-07 and 2007-08. His government's so-called path to balance has actually been a moving target, so we don't know what to believe. They started their mandate saying the books will be balanced in four years. In the last couple of budgets, that was changed to two or three years. In all that time, they only managed to deliver a balanced budget once, in fiscal 2021-22, and that was only because the economy came roaring back after the severe economic contraction related to the pandemic. I will give them a break there: Restoring balance wasn't easy following the pandemic, though they certainly don't give the Liberals a break when the financial crisis hit in 2008, the dollar was at par and manufacturers were facing a challenge.

Post-pandemic, even with all the federal help they are so quick to criticize, this government has not put forward a balanced budget. It's time to stop talking about a path to balance, it's time to stop talking about fiscal responsibility when what we have here is another fall economic statement that is fiscally irresponsible.

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

Hon. David Piccini: Thank you to the member opposite for her remarks—a new member to this place. I always enjoy hearing her speak. I do. And you can tell where the Bonnie Crombie leader's office gets their talking points into that speech.

I just want to know, because I know this member has fiscal acumen, when the S&P bluntly put that our finances were in shambles and downgraded our credit rating and drove manufacturing jobs out of Ontario—putting it bluntly, the manufacturers who are now earning \$14 million in payroll, we're taxing that payroll in Windsor, thanks to this Premier's investments. Is that a good thing for the province? Yes or no.

Ms. Stephanie Bowman: Maybe I'll just remind the member across—thank you for the question—that there

was a global financial crisis in that time; the dollar was at par. So, yes, manufacturing was having a problem because the US could manufacture their own goods and we lost our competitive advantage as it came to the Canadian dollar.

In terms of the payroll taxes: Taxes collected are up by this government. The Minister of Finance has said that himself. Certainly, there is opportunity to cut the tax rate, to give people a break, including small businesses who are struggling and who are supporting my bill to cut taxes by 50%.

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

Ms. Sandy Shaw: I agree completely that this is a government that's awash in debt. Estimates are that every citizen in Ontario owes about \$30,000 each to pay for this debt. By any measure, this government has—their net debt-to-GDP has been hovering at 39% and as high as 42.6% over their term. So this is a government that's not managing their finances. They're spending like drunken sailors.

1520

What I would like to also say—you read some of the headlines. One of the ones was what Global News said: “This is a government that should be truly red-faced” when it comes to the housing starts that are falling. They started off by crowing about the 1.5 million homes that they were going to build, which would have meant 150,000 starts a year. They dropped that to 125,000. Then they moved the goalposts again to 88,000 in 2024. And now they haven't even made 81,000 this year.

They went through the greenbelt scandal. They're under RCMP investigation. Not one house was built. Do you think that is why they're trying to turn away from housing and don't mention it in this fall economic statement?

Ms. Stephanie Bowman: Thank you for the question. Yes, the minister absolutely ignored the topic of housing. It's one of the most important topics that I hear about in my riding in Don Valley West. I hear about the challenges people are having with skyrocketing rents, with the cost of putting food on their table. And this government continues to make reversal after reversal around housing policy. Developers are talking about the confusion that has created.

Again, this government is happy to lay the blame at everyone else's feet and not take accountability. They need to actually take accountability, listen to their Housing Affordability Task Force and come up with a new plan to get housing built.

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

Mr. Rudy Cuzzetto: I want to thank the member for Don Valley West for her remarks here today, but your leader had the worst housing starts in the history of Mississauga. She voted against 90% of the projects that were going to be built in Mississauga. Not only that; when we wanted to remove DC charges for purpose-built rentals and affordable homes, she was totally against that and sent a letter out criticizing us for doing that.

Now, thank God we have a mayor in Mississauga—the new Carolyn Parrish. She wants to cut development

charges by 50% to build homes. Right now, I see every councillor in Mississauga out there trying to build homes. Even in the Lakeview development in my riding where we're building 16,000 homes, Bonnie Crombie was totally against that development, to increase the development and build more affordable homes. How can you stand here and talk about building homes—

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): I thank the member.

Response?

Ms. Stephanie Bowman: Well, I don't see the member of Mississauga–Lakeshore moving out of his riding, so things must be pretty good in Mississauga.

Our leader was mayor and working under this Premier. This Premier has created nothing but confusion when it comes to housing rules. He has voted down our members' bills on building fourplexes. The Premier has voted down a bill to convert commercial buildings to residential buildings. Those are things that could actually get housing built now.

I'm focused on my work here at the province of Ontario. I'm not looking in the rear-view mirror.

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

Ms. Bhutla Karpoche: I thank the member for her presentation. I'm sure the member remembers that, in 2010, under a Liberal government, rebate cheques were sent out to Ontarians just before an election, and the cheques were signed by the Premier. It literally read, "Sincerely, Dalton McGuinty, Premier of Ontario."

So my question to the member is—the member disagrees, and in many ways, I agree with her position on that. But my question is, was it wrong then for the Premier to send out rebate cheques before an election?

Ms. Stephanie Bowman: Thank you, first of all, to the member for her question. There's one key difference: There was a surplus before those cheques were mailed out. This government is in a deficit.

I will also remind the member that, during the NDP government, there was not one year of a balanced budget.

So while we can talk about tactics, we have, again, put forward a number of proposals that would actually make life more affordable for families, including cutting taxes, helping this government keep their promise—

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): I can't hear the member.

Ms. Stephanie Bowman: —to cut taxes on middle-income families and small business.

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

Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon: I just want to compliment the member from Don Valley West on her great speech. It is always terrific when we hear from someone with, as the member from Northumberland–Peterborough South said, such strong financial acumen, being a chartered accountant herself. It's great to have your expertise when you speak about the fall economic statement.

Now, you've done a lot for small businesses in your short time here, including an upcoming private member's bill. What would you have liked to see in the fall economic statement to support small businesses? Because we value our mom-and-pop shops, and we value our workers and entrepreneurs and business people.

Ms. Stephanie Bowman: Thank you to my colleague from Beaches–East York for her kind comments and for her question. Yes, it was under a previous government, a Liberal government, that the small business tax rate was last cut by 50%. We've proposed that exact same measure again in my Bill 195, cutting taxes on small businesses.

I would have liked to see the government set aside money to actually help small business owners. We all know they are struggling, as I said, from the Ontario Chamber of Commerce report, with higher costs, debt burdens, just trying to keep their doors open given lower consumer spending. This would have been the perfect opportunity for this government to actually support small businesses, who create two thirds of the private-sector jobs in our economy.

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

Hon. Graydon Smith: You know, my riding gets mischaracterized a lot, because we've got a lot of people who don't live in lakefront cottages. What we've got is a lot of people who get up every day, go to work and work really, really hard to make enough money to put food on the table and provide for their families. That happens all over Ontario, but in my riding, it happens too.

Every day, people go up to the gas pump and they fill up a truck, which they need to work, and it probably costs them close to \$200 to fill that truck. It costs less because of what our government did and extended with the fuel tax cut.

But I want the member to tell the people in my riding who can have a tank of gas purchased for them through that \$200 rebate why they shouldn't get it.

Ms. Stephanie Bowman: Thank you to the member for the question. First of all, I'll speak to the 19,500 people in his riding who don't have a family doctor, and I feel for them.

The gas tax rebate is about \$11 a month per family, according to this government's own math. As I said, a one-time cheque for \$200 will help for one month. It might fill up their truck gas tank one month, but it won't do much the next. It would have been much more meaningful to actually give them a tax cut—in fact, the exact tax cut that was promised—

Hon. Graydon Smith: They need the money today. They need it now.

Ms. Stephanie Bowman: Well, this government could have cut those taxes since 2018, when they first made that promise. That would have put thousands of dollars back in their pockets.

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): We're going to go to further debate when the House comes to order.

I recognize the member from Niagara Falls.

MPP Wayne Gates: It's been an interesting afternoon, to say the least, talking about the fall economic statement. But I'm going to start off on something that's positive in the fall economic statement. That really doesn't happen very often, but I thought I'd do it because a good friend of mine Steve Gallagher has ALS, and he has been fighting for a number of years to get funding, more education. He is an incredible warrior. He has his family supporting him, his friends, people who he worked with.

The government is giving \$13 million to ALS to help with research, to help with running the organization. So somebody always asks me, "Is there anything good in the economic statement?" I want to say to Steve, congratulations. Congratulations to ALS Canada for getting this into the—

Interjections.

MPP Wayne Gates: I'm not so sure the rest of my comments are going to be quite as good, but I love Steve. I've known him a long time, and these types of diseases, when they hit us—he has fought back incredibly, so I do appreciate my colleagues on the other side acknowledging that as well.

But what I also want to say that's not in the budget that I think should be in the budget is money for autism, where we have 72,000 on a wait-list. I think that's wrong. I think we should be taking a look at those types of things. You take a look at the Boys and Girls Club; they haven't had core funding now for over 10 years, and they're dealing with mental health issues all the time. Those types of things are what I like to see in a fall economic statement. Unfortunately, they're not there.

1530

I am going to get off subject just a little bit, not really because it's been raised a couple of times. I've raised this a number of times. A lot of people here may or may not know that I came from the auto sector. I was president of my union. I worked on an assembly line. I spent a lot of time on the assembly line and then worked in the machining lines. But when I became president, it was during the time—it was talked about by other people here—where our dollar went to \$1.12. I don't know if anybody remembers that. We had what was called a petrodollar. I know there are some people—they're not here right now; I guess you can't say that. Anyway, they were elected in that particular Harper government. The dollar went to a buck 12. What it did is, it allowed the West to be very prosperous.

Unfortunately, in the province of Ontario, it affected us, and it really affected us in the auto sector, where I worked in the parts sector. So not only did we have to compete with a high dollar, we also had to compete with Mexico and some of the southern states. So those 300,000 manufacturing jobs that left were not just a cause of anything other than we had priorities wrong. The Harper government had their priorities wrong. They wanted a high dollar because it was good for the oil sector. It was great for the West. It wasn't good for out here. I watched, because I participated in taking over plants. I participated in clos-

ures. I participated in fighting for our members over and over again.

And Jim Stanford, who I know most people here know, was the economist. You could talk to him all you want. But that was what caused the manufacturing crisis in the province. It was the high dollar.

So what do we have today, as the Conservatives are trying to take credit for the uptick in the auto sector? We have a low dollar. We can compete anywhere in the world with a dollar around 80 cents to 84 cents. Our dollar is at 72 cents, so we are very, very competitive. That's why companies want to come to Ontario, and, quite frankly, come to Canada, because of our low dollar.

Our other advantage—which we're going to make a mistake if we don't smarten up soon. One of the other advantages you have to bring in companies to Canada is because we have a benefit package. We have a publicly funded health care system that uses that as an advantage when they're at the bargaining table for their members, and companies like the fact that they're not paying the cost of health care. We're going to lose that advantage if we continue to go down the road of privatizing our health care—I'm saying to the Conservatives, because that's where you're heading. You want to go down and privatize, but you're going to lose a big advantage that we have for keeping workers working here in the province of Ontario. I wanted to make sure I mentioned that because it's been raised a number of times here, surprisingly.

I have lots of issues that I want to talk about that aren't in here. I'm going to talk about some things in my riding, which I think is fair when I'm standing up here. You mentioned a bit about GO trains in the fall economic statement—no details; just saying, "Well, we're going to do whatever." I want to be clear that when I ran in 2014—it's a long time ago, and I know, surprising to the Conservatives, I've run four other times and continue to win. But it was the Conservative candidate—twice, not once, who twice ran against me, the same guy—and he said no to GO. They said they wouldn't put GO in Niagara because they wouldn't do it until they balanced the budget.

In that same election—I don't give credit to the Liberals, but it was the Liberals who brought in the planning grant for the new Niagara Falls hospital. That same candidate—and you can check it in all the press because I've got all the clippings if you want to see them; I just happened to save those. They said no to the new hospital until they balanced the budget. And today we are at the highest level in our budget in our history. So that meant that that hospital wouldn't even have started.

I disagree that hospitals should take 10 years to go from a planning grant to shovels in the ground. I think that's something where we should all work together, whether you're Conservatives, Liberals, NDP or independents. We have to find a way to get that hospital built quicker.

If you take a look at where we were 10 years ago and where we are today, it's night and day. We've gone through a pandemic. Our population in Niagara is shifting. For some reason, everybody has found out what a beautiful place Niagara is. They're all coming down here.

They found out what Niagara-on-the-Lake is like. They found out what Fort Erie is like, Niagara Falls, Port Colborne, Welland—they're all coming to Niagara. So we need to find a way make sure that our hospitals are built quicker, and we certainly know that if you're going to build them, they should make sure they're going to be able to take the influx of new people, particularly new Canadians.

I'll stay on health care for a minute, before I get into my speech. In Fort Erie, 40% of the people that live in Fort Erie are seniors, and as we know, we're all aging, right across this province. We're all going to be seniors; I'm getting there quicker than probably some in this room. But at the end of the day, that's where we're headed. We're heading to have more and more people being 75, more and more being 80. In Fort Erie, we have to drive down the QEW to get to Niagara Falls hospital, so it makes no sense to me that Niagara Health and this government have cut down the urgent care centre from 24/7 down to 10 hours a day. It makes absolutely no sense. And when I say why it doesn't make sense: because during the winter, we have snow storms that have closed that highway—not once, not twice, but a number of times. We've had ice storms, and people need to get to the hospital when they need it.

The other thing about Fort Erie, and they've been arguing this—I've got to congratulate Mayor Redekop. He has gone to the government, he's gone to the president of Niagara Health. We have a citizens' group that are saying, "We need our hospital open 24/7 for urgent care."

When I talk to doctors that are in the emergency room in St. Catharines and in Niagara Falls, do you know what they tell me? "We need our urgent care centres open right across the province." I say, "Why is that?" They say, "Because if people go to an urgent care centre, they're not coming to the emergency rooms. They're not tying up the emergency rooms." So it makes no sense to me that in the economic statement, it doesn't say we're going to open our urgent care centre, not only in Fort Erie, but also in Port Colborne. Because they continue to grow, and continue to grow with seniors.

I wanted to make sure I got that in. I'm glad I got the GO train in and got to talk about GO trains and talk about the hospital.

Let's talk about affordability and what we've gone through. It's absolutely incredible to me—and I've said this before in the House. It's the cards that you're dealt. I know somebody made a joke about how some of our members are playing cards or something in their ridings, which was not nice and wasn't fair. But the cards that I was dealt when I was kid, four and five years old: My family lived in poverty. I relied on food banks. I relied, quite frankly, on the firefighters that brought my Christmas presents till I was about eight years old.

And today, in one of the richest provinces in the country, if not the richest, we have more people using food banks today than at any time in our history. The Niagara Falls food bank, Project Share—I go in there all the time and talk to them, and they say they can't keep up. They can't keep up.

Toronto: The food banks are saying that they can't keep up. As we say, during this entire debate, we're saying—well, the Premier said it; I can say that. The Premier said, "We've never been better off today at any time in our history." And I say to the Premier: I'm not sure that's accurate. We have an affordability crisis, whether it's that you can't afford to buy groceries. Seniors are really struggling, and I talk to seniors every day, because one of my offices is in the Lions, and a lot of seniors go there, and they're telling me that they're skipping meals. They'll have breakfast and then they'll have supper. They do that a lot of times with their medication too, their prescription drugs and stuff; they skip because they don't have the money to pay. So I'm saying that we have to fix the affordability crisis.

And then I have my daughter. I love my daughter Jacqueline. And happy Halloween to everybody—I'm hoping to get back to Niagara Falls to hand out candy, but I got on this agenda a little later than I anticipated; I might not make it. My daughter Jacqueline has got a good job, a wonderful kid; she lives at home because she can't afford to move out. This government, in 2018, took rent controls off new builds. People say to me, "Well, what's that do?" That means that it allowed the rates to go like this. So we got into renovictions. Our seniors got renovicted probably more than anybody. They renovict you; they're paying \$800, and they've already got the ads in the paper and they're now \$1,700, \$1,800, \$1,900 to get an apartment.

1540

In Fort Erie, Niagara Falls and Niagara-on-the-Lake, which is my riding, the wait times are between 12 and 18 years for an affordable apartment—a wait-list.

How did the rents go up? In 2018, you took rent controls off new builds. I'm saying to this government—it's not in the fall economic statement here—put rent controls back on those buildings. Have rent controls so that people can rent and can live. And do you know who it's for? I'm looking across at my colleagues. I'm looking down here at some of the independents and the Liberals, some of the new people who just got elected. It's for our kids. It's for our grandkids. And quite frankly, in some cases, it's for our sanity, because we love our children, but we don't want them living with us until they're 35 and 36 years old—I'm sorry; I don't. I like hanging out, watching the Buffalo Bills play—I love the Bills—in my boxer shorts. I can't do that with my daughter at home.

Mr. Chris Glover: Nobody wants to see you.

MPP Wayne Gates: Nobody wants to see me in my boxer shorts anyway.

Interjection: Do it for Wayne.

MPP Wayne Gates: Exactly.

There are things that we could have put in this that would have made life easier.

You can talk about the \$200—I don't think anybody is going to say that you don't need the \$200. I think it could have been done a lot differently, quite frankly.

I don't think Drake, who I love, by the way—big Raptors fan—needs \$200. I'm going to ask my colleagues

across the room: Do you guys think Drake needs \$200? Everybody on this side is answering. Anybody on that side?

Well, what about Weston, who owns the grocery stores? Do you think he needs \$200? I'm going to say, probably not. He made enough money when he played around with the prices of bread that he's okay for a while.

What about Mitch Marnier, who I love—great hockey player. We all love the Leafs. Well, most of us love the Leafs. I'm a Sabres fan, but I do like the Leafs. Do you think Mitch Marnier is sitting at home—"Jeez, I hope Premier Ford gives me \$200 so I can pay off my Visa card after Christmas?" What are we thinking here?

Are there people hurting in this province? According to you, they're better off today than they were when you got in government—it was about six years ago. It's not accurate.

I'm going to challenge everybody here—because I have encampments in my riding. Who would have thought, six years ago, when you guys took over government, that we'd have people living in encampments? Think about that. Oh, my God, it breaks my heart every time I drive by one. And they're not just in Niagara Falls, by the way. I'm sure they're in Kitchener. I'm sure they're in Sudbury. I'm sure they're in—I can't remember all the ones you guys have. I'm sure they're in Sam's riding. I'm sure they're in Toronto. I'm sure they're in Hamilton. I know they're in Peterborough. We've got lots of problems up in Peterborough.

Interjection: Burlington.

MPP Wayne Gates: Burlington.

So we're not better off—nothing, nothing.

Even the big-city mayors—which was created, quite frankly, by this government, giving them the extra powers—are crying to this government, "You've got to fix the problem with encampments. You've got to invest. You've got to do something about it." These guys talk about small business. It's hurting the communities. They need housing. Let's get them some housing. Let's find out how we go about doing that. Work with the big-city mayors to fix the problem—nothing, nothing in the economic statement.

I've got a number of things here before I get on with my speech that I have to get to; I've just got to find them. I talked about urgent care, groceries.

Oh, here's the other one that—jeez, it's just amazing. Do you know that we're short doctors in the province of Ontario? Does anybody know that? We need 106 family doctors in Niagara Falls.

And they're closing urgent care centres. It's amazing to me. I think it was my colleague from up north who said there were closures in 2023—he said 1,200; the number I have is 1,000, so we'll split the difference. We'll say 1,100 urgent care and emergency rooms closed, and most were up north. But I'm going to tell you, I don't live up north. I live an hour and 15 minutes from Toronto. Port Colborne: hours cut and closed; Fort Erie: hours cut and closed; Niagara-on-the-Lake—how many of you have been to Niagara-on-the-Lake? Put your hand up. I've seen you guys drinking down in Niagara-on-the-Lake. You can put

your hands up. You guys come down to my riding all the time; I appreciate it. I am disappointed when you come down to my riding and you don't ask me out for dinner. Nobody has called me to go out for a pop or anything—nothing.

But Niagara-on-the-Lake had their hospital closed. Even in St. Catharines we had two hospitals close. Think about that. So in our area—Welland had their hospital close and took services out. I talk about this—how much time have I got for my speech here?

Ms. Sandy Shaw: Two and a half minutes.

MPP Wayne Gates: Okay, I might not get to it.

So, in Niagara Falls, we took services out of Niagara Falls. Yes, we're getting a new hospital; it's about four and a half to five or five and a half years away.

How many have been to Niagara Falls and heard that people go there for their honeymoon? Put your hand up—participate, absolutely. You know what? You can come to Niagara Falls and you can make babies. But you know what you can't do in Niagara Falls because of the cuts? You can't deliver babies in Niagara Falls. Think about that. One of the seven wonders of the world—who would not like to have on their birth certificate, "I was born in Niagara Falls"? Think about that, right? You can't do that anymore. That doesn't make any sense to me. It could be a tourist: "Come to Niagara Falls; make a baby. Nine months later, come back. Get a birth certificate with Niagara Falls on it." It's not a bad idea, but they cut it.

They cut mental health out of Niagara Falls.

I've got one more; I've got to get to this. This was driving me nuts and I'm not going to be able to find my notes, but I'm going to tell you something: You guys should be ashamed of yourselves on what you're doing with advertising in every single newspaper, every single TV show and every single radio station in our schools. You know, I don't mind if you do it. Go ahead and do it; I understand the game. I understand that we all have money and we do things. I put things in the paper. But you know what? You're using taxpayers' money.

I'm a baseball fan and I'm watching the Dodgers and the Yankees play. Seventh inning, I think it was, what comes on? An ad about what a great province we are, that we're better off than we were six years ago. And I don't have a problem with it. You can do that. You know what the problem is? You're doing it with taxpayers' dollars. And you know who said he's never do it? Anybody know? Help me out over here. I know you guys know. Who said he'd never do that? Because Wynne did it when they were in power, and a number of them—I've got a video up on social media if you guys want to check it out—but Wynne did it. Premier Ford said, "I will never do that. I will never use taxpayers' dollars that way."

You know what? We're close to \$40 million that you have spent of taxpayers' dollars doing partisan ads. It's absolutely wrong in the province of Ontario. Take that \$40 million and put it in our food banks. Take that \$40 million and put it into our schools. Take it and get rid of the lead in our schools, in their water. Use that money there.

If you want to raise money and do those ads, I have no problem. Do whatever the hell you want. But at the end of the day, it's wrong and shouldn't happen in the province of Ontario.

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

Ms. Sandy Shaw: Thank you to the member from Niagara Falls. I love your tourist idea about making and birthing babies in Niagara Falls. You might have a bright future ahead of you.

MPP Wayne Gates: My making-babies days are over.

Ms. Sandy Shaw: I know you probably didn't get to a lot of the things that you wanted to talk about. Perhaps it might be the \$200, or how people in your riding probably spend \$16,000 a year on groceries, and this government's going to give them \$200, which is about \$15 a month.

In my riding, they see this as a cynical ploy. They know what this government is doing. They're trying to buy a vote with people's own money. Do you think people in your riding see through this ploy or gimmick—

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

MPP Wayne Gates: Since the fall economic statement, I haven't been back in my riding; I haven't been back to Niagara Falls.

But I will answer that. I believe that there people out there who need assistance. They need help, but there are bigger issues to be done in the province of Ontario. I gave you a number of examples of that, whether that be in health care, whether that be in housing, whether that be in our food banks. Let's take the money that we're spending there and put it into things that people need right away.

1550

The other problem with taking that—and I think it's \$3.2 billion; it's a fair amount of money—I think it would make more sense, because it's only going to be a one-time deal, right? It's going to be a one-time deal before an election. We need to make sure that people can afford housing, make sure they can feed their families, make sure they put gas in their car. All those things should be done, so on that \$200, there are people out there that are going to be very pleased that they're getting any kind of help because they're desperate. They're desperate and going to food banks.

We have people today—I've got 20 seconds left—that are working full-time jobs and when they get their paycheque on Friday, they're going to the local food bank. That shouldn't happen in the richest province in the country.

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

M^{me} Dawn Gallagher Murphy: Thank you to the member opposite for his speech. I would like to recognize the first thing that he said in his speech because I also was extremely pleased with the \$13 million for ALS patients. Thank you for recognizing that. They have been advocating and I think it's very important that we recognize that. So thank you to the member.

I also would like to turn to another issue that I think we can all find agreement in and support on, and that has to do with the issue of fertility treatment. I have to say, when I was there with the Minister of Health and the Minister of Finance at that announcement, it truly was an embracing moment for us all because there are a lot of people who struggle in conceiving a child.

I'd like to quote Zane, who sits on the board of the organization Conceivable Dreams. They were a fertility patient, and they extended their heartfelt thanks to the Ontario government.

I think it says it all, so I'd like to ask the member opposite: Will you join us in supporting an initiative that will help families—

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Thank you.

Response?

MPP Wayne Gates: I'll be honest with you, and I'm going to take it right back to you: I'm a firm believer—and I love Steve; he's done a great job. ALS has done a great job. But I'm going to take it right back to you. Tomorrow, it's Movember month. I started my moustache this morning; I think it's coming in pretty good. But your government has not supported having PSA testing done by OHIP.

You know what? Today, as we're standing here—kids are going to go out for Halloween—13 men are going to die today. I know on your side of the House, because I've talked to some of them, some of the dads on that side of the House, just like some of the dads in my office, have got prostates and some have died from prostate cancer. There is no reason why we're allowing 5,000 men to die every year when we know that if it's detected early and they get the testing done, we can save lives. We save money to the health care system, we save the health care system, and then we make sure that the dad or grandfather—anybody who has a prostate should not be dying prematurely because you won't cover the PSA and because they can't afford to get the test done. If it's recommended by a doctor, we should get it done. So I'd appreciate if you support me—

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Thank you.

Further questions?

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: Their source I have from the Ministry of Health, dated August 28, 2024—in London, the population is 447,643; the physician count is 268 to that population. Rostered patients are 345,656. The percentage of patients rostered to a physician aged 60 and over is 21,000. The number of unattached patients—the population rostered patient count—is 128,978. The number of doctors, based on the 1,200 average—we need 107 doctors.

Now, to go back to urgent care you mentioned, St Joseph's urgent care is one of the most excellent facilities I have ever been to in London. But on their website, they say that if there's a chance that they overbook patients, they have to cut off at a certain place.

You talked about urgent care; how important are urgent cares in the whole picture of making sure people without doctors get access to medical attention?

MPP Wayne Gates: I'm glad you raised that because today there are 2.5 million people that don't have a doctor, so urgent cares are so important. I said it in my speech and I'll say it again: When I went to the doctors to say, when they were here—they were here about two weeks ago; I think they even visited some of the Conservatives. I said to them, "How important are urgent care centres?" They said that they're very important because it makes sure that our emergency rooms aren't being filled up and wait times aren't through the roof. We know that we have hallway medicine. We know all that.

Urgent cares in your area, in Port Colborne, Fort Erie and up north, are very, very important. The government should make sure that we're investing in our urgent care centres to help alleviate the problem in our emergency rooms, where we know there's hallway medicine. It's terrible, quite frankly, in some of our hospitals across the province, particularly on wait times when you get to an emergency room; it's 12, 14, 16 hours.

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

Mr. Deepak Anand: My question is to the member of the honeymoon capital of Canada. There's some similarities between your riding and my riding. My riding has 61% of the immigrants—the population not born in Canada—77% racial community and many, many vulnerable people. Similarly, you have a similar population base, wherein there are people who work in hospitality, as an example.

So if a resident comes to you and asks a very simple question: "I'm going to get \$200 at a time when I need it most to pay out my Christmas bill, and a family of four or five are getting \$800 to \$1,000. Are you going to support this good initiative from this government and make sure that I do not have a crisis at the time of making that bill payment?" What is your answer?

MPP Wayne Gates: I think I already answered this question about six times during my speech. I told you that there are people that need it. And you're right about Niagara Falls: We have lots of people from all over the world, and they're working in the tourist sector. They're working in hospitality. They're working in our hospitals.

I was at Diwali on Saturday night. You asked the question; I'm looking at you so I can answer it, instead of laughing at me. I'm going to tell you, Diwali really—I said at Diwali, "You know what? We should be embracing immigration." I said this because I looked out and there were doctors that were there, there were nurses that were there, there were PSWs that were there. There were people that worked in the hospitality sector. There were firefighters there. That's what makes Canada the greatest country in the world.

Today, what I'm going to say to you and to your government: What we have to do is make sure that our priorities are what's important and that we're not spending it on a spa. I disagree with the spa. I think we can spend it

a lot better than that. We'd like to say that I certainly support having Niagara Falls, like your community—it's wonderful to go to all the different cultures that we have in Niagara Falls. It's growing—

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Thank you to the member.

We have a little time for a quick question and quick response.

MPP Jamie West: Very clearly, every time the member speaks, he talks about being from poverty and getting a unionized job and making a good living. He mentioned seniors being renovicted. He would know the number of widow pensions from unionized jobs. What does it mean when you're on a widower's pension and your rent jumps from \$700 to \$1,800 or more?

MPP Wayne Gates: That's a very good question. A lot of people don't realize that if you're in a union workshop and you have a pension or your spouse has a pension, the minute that your spouse dies, whether it's male or female, that pension goes to about 60%. It's not staying, so if you're getting \$2,000, you lose 60% of that \$2,000 the minute he passes away. Now, you may have some life insurance with the workplace.

Can you imagine losing 60% of what your partner was bringing in on a pension and then ending up having your rent going up 60%? Where's that money going to come from? What's going to happen is that that person is either going to have to rely on family or they're going to end up homeless.

It's a very good question. It's one that a lot of people don't know, don't understand, but you lose 40% of your—

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Thank you to the member from Niagara.

Further debate?

M^{me} Dawn Gallagher Murphy: I have the great privilege to rise today to speak to the fall economic statement, Building Ontario For You. The release of this statement is so timely as it is a testament of our government's commitment to the people of Ontario that we can set the stage for job creation; specifically, better jobs with bigger paycheques. We can build the highways, transit and infrastructure, all the while keeping costs down and delivering better services to each and every Ontarian. What is even better: We are doing this, all the while continuing to do what is necessary to maintain a path to balancing the budget.

1600

Firstly, I would like to thank the Minister of Finance, his parliamentary assistants and all his staff for the great work that they have done over the past several months to prepare such a meaningful 2024 Ontario Economic Outlook and Fiscal Review. I know this work does not happen overnight, and it does not happen over a few months either. In fact, I know that this work takes months and years of consultation, careful consideration, extensive planning, including the running of many fiscal scenarios to ensure that maintaining a path to balancing the budget is respected. Thank you to the Minister of Finance for his due diligence and for listening to the people of Ontario.

Merci, Ministre Bethlenfalvy, pour votre diligence raisonnable et pour avoir écouté la population de l'Ontario.

Speaker, there are many great elements to this Building Ontario For You Act, as it is a plan that focuses on the fundamentals that matter most to Ontario families. I will focus on three key elements that I believe provide:

—firstly, the greatest impact on people of businesses;

—secondly, the greatest meaningful impact on the next generation, on growing the province by making it attainable to have a family here in Ontario; and

—thirdly, the greatest implication on investment where it counts most, as it shows that we are a government that is listening and taking to heart and to the bottom line what it takes to invest in our future, and that is a healthy future.

Madame la Présidente, le plan Bâtir l'Ontario Pour Vous comporte de nombreux éléments intéressants, car il s'agit d'un plan qui met l'accent sur les éléments fondamentaux qui comptent le plus pour les familles ontariennes. Je me concentrai sur trois éléments, ceux qui, à mon avis, apportent :

—premièrement, le plus grand impact sur les personnes et les entreprises;

—deuxièmement, un impact significatif sur la prochaine génération, sur la croissance de la province, en rendant possible le fait d'avoir une famille ici en Ontario; et

—troisièmement, la plus grande implication sur l'investissement, là où cela compte le plus, car cela montre que nous sommes un gouvernement qui écoute et prend à cœur, et aux résultats financiers, ce qu'il faut pour investir dans notre avenir, un avenir sain.

Firstly, to continue keeping costs down for Ontario families and businesses, the legislation, through the 2024 fall economic statement, would extend the temporary gasoline and fuel tax cuts until June 30, 2025. Speaker, this would save Ontario households \$380, on average, since the cuts were first introduced in July 2022. This proposed extension to the gasoline and fuel tax rate cuts bills on a host of measures to make life more affordable for people across the province.

We know that many Ontario families are struggling as a result of the federal carbon tax and high interest rates. This is why our government will always work to help taxpayers keep more money of their own. This includes small businesses and entrepreneurs, for example, groups like the Council of Canadian Innovators. They advised our Associate Minister of Small Business that tax hikes “stifle growth” and they “demotivate Canadians from getting into business in the first place.” This is why under the leadership of Premier Ford, our government will continue standing shoulder to shoulder with Ontario's small businesses and Ontario families and continue to cut the gas and fuel tax. We want to offer relief where we can, including at the pumps.

Nous savons que de nombreuses familles ontariennes sont aux prises avec la taxe fédérale sur le carbone et les taux d'intérêt élevés. C'est pourquoi notre gouvernement s'efforcera toujours d'aider les contribuables à conserver une plus grande part de leur propre argent, et cela inclut les petites entreprises et les entrepreneurs.

Par exemple, des groupes comme le conseil canadien des innovateurs ont informé notre ministre associée de la petite entreprise que les hausses d'impôts « étouffent la croissance » et aussi « découragent les Canadiens de se lancer en affaires ». C'est pourquoi, sous la direction du premier ministre Ford, notre gouvernement continuera de se tenir aux côtés des petites entreprises et des familles ontariennes et de réduire les taxes sur l'essence et les carburants. Nous voulons apporter du soulagement partout où nous le pouvons, y compris à la pompe.

Speaker, last week, I had the honour of standing alongside the Minister of Health, the Minister of Finance, the Minister of Long-Term Care as well as the member from Etobicoke–Lakeshore at the ReproMed Fertility clinic. This was one of the truly memorable moments as a member of provincial Parliament. I stood proud as Minister Jones and Minister Bethlenfalvy announced that our government is investing \$150 million over two years to expand the Ontario Fertility Program to cut wait-lists and triple the number of families connecting to government-funded fertility services in hospital and community settings. This includes giving patients more options where they can access publicly funded fertility services by expanding the program to more clinics.

In addition, we have proposed to introduce a new tax credit that would come into effect January 2025 to further reduce the financial burden faced by people seeking fertility treatment. This tax credit would cover 25% of eligible expenses, up to \$5,000 each year, and this will help families with costs, including IVF cycles, fertility medications, travel for treatment and diagnostic testing.

Madame la Présidente, grâce à ces nouveaux investissements, nous réduisons les obstacles financiers et aidons davantage de personnes et de familles partout dans la province à réaliser leur rêve de devenir parents.

OK, j'aimerais maintenant vous expliquer pourquoi j'ai été si honorée d'être aux côtés de mes collègues lors de cette annonce. Depuis que je suis devenue députée provinciale, j'ai entendu des électeurs, ainsi que des membres d'une organisation appelée Conceivable Dreams, une organisation qui s'est imposée comme la voix de l'Ontario en faveur des soins de fertilité accessibles. J'ai tellement appris de ces personnes que j'ai aussi pu m'identifier à un niveau très personnel.

For some people, it is challenging to conceive a child. I think it is important that we build awareness to reduce the stigma associated with infertility. My husband and I were very blessed to have our son. We tried for more; unfortunately, we were not successful.

The Ontario Fertility Program launched in December 2015. This was well after I gave up on the idea of having a little brother or a little sister for my boy. This is why I can relate to these families and why I started advocating alongside my colleagues for policies that would help couples realize the dream of becoming a parent and growing their family.

Since the launch of the OFP, funding has been provided to over 107,000 families in Ontario to help them build their families. However, each patient was only eligible for one

publicly funded IVF cycle in their lifetime and an additional cycle if they have acted or were acting as a surrogate. By expanding the Ontario Fertility Program, our government is saying, “We are here for you. We want to support you.” Because we are growing as a province, and this includes ensuring that we can help make it attainable and make it accessible for families to grow.

1610

Nous avons beaucoup de citations de la communauté. J’en noterai deux—tout d’abord de la part de la D^{re} Kim Liu, qui est la directrice médicale de Mount Sinai Fertility : « L’annonce d’aujourd’hui est un grand pas vers l’amélioration de l’accès et la réduction des obstacles financiers pour les personnes aux prises avec un trouble de l’infertilité. Merci d’accorder la priorité aux patientes et de les aider à franchir cette nouvelle étape en vue de concevoir une famille. »

Et puis, de la part de Zane Colt, le président du conseil d’administration de Conceivable Dreams : « Étant moi-même un patient atteint de troubles de l’infertilité, je tiens à remercier sincèrement le gouvernement de l’Ontario d’avoir amélioré l’accès aux traitements et d’avoir rendu la vie plus abordable pour les familles comme la mienne. Ce gouvernement est à notre écoute et nous donne du soutien, ainsi qu’une lueur d’espoir pendant que nous travaillons à fonder une famille. »

Speaker, I have now spoken about the positive impact this fall economic statement will have on people and businesses today by giving a reduction in tax so people and businesses can keep their hard-earned income. I’ve also spoken about how it will benefit the next generation by helping to grow Ontario families—a true, human impact.

Now, Speaker, I want to talk about our health; specifically, family medicine. That is the foundation of preventative medicine. I’d like to call it preventative care.

To help close the remaining 10% gap of people who do not have access to a regular health care provider, our government is breaking down barriers for Ontario students to become family doctors by expanding the Learn and Stay grant to include family medicine. In addition, we are requiring medical schools to prioritize for Ontario residents, helping ensure more doctors who study in Ontario will treat Ontario patients rather than leaving the province after their studies.

Pour aider à combler le dernier écart de 10 % des personnes qui n’ont pas accès à un fournisseur de santé régulier, le gouvernement de l’Ontario élimine les obstacles pour aider les étudiantes et étudiants à devenir médecins en étendant la subvention ontarienne Apprendre et rester à celles et ceux qui étudient la médecine familiale. La province exige également que les facultés de médecine réservent des places en priorité aux résidents de l’Ontario afin de s’assurer que davantage de médecins formés en Ontario soignent des patients ontariens plutôt que de quitter la province après leurs études.

À partir de 2026, le gouvernement investira un montant estimé à 88 millions de dollars sur trois ans pour élargir la subvention ontarienne Apprendre et rester. Cela comprend 35,36 millions de dollars pour soutenir 1 360 étudiants

admissibles au cours des années universitaires 2026-2027 qui s’engagent à pratiquer la médecine familiale avec une liste complète de patients après l’obtention de leur diplôme. On estime que cela permettra de connecter 1,36 million de personnes supplémentaires aux soins primaires, en se basant sur le taux d’attachement moyen des médecins de famille.

Le financement couvrira tous les frais de scolarité ainsi que les autres coûts directs liés à leur éducation, comme les livres, le matériel et l’équipement, en échange d’une obligation de service à titre de médecins dans n’importe quelle collectivité en Ontario.

Since the Ontario Learn and Stay Grant Program was first introduced in 2023, it has helped nearly 7,500 students begin training in priority nursing, paramedicine and medical lab technology programs.

Starting in Fall 2026, new legislative and regulatory changes will, if passed, also require all Ontario medical schools to allocate at least 95% of all undergraduate medical school seats to residents of Ontario, with the other 5% reserved for students from the rest of Canada. We’re also creating more opportunities for Ontarians who started their medical education abroad to be able to complete their postgraduate training in Ontario. These actions are designed to ensure Ontario medical schools are training and graduating doctors, including family doctors, who are significantly more likely to practice in Ontario.

L’Ontario a ouvert deux nouvelles facultés de médecine, une à l’Université métropolitaine de Toronto et l’autre à l’Université York, et a augmenté le nombre de places dans les programmes d’études médicales, ajoutant immédiatement plus de 260 places au niveau du premier cycle et 449 places de résidence, pour atteindre à terme plus de 500 places supplémentaires au premier cycle et 742 postes de résidence, ce qui constitue la plus importante expansion de l’enseignement médical depuis plus d’une décennie.

I’m noticing my time is getting short so I’m going to go straight to one of the quotes provided from one of our Ontarian experts on this subject. This is from Dr. Jane Philpott, dean of health sciences at Queen’s University: “The addition of family medicine to the province’s Learn and Stay grant program is good news for both Ontario’s learners and the health care needs of our families and communities. It provides another valuable incentive for students to choose a career path in primary care and it lays the groundwork for more access to family doctors in underserved and growing communities.”

Our government has been listening to Ontarians. I have been listening to my constituents in Newmarket–Aurora, and I want to say to the great residents of my riding: We are investing not only in critical infrastructure, but we’re also investing in you. We are investing in a stronger economy. We are investing in our future generations. We are investing in your health and your well-being for years to come.

Nous investissons non seulement dans nos infrastructures essentielles, mais aussi en vous. Nous investissons dans une économie plus forte. Nous investissons dans nos

générations futures. Nous investissons dans votre santé et votre bien-être pour les années à venir.

Alors, merci beaucoup, madame la Présidente. Merci à tous.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Deepak Anand): It is time for questions.

MPP Jamie West: Merci au membre de Newmarket–Aurora. C’était un beau discours bilingue. Un grand pourcentage de ce discours était en anglais ainsi qu’en français.

Pour moi, c’est très difficile quand je lis les nouvelles et je lis que les citoyens, les travailleurs d’Ontario—que plusieurs travailleurs chaque année cherchent leur nourriture à la banque alimentaire. Pourquoi est-ce que chaque année il y a plusieurs travailleurs qui n’ont pas de « money » pour acheter de la nourriture pour leurs familles?

1620

M^{me} Dawn Gallagher Murphy: Alors, si j’ai bien compris mon collègue, pourquoi les familles ne gagnent pas plus d’argent?

Alors, je veux dire tout d’abord, comme j’ai bien remarqué au début de mon discours, qu’on a fait une réduction sur le tarif pour les carburants. Et pour moi, je crois que ça, c’est très important, et la raison pourquoi : ce n’est pas juste les résidents, mais c’est aussi les entrepreneurs, c’est les entreprises qui peuvent économiser un peu. Parce qu’on sait bien que maintenant, avec le taux Libéral, le taux de carbone, ça coûte très cher pour tout le monde, pas juste les résidents. C’est pour les entreprises aussi.

Donc, pour moi, quand je regarde, est-ce qu’on peut faire quelque chose? On a déjà fait quelque chose et on va continuer ça.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Deepak Anand): Further questions?

M. Tyler Allsopp: Merci beaucoup, monsieur le Président. J’aimerais également remercier ma collègue la députée de Newmarket d’avoir fait sa déclaration en français aussi.

As a father and a husband of—father of three and husband, not a husband of three—many in my riding ask me about fertility supports as an issue I often hear across the Bay of Quinte—hard to switch back and forth quickly. I am sure many others in this room can say the same. It’s an issue that affects not just the individuals in question but also many of their closest loved ones.

Speaker, through you, could the member please expand on what our government is doing to help bring more people the chance at parenthood?

M^{me} Dawn Gallagher Murphy: Thank you to the new member and my new colleague. Thank you very much for that important question.

First off, it’s a good one, because people have been paying a lot of money to go beyond the first cycle of their IVF treatment. Again, as I had noted in my remarks, the Ontario Fertility Program only started in 2015. I think it was great that that program started. But an IVF cycle—typically, most couples don’t succeed in that first one. It could take a second. It could take a third. People that I

heard from in my community and people I heard from right here at Queen’s Park were spending \$40,000-plus and \$50,000-plus and trying unsuccessfully to conceive.

This is why our government is moving forward with this \$150 million, because it is going to make a big difference in the lives of many Ontarians so they can realize the dream of being a parent.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Deepak Anand): Further question? I see the member from Toronto–Danforth.

Mr. Peter Tabuns: Thank you, Speaker. I appreciate the opportunity.

To the member: Housing production in this province under your government has been dropping. There’s no question that you are far from being close to meeting the goals that you’ve said that you will meet to help deal with our housing crisis. I don’t see in this fall economic statement a plan to put in place an agency like Canada mortgage and housing that will actually get housing built.

When will you make housing a priority?

M^{me} Dawn Gallagher Murphy: Thank you to the member opposite for the question. In fact, Ontario has taken some meaningful actions to support and strengthen our local communities with record investments in municipalities. For example, in 2023 alone, the government provided almost \$10 billion through key programs. These investments included \$654 million annually through the Homelessness Prevention Program. I know that’s benefiting my community as well. I remember the day when I made the announcement at the municipality of York region. It’s also increasing land ambulance funding—also, the gas tax program.

As well, the enabling water systems fund—just in my area of Newmarket–Aurora and East Gwillimbury, with this funding, we’ll be able to add 8,000 more homes once a pipe is finished. But it takes that funding of that critical infrastructure.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Deepak Anand): Further question?

Mrs. Daisy Wai: Thank you to my colleague from Newmarket–Aurora. I am so touched by your presentation because it covers, summarizes and highlights all the key things that this fall economic statement has presented. What touched me the most—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Deepak Anand): Can I ask the member from Richmond Hill—you’re not sitting at your own seat. Thank you.

Mrs. Daisy Wai: I’m sorry. Yes.

What I would like—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Deepak Anand): Thank you. Have a seat now.

Response?

M^{me} Dawn Gallagher Murphy: I’m going to answer. I think she was going to probably ask me about the Learn and Stay grant for our medical students, which I think is amazing because, as noted, since 2023, 7,500 students in nursing, in medical technology as well as in—did I say nursing already?—7,500 have benefited from this. Now we are turning our efforts to medical students, because we

know we need more family doctors and we're going to get them to stay right here in Ontario.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Deepak Anand): Further questions?

Mr. Tom Rakocevic: Congratulations again to the member opposite. She always has very well-researched debates, and she knows her material very well.

I wanted to talk about building homes in Ontario. We're about 60% of the way to the target of 1.5 million homes, but the government is lagging so, so far behind. So my question is, have you guys figured out who's sleeping on the keyboard and figured out how to wake them up? Because you've got a long way to go to get to that target.

M^{me} Dawn Gallagher Murphy: Well, as I was saying in the last one—I wasn't really able to finish it. But through the Housing-Enabling Water Systems Fund, which I thought was a phenomenal one because it's helping my area—because one of our challenges is that we need more critical infrastructure in Newmarket–Aurora and East Gwillimbury even to start building more homes that we do need. Specifically, in York region, I recently announced \$139 million that's going towards that, and that's going to make a difference because it's going to add 8,000 more homes to the area where I live.

I'd also like to say about what we're increasing for the Ontario Municipal Partnership Fund, which is also known as the OMPF. By this, we're going to be adding \$100 million over the next two years, and this is going to bring our total funding through this program to \$600 million by 2026. This is going to help municipalities, especially in the small and rural areas.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Deepak Anand): Further questions?

Ms. Stephanie Bowman: Thank you to the member from Newmarket–Aurora for her remarks.

In my riding of Don Valley West, we have a population of about 100,000 people—30,000 of them don't have a family doctor. I get emails, I get calls on a regular basis, asking: Do I know of a family doctor who is accepting patients? Do I have any suggestions for them?

In the member's riding of Newmarket–Aurora, there are 10,000 residents who don't have a family doctor. I'm wondering what the member says to her residents who are seeking a family doctor and need that today, not when the next plan or report comes out in a year or two.

M^{me} Dawn Gallagher Murphy: Thank you to the member opposite for the question. When constituents call my office and they're looking for help finding a family doctor, guess what? I've helped every single one of them to get a family doctor.

I'd say as well that what we're preparing for is the future. Unfortunately—I've got to say this—under the Liberal reign of 15 years, where were programs like this, anticipating? We don't make doctors overnight. We need—what? They need eight years, nine years, 10 years—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Deepak Anand): Thank you so much. That's the time allocated for the debate.

I see a point of order. The member from Spadina–Fort York.

Mr. Chris Glover: Point of order: During the debate this afternoon, the member from Don Valley West said that when the former Liberal government gave out taxpayer bribes—actually, I'll change that—taxpayer-funded cheques, the Liberal government had a balanced budget.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Deepak Anand): My sincere apologies. This is not a valid point of order. Please have a seat.

Further debate?

1630

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Deepak Anand): Thank you so much. After having a conversation, a discussion with the Clerk, I would say there were unparliamentary words used in the statement, so can you please withdraw?

Mr. Chris Glover: I'll withdraw that word.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Deepak Anand): Thank you.

At this time: Further debate?

MPP Kristyn Wong-Tam: It's always a pleasure and an honour to rise in this House to speak on behalf of the fine people of Toronto Centre. Today, we're debating the fall economic statement of 2024.

I want to start with a saying, one that we've all used in this House and one that I certainly have heard throughout my public life in every single chamber of government, and that is: “Show me your budget and I'll show you your values.” This is a statement that rings true ever so more today in Ontario, especially as people are struggling with the high cost of living, the high cost of housing and rent, with the high cost of fuel, and their dollars, their paycheques, are ever-shrinking with the rate of inflation.

Ontarians are not getting what they pay for in this fall economic statement, and that continues to be true: disappointing spending decisions that will deliver fewer services to Ontarians. People in Ontario deserve a government that puts their tax dollars to work by spending them responsibly to make life easier and more affordable.

Ontario became a have-not province in 2023. In 2024, Justin Trudeau's government is sending this province, a have-not province now, a cheque of \$576 million. This is a shameful record by all accounts—the powerful economic engine of this country. The Premier likes to stand up to boast about how things are better today than they were almost seven years ago when they took over from the Liberals, but the record is there. The math does not lie.

This budget is also showing us that we have a \$6.6-billion deficit. Further into the details of this mini budget, we recognize that the government has \$41.8 billion in long-term borrowing on their books. This is \$14 billion higher than it was in 2023, and the cost to carry the debt service alone in this year and into the next is \$13.9 billion—just let that settle—in interest payments. So \$13.9 billion is how much the government is paying to borrow the money, which they are now giving away—and I will get to that further.

Ontario receiving equalization payments is nothing to boast about. These financial transfers from the federal government are simply letting us know that we have lower capacity with respect to economic output. These payments are not expected to go away but expected to rise again in the following year.

Ontarians deserve a government that will actually get to the basics and do them well. The basics that any Ontarian expects from their provincial government is the high-quality delivery of public housing, health care, education, long-term care and other types of services.

On this side of the bench, New Democrats understand that responsibility well. We have put forward solutions to hire more doctors and take the cost of administration off their books so that they can do more of the patient-first medicine delivery. We have put forward solutions to fix the schools that are now sitting with a \$16-billion capital backlog, and instead of addressing that horrible, horrible state of condition, the government is choosing to let it crumble.

Life in Ontario has become far more expensive than it ever has been. It is the scar of this government, and that will be a significant legacy. The budget is out of touch with everyday people who are looking for real solutions to the public service crisis that we see.

Because I'm the official opposition critic on justice and the Attorney General, I want to start my comments about what we're seeing in the justice file. It is hard for everyone to understand, especially for those who claim to support access to justice, for a government to constantly boast about being tough on crime—to see them act so irresponsibly once more by not addressing the long and extraordinary record-high, Canada-number-one, first-in-place backlogs in the courts and the tribunal and administrative agency sectors. We are seeing a half-a-billion-dollar cut in the Ministry of the Attorney General and justice. We are seeing this government implement a 9% cut in the justice file. It is reprehensible and difficult to understand how this government has chosen to ignore victims and survivors who have come before this House and a committee to talk about the heartbreaking wait time that they have experienced, only to see their cases thrown out.

How is it possible that our courts are already shockingly underfunded, and you are now choosing to make that cut even deeper? Every single day, we are seeing the chaos in the courts, and cases are being thrown out. You have heard from the legal stakeholders. You have heard from victims and survivors. You have heard from the justices themselves. And you have chosen to ignore all their advice.

Government members are familiar with the Jordan decision, which states that cases must be tried within 18 months of charges being laid, and if that timeline expires, somebody walks. That is regardless of whether or not they are innocent or guilty; they all walk. So while the government beats their chest and writes letters, points their finger to the Ottawa government and says, "Fix bail reform," when you have a responsibility right here which you choose to neglect day in and day out, dangerous people

who are repeat offenders are being released into our communities with zero consequence.

When this government talks about public safety and you cut a half-a-billion dollars from the justice file—there is no public safety when you can't get to trial.

Cait Alexander's story, you know all too well, was heartbreaking—Emily Ager and dozens more.

You are failing Ontarians when it comes to public and community safety. The record is there for all of us to see. Regardless of the press statements or how many pictures you choose to take with police officers, communities do not feel safer when you don't invest in the justice system.

We are hearing from the crown attorneys' association, who rang the bell on intimate partner violence during the hearings. Courtrooms are triple-booked. Survivors are emotionally preparing themselves for a trial which then never happens. And what is worse is, when a trial begins, the testimony has started, witnesses have been called to provide their statement, and then the trial is cancelled because the clock has run.

How dare you cut half-a-billion dollars from the justice file? How dare you continue to defund the justice system? It is absolutely shameful. There are so many people who are watching what happens in our courts. There is no safety when you cannot get to trial. If a case closes and the judge is not able to hear the case, those who have been charged with the crime walk. It is also a colossal waste of time and money that is spent. This is not fiscally responsible, nor is it fiscally sustainable. We cannot have a justice system that runs on an ad hoc "when we feel like it, when we're going to deliver" policies by press statements. You're setting every single person up for failure, including the crown and justice—and it's not fair that they wear it, because it's not their fault. The police have done their work—they've done their investigations, they've laid their charges, they're prepared to go, and, again, the trial doesn't take place.

When will you understand that by defunding the courts, you are making things worse? What would it take? How many more victims and survivors have to fill this chamber for you to understand that you are not helping the situation? You've made it worse in your almost seven years in government. There is absolutely no rationale whatsoever to see the half-a-billion-dollar defunding of the justice system; there's no rationale for that 9% cut. The detention centres, incarceration—jails are full. As you talk about locking people up, there are three to a cell. Where are you going to put them?

1640

I'm going to move on, Speaker, to talk about health care and the challenges that we are seeing in health care.

Although the government is showing an additional \$1 billion of health care spending, it's actually to reimburse the health care workers for the wages that were stolen through Bill 124. We are not going to see an expansion of services. We're not going to see a reduction in wait times for surgeries. We're not going to see more family physicians for the 2.5 million Ontarians who are waiting—soon to be four million Ontarians who will be waiting in

the next few years. We're not going to see more nurses either.

The crisis in the health care system is so significant. We know that this government came to power promising to end hallway medicine, but instead, what they're doing is closing emergency rooms—emergency rooms. Women who need to deliver their babies have to drive eight hours in northern and remote communities. This is not the Ontario that you are describing in your partisan publicly funded advertising on Facebook and other social media platforms. That is the Ontario, the true Ontario, that you have created, and it's absolutely shameful.

I think we need to invest in health care. We need to invest in mental health care. We need to build up and stitch together the social safety net that has been ripped and absolutely torn apart into pieces. People are falling through the cracks in Ontario, and it's getting significantly worse. Ontarians deserve an apology from this government for failing them so miserably.

The wait-lists are simply too long. We are seeing more and more people being diagnosed a lot later with serious illness and cancer.

This is an issue that affects every single family. There isn't a single family in Ontario who's not struggling with the health care system.

If you're lucky enough to have a family doctor, you'd better pray that this person is young enough to grow with you and your family, because I know that the statistics are also going to show us, as the OMA has told us, that there are going to be a number of doctors retiring, and they are not going to be replaced in equal, proportionate numbers.

Speaker, it's time to talk about housing. This is an issue that affects every single community. Ontarians deserve a home that is safe; that is in the communities that they want to live in; that is connected to proper, well-maintained roads and highways; that is connected, in urban centres, to public transportation that will allow them to get from A to B in a timely fashion. This is one of the most important issues of our time, and we have a responsibility to get it right.

The challenge is that the housing starts under this government have been increasingly coming down—the numbers are going in the opposite direction. The annual goal of hitting 125,000 housing starts is not being met; it has never been met. And this year, the housing starts have fallen, once again, to 81,300. Every single land economist, every single developer, every single urban land institute—or akin to—every single newspaper editorial is saying that the government is not going to meet its goal of 1.5 million homes in 2031.

I'm incredibly sad to point out this record, because families are struggling with being either underhoused—two generations living together in small apartments and small homes, young people delaying the start of their adult life and independent living because they can't get out, and seniors who are facing higher and higher costs of living and feeling that the belt is just tightening around their waists, but also around their necks.

We are seeing more people choosing MAID because they just don't have hope. Just this weekend, I know there was constituent in my own community who invited everyone to a party, but it wasn't really a party; she wanted to say goodbye to community members and family because she has chosen MAID. It was not because she's terminally ill or in chronic pain; it's because she cannot subsist on the \$1,308 from ODSP.

We know that rents in Toronto and right across Ontario are high, but the rents here in this city, the most expensive city in Canada—a one-bedroom apartment will almost set you back close to \$3,000. There's really nothing left.

The solutions are there. You've chosen to ignore your own Housing Affordability Task Force. The opposition Ontario NDP has put forward numerous, numerous proposals on how to accelerate the provision and the building of housing, whether it's building more fourplexes on the main lines, building up our transit-oriented communities, ensuring that the incentives are there to work with our public and private partners so that everyone can get shovels into the ground. We have put all of that forward and more.

And we're the only party that's committed to fully getting back into the public housing game, because governments have a responsibility to build affordable housing, whether it's supportive housing with the wrap-around supports that should be health care-based and funded by the provincial government, which this government is not doing; or if it's working with Options for Homes by releasing and making available public lands for public good; or building co-operative housing by ensuring that the financing and mortgage structures are there.

All of that requires every order of government to come together. What we hear from the federal government and the municipal governments is that the province of Ontario is constantly missing, or, when they do arrive, it's late, and when they do arrive, they're a dollar short.

We have 1,400 encampments in Ontario, and that is a very conservative number. They're in every single community—homeless individuals who don't have a place to go, who are sleeping rough, and winter is coming. This is not a joke; it is coming.

The unofficial numbers, according to the government's own document on homelessness in Ontario, is over 234,000. Let me just repeat that: That's more than a quarter of a million people in Ontario who are unhoused. The crisis before our doorstep is real, with the Premier saying that, if only municipalities just asked for help, he would respond.

The shameful thing about this is that the Premier is choosing to tell certain truths. The truth is that Ontario's big mayor caucus has put forward not just one letter but multiple letters asking—

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): I just want to interrupt the member. Let's frame that "certain truths"—it's pretty much intended to the word you're not supposed to say, so let's clean that up.

MPP Kristyn Wong-Tam: Thank you, Speaker.

We want every politician in this House to be truthful, to look at the statistics and then to rise to respond to them.

We have a homelessness crisis that is absolutely unaddressed in this mini budget. We have a Premier who is saying to municipalities—he is actually gaslighting them—by saying, “Ask me for help, and I will help you. Write me a letter.”

Well, I’ll tell you what. The Ontario big-mayor caucus wrote the Premier a letter in 2022, before the last provincial election and the Premier chose to ignore it—

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Sorry. I don’t want to interrupt the member again, but we know what “gaslighting” means.

MPP Kristyn Wong-Tam: Withdraw.

There’s so much about this budget that I think Ontarians need to see more from, and at this time—what I consider the power of the moment and the opportunity that’s before us when a government of the great province of Ontario tables a budget—it should meet the moment. Regrettably, by all accounts from every single major newspaper, every single economist, this government has failed to meet that moment.

1650

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

Mr. Anthony Leardi: This province is on its way, in the right direction, towards a balanced budget.

I want to share with the House a quote from George Smitherman, a former Liberal Minister of Health. Mr. Smitherman said that the previous Liberal government had indeed balanced a budget, but this is how they got there: “To get to that balanced budget” the Ontario Liberals “really starved health care for five years, and ... that’s not spoken of enough...” That’s what the Liberal health minister said about his own government. So my question to the honourable member across the way is, is it about time that we start speaking about that more?

MPP Kristyn Wong-Tam: I couldn’t agree with you more, sir; I do believe that we should be raising attention to the horrible, horrible record of the Liberal government. They created hallway medicine. They deepened the crisis in Ontario. They drove away nurses. They did not plan for the future with the adequate number of doctors.

But now, things are significantly worse, because you have followed the exact page from Mr. George Smitherman, and you’re doing exactly the same thing.

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

Mr. Chris Glover: I want to thank the member from Toronto Centre for her comments today. There were so many good points that were made, but the one that stuck with me is—she was talking about MAID.

On Friday night, I had a conversation with a friend who has a disability and who applied for MAID because they were in chronic pain and they were also about to be evicted from their home, and they just said, “I can’t be homeless again.” Fortunately, there was an intervention, and that person was saved.

On Saturday night, I attended a celebration of life for somebody who has actually applied for MAID this coming week—and it’s somebody you know and who you just mentioned. You’re saying that they also cannot survive on the ODSP that this government gives, which—the housing allowance is \$582 a month.

Can you tell the government that their ODSP policies are actually leading people to take MAID—and how unconscionable those are?

MPP Kristyn Wong-Tam: I believe that there is a combination of 27,000 people in Ontario on some type of government assistance—some receiving \$730 a month on OW and \$1,308 a month on ODSP.

I also know that there are over 100,000 multi-millionaires in Toronto who do not need a \$200 rebate.

If you really want to see this budget work and to show compassion to those who need it the most, this rebate should be the litmus test, and I can’t imagine people more worthy and deserving of that \$200 than those who are trying to survive on OW and ODSP.

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

Ms. Sandy Shaw: I want to thank the member from Toronto Centre for raising the issue that this budget fails people, but it has failed women more than any other group. The fact that we’ve come in this House, with victims and survivors, to say to this government, “You are failing us”—sexual assault perpetrators are walking free in this province because of the underfunding of our justice system.

We have asked the government time and time again to declare gender-based violence and intimate partner violence an epidemic, as has been declared by almost every province, every municipality in Ontario, but this government steadfastly refuses to declare this an epidemic.

Would you agree with me that this government seems blind to the conditions that women and sexual assault survivors are facing in this province.

MPP Kristyn Wong-Tam: Yes, to the wonderful member from Hamilton. Thank you very much for your question.

It is with a heavy heart that I see this government continue to fail on the issue of addressing gender-based violence and intimate partner violence. We know it’s an epidemic; it’s been declared by over 100 municipalities. We hear from AMO asking this government to do more to end gender-based violence. We’re hearing from the OPP—we heard from various police chiefs, “Please do more.” This government has chosen not to.

On November 25, you’ll all be wearing scarves—Madam Speaker, we’re all coming in to wear some purple scarves. It would be good, on that day, for us to come together as a House, before you put on your purple scarves, to declare IPV an epidemic in this province of Ontario.

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

Ms. Natalie Pierre: Thank you, Speaker, and thank you to the member opposite for their comments and remarks this afternoon.

I heard you mention affordability a couple of times during your speech, so I wanted to talk to you a little bit about the cuts that we're extending on the gas tax and fuel to save Ontario families about \$380 a year. That will help families, Ontarians and businesses in the province.

Through you, Speaker, I ask the member opposite: Will they support our government as we make life more affordable for Ontario people and businesses here?

MPP Kristyn Wong-Tam: Thank you very much to the wonderful member from Burlington. I deeply appreciate your question. The temporary reduction in the gas tax that is renewed constantly every six months is simply an opportunity for the government to get in front of the cameras once again to remind everybody that they've temporarily reduced the gas tax.

If you really want to help Ontarians, I'd say you would go one step further: Why not eliminate the small business tax? Why not go further and reduce the tax burden on low-income families? Why not support the budget by taxing the very rich, like Galen Weston, tax the billionaires, tax the multi-millionaires? You can actually do something right now that will help everybody who is struggling in Ontario, and that is to bring back real rent control.

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

MPP Jamie West: Thank you to the member from Toronto Centre. She made a lot of great points. She started off by saying, "Show me your budget and I'll show you your values." We've heard many times from the Conservatives about how much money they're saving for workers, but the thing that stands out to me all the time is that every year, more and more working people are accessing food banks on a regular basis.

Why is there this disconnect thinking—from the Conservative government—that they're helping working people if more and more working people are using food banks every single year since they've been elected?

MPP Kristyn Wong-Tam: Thank you very much to the member from Sudbury. The reality is that this cheque is a symbolic gesture. It is not litmus- and needs based. It actually doesn't make sense when you're throwing out money across the province, including for those who sit in \$3-million, \$5-million, \$10-million mansions. The fact that it's such a blunt instrument, it doesn't make sense.

Food bank use is on the rise across Ontario, and you are not being surgical, you're not being intentional and you're not being purposeful in how to target the support to those who need it most. I'll tell you that every single food bank operator in Ontario would love to see this government step up to actually support them as opposed to telling the farmers, when they're here, to donate more to food banks.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Quick question and quick response.

MPP Zee Hamid: My question is for the member opposite from Toronto Centre. Given where I sit, I hear countless times the members from opposition talking about

the doctor shortage. Well, I also heard the member say, "Show me a budget and I'll show you the values."

Our government is expanding the Learn and Stay grant to provide more doctors in more communities—right out of medical school—and were encouraging more Ontarians to stay and study right here at home.

Interruption.

Hon. Doug Downey: Got to move your phone, Zee.

MPP Zee Hamid: Just a popular guy sometimes.

Through you, Speaker, I ask the member: Are they going to stop saying no to every health care measure we propose, or are they going to vote for this fall economic statement and ensure more family doctors for families right here in Ontario, for families that need them?

1700

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): A quick response.

MPP Kristyn Wong-Tam: Thank you to the wonderful member. It is my intention to support the initiatives that actually support the people who need it the most.

Speaker, we do have a health care crisis in Ontario, and after six—seven—years now of Conservative government policy decision-making and, I would say, failed health policies, things have gotten significantly worse. There's not a single health care provider in Ontario who doesn't point at this government and say, "This is them. They've made this worse. They started the problem, the Liberals, but they actually broke it now permanently."

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

Mr. Mike Schreiner: It's always an honour to rise, today to debate Bill 216, the government's fall economic statement. Since the economic statement was released yesterday, I can't tell you how many people have reached out to me feeling abandoned by this government:

- young people who are forced to leave Ontario, because they can't afford to buy a home;

- full-time workers who can't pay the rent in the communities they work in;

- an unprecedented number of people experiencing homelessness right now in Ontario;

- the 2.5 million people looking for a family doctor or a primary health care provider;

- the 2,000 people experiencing hallway medicine, which has doubled over the last five years;

- people with disabilities being forced to live in legislated poverty;

- children stuck on a never-ending wait-list to access mental health services;

- families desperately seeking supports as programs and services for people with developmental disabilities are cut;

- children with autism and their families on a wait-list that's ballooned now to 73,000 people;

- people whose basements were flooded this summer because our infrastructure isn't ready for the severe unsafe weather events fuelled by the climate crisis.

The list of people feeling abandoned is long, and it's growing. As the Ontario Green leader, I oftentimes talk

about the climate crisis, but I think right now in Ontario we're experiencing a deeper crisis. It's a crisis of caring—caring for the most vulnerable in our society: people who are struggling, people who are trying to get by, people who depend on public services. They look at a government that yesterday handed out \$200 cheques to millionaires and billionaires like Galen Weston.

You know, I had Professor Jennifer Robson, who is a professor of tax policy at Carleton University—she specializes in how tax policy is implemented, and she said what I suspected: that the most vulnerable people in Ontario likely will not receive \$200 cheques, because they don't file taxes, because they don't need to, and because many of them are experiencing homelessness and do not have an address to send a cheque to.

Those folks desperately need \$200. I don't know if millionaires and billionaires need \$200; I know those folks need \$200. The government didn't go out of its way to come up with an alternative plan for those folks to get \$200, but they did come up with an alternative plan for people who make too much money to qualify for the Canadian child tax benefit to apply for \$200 for their children.

So I would ask the government: What kind of society are we living in? What kind of society are we creating, when the most vulnerable, the most desperate in our province can't even have access to the little \$200 cheque they're sending out, when millionaires and billionaires get it?

Speaker, in this bill and in the fall economic statement, we learned what many of us have been saying would happen: Housing starts are going down. They're not going up. The housing crisis is getting worse. The primary driver of the affordability crisis in the province of Ontario is the lack of access to housing. It's affecting middle-income people, working people, people on social assistance. People are struggling to get a home.

I know the finance minister, yesterday, said the reason Ontario is not going to hit its targets is because of high interest rates. There's no doubt there are high interest rates. But do you know what? It's not affecting other provinces, which are having far higher housing starts than the province of Ontario is. The number of housing starts per 10,000 residents—Canada average for that is 41. Do you know what it is in Ontario? It's 35. We're not even at the Canadian average. As a matter of fact, Alberta is far ahead of us, at 69—British Columbia, 57; PEI, 61. Other provinces are figuring out how to build homes when Ontario is not.

Why are we not building homes? Well, the Premier has said no to changing zoning laws to make it easier for gentle density and missing-middle housing. He said no to my bill to say fourplexes should be as of right across the province. One builder told me that if only 18% of existing single-family homes in Ontario became a fourplex, that would be 1.5 million homes built where we already have infrastructure in place. He said no to my bill to build six to 11 storeys as of right on major transportation corridors. I had a number of builders tell me that if they'd say yes to that, we

could cut times in half for building those mostly purpose-built rentals, but also some condominiums in there as well.

If we don't start saying yes to housing, we're never going to hit this target. As a matter of fact, the province's own Housing Affordability Task Force—those are their two primary recommendations: to say yes to legalizing gentle density and missing-middle housing.

Speaker, as my colleague from Kitchener Centre pointed out on multiple occasions, renters are being failed in this province. We have to say yes to bringing in protections for renters. We have to say yes to fixing the Landlord and Tenant Board, which isn't working for landlords or tenants.

And this province has to start getting back into building non-profit, co-op and permanent supportive housing. Speaker, 93% of the deeply affordable homes in the province of Ontario right now were built before 1995. What happened in 1995? The province got out of building those kinds of homes.

So it's no wonder the housing crisis is getting worse and worse each and every year. It's no wonder 200,000 people are unhoused tonight—and I know the Premier made some comments in the media about how we should take their charter rights away, when it comes to encampments. I just want to say, where are these folks supposed to go? There is no housing for them, unless we start saying yes to building deeply affordable homes.

The co-op housing federation was just here yesterday. They're ready to help us build 250,000 homes that are deeply affordable, which is exactly what Scotiabank is calling for. They're saying the province and the federal government have to get back into the game of building housing. Unfortunately, we had a chance in the fall economic statement to do that, but the government decided to send \$200 cheques to millionaires and billionaires instead.

Health care: I have so many residents in my riding calling me—I got three texts today asking, "Can you help me get a family doctor?" I do everything I can. I work with the family health team. I'm calling folks, trying to get folks access to a doctor or a primary health care provider. But the reality is, 2.5 million people don't have access to a doctor or a primary health care provider right now—2,000 people being cared for in a hallway right now.

We have hospitals in the province of Ontario, especially in rural ridings, taking out lines of credit just to meet payroll, hiring private agency nurses because they've lost so many of their staff due to the government's wage restraint legislation, and paying millions more for that. That's why people are waiting in emergency departments. That's why we're seeing temporary closures of emergency departments. That's why we're seeing so many people not being able to access health care services, and yet there was a 4% increase in the fall economic statement, not even enough to meet inflation, let alone the costs of dealing with the government's unconstitutional legislation.

1710

Mental health: I know the minister is here, and I appreciate the minister coming to my riding to open a youth

wellness hub. Thank you for that. That was a great day in Guelph, just a few weeks ago. But I also want to acknowledge that 30,000 kids are on a wait-list right now to access mental health services. There's this conversation happening in Ontario right now about involuntary care. How can you even have that conversation when people who want care for mental health or addictions treatment can't access it because there aren't enough care providers? The Canadian Mental Health Association and others are saying, "We need funding increases to hire people to be able to meet the demand that exists in the province of Ontario."

ODSP recipients trying to live on \$1,300 a month: Do you know what their housing allowance is? The shelter allowance is \$556, Speaker. Average market rent in Ontario is over \$2,000. The math doesn't add up, yet poverty costs this province \$33 billion a year. It would just be far cheaper to end legislated poverty and take the stress off our health care system, our mental health care system, our criminal justice system, our first responders.

Developmental services: I have parents coming to my office right now. Speaker, I'm taking about this. I think the people of Ontario need to hear some of these stories because I don't think everyone realizes the crisis state that our caring professions are in right now. I had a woman come into my office and say, "My son, who has a developmental disability, has been on the housing wait-list for 10 years and hasn't moved at all"—desperate. She had tears in her eyes. She said, "Do I have to commit suicide to make things so bad in our family that my son can move up the list?"

So I talked to the treasurer of Community Living Guelph Wellington, and he was saying that, over the 30 years, they've received a 7% increase in funding. Inflation during that time has been 60%. He said, "That's why we're selling off group homes. That's why we're cutting programs and services. We just don't have the money." The math doesn't add up.

I'm almost out of time but I just want to close. There were a lot of fantasies about tunnels and highways that are uncosted in this budget. But we don't even have enough money to maintain our existing roads and bridges. The backlog for roads and bridge repair is \$25 billion in this province. That's why, in rural ridings, you're seeing roads and bridges close.

The cost of climate to our infrastructure is going to be \$4 billion a year. There's nothing in this budget for it. It was \$1 billion just this summer in Toronto alone, Speaker. I think we can do better.

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

Hon. Stephen Crawford: To the member opposite, thank you for your presentation. You did touch on housing. I think all of us in the House recognize we have a housing issue in the province, given the population increase here over the last couple of years, which is second to none in North America. Our government has put through some proposals. We've had more purpose-built rentals; in fact, a record number with getting rid of the tax

on purpose-built rentals. We are increasing density around transit areas, including GTA areas like Mississauga, Toronto and in my community of Oakville.

What more do you feel we can do specifically around transit hubs? We've put some policies through. What more should we be doing around transit hubs to increase intensification around those particular hubs?

Mr. Mike Schreiner: I appreciate the member's question. First of all, I would say let's follow the Housing Affordability Task Force put together by your government to legalize six to 11 storeys as of right along major transit and transportation corridors. That would cut building time in half, according to builders, and would be the fastest and cheapest way that we could increase housing supply.

I would also say for the government to reverse their reversal on doing some of the transit-oriented density around certain transit stops that the government has backed off on. Because I agree with you: We should have density around transit stops. So let's make it easy. Let's make it legal. Let's get rid of the red tape so we can actually start building that gentle density and missing middle we need.

Finally, I would say, there are a lot of single-family homes in and around transit stops. Why don't we legalize multiplexes? Again, almost every builder or housing expert I talk to says that's the fastest and cheapest way we can quickly increase market supply.

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

Mr. Peter Tabuns: I want to say I appreciate the presentation that was made by the member. In his presentation, he referred to the support that people need when they're hit by climate-driven flooding. I would like to know if, in his exploration of the document, there is funding for climate adaptation or support for those who are affected by extreme weather driven by the climate.

Mr. Mike Schreiner: I appreciate the member's question. I didn't find anything in the fall economic statement about that. I think climate change was mentioned once in the entire fall economic statement.

I just want to say that the average cost to a basement flood is \$42,000 for just one house. That's just one house. The costs to the city of Toronto alone this summer—so it's even bigger when you start factor in the GTA and stuff—according to the Insurance Bureau of Canada, when we had that big storm back in August or July, was over \$1 billion. The estimate is the uninsurable losses were likely triple that—think about that—in just one day due to unsafe weather events. Those costs are only going to escalate for people and the public if we don't actually start getting our infrastructure climate-ready, and I saw nothing in the fall economic statement that even mentioned it.

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

Mr. Dave Smith: What we saw in the fall economic statement is that organizations like Moody's, Morningstar DBRS and S&P have all either given an upgrade to our credit rating or put us on a positive watch, because they believe that we're actually doing the things that we need

to do financially to make sure that our economy is doing well. That means that our interest rates will go down on money that we borrow.

What we saw in the fall economic statement, then, is \$1 billion less in interest than what we had projected because of that, yet you say that we're doing the wrong thing. The four major credit agencies have said that Ontario is on the right path. We're the only government in Canada right now that is on the path to balance. What do you have to say to the four major credit agencies who disagree with what you just said?

Mr. Mike Schreiner: First of all, I appreciate the question from the member from Peterborough. I don't think they disagree with anything I said. Budgets are about priorities. Saving \$1 billion on interest payments is a good thing; I'm not going to argue about that. What I'm opposed to is the fact that millionaires and billionaires, and even people with six-figure incomes, are getting a \$200 cheque at a cost of over \$3 billion, when we have so many other needs among the most vulnerable in our communities.

The other thing that I didn't even mention is \$7.3 billion goes to be the only jurisdiction in North America to subsidize electricity prices. According to the Financial Accountability Officer, that disproportionately benefits wealthy people. The government has made a lot of decisions to provide rebates and benefits to the most wealthy in our society. Meanwhile, we have people living in legislated poverty. We have people with developmental disabilities not being able to access housing. We have record numbers of people experiencing homelessness.

So for me, it's about priorities. I would prioritize money to help working, middle-income and the most vulnerable people, and not the wealthiest in our society.

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

Mr. Tom Rakocevic: I thank the member. Of course, he is one of the hardest-working people here at Queen's Park.

I want to say to him that one of the things that we heard a lot about from Conservatives, especially during the government previous, was pointing out that Ontario had one of the largest sub-sovereign debts on earth. I don't know why, but for some reason, we don't hear this sort of language anymore.

Of course, we're all hearing about the potential of a looming election, and all of a sudden, a \$200 pre-vote inducement fund is going out that will cost \$3 billion to the taxpayers of Ontario. So there seems to be a lot less interest in dealing with the debt, in light of some of the announcements that the government has been making. What are your thoughts on this?

Mr. Mike Schreiner: I appreciate the question. If I'm not mistaken, Ontario still has the largest debt of any sub-sovereign jurisdiction in the world. That hasn't improved, so it is true. This is why I want to talk about the fact that it's \$3 billion to hand \$200 cheques to millionaires, billionaires and people with six-figure incomes. Why didn't they means-test that and just have it for the people who need it the most?

1720

It's \$1.5 billion a year each and every year for the licence stickers—again, it disproportionately benefits people who own multiple vehicles. Why didn't we prioritize those types of savings for people who are struggling the most?

So it's an issue of priorities when it comes to fiscal management. Something like poverty, for example, costs our province \$33 billion a year. It would be cheaper just end poverty than actually have all those expenses. It's just a matter of priorities.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Quick question, quick response.

Mr. Dave Smith: I want to touch on something that the member just talked about in his last answer. In my riding, there are 128,000 people. The average income, as of 2016, was \$69,000 for a family. That means that 64,000 people in my riding earn \$69,000 a year or less, and they're all going to get a cheque for \$200. And yet, the member opposite talks about billionaires. I don't have a single billionaire in my riding.

Disproportionately, 64,000 people in my riding with an income less than \$69,000 are going to get a \$200 cheque. Can the member not agree that is something that will help 64,000 people in my riding alone?

Mr. Mike Schreiner: I appreciate the member's question, as always. Like I said in response to the last question, I don't understand why the government didn't means-test this. I don't understand why the government doesn't means-test their electricity subsidy. I don't understand why they don't target it to the people who earn \$69,000 or less. Why not means-test it so it's targeted to those folks instead of people who make six-, seven- and eight-figure incomes? To me, that's the smarter way to go.

I would also say, to the member opposite, the university in his riding would like to see sufficient money in place. Members in his riding would like to have access to a family doctor. They would like to go to an emergency department where there isn't a long wait time or their loved ones aren't being cared for in a hallway. They would actually like access to affordable housing so those neighbours of theirs who are living in tents have an affordable place to call home.

There are costs associated with the fiscal decisions this government is making that have real detriment to many people in this province.

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

Hon. Stephen Crawford: It's great to be able to speak today to Bill 216, Building Ontario For You Act (Budget Measures), 2024, or the fall economic statement. I would like to congratulate the finance minister and the parliamentary assistants—I see them here—from the riding of Milton and from the riding of Peterborough-Kawartha for the great work in putting this together, because I'll tell you, Ontario is back. There's no doubt about it: Ontario is back.

Putting together a fall economic statement does not happen overnight. It takes months of hard work and many

drafts. So I'd also like to thank the deputy minister's office for putting this work together.

This plan, the fall economic statement, represents our government's commitment to investing in the future of Ontario and ensuring prosperity and building strong, sustainable communities. As the elected representative for Oakville, I'm especially excited to share how this economic plan supports my community directly.

Ontario, like the rest of the world, faces significant economic challenges, from rising interest rates and inflation to the ongoing pressures of a growing population. We've seen the impact on families, small businesses and essential services. Despite these challenges, our government has remained steadfast in fiscal responsibility, while continuing to invest in the priorities for Ontarians. Our government is on track to balance this budget by 2026.

Today, I will take the opportunity to highlight some of the major areas of our plan and how it directly benefits communities like mine in Oakville.

First, with respect to fiscal responsibility and deficit reduction, Ontario's finances have improved remarkably thanks to a disciplined, responsible approach to budgeting. This year, we are projecting a \$6.6-billion deficit for 2024-25, a substantial \$3.2-billion improvement over previous projections.

With a clear path to balance the budget by 2026-27, we're making investments in infrastructure, health care and public services without burdening future generations with unsustainable debt. Our net debt-to-GDP ratio is projected to be at 37.8% for 2024-25, the lowest in over a decade, showcasing our commitment to financial stability.

This fiscal health enables Ontario to make bold investments in local communities. In my community of Oakville, financial prudence ensures that we can continue to build vital infrastructure projects. We can sustain our local health care services and support families and businesses through thoughtful economic planning. This is essential as Oakville grows and as we see more families move to our beautiful community.

One of the biggest needs in Oakville and across Ontario is infrastructure. Our government has committed \$191 billion dollars over the next decade to strengthen Ontario's infrastructure, making it the largest investment in the province's history. This includes \$27.8 billion for roads and highways and \$68.2 billion for public transit. For those living in Oakville, this means direct support in addressing congestion along major routes like the QEW, which impacts not only our daily commutes but also our local businesses.

Investments in the 413, which will reduce travel times and support economic growth across the GTA, are especially relevant. Highway projects like the Bradford Bypass will also enhance connectivity to nearby regions, making an integrated transportation network.

For our community, the benefits of these investments extend beyond roads. Improving highways benefits families, businesses and employees by reducing time spent in traffic. Families will spend less time on the road, allowing them to focus on activities at home and providing a

smoother journey to and from school. For business owners and their employees, improved highways translate to faster, more efficient transportation, saving valuable time that can be reinvested into productive work hours. Altogether, better highways mean a stronger, more connected community, where time saved in traffic can be spent on what truly matters.

Moving on to affordable energy and sustainable growth, affordable energy is foundational to Ontario's economic success. The largest energy procurement in Ontario's history, securing over 5,000 megawatts of new capacity, is being undertaken to guarantee affordable and reliable electricity for families and businesses alike. Oakville is home to diverse energy-intensive industries and businesses, from manufacturing to technology firms. By ensuring a sustainable and cost-effective energy supply, we're helping to keep these businesses competitive. Nuclear energy plays a central role in the strategy, with Ontario leading in the adoption of small modular reactors to deliver stable clean energy to meet the increasing demand.

Investments in sustainable energy also position Oakville to benefit from the growing green economy. Ontario's clean energy focus provides Oakville's businesses with the stability they need to innovate, expand and contribute to Ontario's growth.

Moving on to keeping costs down for families, our government is committed to easing the financial burden on families. Many households throughout the province and beyond have felt the pressure of inflation and rising costs, particularly from the federal carbon tax. Our government has responded by proposing to extend the gas and fuel tax cuts until June 2025, saving the average Ontario household around \$380.

To provide more relief, we are introducing a \$200 taxpayer rebate early next year. Eligible adults in Ontario will receive \$200, with families getting an additional \$200 per child under 18. This immediate support will help families right now.

1730

For daily commuters, our One Fare initiative eliminates double transit fares. Oakville residents who use GO Transit and other regional transit systems are saving up to \$1,600 annually, making transit more affordable and convenient.

Our proposed continued freeze on post-secondary education is making higher education more accessible for families in Oakville and throughout the province, giving our young people the tools they need for success.

Expanding health care and family support programs is critically important. Health care remains a cornerstone of our economic plan. A significant investment of nearly \$50 billion in health infrastructure over the next 10 years is being proposed. This includes 3,000 new hospital beds and more than 50 new hospital projects. For Oakville, this means enhanced health care, infrastructure and services; reducing wait times; and allowing for more specialized care closer to home.

The expansion of the Ontario Fertility Program with an additional \$150 million to nearly triple IVF support offers

valuable assistance to families here seeking fertility treatment.

We're also addressing the shortage of family doctors. Our government's Ontario Learn and Stay Grant program is expanding to cover medical school tuition for those committing to practise in underserved communities and those committing to serve in family practice for the next five years, ensuring we have a stable supply of family doctors in the province of Ontario with our projected growth and population over the next decade. This initiative is estimated to connect an additional 1.36 million Ontarians to primary care. This will also support northern communities as we work to ensure that every resident has timely access to a family doctor within the next five years.

Speaker, supporting municipalities and housing infrastructure is also critically important. We work very closely with our municipal partners wherever we are in the province. Oakville, like many communities in Ontario, is experiencing rapid population growth, with calls for expanded local services and more housing. We are increasing the Ontario Municipal Partnership Fund by \$100 million over two years, assisting municipalities like Oakville with the resources they need to sustain our communities' infrastructure and services.

Our government is investing nearly \$2 billion in housing-enabling infrastructure, including funds for water systems and municipal housing initiatives. In Oakville, this assessment means accelerating our housing goals, enhancing our infrastructure and ensuring that more residents have access to safe, affordable homes. By focusing on housing-enabling infrastructure, we're setting Oakville on a path to sustainable growth. Our Building Faster Fund, awarding more than \$260 million to municipalities based on housing targets, directly supports Ontario's housing development and enables us to meet demand efficiently.

Building a skilled competitive workforce is also critical for the future in Ontario. The strength of Ontario's workforce is the bedrock of our economy. In Oakville, we see this daily in our thriving business sectors. To address labour shortages, we're investing \$260 million through the Skills Development Fund, targeting critical sectors like manufacturing, construction and health care. The Skills Development Fund has already been instrumental in training workers across Ontario, including in my community, where we have a growing demand for skilled tradespeople and health care professionals. In addition, we are modernizing our apprenticeship programs, promoting skilled trades and supporting the next generation of workers in finding fulfilling careers. Since 2020, Ontario has invested over \$1.5 billion in skilled trades initiatives, empowering youth and residents to pursue promising careers that meet the needs of our economy.

Ontario is also making strategic advancements in the mining sector, especially in the critical minerals in the Ring of Fire. This initiative, carried out in collaboration with our northern First Nations, positions Ontario as a leader in sourcing essential minerals for electric vehicles and renewable technology. This thriving sector supports

78,000 jobs across mineral processing, mining supply and services, while 25% of Canada's direct mining jobs are based right here in Ontario and 9% of Ontario's mining workforce is Indigenous—the highest percentage of any industry in the province.

Ontario's mining sector is a pillar of our economy, contributing approximately \$14.3 billion annually to our GDP. As one of the top 10 global jurisdictions for mineral exploration spending, Ontario produced \$15.7-billion worth of minerals in 2023, with critical minerals accounting for \$6.4 billion. With 36 active mines and around 200 companies exploring over 400 projects, Ontario is at the forefront of Canadian mineral production, leading in gold, nickel and platinum.

Our province's favourable business climate, skilled workforce and incentives for innovation uniquely position Ontario as a critical supplier for North American technology. This will, of course, include batteries and electric vehicles. Our advancements into the mining sector will generate new and stable careers. It will also reduce dependency on international mining suppliers, providing greater stability and opportunities for workers in the north. This has the opportunity to unleash a new prosperity in northern Ontario.

Driving economic growth and supporting businesses is critical for the future growth of Ontario. Ontario's economy is robust and resilient, but we continue to target high-growth sectors. With \$100 million added to the Invest Ontario Fund, we're advancing local economies, creating jobs and establishing Ontario as a leading hub for manufacturing and life sciences.

For Oakville, our local manufacturers benefit from the Ontario Made Manufacturing Investment Tax Credit, which helps businesses invest in innovation and expansion. Our 10-year Advancing Ontario Made Manufacturing Plan is a road map to expand Ontario's manufacturing workforce to one million by 2035, positioning Oakville at the forefront of this growth.

Our life sciences strategy is investing \$146 million. Oakville stands to benefit from cutting-edge research and bio-manufacturing growth. This initiative supports local biotech firms and strengthens Ontario's role as a global leader in the life sciences.

Unfortunately, one thing we have seen a little bit more of in the province of Ontario over the last few years is organized crime and auto theft. We are the first government to actually put a new minister, who is sitting right here, in charge of that portfolio. Thank you, Minister, for the great work that you're doing in combatting auto theft and bringing about bail reform, which we badly, badly need.

Our government, right here in Ontario, is doing what it can to lower crime and put the people doing the crime into jail. Our government is bolstering resources to combat auto theft and organized crime by expanding air support capabilities. We are investing \$134 million to acquire five advanced police helicopters. This was not a decision that was made by a government or bureaucrats; it was a decision made after talking to the police and the police

chiefs and understanding what they need to do their job to minimize crime. It was the number-one ask that police chiefs had. We did not have the capability to monitor from the air, to reduce the number of high-speed chases, which reduces potential innocent people being killed in a car accident. This is going to play a major role in improving safety and reducing crime right here in the GTA.

1740

The Halton police will also be getting a helicopter, and I know they're thrilled about the capabilities that's going to provide them to keep my community in Oakville safe. The OPP will be obtaining two new H135 helicopters to collaborate with Ottawa and Toronto Police Services as well, while three additional helicopters—one will be used by my police force in Halton, but also the Durham and Peel Regional Police services to enhance patrols and response times. Those helicopters, incidentally, are built right here as well—Canadian-made.

These investments are just a small part of our ongoing effort to strengthen public safety and ensure police services have the tools needed to respond effectively to major incidents and urgent situations. With state-of-the-art technology, these helicopters will be pivotal in making our roads safer and more secure, targeting violent carjackings, auto theft, street racing and impaired driving.

The 2024 Ontario Economic Outlook and Fiscal Review, or FES, is about creating opportunity, allowing businesses the opportunity to flourish. It's about ensuring affordability, providing a gas tax cut for drivers, for families, with providing the people of Ontario a \$200 dividend. That dividend is really coming about because of increased revenue, because of fiscal prudence. That is money going back to the people of Ontario, where it originally came from. We're ensuring people can get through these tough times.

Our government is managing the finances responsibly, reducing the deficit in making thoughtful investments. When I came here into Parliament six years ago as a new MPP, with an enormous debt built up over many, many years, the largest sub-sovereign debt in the world, being downgraded, spending billions in interest a year—here we are, six years later, where we have a province that has economic growth; manufacturing jobs coming back to this province after having left for a decade or more; building new health care facilities; building long-term-care homes; building new roads, bridges and highways which are sorely needed, and still able to balance a budget in the next twelve months. It's a phenomenal success, and I give full credit to the Minister of Finance and his team for bringing out the fall economic statement, which I believe is a road map for great success for this great province.

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

Mr. Tom Rakocevic: I want to congratulate the new associate minister on his new position.

I heard something incredible this morning in question period, really incredible. What it was: Apparently, in the face of rising interest rates, the Premier had had enough, he picked up the phone and made a phone call to the

governor of the Bank of Canada and he said, "Stop. Lower the interest rates." And, according to the minister, the interest rates came down.

My question is, considering—because we all know in question period that the ministers are fully honest in everything they answer. Since the Premier and this government had that power, what took so long for that phone call to be made, and will this government take responsibility for procrastinating on that phone call?

Hon. Stephen Crawford: Well, it is Halloween, so I take the question in jest. It allows me to talk about the opportunity, about what's happening here in Ontario, because I didn't really finish up on great success we have here.

You may have heard that Ontario has created in the last year more manufacturing jobs in the province of Ontario than the entire 50 states combined. We are bringing jobs back to this province, having reasonable energy costs, lower regulations, having a skilled workforce, having a clean energy grid. We're getting the policies in place to get this province back on track. I'll tell you, it's great that rates are going down too.

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

M^{me} Dawn Gallagher Murphy: Thank you to the associate minister for his speech today. I found it difficult to hone in on things, because in this FES, this fall economic statement—there are so many good things in there.

But the one I'm going to ask you about is about ensuring that Ontario remains a top destination for investment. Invest Ontario: Can you talk to us a bit about what the funding is? Because I know there's an additional \$100 million that we are investing in Invest Ontario. Can you talk a bit about that and how it's going to continue to attract investors from around the globe?

Hon. Stephen Crawford: What a great question. Thank you to the member from Newmarket–Aurora. And you are correct: At the end of the day, in this province, we need to put the horse before the cart. We need to have a province of prosperity and wealth and job-creation, so we can have the great health care and the great educational facilities that we have in the province.

Invest Ontario plays a role in that, and our government is committed to Invest Ontario. Invest Ontario has helped attract \$4.1 billion in investments to Ontario and created 4,000 jobs directly—how many more indirect, I don't know, but that's direct. By creating the right environment, by attracting investment to the province, we're getting the jobs and the prosperity. That's what's bringing us back to a balanced budget. And by the way, we're the only government in Canada that hasn't raised a tax, and yet revenues—when I came here in 2018, \$150 billion; now, almost \$220 billion, with no new taxes.

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

Ms. Sandy Shaw: I appreciate all the things that the government is saying they're doing, but let's be honest: You're doing this all with borrowed money, because you guys are awash in debt.

You talked about how when you took office, this government had the largest sub-sovereign debt in North America. Do you know who has that now? You guys. You guys have the largest sub-sovereign debt in North America. In fact, every man, woman and child in Ontario owes \$26,000 as part of your debt. I know you're giving them 200 bucks, but they still owe a lot of money—\$26,000—and you have increased the net debt by \$100 billion.

You're spending big, but we have hospitals where people wait for days to get a room. We have 2.5 million people without a doctor, and we have people who want home care bandages, when they're at home trying to recover from cancer, that have to go to Amazon and buy their products when they should be getting it from this government, because they pay for it and they're not getting it.

So how do you explain this explosion, this wash of debt that are you talking about, when you know that that is a fiscally irresponsible and unsustainable trajectory?

Hon. Stephen Crawford: Speaker, did I hear this correctly? Is the NDP becoming a party of fiscal responsibility? Did I hear that?

Ms. Sandy Shaw: Well, we know you're not.

Hon. Stephen Crawford: No, I don't think I heard that. I don't think so—spend, spend, spend.

We get criticized for spending too much. Now it's the deficit. At the end of the day, Speaker, we have grown a budget in Ontario from \$150 billion to \$220 billion with no new taxes. We inherited a fiscal deficit. There is no major government in Canada—look at Quebec; look at BC; look at the federal government—that has a path to balance. We've been able to do that while still making the investments in Ontario infrastructure.

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

Interjections.

Mr. Tyler Allsopp: I'll wait. It's okay. Thank you very much, Speaker. I appreciate it.

We've heard some members of the opposition say today that what you see in a budget represents the values of that party. When I look at this budget, we're talking about fiscal responsibility; a path to balance the budget; more support for our Ontario municipal partners; fertility investment, helping couples and aspiring families have the children that they're looking for. We're talking about Learn and Stay, hiring more doctors, getting people the health care that they need. We're looking at crime and public safety, keeping people safe in Ontario.

Investing in Ontario, bringing more jobs, getting people higher paycheques: If these are not the values of the opposition, why is it—considering that I'm sitting in our overflow caucus section—that these values are the ones that resonate so deeply with the people of Ontario?

1750

Hon. Stephen Crawford: Thank you to the member from the Bay of Quinte. It's great to see you here. It's great to have a question from you.

You are absolutely correct; this budget is a reflection of our values. It's a vision of fiscal responsibility, balancing the budget, attracting investment, but also putting the investments in health care, which are badly needed.

This government is committed to getting more doctors in this province. We know there's an issue. We understand that. We recognize that. That problem, by the way, was started when the Liberals cut down the number of medical seats in the province. Having said that, we're increasing it—we're dedicating those seats to Ontario doctors.

This fall economic statement will also pay the tuition of doctors who are dedicated to stay in northern communities and to stay on as family doctors, which we sorely need.

In order to attract people to this province and people to invest here—they want to see that this province is not only a great place to invest, but it's a great place to live.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): The member from Spadina–Fort York.

Mr. Chris Glover: Congratulations to the associate minister on your new position.

The Conservative government always talks about fiscal responsibility, and they pride themselves on being fiscally responsible.

In 1995, they were fiscally responsibly selling the 407 for \$3 billion. After 30 years of paying outrageous tolls and having that highway sit largely empty, the government is now thinking of buying it back for \$35 billion.

It's not just the previous Conservative government that was making those kinds of deals. We just got the lease for Ontario Place, and according to the Premier, we are investing 1.5 billion tax dollars into it, and over 95 years, Therme and Live Nation—they're going to pay us back \$1.1 billion. So, in 95 years, our great-great-grandchildren will be paid back for our initial investment, plus they're going to have the parkland for free.

So how is it that the government continues to pride itself on being fiscally responsible, when they keep giving away our assets and subjecting future generations to paying off these really, really bad deals that the Conservatives keep making?

Hon. Stephen Crawford: Thank you for the congratulations; I appreciate that—to the good member over there.

I will say, in terms of us being fiscally responsible, the proof is in the pudding. At the end of the day, S&P, Moody's, Dominion Bond Rating Service—these are independent agencies of the government that look at every government and corporation around the world. They rate governments based on debt. They've all upgraded us. Our debt-to-GDP has gone down. You can see it in the numbers. We are the only major government in Canada that has a path to balance. So we're getting the investments we need in health care, in infrastructure, in education; rebuilding roads, bridges, highways and subways, in a fiscally prudent manner.

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

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: It's always an honour to rise and speak on behalf of my constituents from London—

Fanshawe. Today, I want to respond to the 2024 fall economic statement.

I stand, also, on behalf of families of Ontario who are struggling under the weight of the economic crisis that is simply unsustainable. There have been many speakers in the Legislature today giving very concrete examples of how financially unsustainable things are today for many people, even working people. For many of my constituents in London–Fanshawe, the cost of living has spiralled out of reach, leaving them facing hard choices and, quite frankly, impossible situations—to the extreme, where people are homeless because they can't afford to pay the high cost of living, which includes rent, which includes groceries, which includes insurance, which includes energy costs. It goes on and on.

First, let's talk about the cost of living. The harsh reality for Ontarians on social assistance is that they barely are scraping by. But it's not just people on OW and ODSP who are feeling the pinch. Even families with two working parents are feeling the hard times. Families are doing everything right, and they're struggling to make ends meet. Groceries, utilities, home and auto insurance, as I mentioned—everything is more expensive, and families are being stretched to the breaking point.

When we talk about affordability, like I said today, it's not unusual that someone who's working has to access a food bank. Over one million Ontarians visited the food bank between April 2023 and March 2024, which is 8% higher this year—this represents a 134% increase from the same period since 2019 and 2020. The increase in the food bank use is due to a number of factors including the high cost of living, stagnant wages, insufficient income supports, rising housing costs and a changing job market.

The Daily Bread Food Bank in Toronto sees about 350,000 client visits per month. That is a huge number and something we should not be proud of. More than 50% of new clients are employed full-time, and more than 60% have post-secondary education.

The HungerCount report in 2024 found that one third of food bank clients are children, which represents nearly 700,000 monthly visits. This is, really, a number that I think we should all be surprised about, and that's something that we all need to do something about.

Some of these things in the fall economic statement—as one of the members pointed out, there are some things in there. But quite frankly, the financial burden that families have—this financial economic statement is not going to solve that situation.

The \$200 cheques that have been sent out: There has been a lot of back and forth about that, and I want to give a little bit of history on that. In 2000, actually, the Conservative government at the time, the Harris govern-

ment, actually sent \$200 out as well. I don't know if everybody knows that. Full circle, we have Mike Harris, his son, here, and here we are today sending another \$200 cheque out with the Conservatives. They're not the only ones that sent out \$200 cheques, repeating history from the Harris years, but also the Liberal McGuinty government sent out a \$200 cheque in 2010.

The member, at the time, I think it was, of Don Valley West had mentioned that it was because the Liberal government had a surplus and that's why they handed out those cheques. Quite frankly, that isn't accurate. They had a huge deficit in the budget.

Sending out those cheques, again, what the motive is—I'm not going to impute motive, Speaker, but I don't think it looks good. It's not a good look when governments send out cheques. There's speculation, perhaps, of elections coming up. I have to say, when the Harris government sent out their \$200, there was a quick election afterwards as well. So it kind of goes hand in hand that—it seems a little self-serving. We'll say that.

There are also families that are suffering, people who are working—also children with disabilities. That is something that was especially hit hard. For three years, critical funding to social services, including the Ontario Disability Support Program, Ontario Works, the Ontario Autism Program and the children's aid societies, have been frozen. Those funds have been frozen.

There's a lot of investment that needs to happen, Speaker, when we talk about services like this. I don't know if you've seen the news article, especially in London—and I know the member from Hamilton Mountain also talked about what the children's aid societies are going through right now. There are kids actually being housed in hotels. There are kids sleeping in staff's offices. This doesn't make sense.

So when we're talking about a fall economic statement, we have to look at it in all aspects of how we should be helping everyone. If we have \$3 billion that we can use. I think we should reassess maybe, looking at another way of helping the kids I just talked about. I have a family—

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): I apologize to the member from London–Fanshawe. The time has now come to an end.

Second reading debate deemed adjourned.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): There being no private members' public business—pursuant to standing order 100(e), as no business is designated for consideration, this House now stands adjourned until Monday, November 4, at 10:15.

Happy Halloween, everyone. Have a great night.

The House adjourned at 1800.

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