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of Ontario



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Jeudi
2 avril 2026

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Clerk: Trevor Day

Présidente : L'honorable Donna Skelly
Greffier : Trevor Day

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CONTENTS / TABLE DES MATIÈRES

Thursday 2 April 2026 / Jeudi 2 avril 2026

ORDERS OF THE DAY / ORDRE DU JOUR

Plan to Protect Ontario Act (Budget Measures), 2026, Bill 97, Mr. Bethlenfalvy / Loi de 2026 sur le plan pour protéger l'Ontario (mesures budgétaires), projet de loi 97, M. Bethlenfalvy

Hon. Stephen Crawford.....	3465
MPP Catherine McKenney	3466
Mme Lucille Collard	3467
Mr. Lorne Coe.....	3467
Mme France Gélinas	3467
Mme Dawn Gallagher Murphy	3467
Mme France Gélinas	3468
Ms. Natalie Pierre	3469
MPP Jamie West	3469
Mr. Lorne Coe.....	3470
MPP Jamie West	3470
Ms. Peggy Sattler	3470
Mme Lucille Collard	3471
Mr. Lorne Coe.....	3472
Ms. Sandy Shaw.....	3472
Mr. Rudy Cuzzetto.....	3472
Hon. Steve Clark	3473
Vote deferred.....	3474

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS / DÉCLARATIONS DES DÉPUTÉES ET DÉPUTÉS

Sara Tessier

MPP Mohamed Firin.....	3474
------------------------	------

KW Titans orange jersey basketball game

Ms. Catherine Fife.....	3475
-------------------------	------

Homelessness

Mme Lucille Collard	3475
---------------------------	------

Long-term care

Mr. David Smith	3475
-----------------------	------

Brad Kovachik

MPP Wayne Gates	3475
-----------------------	------

Government investments

Mr. Anthony Leardi	3476
--------------------------	------

Laboratory services

Mme France Gélinas	3476
--------------------------	------

Government investments

Mrs. Daisy Wai	3476
----------------------	------

Ontario Trillium Foundation grants

Mr. Lorne Coe.....	3476
--------------------	------

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS / PRÉSENTATION DES VISITEUSES ET VISITEURS

Mr. Robert Bailey.....	3476
Hon. Graydon Smith	3477
MPP Paul Vickers	3477
Hon. Jill Dunlop	3477
Hon. Vijay Thanigasalam.....	3477
Hon. Nolan Quinn	3477
Hon. Stephen Crawford.....	3477
MPP Stephanie Smyth.....	3477
Mr. John Jordan.....	3477
Hon. Stephen Lecce.....	3477

Opposition day motions

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly)	3477
---------------------------------------	------

QUESTION PERIOD / PÉRIODE DE QUESTIONS

Nurse practitioners

Ms. Marit Stiles.....	3477
Hon. Sylvia Jones.....	3477

Education funding

Ms. Marit Stiles	3478
Hon. Paul Calandra	3478

Education funding

Mr. John Fraser	3479
Hon. Paul Calandra	3479

Subventions destinées à l'éducation / Education funding

Mme Lucille Collard	3480
Hon. Paul Calandra	3480
Hon. Todd J. McCarthy.....	3481

Land use planning

MPP Alexa Gilmour.....	3481
Hon. Trevor Jones	3481

Programmes d'enseignement à l'enfance en difficulté / Special education

M. Stephen Blais	3482
Hon. Paul Calandra	3482

Energy rates

Mr. Matthew Rae	3482
Mr. David Smith.....	3483

Home care

Ms. Chandra Pasma.....	3483
Hon. Sylvia Jones.....	3483

Teachers

Mr. John Fraser	3484
Hon. Paul Calandra	3484

Infrastructure renewal

MPP Bill Rosenberg.....	3484
Hon. Todd J. McCarthy.....	3485

GO Transit

Mrs. Jennifer (Jennie) Stevens	3485
Mr. Ric Bresee	3485

Impaired drivers

Mr. Stephen Blais.....	3486
Hon. Doug Downey	3486

Bail reform

Mr. John Jordan.....	3486
Hon. Michael S. Kerzner.....	3486

Hospital services

MPP Wayne Gates	3487
Hon. Sylvia Jones.....	3487

Answers to written questions

Mr. John Vanthof.....	3487
Hon. Stephen Lecce	3487

Notice of dissatisfaction

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly)	3487
---------------------------------------	------

Legislative pages

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly)	3487
---------------------------------------	------

Notice of dissatisfaction

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly)	3488
---------------------------------------	------

DEFERRED VOTES / VOTES DIFFÉRÉS

**Mandatory Blood Testing Amendment Act, 2026,
Bill 84, Ms. Smith / Loi de 2026 modifiant la Loi de
2006 sur le dépistage obligatoire par test sanguin,
projet de loi 84, Mme Smith**

Second reading agreed to	3488
--------------------------------	------

**Plan to Protect Ontario Act (Budget Measures),
2026, Bill 97, Mr. Bethlenfalvy / Loi de 2026 sur le
plan pour protéger l'Ontario (mesures
budgétaires), projet de loi 97, M. Bethlenfalvy**

Second reading agreed to	3489
--------------------------------	------

Business of the House

Hon. Steve Clark	3489
------------------------	------

**INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS /
PRÉSENTATION DES VISITEUSES
ET VISITEURS**

Mr. Brian Saunderson	3490
----------------------------	------

**REPORTS BY COMMITTEES /
RAPPORTS DE COMITÉS**

Standing Committee on Government Agencies

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly)	3490
Report deemed adopted.....	3490

PETITIONS / PÉTITIONS**Student assistance**

Mr. Ted Hsu	3490
-------------------	------

Education funding

Ms. Sandy Shaw.....	3490
---------------------	------

Accident benefits

Mr. Adil Shamji	3490
-----------------------	------

Affordable housing

MPP Lise Vaugeois.....	3491
------------------------	------

Health care workers

Mr. Terence Kernaghan.....	3491
----------------------------	------

Social assistance

MPP Lise Vaugeois.....	3491
------------------------	------

Student assistance

Mr. Terence Kernaghan.....	3491
----------------------------	------

Student assistance

Ms. Sandy Shaw.....	3491
---------------------	------

Social assistance

Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon	3491
---------------------------------	------

Student assistance

MPP Wayne Gates	3492
-----------------------	------

Health care

Mr. Terence Kernaghan.....	3492
----------------------------	------

**INTRODUCTION OF GOVERNMENT BILLS /
DÉPÔT DE PROJETS DE LOI ÉMANANT
DU GOUVERNEMENT**

**Better Regional Governance Act, 2026, Bill 100,
Mr. Flack / Loi de 2026 pour une meilleure
gouvernance régionale, projet de loi 100, M. Flack**

First reading agreed to.....	3493
Hon. Rob Flack	3493

ORDERS OF THE DAY / ORDRE DU JOUR**2026 Ontario budget / Budget de l'Ontario de 2026**

Ms. Chandra Pasma.....	3493
Ms. Jessica Bell.....	3496
MPP Lise Vaugeois.....	3498
Ms. Stephanie Bowman.....	3501
Mr. John Fraser	3506

Burdett Sisler

MPP Wayne Gates	3509
-----------------------	------

2026 Ontario budget / Budget de l'Ontario de 2026

Hon. Stephen Lecce	3510	Mr. Anthony Leardi.....	3522
Mr. John Vanthof.....	3512	Mr. Chris Glover	3522
Mr. Anthony Leardi	3513	Ms. Stephanie Bowman.....	3523
MPP Alexa Gilmour.....	3513	MPP George Darouze.....	3523
Mme Dawn Gallagher Murphy	3513	MPP Kristyn Wong-Tam	3526
Mr. John Vanthof.....	3514	Ms. Stephanie Bowman.....	3526
Mr. Terence Kernaghan	3514	Hon. David Piccini	3526
MPP Kristyn Wong-Tam	3515	MPP Alexa Gilmour.....	3526
Mr. Anthony Leardi	3517	Mr. Jonathan Tsao.....	3527
Mr. Chris Glover	3517	Mr. Tyler Allsopp.....	3527
Mr. Matthew Rae	3517	MPP Alexa Gilmour.....	3527
Ms. Jessica Bell.....	3518	Mr. Chris Glover	3529
Mr. Joseph Racinsky	3518	Mr. Jonathan Tsao.....	3530
Mr. Adil Shamji	3518	Mme Dawn Gallagher Murphy	3530
Mr. Rob Cerjanec	3520	Mr. Tom Rakocovic.....	3530
Mr. Anthony Leardi	3521	Mr. Jonathan Tsao.....	3531
Ms. Jessica Bell.....	3522	Mr. Anthony Leardi.....	3531
Ms. Stephanie Bowman	3522	Mme Lucille Collard	3531
		Debate deemed adjourned	3532

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

Thursday 2 April 2026

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

Jeudi 2 avril 2026

The House met at 0900.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): Good morning. Let us pray.

Prières.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): And now a moment of silence for inner thought and personal reflection.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

PLAN TO PROTECT ONTARIO ACT (BUDGET MEASURES), 2026

LOI DE 2026 SUR LE PLAN POUR PROTÉGER L'ONTARIO (MESURES BUDGÉTAIRES)

Resuming the debate adjourned on April 1, 2026, on the motion for second reading of the following bill:

Bill 97, An Act to implement Budget measures, to enact, amend or repeal various statutes and to revoke various regulations / *Projet de loi 97, Loi visant à mettre en oeuvre les mesures budgétaires, à édicter, à modifier ou à abroger diverses lois et à abroger divers règlements.*

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): I recognize the Minister of Public and Business Service Delivery and Procurement.

Hon. Stephen Crawford: Good morning, Speaker. It's good to be able to speak about the budget today. As a former parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Finance, I know what's involved in that, so I want to give a special shout-out to the parliamentary assistants to finance and to the Minister of Finance for working so hard to put this budget together.

I am proud to rise today in support of the 2026 Ontario budget, A Plan to Protect Ontario. At a time of global uncertainty, rising costs and economic pressures, our government is focused on one thing: protecting the people of the province of Ontario—protecting their jobs, protecting their wallets and protecting the services that they rely on every single day.

The reality is, the world has changed. We are seeing tariffs, supply chain disruptions and economic instability ripple across global markets. While we cannot control these forces, we can control how we respond. And our response is clear: We are building the most competitive, resilient and self-reliant economy in the G7. We are lowering costs. We are reducing red tape. And we are making smart, targeted investments that protect Ontario today while setting us up for great, long-term success.

Speaker, this budget is grounded in a simple principle: Be prudent with public dollars, be focused on results and never lose sight of the people we serve. That is why our government continues to take a pragmatic and responsible fiscal approach, making targeted investments while maintaining the flexibility to respond to changing conditions.

While others are raising taxes or cutting services, Ontario is doing the opposite. We are keeping costs down. We are supporting growth. And we are maintaining a clear path to balance the budget. The work of the Ministry of Public and Business Service Delivery and Procurement is central to that plan, because our ministry is about making government work better, faster, more efficiently and more responsibly for the people of Ontario.

Let me start with one of the most important priorities of the budget: protecting Ontario workers and businesses. Through the Buy Ontario Act, we are keeping more public dollars here at home, supporting local jobs, strengthening our supply chains and ensuring that Ontario businesses have the opportunity to grow and compete.

This is about economic resilience, and this is about standing up for Ontario workers in the face of global uncertainty.

At the same time, we are breaking down trade barriers within Canada. For too long, internal trade barriers have held back our economy.

That is why Ontario is leading the country in advancing a mutual recognition, making it easier for businesses to operate across provincial borders, reduce costs and unlock new opportunities for growth, because when Ontario businesses succeed, Canada succeeds.

Speaker, we are also taking bold action to cut red tape and make Ontario the best place in Canada and, indeed, the world to do business.

Right now, businesses face fragmented and outdated permitting systems that slow down investment and job creation. We are fixing that by building a new digital permitting system that will simplify approvals, reduce delays and give businesses the certainty they need to invest because we know that time is money, and unnecessary delays cost jobs.

At the same time, we are embracing innovation, and we are doing it responsibly. Artificial intelligence is transforming our economy, and Ontario is leading the way. Through the Enhancing Digital Security and Trust Act, we are putting guardrails in place to ensure AI is used transparently, responsibly and securely. We are protecting privacy, we are strengthening accountability and we are making sure that innovation works for people, not against them.

Speaker, we are also taking decisive action to protect consumers because in today's economy fairness is not optional; it is expected. Nowhere is that more obvious than the ticket resale market. Families across Ontario have experienced the frustration. They log on early, they wait in line, they do everything right, only to watch tickets disappear in seconds and reappear a moment or two later, sometimes at even four times or five times the price. That's not a fair marketplace; it is a system that rewards bots and bulk resellers at the expense of everyday people.

We're going to put a stop to that, Speaker. Our government is introducing changes that would make it illegal to resell tickets for more than the original total cost, including taxes and fees. Our government is introducing changes that would make it illegal to resell tickets for more than the original face value of a ticket—no more hidden markups, no more excessive resale prices, just a fair and transparent system that puts fans first.

Let's be clear: This is about restoring balance. People should not have to compete with automated systems or professional resellers just to take their family to a concert or a hockey game. This is about access, it is about fairness and it's about protecting the hard-earned money of the people of Ontario.

At the same time, we will continue to monitor the marketplace very closely. If we see fees or service charges being used to get around these rules, we will not hesitate to act because our focus is very simple: a fair system that works for the people.

Speaker, we are also strengthening consumer protections in other ways, including exploring new rules to protect reward points. Ontarians earn these points through everyday purchases. They are not perks; they represent real value that people rely on. Our goal is to ensure those benefits are protected, accessible and transparent so people can use what they have earned with confidence.

Speaker, we are modernizing how government protects information because trust in government depends on how trust in information is handled. The reality is, our current privacy and access laws are nearly 40 years old. They were written in a different time, before cloud computing, before AI and before the scale and sophistication of today's cyber threats. They are no longer enough, so we are updating them. We are strengthening cyber security requirements across the broader public sector, including schools and hospitals; we are improving how personal information is collected, used and protected; and we are putting stronger safeguards in place for children's data because there is no greater responsibility than protecting young people in the digital world.

We're also modernizing access processes to ensure that they reflect today's technology and expectations while continuing to support transparency and accountability because protecting information is not about systems—it is about people, it is about trust and it is about ensuring Ontarians can have full confidence that their data is safe, secure and handled responsibly.

We're also taking action to combat financial crime. Through work towards a beneficial ownership registry, we

are strengthening transparency, law enforcement and ensuring that Ontarians remain safe and competitive doing business here in the province.

0910

Speaker, all this is about one thing: building a stronger, more competitive Ontario. But it is also about delivering services and doing so efficiently. That is why our ministry continues to deliver services in the most cost-effective way possible, ensuring every dollar delivers results and is directed where it matters most. This budget reflects that discipline. My ministry's expenses are decreasing this year not because we are doing less, but because we are doing more efficiently, delivering better outcomes at a lower cost. That is what responsible government looks like.

This budget is not about short-term fixes; it is about long-term strength. It is about building an economy that can withstand global shocks, an economy that creates jobs and an economy that delivers opportunity for every person in the province.

Let me be clear, Speaker: Our plan is working. Our economy continues to show resilience. We are attracting investment. We are creating jobs. We are maintaining one of the strongest fiscal positions in the country, because we made a choice not to raise taxes, not to cut services, but to grow the economy and support the people who drive it.

At the end of the day, this budget is about people. It is about the worker trying to get ahead, the family trying to make ends meet and the business owner trying to grow. It is about giving them the tools they need to succeed and ensuring Ontario remains the best place to live, work and raise a family. So yes, the world is uncertain, but our plan is clear: We will protect the people of Ontario.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Questions?

MPP Catherine McKenney: Thank you to the minister for your comments.

One of the most alarming things that I see in this budget is a cut to the municipal affairs and housing budget, during a housing crisis on one hand. Giving a one-year HST break will certainly help developers off-load their housing oversupply, but do you agree that cutting housing programs, in particular housing programs that are meant to house people in social housing—we see a growing amount of homelessness. We see a growing number of people sleeping unsheltered. We have organizations that house people and do it well, but this is a cut. Do you agree that this is the time to make that type of—

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Thank you.

Response?

Hon. Stephen Crawford: I appreciate the question from the member from Ottawa Centre. We do certainly agree that there is a housing crisis in Ontario and, indeed, across the country. In fact, quite honestly, in most Western countries there's a housing crisis right now, for a number of reasons, and it's certainly been compounded with higher interest rates and some of the affordability issues that we touched on.

We've taken very strong measures year over year, in this budget and some legislation, to reduce the cost of housing. The HST cut, getting an agreement with the federal government: We believe a 13% cut—that's a \$130,000 cost savings for someone buying a \$1 million new home—is significant, and we believe that will have a very positive impact on the housing market here in Ontario.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Questions?

M^{me} Lucille Collard: Thank you to the member for his speech and his descriptions of what he considers really good measures in there. But I have to say that I can't fully agree with it because we see in Ontario—everywhere, including in Oakville—the homelessness crisis has increased by 185% since 2018 and the emergency shelters are operating at 140% capacity. I just looked that up, so I'm pretty sure that's very recent data.

We know that the crisis is created by people having mental health and addiction issues and the lack of affordable housing. Can you point to the measures in this budget that are addressing this crisis?

Hon. Stephen Crawford: To the member: I appreciate the question.

I think we all here in the House agree that the opioid, drug and mental health issues are certainly a crisis, and our government has taken action. The Minister of Health certainly has touched on that. The Associate Minister of Mental Health and Addictions has touched on what we're doing with respect to the HART hubs that we are putting in across the province, which are more comprehensive in their approach to dealing with people who have drug addiction issues, mental health issues. Rather than just giving them free drugs and keeping the addiction going, we're taking a more holistic approach to dealing with this very important issue.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Question?

Mr. Lorne Coe: My question is to the Minister of Public and Business Service Delivery and Procurement.

Our government has been very clear that protecting Ontario means cutting taxes, keeping costs down and standing with the businesses that power our economy.

So I'd like the minister to explain further, beyond his earlier remarks, how this government's plan, particularly the proposed small business tax cut, is helping protect Ontario small businesses and support job growth in his riding.

Hon. Stephen Crawford: Thank you to the member from Whitby—great question.

We've always believed that government does not create wealth and prosperity. Government sets the environment for wealth and prosperity, for companies to flourish, and that's exactly what we've done in the past and will continue to do.

We are the first government in Ontario that has never raised a single tax, and of course we've cut taxes, whether it's the carbon tax or driver's licence fees, the small business tax, which was in this budget, which is a fairly

large reduction, actually—an over 30% reduction in the small business tax.

Small businesses are the backbone of the Ontario economy. Tens of thousands of small businesses in the province create jobs, create great opportunities, create opportunities for summer students, so giving them a break will definitely put them on a better path to withstand some of the turbulence we're feeling globally right now.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Question?

M^{me} France Gélinas: I want to ask the member about the changes to the freedom of access to information. I filed a freedom of access to information request to get access to a report that the Minister of Health had on fibromyalgia, myalgic encephalomyelitis and other environmentally linked diseases. The report was never made public, but through freedom of access to information, we were able to get a copy of this report. We were able to share that report so that we now have best practice for plans of care for the people of Ontario, because the freedom of access to information gives us access to a report that only the minister had.

With the changes you're putting forward, none of that would have been possible; all of the people who suffer with those environmental diseases would not have access to high-quality care. How can you justify that?

Hon. Stephen Crawford: Thank you to the member from Nickel Belt for that question.

I want to make it very clear that 95% of what is accessible now—actually, greater than that—will still be accessible through freedom of information.

Again, it needs to be very clear as well—maybe some of the members of the opposition don't fully understand—that any direction from ministerial offices to the public service is still open to freedom of information. Anything within the public service is open to freedom of information so that people will be able to access that information.

What we are doing in terms of this legislation is aligning with the majority of jurisdictions in Canada and indeed globally within the Westminster tradition to ensure candid decision-making within cabinet.

All final decision-making, all outcomes, all spending will be fully open and accessible to the public. Nothing is changing with respect to that.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Question?

M^{me} Dawn Gallagher Murphy: My question is to the minister. First off, I'd like to thank him for all his work in his ministry.

0920

My question is specifically along the lines of artificial intelligence. We know that we have an economy that's changing. We know workers are having to change what they do to accommodate artificial intelligence. We know that our economy is going to become more dependent on AI.

So, how are we, as a government, helping businesses and workers really look to the future to see how AI can be

incorporated? Because it's going to make our economy one of the most successful in the G7.

Hon. Stephen Crawford: That's a great question from the member from Newmarket. I wish I had more time to answer that.

Ontario is a leader in artificial intelligence. We've got the third-largest tech cluster in North America right here in Ontario. In fact, Ontario was the incubator of AI, right here at the University of Toronto. We've got dozens and dozens of great companies, right here. So we do play a major role in it.

Now, having said that, unfortunately, Canada as a country, and Ontario being part of that, we do have a little lower adoption rate than some of our competitors, like the US. We need to make sure that businesses utilize AI more efficiently because there has been a productivity gap between the US and Canada over the last decade, and I believe AI definitely plays a part in that.

But as a government, here in Ontario, we're certainly supporting companies that are in the AI space. And as a government, we've been expanding within my own ministry to be able to utilize and see how we can use AI more efficiently in government because we believe there are a lot of opportunities within government to be able to use AI and save the taxpayers. In fact, right now, we're leading Canada in AI usage within the public service.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Further debate?

M^{me} France Gélinas: I'm happy to have a few minutes to talk about A Plan to Protect Ontario, the 2026-27 budget. I will go through in the same order as you can find them in the budget.

I'm on page 91. Page 91 says, "Building Highways for Northern Ontario." I represent a riding in northern Ontario. This is, like, really good news.

Nope, it's not. We have been waiting for about 40 years for the four-laning of Highway 69. Highway 69 is the highway that goes from the 401 all the way to Sudbury. We still have 68 kilometres of Highway 69 that are two lanes. Today, MPP West and I will be driving home to Sudbury. They're calling for freezing rain. They're calling for heavy snow. I guarantee you, on this stretch, there will be—I don't know—100 trucks that cover your car so that you can't see anything. They swerve over the middle lane. There is closure of that highway every week in the winter.

I read this in the budget, and I'll read it to you, Speaker: "Widening Highway 69 from two to four lanes between Parry Sound and Sudbury ... the government is working to complete the remaining 68 kilometres." No timeline, no money, no commitment, no nothing—they are working to complete the remaining. Will it take another 40 years to complete the 68 kilometres? It could very well be, because that's all that's in the budget.

People in northern Ontario need a government who understands that the roads in northern Ontario need to be improved. We cannot continue to have 10 times the amount of risk of death on northern Ontario roads than you have on the 401. This is our lifeline. There is no public

transit in Nickel Belt. There are no buses. There is no train. We drive, or we stay home.

When I read things like this in the budget, it makes me feel like we don't matter. We don't count. We're not there. What are you waiting for? Why are there billions of dollars for a fancy tunnel under the 401, but there isn't even a mention of money allocated to the widening of Highway 69, although it was a promise that this Premier made? While campaigning, he promised to four-lane Highway 69. And then, we get this budget that doesn't assign a single penny to it, that doesn't assign a timeline, a work plan—nothing. I'm not happy.

Then, I went on to investing in hospitals. I've been the health critic for the last 18 and a half years. I worked in the hospital for 15 years. The hospital that serves most of my community is Health Sciences North, located in Sudbury. Health Sciences North has 526 beds—526 beds. That's the number of beds at HSN, Health Sciences North. Last night, there were 644 patients. I'll let you do the math, Speaker. That's 118 patients that were sick enough to be admitted into a hospital who did not have a bed. They were in hallways, they were in a bathroom, they were in a TV room, in a waiting area. They were anywhere but in a bed in a room.

This is not acceptable, Speaker. This is not acceptable. Our hospital has been in need of an expansion for a very long time, but things move at the rate of a sleepy turtle. They've done the work. They've submitted the plan. They've told the ministry it has been a year and a half, and so far, crickets.

So I read the budget where it said, "Investing in Hospitals," and Health Sciences North is nowhere to be seen. Health Sciences North is a hub for all of the hospitals in northeastern Ontario. You go anywhere—Espanola, Manitoulin Island, Thessalon, Blind River, Elliot Lake, Sturgeon Falls—they all depend on Health Sciences North. Health Sciences North is a tertiary care centre. There are people from all over northeastern Ontario who come to their cancer treatment centre, who come to their specialized care, which is great. But when you are sick enough to be admitted into a hospital but you're part of the 118 patients last night who slept anywhere but in a bed, that's not acceptable.

Their average hallway is 130 patients a night. They do a count every night at midnight, and the average is 130. Last night was a little bit better, at 118. No, it's still terrible. This has to change, and we don't see that in the budget.

What we see in the budget—and I will read it to you; it's on page 125 in the English version. It says, "Ontario's hospitals play an integral role in delivering critical health services. This is why the government is investing over \$1.1 billion in additional hospital funding.... This investment includes an up to 4% increase in base and targeted hospital funding...."

Hospitals want certainty. They want to know for sure at the beginning of the budget year, which is April 1 to March 31, how much money they're going to be dealing with. Last year, in December, a couple of months ago, most of

the hospitals got bailout money—that's really good—so that they're not going to be out hundreds of million of dollars of deficit, but that's not how you plan health care. The hospital association has come. They said that they need a minimum of \$1.1 billion to keep us at the disastrous level we're at, but they need \$2.2 million to meet the needs and still have halfway health care and still have long wait times and still have Thessalon Hospital, which was closed four days last week, three days the week before. This is not acceptable.

The budget says “up to 4%.” Does that mean you get 1%? Does that mean you get 2%? How can you plan? Hospital associations want a three-year forecast so that they can recruit and retain a stable workforce, form them and supervise them so that we have high-quality care. None of this is possible when it is probably going to be December before they find out what the percentage increase is that they're getting this year. Is it an ongoing increase or is it just for this year? None of that is clear.

When you keep things like this, people cannot plan. They cannot use their resources to the best ability so that taxpayers get value for their money. Why? Because this government puts numbers out there, but then it takes months and months and months before the hospital actually knows what their budget is going to be.

It is hard to recruit and retain a stable workforce in northern Ontario. We are short over 400 physicians, thousands of nurses, and when you don't know—they say, “Well, we'll give you a occasional job, because we don't know if it's going to be a contract because we don't know if we'll have the money to keep you for next year.” Who wants a job like that? Nobody. It makes it really hard to provide equity care in northern Ontario.

0930

I only have one minute. Man, this goes by really fast, doesn't it?

Okay, “Supporting High-Quality Long-Term Care”—we got all of a 2% increase in long-term care. The acuity of the people that are in our long-term-care system is continuing to increase. It was back in 2014 that I first tabled a bill asking for four hours of hands-on care, because back in 2014, when I tabled that bill, we had done the study, and the acuity of the people in long-term care needed four hours of hands-on care. We are in 2026 and we still have not achieved four hours of hands-on care, but the level of needs of the 78,000 people admitted into our long-term-care facilities in Ontario has gone way past what it was in 2014. We are now able to provide a much higher level of care, and that's great, but that requires resources. And yet we're getting a 2% increase while the number of beds is going up, while the acuity is going up.

I had a whole lot more to say, but I'm running out of time. Sorry.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Questions?

Ms. Natalie Pierre: To the member opposite, small businesses are the heartbeat of Ontario's economy, supporting local communities like mine, like Sudbury, and they employ hundreds of thousands of Ontarians across the province.

Included in this budget, our government is proposing lowering the small business corporate income tax rate by over 30% from 3.2% to 2.2%, delivering over a billion dollars in tax relief to more than 375,000 small businesses across the province of Ontario. In other jurisdictions across Canada, they are raising taxes, recording record deficits, cutting jobs. Our government is choosing affordability, competitiveness and private sector job creation.

Through you, Madam Speaker, I ask the member opposite, do they support the historic small business tax credit, and how would that help small business owners in your—

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Thank you.

Response?

M^{me} France Gélinas: To give small businesses a 1% decrease in taxes is something that we support—no problem with that. But small businesses have come and they've told you that they need so much more. The people who work in small businesses would like to have sick days. Those workers deserve sick days, but there's a good chance they won't have them.

We just had a press conference on Monday that a lot of those small businesses in my riding—I have many industrial parks that support the mining sector—a lot of those small businesses would be glad that we had anti-scab legislation so that, when those workers go on strike or are locked out, we don't destroy our community, we don't take advantage of vulnerable workers.

There's so much more that could be done to support our small businesses, but 1% is one tiny step in the right direction.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Questions?

MPP Jamie West: Thank you to my colleague from Nickel Belt. She talked about Highway 69 and the broken promises the Premier has made. In 2018, 2022, 2025 and every year during the budget, we ask about Highway 69, and the Premier and the Minister of Transportation always promise the cheque is in the mail.

I want to tell you about, in 2025—you read this article, I know, because we talked about it during the drive—the Premier said:

“‘I want to make sure our highways are safe. It's treacherous and not just here,’ Ford said. ‘Have you ever (gone) from Sudbury down to the city? That two-lane is like white-knuckle driving down there. If the transport is off by two inches and you're done...’”

“‘We drove all over the north during the election and snow was coming down. We had a pretty heavy winter. It was terrifying. But until you see it first-hand, you can't appreciate it. We'll do everything we can to be sure we get that fulfilled...’”

My question is, why do you think the Premier keeps breaking his promise?

M^{me} France Gélinas: I represent a northern riding with 33 small communities. What I hear from my constituents is that they don't care—they don't care about the people of northern Ontario.

I have more mines in my riding than in any other riding. They're interested in the minerals that we have in Nickel Belt. They're interested in the mines that we have, but they're not interested in the people who live there. Things as easy as making—we need access to schools for our kids, to homes to live in, to health care services just like everybody else. But no; they want the resources that come from the ground in Nickel Belt, but they don't care about the people of Nickel Belt. They don't care about the people of northern Ontario. If they did, they would have four-laned Highway 69 in 2018 when they said they would.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Question?

Mr. Lorne Coe: Thank you, Speaker, and through you: My question focuses on community safety because it is not optional, as you know, and it's absolutely fundamental. It's why our government is investing in this budget concrete measures, again, to protect hard-working families and neighbourhoods—I'm sure including some of the neighbourhoods in Nickel Belt. Since 2018 alone, \$375 million has been allocated to combat guns and gangs.

So I'm interested in hearing, through the member from Nickel Belt, will she support a budget that protects the hard-working families in her community and keeps them safe?

M^{me} France Gélinas: Do the people of Nickel Belt need protection? Absolutely. We have Highway 144 that starts in Sudbury, that goes to Timmins. There is no police whatsoever. We had an OPP detachment in Gogama. You closed it. We had an OPP detachment in Foleyet. You closed it. If you have an accident on Highway 144, if you're lucky enough to have cell service or somebody goes to somebody's house to call, it will be hours before a police officer is there to help you.

The money you've invested probably helped keep people in southern Ontario safe. For northern Ontario, you took the resources that were in the OPP stations in northern Ontario, and they're not there anymore. The amount of resources to keep us safe is going down, not up. We kept the OPP station open in Noëlville because we screamed loud enough that you couldn't do it behind our backs. But Gogama is gone, Foleyet is gone, and we see it in intimate partner violence, in car accidents. We need protection, too—

Interjection.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Stop the clock.

The Associate Minister for Forestry and Forest Products will withdraw his unparliamentary remark. I will wait.

Hon. Kevin Holland: Withdraw.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Further questions?

MPP Jamie West: As the member for Nickel Belt knows, my wife works in a kindergarten class. I want to summarize a couple of statements and ask you a question:

“As a wish list, I'd like to come to my place of work 21 days out of the year.”

“I'd like a Ferris wheel, a second Ferris wheel.”

“I would like a secret superhero tunnel like Batman has.”

“I'd like a private luxury spa.”

“Instead of fixing the roof of the science centre, I'd like to build a new science centre.”

“Instead of building a place, I want to build a secret island”—even though Lake Ontario is over 86 metres deep on average.

My question to you: Are these the wish lists of one of the kids in my wife's kindergarten class, or are these the wish lists of the Premier?

M^{me} France Gélinas: That was funny. None of that is the wish list of anybody but the Premier. The Premier uses resources for a Ferris wheel, for fantasy tunnels, for all sorts of things that are not a priority for anybody.

What I hear from people on the front lines is that we want more support for our kids who have special needs. We want them to be able to go to school and achieve their full potential. We want smaller class sizes so that there aren't 35 kids and one teacher in one room. We want our schools to be there to support each and every one of the students because this is what makes Ontario strong. It is our health care, it is our education system, and for the francophones, if we don't have French schools, we lose our French really quickly.

0940

So, no, that's the fantasy of the Ford government, not of the people.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Question?

Ms. Peggy Sattler: One of the concerns that I hear about a lot from people in London West is the amount of money that they have to pay out of pocket to access health care services. I just did a health care survey of residents in London West, and this was one of the top concerns that they mentioned.

So my question to the member is whether there is anything in this budget that would help clamp down on the number of times that people have to use their credit card to access health care services in the province of Ontario.

M^{me} France Gélinas: The answer to your question is a capital no. There's actually more money in this budget to expand private, for-profit health care, not to guarantee that people won't have to pay. What's happening in your riding is happening everywhere.

Just look at cataract surgery. If you have cataract surgery done in the hospital, everything is free. If you have the same patient and the same ophthalmologist do the same procedures in a private clinic, I guarantee you it will be hundreds if not thousands of dollars in extra fees. When people complain—if they know how to complain, because it's not easy—some of them will get their money back, but the other hundred that were billed the exact same thing do not.

The government underfunds our publicly delivered health care system for one reason. It's to push forward their privatization agenda. There is a lot of money to be made off the backs of sick people, and rich corporations know this, especially US corporations.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Further debate?

M^{me} Lucille Collard: It's a pleasure to rise and speak to the budget. There's always a lot to say about the budget because, at the end of the day, we know that the budget is about choices. It's about the priorities of the government in that particular year.

Despite the title of this budget that says it wants to protect Ontario, that's actually not—we see in the budget when we look at the measures that are put forward to presumably try to help Ontarians get by—so we're not just talking about numbers. Again, it's a reflection of our priorities, the values that we hold dear and whether a government understands or not the lived reality of the people it actually serves.

When I look at the budget again, I see a government that is out of step with that reality because what I see is that it doesn't reflect the priorities that I hear about day in and day out in my riding of Ottawa–Vanier. In communities like Ottawa–Vanier and everywhere else, people don't want slogans; they are asking for support. I mean real supports, supports directly helping people, to help people live with dignity at every stage of their lives and for everyone, regardless of their income. We don't see that in the budget.

Madam Speaker, the cost of living continues to rise, especially with housing. In Ottawa–Vanier, families are struggling to keep up with rent increases. Young people can't afford to move out, and I have an example at home. I have four kids. My son of 24 years old is actually moving out this year. He's 24 years old. I'd like to think that he stuck around because of my good cooking, but I know he was tired of listening to his mom and dad and his siblings.

He's able to move out, but only just because now he has a girlfriend that he can share the rent with, and he also works two jobs. I think that if the situation would have been different, if affordable housing was available, he probably would have made his way out earlier. That's not to say that I'm not happy that he's stuck around for that long. He's a strong young man, and he's been a great help at home.

I also have my mother, actually, who has been living at home with me. For the last 18 years, my mom has been with us, helping us—and also, one of the reasons for that is that she couldn't afford to live in Ottawa on her own. So there is a big household of seven people. We make it work. But not everybody has that opportunity, and unfortunately, a lot of people live in precarious situations. Because what we see is that more and more residents are being pushed into that precarious housing or even out of housing altogether, which is a really bad situation for anyone.

But the data is clear: If we look at the numbers, the median rent in Ottawa has increased by over 60% in the last decade, reaching around \$1,600 per month. I think that's a conservative number. The wait-list for affordable housing has grown to over 15,000 households with wait times stretching up to 7.6 years.

So what we are seeing is the consequences of that every day is that we see encampments. We see them everywhere

in Ontario. They're hidden, but sometimes they're in plain sight as well. We see shelters that are operating beyond capacity—and those shelter models, really? They should disappear altogether, to be replaced by supportive housing, because they don't provide a dignified lifestyle. It's really degrading, and I see it all the time because there is a big concentration of shelters in Ottawa–Vanier and it's nothing somebody should dream of living in. Because that's what it has become. People don't go in shelters anymore as a transition. They end up spending not only weeks, but months, and in some cases, years, in shelters—imagine.

What we also see is the growing pressure on community organizations that are really, really doing their best to try to get ahead and try to help people on the street. But really, they're not getting the financial support that they need. Honestly, this budget fails to meaningfully invest in deeply affordable housing and supportive housing, the very solutions municipalities and service providers have been calling for for a very long time. Instead, the government continues to focus on supply targets without addressing affordability. But, Madam Speaker, if people cannot afford the homes they build, then they're not solving the crisis.

I want to talk a little bit more about homelessness and community services, because in my riding, it's a big issue. And I know you hear me here talk about this a lot. In Ottawa–Vanier, I also see the human side of the crisis every day. I'm going to name some organizations in my riding, like Ottawa Inner City Health, Sandy Hill Community Health Centre, the Ottawa Mission and Shepherds of Good Hope. They are doing extraordinary work.

Community groups like SOS Vanier street outreach are stepping up every day. Imagine: A group of neighbours figured that they felt like they needed to do something. They got together, and they collect just normal supplies—clothing and juice and food. They go out every night, and they go meet people on the street to give them some supplies, just to help them get through the day and have a little bit of a better day.

These organizations are being asked to do more and more with limited and uncertain resources. Because the crisis is growing; it's not going backwards. We have nearly 85,000 Ontarians that are experiencing homelessness. That's an increase of 50% since 2021, just four years ago. In Ottawa alone, close to 3,000 people are experiencing homelessness with hundreds living unsheltered.

This budget does not match the scale of this crisis. Actually, it falls very short. When we fail to invest in housing, mental health and addiction services, what we do is we shift the burden. We shift the burden onto emergency rooms. We shift the burden onto police services and community organizations already stretched to their limit.

Madame la Présidente, la réalité est simple. La crise de l'itinérance et du logement n'est pas une fatalité. C'est le résultat de choix politiques.

À Ottawa–Vanier, nous voyons des organismes communautaires qui font un travail exceptionnel, mais honnêtement, ils sont à bout de souffle. Pendant ce temps,

les besoins augmentent, les listes d'attente s'allongent et trop de gens tombent entre les mailles du filet. Investir dans le logement abordable, dans la santé mentale et dans les services en dépendance, ce n'est pas une dépense, c'est une responsabilité comme gouvernement. Et surtout, c'est une question de dignité humaine.

0950

Madam Speaker, access to health care remains one of the top concerns in my riding. Too many people in Ottawa–Vanier still do not have access to a family doctor. Community health centres are overwhelmed, and mental health and addiction services are underfunded. And yet, this budget does not deliver the urgent structural investment needed to stabilize the system. We cannot continue to rely on patchwork solutions while the system is under strain because when people cannot access care, conditions worsen, costs increase and the entire system becomes less efficient.

The same disconnect exists in education. I got into politics because of education, because as a mother of four, I thought, “Gosh, our education system has to be able to be better.” I saw the potential, but what I saw instead were portables where my kids were going to school. They had classes in portables. We were in Ontario; I couldn't believe it. So I decided to get involved, and that's how I eventually ended up here to talk about education—but there's so much more to talk about.

But right now, what we're dealing with in schools is overcrowded classrooms, increasing student needs and insufficient supports. Teachers are exhausted, students are struggling and, yet, instead of meaningful investments, this budget offers limited, one-off measures that do not address the systemic challenges. The \$750 gift card that some of the teachers are getting is not going to cut it to help with the struggles with our education system.

If we're serious about preparing the next generation, we must invest in the conditions that allow students and educators to succeed. We need good, modern infrastructure—not ruins—and special education supports. Those are two areas that are really needing support.

Madam Speaker, I see that I'm getting to the end. Ontario is a wealthy province, and I think we can do better. We can do better with housing. We can do better with health care. We can do better with education and the support that our communities need.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Questions?

Mr. Lorne Coe: I thank the member from Ottawa–Vanier for her presentation.

Across Ontario, including Ottawa–Vanier, families want assurance that their loved ones will have access to safe, modern and reliable long-term care closer to home, and built to meet growing demands. The member from Ottawa–Vanier will know that this budget continues to affect the building of long-term-care beds across the province. Sadly, her party built only 600 beds over 15 years.

Will the member, when it comes time to vote, stand up in her place and support more long-term-care beds in Ottawa–Vanier?

M^{me} Lucille Collard: I thank the member from Whitby for his question.

Of course, long-term-care facilities are very important. I have to say, I had the Minister of Long-Term Care come to my riding, and she has come to visit some of those long-term-care facilities with me, so she's well aware that those places are not places where people dream of going.

What I wish I could see in this budget and as a government priority is more investment in home care, because people like my mother, who is 82 years old—she doesn't want to go to any long-term-care facility. She wishes to stay at home for as long as possible, but she will need the support to be able to do that. So long-term care is fine when you don't have a choice, but they're not staffed properly, staff are not treated properly. That's why we're having a challenge of retaining those people and that's what we need to address.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Questions?

Ms. Sandy Shaw: Thank you for your speech this morning.

I share your concerns with public education. I have put my kids through the public system, and I have eight grandchildren right now in the public system. With this government's continued underfunding, underspending and cuts to education, we're seeing more and more crowded classrooms.

The Hamilton district school board just announced that, because of these budget cuts, they're going to have to fire 120 teachers, including 55 elementary school teachers. Like you, we're receiving hundreds and hundreds of petitions from parents saying we need to reduce class sizes, not squeeze more and more students into larger sizes. So, you know, I share your disappointment.

Can you just say, why do you think the government doesn't think that young people in our province deserve more than this?

M^{me} Lucille Collard: Thank you to the member for her question. Obviously, education is a big passion of mine. Like I said, that's the reason I got into politics. And after six years of being an MPP and 10 years of being a school trustee, I'm still disappointed with our system. I ran into a parent that had her kids in the same school my kids were in and she said, “My youngest daughter doesn't want to go to school anymore. There's 29 people in her classroom and half of them have special needs. There's no support, so she's totally lost motivation to go to school.” And that's the last thing we want to see. That's why we need to create those good conditions, so that kids are motivated to go to school and receive the quality education that they deserve.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Time for a quick question.

Mr. Rudy Cuzzetto: I was listening to the member from Ottawa–Vanier talking about how when she was a trustee 10 years before—she was elected in 2020 in a by-election—and she was saying how terrible the education

system was back then. I'm not sure if the member remembers that it was a Liberal government that was in power at that time.

Can you elaborate on how bad it was under the Liberal government, the education system in Ontario?

Mme Lucille Collard: I'm here to tell you one thing: It wasn't as bad as it is right now.

Interjection.

Mme Lucille Collard: Well, you asked for it. That's my experience. I was 10 years a trustee. There was some support coming in from the Liberal government. I'm not saying it was perfect. I think our education system has fallen behind for way too many years.

Really, it's the fault of every government for not prioritizing education more, all the governments. But definitely, after eight years of this government, we haven't seen a dent in the quality of education in the right direction. So, no, I don't need to say more.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Further debate?

Hon. Steve Clark: Good morning, everyone. I want to first thank the people of Leeds–Grenville–Thousand Islands and Rideau Lakes for the opportunity to provide some perspective on our government's budget bill, Bill 97.

First of all, I want to thank the efforts of our finance minister, the Honourable Peter Bethlenfalvy, and the team in the Ministry of Finance behind him. I want to thank his two parliamentary assistants, the member for Eglinton–Lawrence and the member for Peterborough–Kawartha, for all their work that they have done. This is an incredible amount of work that took place, lots of public hearings by the minister and the parliamentary assistants in addition to the all-party standing committee. It really takes a united front to uphold the economy. More than that, it takes an ambitious, progressive government to grow our economy beyond what it is today.

Speaker, let me tell the House this one piece at the start of my address: We need to secure the future of Ontario's economy and we need to invest in it now. That is exactly what our 2026 budget, A Plan to Protect Ontario, is designed to do. It makes targeted investments to protect workers, to protect businesses, to keep costs down for families, to strengthen public services and to build a stronger, more competitive Ontario.

From my home in Leeds–Grenville–Thousand Islands and Rideau Lakes, I would like to share some core highlights of what I think are well-laid investments. To start off, I'm going to take a look at the steps we have taken to support schools and students and inspire generational growth in our province. Our government is investing \$30 billion over the next 10 years to support new and redeveloped schools and child care projects: English and French, public and Catholic, elementary and secondary. Our school system portrays a number of different forms. Each form and each board has every right to have increased investment.

In my riding, in the municipality of North Grenville and Kemptville, Ontario's government has approved the Conseil des écoles catholiques du Centre-Est to tender a

new école élémentaire et secondaire catholique Notre-Dame.

1000

Speaker, je suis très fier des investissements de ce gouvernement dans cette nouvelle école. Lorsque la construction de l'école sera terminée, la nouvelle école élémentaire et secondaire catholique Notre-Dame permettra à 417 élèves de bénéficier d'un environnement d'apprentissage moderne et entièrement équipé. Ce sont 417 élèves qui pourront atteindre leur plein potentiel, tisser des liens durables et s'épanouir dans ce nouvel environnement que nous avons construit de A à Z, grâce à un investissement provincial de 26,5 millions de dollars. Et ce n'est pas tout. Le projet offre également 49 nouvelles places en garderie pour les familles de la région.

Située à North Grenville, cette école n'est pas simplement une étape dans l'atteinte des objectifs de construction, c'est une avancée dans le développement de l'éducation. Ces investissements sont un effort essentiel pour mettre en valeur les élèves francophones de mon comté et pour assurer que leur éducation soit durable et protégée, comme partout ailleurs en Ontario.

I take a great pride in the francophone population of Leeds and Grenville. Investments in French education are not isolated to my riding—far from it.

Looking to our budget, I want to highlight another investment: a net new investment of over \$5 million to develop learning resources to help reflect Ontario's proud dedication to francophone culture. That \$5 million will be allocated to reading supports, online courses, mental health services and many, many more resources that raise our students for future prosperity.

Our investments in education don't stop there. Like I said before, investments in the schools—and I'm hoping this year, we might actually have a record in my riding, although the announcements around the budget haven't been made in every riding. But I've got some very good projects, and it could be for the first time in the history of Leeds–Grenville–Thousand Islands and Rideau Lakes I might have all four boards with a new construction project in my riding. That's really, really special, for young people to have a state-of-the-art facility in their community.

I also want to talk about our government in terms of the Classroom Supplies Fund for elementary school home-room teachers. I have already seen emails from teachers thanking us. This allows them to access \$750 to supply their classrooms with essentials for our student needs.

I want to thank those teachers who have taken the time to email me to thank us for putting that money in their hands. Because some of them have expressed that, in the past, maybe the principal might have received the money but not provided it to them. I want to thank them for emailing me about that. It's a \$66-million investment and I think it's an investment that's well spent.

Building off last year's Supporting Children and Students Act, this budget holds its objective strong. Every dollar invested has been invested for the betterment of student success, and student success is our province's success.

The education sector is not alone in this budget's mission to improve Ontario. Our government is continually investing in the welfare of our province's communities. Because populations are growing, which is indisputable, those communities need to be supported. And beyond schools, I think we've achieved a great opportunity to support our communities with the Community Sport and Recreation Infrastructure Fund. So Minister Lumsden, I want to thank you for that announcement; I want to thank you for that investment in the budget.

I know communities in my riding of Leeds–Grenville–Thousand Islands and Rideau Lakes appreciate the additional \$300 million over six years. They're going to help meet the needs of our growing communities to repair facilities, to establish new recreation facilities and, altogether, the investments raise that total program funding to about \$500 million. That's \$500 million dedicated to our children, adults and our growing communities. Thank you so much, Minister.

As well, this week I was able to make some announcements regarding arts culture funding for both the Thousand Islands Playhouse and the St. Lawrence Shakespeare Festival. I want to thank the Ontario Arts Council, which is an agency of the government of Ontario, for that investment. It was roughly \$264,000.

But I want to take the few precious minutes I have to talk about two things. I want to talk about our investment in corrections. I want to thank the minister for the investment at the Brockville community correctional complex, we're going to house 295 inmates; the St. Lawrence valley treatment centre, another 25 female beds, expanding their secure treatment unit. Brockville jail is the oldest operating jail in Ontario. I feel—and I've told Minister Kerzner this, told the Premier this, when they were in my riding—after 184 years, it's time to invest in that facility. I'm glad that it's part of our plan to keep Ontario safe.

The final thing I want to mention in the last minute of play, is the HST rebate. I was at an event for the Ontario Federation of Agriculture on Saturday. I had Mayor Roger Haley show me an actual down payment that was made because of that grant. So I know, in my own riding, that we are literally—people are buying new homes because of this grant.

Speaker, we've debated this matter at length. I ask you, respectfully, that I move that the question now be put.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): There having been more than nine hours and one minute of debate and 26 members having participated, Mr. Clark has moved that the question be now put. I am satisfied there has been sufficient debate to allow this question to be put to the House.

It is the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? I heard a no.

All those in favour of the motion that the question be now put, please say "aye."

All opposed to the motion that the question be now put say "nay."

In my opinion, the ayes have it.

A recorded vote being required, it will be deferred to the next instance of deferred votes.

Vote deferred.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Orders of the day?

Hon. Steve Clark: No further business at this time, Speaker.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): In that case, this House stands in recess until 10:15.

The House recessed from 1008 to 1015.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): You may be seated. Good morning, everyone.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

SARA TESSIER

MPP Mohamed Firin: I rise today to recognize Sara A. Tessier, impact director for formerly incarcerated persons at the Northpine Foundation, whose work is transforming lives across Canada. Sara's work aligns closely with priorities to build safer communities by supporting evidence-based rehabilitation initiatives that reduce long-term system pressures and improve outcomes for individuals and families across Canada.

With nearly a decade of experience, Sara has dedicated her career to supporting some of the most marginalized individuals in our society—those who are victimized, criminalized and often left behind. Drawing from lived experiences, Sara has worked with organizations such as the Elizabeth Fry Society, John Howard Society and Coverdale Courtwork Society to support individuals transitioning out of incarceration and to reduce recidivism.

Through the initiatives and the investments that Sara led, thousands of individuals have gained access to stable housing, education and employment. The broader impact is equally significant as a \$30-million investment in these programs over four years has saved the taxpayers over a billion dollars. In recognition of this leadership and impact, Sara was awarded the King Charles III Coronation Medal in 2025.

Beyond program delivery, Sara has played a key role in advancing policy and advocacy, including providing testimony to Senate committees and supporting legislative discussions on the rights and rehabilitation of incarcerated individuals.

Madam Speaker, Sara's work is a powerful reminder that when we invest in people, we create safer communities, stronger systems and real second chances. Sara is here with us today. I would appreciate if the members can kindly welcome her with me.

Applause.

KW TITANS ORANGE JERSEY BASKETBALL GAME

Ms. Catherine Fife: On Saturday, I had the pleasure of attending the first ever KW Titans's orange jersey basketball game. This was not just an event but a moment of learning, healing and truth in action.

I was able to meet Phyllis Webstad, a beautiful and courageous woman and the founder of Orange Shirt Day. At six years old, on her first day at St. Joseph's Mission Residential School, Phyllis was stripped of her clothes, including a new orange shirt from her grandmother. It was never returned. That shirt is a symbol of the efforts made by residential schools to erase Indigenous children's identity.

Canada's last residential school closed just 30 years ago. Thousands of families were torn apart, which resulted in generational trauma.

My friend and colleague the member from Kiiwetinoong is the only residential school survivor to serve in Ontario's Legislature. His experience is echoed by every Indigenous person who survived these horrific institutions. As a Canadian, I am proud of our ability to face difficult historical truths and say, "Never again." That begins by remembering our collective past.

I want to thank Sheena Merling and her team for organizing Saturday's event and to the Titans's owners, David and Kate Schooley, for understanding the value of this kind of leadership. Sheena pointed out that this game showed what community can look like when we lead with heart.

Finally, a heartfelt gratitude to Phyllis Webstad for courageously sharing your story so that we can all learn together.

HOMELESSNESS

M^{me} Lucille Collard: The homelessness crisis we are seeing today is not accidental. It is a result of underinvestment in housing, mental health and addiction services. In a province as wealthy as Ontario, it is unacceptable that people are losing their dignity simply because the support they need is not there.

In my riding of Ottawa—Vanier, I see the extraordinary work being done every day by organizations like Ottawa Inner City Health, Sandy Hill Community Health Centre, the Ottawa Mission and Shepherds of Good Hope, as well as community groups like SOS Vanier street outreach.

To the front-line workers and volunteers, thank you. You meet people where they are, and you bring compassion and hope into incredibly difficult situations, because the people living on our streets are not a problem to be managed; they are human beings who deserve dignity. And it should be a wake-up call for everyone here that naloxone advocates need to come to Queen's Park to ask for this life-saving medicine to be more widely available to address the crisis.

I know residents are feeling the strain of this crisis, but the solution is not to look away or rely on enforcement

alone. The solution is to invest in supportive housing, in mental health care and in addictions services. Ontario has the capacity to lead. I urge the government to show the courage to act.

1020

LONG-TERM CARE

Mr. David Smith: I rise today to recognize long-term care in our province of Ontario.

Over the winter break, I had an opportunity to visit several long-term-care facilities in my riding of Scarborough Centre, such as Wexford, Bendale Acres, Kennedy Lodge and Alexis Lodge. These facilities are doing an exceptionally great job taking care of our seniors in our community, building a vibrant, caring community for seniors.

As a result of that, I would like to recognize the minister for the great work that she's doing all across Ontario in providing the care and the understanding of our administrators, nurses and PSWs. Recently, I visited long-term-care homes to interact with directors, PSWs and nurses. Therefore, I believe that our government, under the leadership of Premier Ford, is doing a great job in taking care of our seniors. They rightfully deserve all the treatment that they should have.

My profound gratitude goes out to every PSW, nurse, administrative staff and every working person in the field of long-term care in my riding. I would like to express my strong dedication for all the work—

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): Members' statements?

BRAD KOVACHIK

MPP Wayne Gates: Speaker, I rise to honour a special community member in the town of Fort Erie. His name is Brad Kovachik. If you played hockey in Niagara at any point, you probably know Brad. He's been a pillar to families and young players in Fort Erie for many years. He's given back. He's a coach to young people in Fort Erie. He's a leader in our community on the minor hockey board. But he's also been a linesman in the National Hockey League for over 30 years. He's now retiring.

His last game was two days ago when he refereed the Florida Panthers and the Ottawa Senators in Florida—Florida unfortunately won the game 6-3. It was a nice moment when all the players from both teams came together at centre ice to congratulate him for his amazing career. Brad's entire family and his close friends were at the game to share a special moment one last time.

Brad has worked an impressive five Stanley Cups. That's 1,974 games over three decades—more games if you include international play, like the 2014 Winter Olympics in Russia.

Fort Erie and Niagara are proud and privileged to have a community member like Brad help and grow the game we all love. Join me in honouring Brad in the Legislature on an amazing career and a wonderful retirement.

I'd also like to say—Brad wanted me to say this. He wanted me to congratulate the Fort Erie Meteors, who tied their semifinal junior league playoffs at 2-2 with St. Catharines.

Brad, enjoy your retirement.

GOVERNMENT INVESTMENTS

Mr. Anthony Leardi: I have more great news from the county of Essex, this time from the town of Amherstburg, which is my hometown. Amherstburg has 700 acres of industrially zoned land. It is called the Howard Avenue industrial park, and our government has a plan. It's called the Trade-Impacted Communities Program, and under this program, the town of Amherstburg will be receiving \$838,000 to help plan the Howard Avenue industrial park.

We will be doing environmental assessments, land use planning and market analysis. The Howard Avenue industrial park is strategically located within a 10-minute radius of the Gordie Howe bridge, of Highway 401 and Highway 3. Madam Speaker, we are a strategically located location in the province of Ontario.

I want to thank the Minister of Economic Development, Job Creation and Trade for the Trade Impacted-Communities Program, and state that, under the leadership of Premier Ford, we are protecting jobs, we are protecting Ontario and we are building for the future.

LABORATORY SERVICES

M^{me} France Gélinas: I am so proud of the people of Sudbury, Nickel Belt and northeastern Ontario. In December, thanks to a whistle-blower, we learned that Quest Diagnostics, a private, for-profit American company, wanted to increase their profit by closing the Sudbury lab testing and transporting the lab samples to Toronto.

Transporting time-sensitive medical samples on Highway 69, on winter roads leads to delays and less accurate tests, which impacts patient care.

People were shocked. They were frightened. Municipal, provincial and federal offices were flooded with messages from concerned citizens. Over 10,000 people signed the petition that the MPP from Sudbury and I put together, calling on the minister to overturn this decision. We want the minister to tell us what is in this contract and how we can change it.

Make no mistake, Speaker: If this was happening in reverse, if Quest Diagnostics was closing resources in Toronto to bring them to the north, I have no doubt that the Premier and the minister would look at the contract and change things.

We are moving forward. Quest Diagnostics, LifeLabs, the minister—they are feeling the pressure. But we can't give up. We need to stand shoulder to shoulder and raise our voices together. We need to continue to stand up and be counted—more letters, more phone calls, more petitions, more demonstrations. This is how we will win. This is how we will protect health care services in Sudbury and northern Ontario.

GOVERNMENT INVESTMENTS

Mrs. Daisy Wai: Today, I rise to celebrate the incredible work our government is doing in my riding of Richmond Hill. As hard-working families continue to face the challenges of tariffs and economic uncertainty, our government has continued uplifting our community.

This year alone, Richmond Hill has received millions of dollars in provincial funding to weather the storm of tariffs and keep our residents healthy, safe and self-sufficient.

Our government is ensuring firefighters have the supplies they need to save lives, with a grant of over \$100,000.

We're investing over \$1 million to keep municipal water infrastructure safe for future generations.

We're supporting Mackenzie Health hospital with millions of dollars in funding so patients can access quality care close to home—and they have access to CT scans a lot more.

And we're uplifting local businesses so that they can keep driving our economy forward, with the recent announcement in the budget that reduces taxes from 3.2% to 2.2%—that makes the biggest difference for them.

Now, more than ever, Richmond Hill is so thankful for this ongoing support. I've heard it loud and clear: These projects are making everyday life better and more affordable for our residents.

ONTARIO TRILLIUM FOUNDATION GRANTS

Mr. Lorne Coe: Through the Ontario Trillium Foundation Grow program, our government is investing over \$1 million this year to support two non-profit organizations in Whitby and one in Ajax. These include Big Brothers Big Sisters of South Durham and Northumberland, the Alzheimer Society of Durham Region and the Sunrise Developmental Support Services group. These organizations are pillars of our Durham communities, and this support will enable them to improve programs that are essential to the well-being of residents, making a lasting impact for years to come.

Melanie Stewart, who's the executive director of Big Brothers Big Sisters of South Durham and Northumberland, had this to say about the new funding: "This funding will allow us to adapt our group mentorship program for young women ages 11 to 14, to better address the challenges they are facing today, online safety, bullying and mental health. We are thankful to the Ontario Trillium Foundation for standing alongside us as a committed partner in supporting girls' mental health, safety and empowerment in our community."

1030

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Mr. Robert Bailey: Thank you for the opportunity today to introduce a long-time friend and colleague, Monte McNaughton, and his wife, Kate Bartz, in the Speaker's

gallery today. They're here to acknowledge and honour their daughter Annie, who is a page here today. She's a page captain, and she's here today, and they're here to witness that.

I'd also like to add that Monte being a former colleague as well—he was also a page some 35 years ago in this chamber.

Anyway, congratulations.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): Monte, just so you know, Bob and I wrestled for that introduction in the lobby, and he won.

Introduction of visitors.

Hon. Graydon Smith: I'd like to welcome the family of one of our page captains today, Marigold Mason, whose family made the trip down from Huntsville. Welcome to her parents, Heather Mason and Patrick Mason, and her sister, Cecily Mason.

Have a great day here at Queen's Park.

MPP Paul Vickers: I'd like to introduce Mike Engelhardt today from my riding. He is also the father of Else. Else has done a great job. She has shown what good spirit is, and hard work and determination.

Hon. Jill Dunlop: I'd like to welcome a good friend of mine to the House today: Mehdi Shafiei. Welcome to Queen's Park, and enjoy your day.

Hon. Vijay Thanigasalam: I'd like to welcome Dvorah Richler, Danielle Portnik, Justine Yim, Erica Louttit, Jennifer Sevigny and Yelena Rogan from Emergent BioSolutions, champions for Narcan. Welcome to Queen's Park.

Hon. Nolan Quinn: I would like to welcome Dr. Asima Vezina, president and vice-chancellor of International Business University, as well as Dr. Feridun Hamdullahpur, chancellor of IBU, as well as Mr. Nevzat Gurmen, VP of strategy and growth at IBU.

Hon. Stephen Crawford: I'd like to welcome Yong Jiang from my riding of Oakville—he's here with some guests from Halton—and Jeffrey Dunham. Welcome to Queen's Park.

MPP Stephanie Smyth: I'd love to introduce today a constituent of mine, and you might have heard of him: John Moore from Newstalk 1010.

Welcome to your House.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): And no, John, you cannot have the tricorne hat. It stays in the building.

I recognize the member for Lanark-Frontenac-Kingston.

Mr. John Jordan: I want to welcome my lifetime friend and best man at my wedding, Chris Flood.

Hon. Stephen Lecce: I want to introduce a long-time friend, Antonio Ienco, who's the director of sponsorship and events and the founder of the Vaughan International Film Festival.

OPPOSITION DAY MOTIONS

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): Two notices of opposition day motions were tabled yesterday for consideration the week of April 13, 2026. I'm therefore

required to decide which motion will be debated pursuant to standing order 45(d).

As it stands, the official opposition and the third party each have two remaining opportunities to file notice of an opposition day. Last week, I selected the motion standing in the name of the leader of the official opposition for debate, and the third party's notice was removed from the Orders and Notices paper. I believe it is fair for the third party to have its turn as well, and I am selecting the notice of motion standing in the name of the member from Nepean to be debated the week following the constituency week.

Please note, since this is already the second time this issue has come up this meeting period, I would urge the official opposition and third party to work with each other to avoid tabling competing notices. I hope that this will not be a regular occurrence throughout the rest of the meeting period. I thank you for your attention.

It is now time for question period.

QUESTION PERIOD

NURSE PRACTITIONERS

Ms. Marit Stiles: My question is for the Premier. Premier, your Minister of Health has failed Ontarians. She has failed to comply with the Canada Health Act. She missed the deadline to deliver nurse practitioner-led primary care, and the most she can do, apparently, is shrug her shoulders. The minister admitted that she has no plan or any timeline to bring nurse practitioners into publicly funded primary care. This is going to mean less money for health care from the federal government and more money going out of peoples' pockets in the province of Ontario.

How much money is being left on the table, and what is it going to cost patients?

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): The Minister of Health.

Hon. Sylvia Jones: Respectfully, perhaps the member opposite hasn't actually read the letter. I have made it very clear that Ontario will be in compliance, even though the federal government has given no funding and has given no direction, so we are going to see different processes in all of the Canadian jurisdictions. Now, Ontario will lead. We will continue to lead, and we will make sure that we are in compliance because we are already doing that.

We have over 170 additional seats as a result of the work of the Minister of Colleges and Universities to train nurse practitioners in the province of Ontario. Why? Because we see the value in a publicly funded system that includes hospitals, that includes primary care, that includes home and community care. We're doing that work. We've made a commitment to nurse practitioners to be part of a publicly funded system.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): Back to the Leader of the Opposition.

Ms. Marit Stiles: Speaker, I don't know whether this government just has no idea what people are experiencing in northern and rural and so many other parts of Ontario—either that or they just don't care. When there's no family doctor in a community, it is nurse practitioners and it is nurse practitioner-led clinics who pick up the slack. But because they're not funded by your government, it is actually rural residents, northerners and people all across this province that are paying out of pocket for primary care. Also, we are losing nurse practitioners in this province.

How much longer are northern and rural patients going to have to pay for primary care with their credit card?

Hon. Sylvia Jones: I'm not sure that the member opposite is actually following the enhancements and the expansions of our primary care clinicians. We have nurse practitioner-led clinics that we didn't have a year ago in Ottawa, in Cambridge, in Minto-Mapleton. We are enhancing primary care clinicians, and we absolutely are funding nurse practitioner-led clinics. We're also making sure that those nurse practitioners work in multi-disciplinary teams where physicians work with nurse practitioners, work with dietitians, work with mental health workers.

When we make sure that interprofessional clinicians work together, we have better patient outcomes and we have clinicians who are working together. That is the goal, and that's what \$3.4 billion in primary care expansion is giving us in the province of Ontario.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): Back to the Leader of the Opposition.

Ms. Marit Stiles: As long as people in Ontario have to pay with their credit card to get primary care, you are failing the people of Ontario. Meanwhile, in other provinces, patients can go see a nurse practitioner for primary care, and they don't have to pay with a credit card; they don't have to pay out of pocket. But here in Ontario, we have seniors lining up in our emergency rooms to fill their prescriptions because they can't get primary care.

There are two and a half million people in Ontario who still cannot access a family doctor or get primary care. You know, nurse practitioners are more than ready to fill the gap, but they need this government to step up and fund their services.

You have no plan, you have no timeline, and there's no action from this government. Why are you denying the people access to primary care?

Hon. Sylvia Jones: Do you know why nurse practitioners are ready to provide those services? Because we've expanded their scope of practice. We are committed to ensuring that primary care is part of nurse practitioners, and nurse practitioners are in primary care. Tell that to the 330,000 people who have a primary care clinician today that didn't have one less than a year ago.

1040

We are making the investments. We are having people step up to ensure that those individuals have access to a primary care provider that absolutely include world-class trained nurse practitioners in the province of Ontario.

EDUCATION FUNDING

Ms. Marit Stiles: My question is to the Premier. Just yesterday, we learned that the government's cuts to education funding mean that 40 more vice-principals are going to be fired in the Toronto District School Board. This is going to mean kids getting less attention, less supervision, less support. It means parents get fewer updates, less predictability, more phone calls in the middle of the day telling them to come pick up their kid. This means teachers have fewer resources, fewer options, more stress. These are the choices that this government is making.

So to the Premier: Why is this government firing these vital workers, these vice-principals, who keep our schools running?

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): The Minister of Education.

Hon. Paul Calandra: As you know, Madam Speaker, the board made the decision to reduce the amount of vice-principals for two reasons. First, there are 5,000 fewer students, approximately, that will be attending the Toronto District School Board come September, which requires fewer vice-principals in the system. Also, the previous board of trustees had decided to continue a program that was no longer funded. Of course, that program was additional supports during COVID, a time when there needed to be some additional supports in our schools. They chose to continue on that program that was no longer funded. The fact that COVID is now behind us and the fact that enrolment has decreased by over 5,000 students in the Toronto District School Board means that the board does not require these extra vice-principals.

There are no students that will go without proper supervision. In fact, the investments that we're making in our schools mean that there will be better outcomes for our kids. We're focused on students, parents and teachers and student achievement across not only Toronto, but across all of Ontario.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): Supplementary?

Ms. Marit Stiles: I think this Premier and this Minister of Education need to get into a classroom and actually talk to kids and families, who are still struggling so much.

You know, this is this Minister of Education's hand-picked supervisor who's making this decision.

Why is it that the government has the money to pay 124 Metrolinx executive vice-presidents, but when it comes to our schools, there is no money for them to even have a vice-principal? Why is that? There's money for a broke luxury spa company, but no money for our kids.

The Premier's approach to education is a disaster, and it is Ontario's children that are being left behind. Will the Premier get up today and commit to ending these education cuts?

Hon. Paul Calandra: Look, Madam Speaker, I've said it on a number of occasions: The reality is, of course, that the budget puts additional resources into education.

But honestly, I don't think parents care about what the Leader of the Opposition says or what the Minister of

Education says. You know what they care about? Are their kids succeeding? Are they getting the best out of a \$43-billion Ministry of Education budget? That is what I'm going to continue to focus on.

Now, she talks about going into classrooms. I have been all across the province of Ontario, speaking to teachers directly. They continue to tell me, "Put the focus back on students." A lot of teachers have said to me, "I don't want to be a parent. I want to be an educator. Give me what I need so that we can succeed."

That is why we announced, in this budget, 750 additional dollars for homeroom teachers across the province on top of the other resources that we're giving for classroom education, so that teachers could make decisions for themselves as to what they need to help students succeed in their classrooms.

The results are the highest levels in literacy scores across the province of Ontario—

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): Final supplementary?

Ms. Marit Stiles: So \$750 cards—are you going to buy a vice-principal with that? No, you're not.

You know what parents care about? They care that they can get on the phone when their kid is falling behind and find somebody to talk to. Now they're going to have no vice-principal. They care that the teachers are overwhelmed and burning out. We can't recruit principals into our system right now because they are so overworked and burned out.

Parents know what this means. It means fewer resources in their classrooms. It means fewer caring adults in their schools. There is money for a broke luxury spa company in downtown Toronto, there is money for 124 executive vice-presidents at Metrolinx, but you can't fund a vice-principal in a school.

What is wrong with this government that you cannot get your priorities straight?

Hon. Paul Calandra: I guess that's quite interesting. I know my colleagues will probably agree with me, because I know a lot of my colleagues have been in schools across the province of Ontario helping teachers understand that they're getting an extra \$750 per homeroom to buy the types of things that they need—pencils, papers—on top of what we're already providing to our schools.

So now you've heard it, colleagues: The Leader of the Opposition wants to rip that money out of the classroom, right? Because that's what the NDP is all about. It's not about the classroom. It is not about achievement. It's about them and what they think is best.

So you go to the schools—I'll come with you—and you tell teachers that you no longer want them to have access to that \$750.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): Through the Speaker.

Hon. Paul Calandra: You tell teachers that what they're doing isn't enough—because do you know what I think, Madam Speaker? Our teachers are the lifeblood of the education system. Our teachers work hard every single day to give our students the best opportunity to succeed, and I

won't listen to the Leader of the Opposition. What I will do is plow more money back into the classrooms and less into administration.

EDUCATION FUNDING

Mr. John Fraser: My question is for the Minister of Education. After eight long years, this Ford government is tired, out of touch and out of ideas. Their latest budget tells that story, because there's nothing in that budget for families and their budgets.

You know, Speaker, families depend on great schools. But right now, their schools aren't safe places to learn or to work. That's because class sizes are too big; they've grown. That's because special education has been starved, and there's a mental health crisis in our schools that's not being addressed.

My question is simple: Why is the Minister of Education cutting funding to our kids' schools?

Hon. Paul Calandra: In fact, the leader of the third party would know that we're doing no such thing. The only person that is advocating for less resources in our schools is actually the opposition, because they will have an opportunity in this budget to vote for additional resources for schools. They'll have an opportunity in this budget to support the highest level of education funding in the province's history. They will have an opportunity in this budget to vote in favour of additional supports for math. They'll have an opportunity in this budget to confirm that they believe that teachers are the lifeblood of the education system and they deserve more money to make choices on their own of how they can best support their students. They'll have that opportunity. They'll have the opportunity to vote in favour of billions of dollars' worth of capital improvements across the system.

I ask the member opposite: Will he do the right thing and vote in favour of teachers? Will he vote in favour of students? Will he vote in favour of parents? Because what we're seeing is the highest graduation rates in the history of the province, literacy scores at the highest they've ever been, and after 15 long years of Liberals, who failed our students, we're going in the right direction, and we won't look back.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): Back to the leader of the third party.

Mr. John Fraser: The minister spent three months looking at EQAO results, and, obviously, he probably needs some help in reading and help in math, because if you go to page 185 of the 2025 budget and then go to page 192 of the 2026 budget, you'll notice that it's \$170 million less. Even by Conservative math, that's a cut. So we know that boards are having to find \$800 million a year just to fund special education and they're not meeting the need.

Last week, I told a story about Marigold, a six-year-old girl who's been waiting two years to get the help that she needs. My colleague from Orléans told a story about Juliet, who was thriving one year and the next year she got nothing.

So, Speaker, why is there nothing in this budget to help children like Marigold and Juliet get the help that they deserve?

Hon. Paul Calandra: Again, Madam Speaker, we're at the highest level of education spending in the province's history, but it's of no consequence unless you start to see the results of those investments.

The member talks about the EQAO results. I love to talk about the EQAO results. You know why? Because when I look at it, I see literacy scores at the highest level in the province's history.

Now, unlike the Liberals, colleagues—you will all remember this. You remember discovery math, right? Nobody could understand discovery math. Under Liberals, literacy scores plummeted. Under Liberals, math scores plummeted. Under Liberals, graduation rates were lower.

Under Conservatives, literacy scores: the highest ever. Graduation rates: the highest ever. Math scores: starting to increase. But you know what? Conservatives aren't happy with where they are. That's why we're doubling down, putting more investments in it, because we want our students to have the exact same success as they're having in literacy. We will get the job done, unlike the failed Liberal Party who failed students, parents and teachers every day.

1050

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): Back to the leader of the third party.

Mr. John Fraser: Speaker, children like Marigold and Juliet are not just bums in seats. They're not just heads to be counted. It's critical for their development as a child that they get the help that they need. Right now, in nine boards, there's no one left to call.

Speaker, what do you do when your child needs a speech pathologist? I guess—

Interjections: Better call Paul.

Mr. John Fraser: Speaker, what do you do as a parent when your child needs help with reading?

Interjections: Better call Paul.

Mr. John Fraser: And what do you do when you need an EA for your child because they need educational support?

Interjections: Better call Paul.

Mr. John Fraser: So in nine boards: Who does the minister think parents should call?

Hon. Paul Calandra: Just when you thought the Liberals could not get more pathetic you see that. My God. No wonder he's the leader of the Liberal Party for the third time, the third-time leader of the Liberal Party. That's right.

You know who parents, teachers and students want to call? They call the Progressive Conservative government when they have been left in shambles by a previous Liberal government. That's who they're going to call.

But the funny thing is that, in those boards where we have supervision, we also have student and family offices. In Ottawa, in his board, you know what's happening—

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): The member for Don Valley North will come to order.

Hon. Paul Calandra:—family helpline are responded to within two days, and 88% of the problems that they raise are addressed within five days. The results are even better in Toronto. But ultimately, what matters is that students, parents and teachers have better outcomes, and they know that when Conservatives are in charge, the outcomes are better. When Liberals are in charge, you can discover things but never—

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): Question?

SUBVENTIONS DESTINÉES À L'ÉDUCATION EDUCATION FUNDING

M^{me} Lucille Collard: Après huit ans de ce gouvernement, la vie est plus difficile pour nos éducateurs et nos éducatrices, qui sont épuisés, démoralisés et vraiment à bout de souffle. Les classes débordent, la violence en milieu scolaire augmente et trop d'élèves perdent l'intérêt d'aller à l'école.

Pourtant, dans son budget, le gouvernement n'offre aucun investissement significatif pour répondre à ces défis parce qu'il est clairement déconnecté de la réalité. À la place, ce qu'il propose, c'est une carte-cadeau de 750 \$ pour certains enseignants du primaire.

Est-ce vraiment la valeur que le gouvernement accorde à l'éducation de nos enfants?

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): The Minister of Education.

Hon. Paul Calandra: Now I've actually heard it all. I've actually heard it all. The Liberals now, with the NDP, are saying that the additional resources that we're giving directly to teachers—an extra \$750—the translation came across to me as a “gift card.” The Liberals are now claiming that teachers who get additional resources to help students in their classrooms, that's a gift card, a nice-to-have. But under 15 years of Liberals, they starved our teachers, forcing them to go to Dollarama, forcing them to buy resources on their own.

We've said, “Enough. That's enough.” We want to support our homeroom teachers. It's not a gift card. It's not a “nice-to-have.” Our teachers have told us that it is a must-have. That is why, under Conservatives, you're seeing things like literacy rates, the highest levels ever, and graduation rates, the highest levels ever.

And do you know what? We aren't satisfied with just meeting the averages; we want to go above and beyond. We will not stop until our kids have the best opportunity—

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): Back to the member for Ottawa—Vanier.

M^{me} Lucille Collard: Yes, it is a must-have, because they should never have had to pay for that kind of stuff in the first place. So thanks for fixing that, eight years later.

Our education system depends on qualified, supported teachers. But more and more, we see these valued teachers leaving the profession within the first five years. In the

francophone system, the unresolved teacher shortage crisis is increasing the pressure in the classroom—classrooms that are overcrowded, with too many kids with special needs that are not met and increased violence among children and against teachers.

How does the minister expect the next generation to choose teaching when these are the working conditions they are walking into?

Hon. Paul Calandra: That is why we are making so many changes across the system. It's not just about what the member raises, right? That is why, when we decided to reverse the decisions of the previous Liberal governments to remove community resource officers or take police out of our schools, we said that's no longer good enough. We saw what happened when that decision was made—an ideological decision by the Liberals. We're bringing our police back into our schools to make them safer.

But you know what? It's not just about that either. They let schools crumble. How do you turn to an education professional and say, "Go teach in a school that is old and outdated?" I have had to take over a school board in the Near North District School Board that allowed their kids to be taught in a half-demolished high school. That's the legacy of the Liberal government.

So it's not good enough for us. And we are going to step in, put things back on track when they fall off the rails.

Interjection.

Hon. Paul Calandra: The three-time leader of the opposition says, "Oh, it's been eight years"—eight years where we fought a pandemic and came out stronger than anybody before, eight years where we're struggling with tariffs. Ontario's on—

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): Back to the member for Ottawa–Vanier.

M^{me} Lucille Collard: Speaker, not only are teachers exhausted, our school infrastructure is too—and I think you've just pointed to crumbling infrastructure, so what have you done after eight years?

In my riding of Ottawa–Vanier, Manor Park Public School was ranked in the top 10 in Ontario in a recent report by the Canadian Environmental Law Association—guess what—for exceeding provincial limits for lead in water. While it might be okay to have politicians work in a building with contaminated water, no one here and no parent in Ontario should be comfortable exposing our children to this.

What is the minister's plan to protect the health of our kids from lead exposure, unless government considers that there is a level of contamination that is acceptable for children in Ontario schools?

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): The Minister of the Environment.

Hon. Todd J. McCarthy: We are proud of the fact, under our government's watch, that Ontario's drinking water is among the safest and most well protected in the world. Our comprehensive legislation and our strong monitoring, reporting and enforcement systems ensure

that our drinking water is always held to Ontario's high safety standards.

Now, when it comes to protecting our children in schools, those strong standards are applied across the board in every way. We have the testing, the monitoring, and in those rare occasions when there is any issue whatsoever, strong, decisive action is taken.

LAND USE PLANNING

MPP Alexa Gilmour: Speaker, there are some things that our government is meant to guard, not gamble with: our farmlands, our food supply, our jobs and the infrastructure that holds this province together.

The Ontario Food Terminal is one of those things. It moves over two billion pounds of produce a year, connects 400 farmers with over 5,000 buyers, supports more than 100,000 jobs, many of them from my riding. And now, the land beside this vital food hub, along with three other Toronto employment lands, are under threat of rezoning. And once those employment lands are gone, Speaker, they are gone for good.

Speaker, will this government act now to protect the employment lands we all depend on?

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): I recognize the Minister of Agriculture.

Hon. Trevor Jones: I thank the member across the aisle for the question, because it's a critical piece of infrastructure that I acknowledge, and I invite you to be there sometime with us to see the investments we're doing.

We're working closely with the board, with the vendors. We've been there many times. We've got our staff there to engage with the vendors, to hear the success stories of the people that started selling vegetables to our independent network of grocers coast to coast. There's fresh fruit and vegetables and food products that start in Ontario. They go to Gander, Newfoundland, and Richmond, British Columbia, and everywhere in between. We support that wholeheartedly, working closely with our ministry colleagues to make sure we protect that resource, that crown jewel in our network.

1100

I invite the member to join me sometime there to engage with the vendors, with the board and the people there who are protecting our food supply and protecting Ontario just as we are.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): I'll remind members to direct their questions and responses through the Chair.

I recognize the member for Parkdale–High Park.

MPP Alexa Gilmour: Speaker, I appreciate the member's answer. It's wonderful that the member visits.

I asked him what he's going to do to protect it now that it's under threat, because farmers rise before dawn for this place. Truck drivers, warehouse workers, small grocers, restaurant owners, school nutrition programs and food banks all depend on it. The produce from the Ontario Food Terminal supports nine provinces in this country.

At this moment in time when families are skipping groceries, when workers are anxious, when food security is sacred and should be treated in such a way, this government is failing. It's failing to safeguard the one greatest pillar of our food system.

So I want to ask the Premier, will he save the Ontario Food Terminal, or has he already made a backroom deal to sell it?

Hon. Trevor Jones: Once again, I thank the member for shining a spotlight on our food producers, our farmers and our food terminal. The short answer to that question is yes, we're protecting Ontario's food supply, we're protecting Ontario's farmers and we're protecting our crown jewel, which is the Ontario Food Terminal.

To complement that, let's highlight the work we're doing through the food terminal to benefit all of Ontario. That's a component of the \$52 billion—the biggest part of our GDP, our economic pie, is food production, agribusiness. One in nine jobs, including mine, is because of food producers and agricultural producers.

That terminal is going to stay. We're protecting it. I'll be there, and I'll stand behind those words. I will stand beside my Premier, our cabinet and our caucus to protect Ontario's food supply and protect that terminal.

PROGRAMMES D'ENSEIGNEMENT À L'ENFANCE EN DIFFICULTÉ SPECIAL EDUCATION

M. Stephen Blais: Madame la Présidente, les parents d'Ottawa sont fatigués d'entendre que tout va bien. À Orléans et à travers la ville, les enfants apprennent dans les écoles qui n'ont pas l'eau potable. Les classes sont surpeuplées, il y a un manque d'enseignants en français et il n'y a pas assez de soutien pour les élèves ayant des besoins spéciaux. Mais le plus grand échec, c'est que les enfants qui ont besoin d'aide ne la reçoivent pas.

Après huit ans de ce gouvernement conservateur, pourquoi les familles d'Ottawa doivent-elles toujours lutter juste pour obtenir le soutien d'éducation spécialisée promis à leurs enfants?

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): The Minister of Education.

Hon. Paul Calandra: I'll repeat it again. I've said it a number of times. Look, we're at the highest level of education spending in the province's history, but I think what's really important is the results that come out of an education system. We saw for 15 years the Liberals really weren't focused on results. They were focused on ideology, and they never put students, parents or teachers first.

We're doing the exact opposite. Look, just today we've learned that the Liberals and NDP will tear apart the agreement that we have in place to get \$750 back into classroom spending, that they would cancel that program. That is very disappointing. I'm sure that teachers across the province who are depending on this in September are

disappointed to learn that both the Liberals and NDP think that it's a nice-to-have and not a must-have.

Look, we're going to double down. We're going to continue to support students, parents and teachers. We're going to refocus the education system away from politics and back on results and student achievement. We will not be moved off track on that vital mission, and we're seeing results: highest literacy rates, highest graduation rates, math scores going in the right direction. But we want better, and that's why we're doubling down. This budget puts more resources into getting that job done.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): Back to the member for Orléans.

Mr. Stephen Blais: Madam Speaker, parents are being told that their child qualifies for support, that they need an educational assistant, a psychologist, speech therapist—some form of specialized programming—then they are told that none is available.

The minister blames school boards, but school boards cannot hire the staff they need if this minister does not provide the funding that is adequate. Kids like Juliet, like Marigold, like tens of thousands of others across Ontario need this help to thrive and to pursue their dreams.

After eight long years of Conservative government, when will this minister stop passing the buck and finally fund special education properly?

Hon. Paul Calandra: I don't think anybody can accuse me of passing the buck, Madam Speaker. You can say a lot of things about me, but I don't think right now you can say that. In fact, in an earlier question they were complaining that I've taken over too many school boards and taken over too much responsibility.

Well, you know what? The only people that actually passed the buck were the Liberals for 15 long years. When math scores were plummeting, what did the Liberals do? Nothing. When literacy scores were plummeting, what did they do? Nothing. When conflict within our schools increased, what did they do? Nothing. When our schools were crumbling, what did they do? They closed them as opposed to fixing them and building new ones.

You know what we're going to do? We're going to continue to show leadership across the province of Ontario. The ministry is going to continue to show leadership, and I'm going to focus on what matters: student achievement. I'll let them focus on administration. I'll focus on students, parents and teachers, and I'll get the job done, along with my colleagues.

ENERGY RATES

Mr. Matthew Rae: Time to get this question period back on track.

My question is to the Minister of Energy and Mines. Families in my riding of Perth–Wellington and across Ontario continue to feel the pressure of affordability. They expect their governments to take real action to lower the cost of living, especially when it comes to their energy bills.

Our government has taken comprehensive approaches, and we're delivering immediate relief to those who need it most, while also helping families reduce their energy use through practical upgrades and conservation programs.

Speaker, can the minister outline how our government is helping Ontario families save on their energy bills today, and how these programs are delivering measurable results across Perth–Wellington and Ontario?

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): I recognize the member for Scarborough Centre.

Mr. David Smith: I'd like to thank the member from Perth–Wellington.

Our approach is simple: Don't make life more expensive. We are focused on keeping costs down and putting money back in people's pockets.

The previous Liberal government drove up hydro bills with bad contracts. We are doing the opposite; we are protecting affordability.

While the opposition supported policies that made life more expensive for drivers, our government is doing the opposite. We are cutting costs, including the provincial gas tax by five cents per litre.

We are also helping people save at home through the Home Renovation Savings Program, covering up to 30% of energy upgrades, including insulation and efficient appliances.

We are also making smart, targeted investments in the energy system to ensure we have the reliable, affordable power needed to supply—

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): Question?

Mr. Matthew Rae: While immediate relief and helping families lower their monthly bills is critical, Ontarians also want confidence that their energy system will remain stable, reliable and affordable for decades to come.

We know that demand for electricity is expected to grow significantly across our province as it continues to expand, with more homes being built, more industries coming online and increased electrification across our economy.

At the same time, families cannot afford to see the return of the kinds of skyrocketing hydro bills that we saw under the previous Liberal government.

Can the parliamentary assistant please explain to this place how our government is planning for long-term growth and ensuring Ontario has the reliable, affordable energy it needs to support that growth while protecting ratepayers from future cost increases?

Mr. David Smith: Keeping energy affordable means planning for the long term, not just for today. That starts with prioritizing nuclear energy, a made-in-Canada solution that provides consistent, affordable power. Nuclear facilities operate over 90% of the time—60 to 80 years—avoiding the need for repeated reinvestment in shorter-lived generation sources.

Replacing long-term, reliable generation with intermittent sources would require more infrastructure, more land, more cost—and costs get passed on to our families.

1110

And in doing so, we are strengthening the Canadian supply chain, supporting good-paying jobs and positioning Ontario as a global leader in clean, reliable energy, Madam Speaker.

HOME CARE

Ms. Chandra Pasma: In January, John Lacombe died all alone in his apartment in Ottawa. His body wasn't found for seven days. John should have been receiving daily visits from home care, but Ontario Health atHome closed his file, saying they couldn't contact him to make arrangements despite the fact that they had been told he couldn't answer the phone because of his condition. The system completely failed John, and it failed his family.

What will the Premier do to ensure that no other patient falls through the gaps of our broken home care system?

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): I recognize the Minister of Health.

Hon. Sylvia Jones: The situation that the member opposite highlights is obviously under active investigation—it was immediately when Ontario Health atHome realized what had happened—so I cannot speak specifically to that individual case.

What I can tell you is, under the strong, new leadership at Ontario Health atHome, we are making great progress to make sure that those individual organizations that are providing this critical service across Ontario not only have the investments and the money to provide that, but also making sure that the oversight piece is there.

Because we want to make sure that when people leave hospitals, they have access to home care. We know that it is a very positive outcome when people have the appropriate services in their homes and in their communities. We will continue to work with Ontario Health atHome to ensure that that oversight happens.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): Back to the member for Ottawa West–Nepean.

Ms. Chandra Pasma: Speaker, Ontario Health atHome didn't even start investigating for two months, until John's sister contacted a reporter. John's sister, Norine Gagnon, repeatedly asked for help for her brother. She told Ontario Health atHome that John could not answer his phone. She asked them to knock on his door; they did not. They called her to say they were discharging him without ever having checked on him or done anything more than make a few phone calls.

Despite all of his sister's advocacy, John died alone. How many tragedies like John's do we need before this government will act?

Hon. Sylvia Jones: As I said, Speaker, we cannot comment on an ongoing investigation that is currently happening with that individual situation.

But I also think it's important to remind the member that we are making those investments because we know that individuals who are getting home care in their communities, in their homes, have better outcomes. We know that as we expand hospital-to-home programs, where

hospitals work directly with service provider organizations, the outcomes for patients and their families improve.

Look, I wish I could speak more to an individual situation, but the truth is, that would not be fair to the patient, to the family or the ongoing investigation. What I can tell you is, as we continue to expand programs like hospital to home, as we continue to expand community paramedicine programs, we are seeing outcomes that patients want to have availability to, and clinicians know that it is an improved outcome.

TEACHERS

Mr. John Fraser: To the Minister of Education: Yesterday, more than 100 students in the Minister of Transportation's riding walked out of school to protest the firing of their favourite teachers. They're part of the more than 300 teachers in Peel who are on the chopping block.

And don't take it from me; take it from Arshiya Ohri, a grade 12 student organizer at Brampton Centennial. Here's what she had to say: "I was pretty angry about it. These people are more than just numbers. They're beloved teachers within the school."

Madam Speaker, Brampton students shouldn't have to hold up signs that say, "Hands off our education" or "Protect our teachers." Can the Minister of Education tell these students why they're doing a better job of protecting their schools than he is?

Hon. Paul Calandra: The member opposite will know the reason I assumed responsibility for supervision of the Peel board was because they actually wanted to fire teachers in February, pull them out of the classroom and give students a new teacher in the middle of the year. I don't know about the Liberals, but I don't think that is in the best interests of students. I don't think it's in the best interests of parents, and it's certainly not in the best interests of our teachers. Consistency in the classroom throughout the school year I think is very, very important, and that's in part why I stepped in.

Now, as we looked a little bit further into Peel, there were so many different challenges there that the previous school board was not addressing. Of course, there were challenges with respect to the numbers that were starting to decrease. A lot of parents were choosing to take their kids out of the Peel system and for other opportunities. That is something that we are addressing.

These notices that are going out now are part of a yearly challenge that happens across school boards in Ontario when they look at the numbers that they're expecting in September and they match that with the amount of teachers they'll need in the next school year.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): Back to the leader of the third party.

Mr. John Fraser: Respectfully, I think we need more "we" than "I" when we're talking about education.

Madam Speaker, let's talk about another Brampton school that has more than 1,700 students; they're letting 18 teachers go. In Mississauga, West Credit, a school with a high population of special-needs students, is losing eight

teachers that students rely on. At a time when we know class sizes are too big, special education is being starved and the mental health crisis in our schools is not being addressed, this minister is firing teachers.

Speaker, Brampton, if I can recall, I think has three cabinet ministers, but if you had a kid in one of these schools, you'd never know it. Can the members across the aisle, or the minister, tell us what they're doing to protect the schools or the kids in Brampton?

Hon. Paul Calandra: The leader of the Liberal Party, colleagues—let's hear what he says. They want to take \$750 out of the classroom. He just said there's not enough "we" and too much "I." Well, for 15 years, the Liberals were all about "we" and not about "I," and who is the "I"? The "I" is the student. The "I" is the teacher. The "I" is the parent. That's who the "I" is, and that is who this entire caucus fights for. It fights for the teachers, the students and the parents, because you know what happens when you do? You put more resources into the classroom. You give our students the opportunity to succeed. Under Liberals, all of the results were crashing—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): The leader of the third party will come to order.

Hon. Paul Calandra: Under Conservatives, we're starting to see the highest education supports ever, the highest budget for education—

Interjections.

Hon. Paul Calandra: You gotta love the Liberals. You hear? I wish the people at home could hear the Liberal leader right now. I wish they could hear him right now. He's sour. He's sour because you know what he knows? Parents, students and teachers support what we're doing.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): Order. We are not in school. Order.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): Order. I recognize the member for Algoma-Manitoulin.

INFRASTRUCTURE RENEWAL

MPP Bill Rosenberg: My question is for the acting Minister of Infrastructure. In my riding of Algoma-Manitoulin and across northern Ontario, I continue to hear the same message from families, businesses and local leaders: People want more housing so communities can grow, young people can stay and new opportunities can take root.

For years, communities in the north were working with decades-old water systems that the previous Liberal government allowed to decline, ultimately limiting capacity and holding back growth.

Our government is changing that. Speaker, can the acting minister please share how our government is helping northern municipalities repair and upgrade our water systems that make housing possible?

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): The interim Minister of Infrastructure.

Hon. Todd J. McCarthy: I thank the excellent member from Algoma–Manitoulin for that thoughtful question. He's now in his second year in office, having won victory in the election of 2025, and he's an excellent member of Treasury Board as a parliamentary assistant there.

1120

Under the previous Liberal government, we had an infrastructure deficit, as you know. Our government is taking a different approach. Under the Premier's leadership, we are protecting Ontario by investing in the core infrastructure that families and businesses rely on every day. So far, MHIP, the Municipal Housing Infrastructure Program, has invested \$3 billion across Ontario and \$2.8 billion through OCIF, the Ontario Community Infrastructure Fund. As a result, communities are now seeing record investments in their local infrastructure—new and existing—to upgrade that and protect it. This means expanded, upgraded and more reliable water systems all throughout the north.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): Back to the member from Algoma–Manitoulin.

MPP Bill Rosenberg: Thank you to the acting Minister of Infrastructure for that thoughtful response.

Speaker, families in rural and northern communities want to see real action to address the challenges that have delayed housing for far too long. They need clean water and reliable infrastructure not only to support growing communities but to help get homes built faster and keep costs down for families. Unlike the past Liberal government, which left communities struggling with aging assets, we are focused on delivering results.

Through you, Speaker, to the acting minister: Can he share what dedicated supports our government is providing to ensure rural and northern communities are no longer left behind?

Hon. Todd J. McCarthy: Another thoughtful and timely question from the member.

Under the leadership of Premier Ford and our government, communities across northern Ontario have received more than \$745 million in recent infrastructure funding. That's to support water treatment upgrades in Cochrane, housing-enabling water system improvements in Sudbury and a new pump station and expanded water distribution in the member's riding of Algoma–Manitoulin.

These record investments reflect our Ontario government's long-term planning. Through these programs, we have helped unlock 800,000 new homes, and 375,000 existing homes are supported. We are proud to stand with the north and we keep doing the work that's required to remove barriers that have held the north back for so long—the north that was rejected and disrespected by the former Liberal government propped up by the NDP.

GO TRANSIT

Mrs. Jennifer (Jennie) Stevens: This question is to the Premier. The government's recent budget talks about improved GO train service to Niagara, but once again fails to provide any clear timeline. Residents in St. Catharines

have been calling for two-way, all-day GO services for years to access jobs in the GTA, reduce congestion on the QEW and connect Ontarians to one of the largest tourism hubs in all of North America. After years of promises, Niagara is still waiting at the platform.

Speaker, when will St. Catharines and Niagara see two-way, all-day GO?

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): The member for Hastings–Lennox and Addington.

Mr. Ric Bresee: Since 1967, GO Transit has kept the GTHA moving. The previous governments failed to invest in public transit and keep up with the demand required. In a recent report, a total cost of congestion to Ontario's economy cost the province over \$56 billion a year in lost GDP. Ontario's population is rapidly growing, and we need to give people more options to get where they need to go.

That's why our Premier and our government are moving forward with GO 2.0. We've directed Metrolinx to develop a plan with the federal government with CN and CPKC rail to shift freight rail from existing passenger lines to a dedicated freight bypass along the 407 corridor, because we know that for Ontario's economy to continue to grow, we need to keep building roads, highways and public transit all across this province.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): Back to the member for St. Catharines.

Mrs. Jennifer (Jennie) Stevens: You know, we have not seen any expansion to GO in Niagara. That answer is the same—it's no answer, it's no timeline and no accountability.

So to the minister: This government continues to say GO is coming to Niagara, but not to St. Catharines or Niagara Falls, where people actually live and work. Instead, they're focused on a Ferris wheel, casinos and a mini Vegas in Niagara Falls, when people can't even get there. No trains, just talk—and the priorities are completely off the rails.

Speaker, how does this minister justify choosing flashy projects over transit that Niagara so desperately needs?

Mr. Ric Bresee: Some quick facts for the member opposite: The GO Transit service area—which includes the greater Toronto and Hamilton region, Kitchener-Waterloo, Barrie and Niagara—is expected to grow to 15 million people by 2051. On January 9, 2025, the Premier directed Metrolinx to begin developing a plan for GO 2.0.

GO 2.0 proposes to explore the longer-term expansion for GO passenger rail service across the greater Golden Horseshoe, beyond the current GO expansion plans. These rail lines and GO rail extensions—

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): Order. The member for St. Catharines will come to order.

Mr. Ric Bresee: —are owned or partially owned by the freight companies—

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): I apologize to the member.

The member for St Catharines will come to order. The Associate Minister of Energy-Intensive Industries, for the second time, has been asked to come to order.

You have 10 seconds to respond.

Mr. Ric Bresee: Thank you, Speaker.

The current plan to build out the GO network, called GO expansion, aims to create a network with the capacity to deliver service every 15 minutes or better, all day in both directions across the core segments of the GO rail network. We're getting it done.

IMPAIRED DRIVERS

Mr. Stephen Blais: My question is for the Attorney General. Madam Speaker, a crossing guard in Ottawa is dead. The young man accused of killing him was already before the courts on an impaired driving charge in July 2025, but he was still behind the wheel, still on the road. And now, another family is grieving.

Conservatives say that they're tough on crime. They lecture the federal government about bail reform and dangerous people being released back into our communities, but when it comes to impaired driving, this Conservative government lets people keep their licence, keep their car, keep on driving and put families at risk.

Why is this government tougher on rhetoric than it is on drunk drivers?

Hon. Doug Downey: I can't address the individual situation, but I can tell you this: There are tragedies on our roads, but we have among the safest roads in the country because we have tough laws. Madam Speaker, the laws only matter when they're enforced, and that is what we're working towards—tougher enforcement to make sure that our kids and our family members are safe, to make sure that our roads are safe.

Now, as we build capacity across our system to move cases along faster and to make sure that people have their day in court, we resist listening to the Liberals who did absolutely nothing for 15 years and allowed the backlog to build that we are now having to clean up, but we are doing it. And I don't want to hear from the leader, three-peat Pete over there. I don't want to hear from the leader about what we should be doing when they did absolutely nothing.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): Order. Order.

Back to the member for Orléans.

Mr. Stephen Blais: This government has had eight years to get tougher on drinking and driving. Driving is a privilege, not a right. If someone is charged with impaired driving, there should be an automatic vehicle impoundment, ignition interlock and an immediate suspension that actually keeps them off the road until they prove their innocence. That's what tough on crime looks like. That's protecting the public.

The Conservative government's soft-on-crime, catch-and-release approach to drinking and driving is leading to tragedy and death in our communities—tragedy and death in our communities. Why does this government only get tough after someone is dead?

Hon. Doug Downey: Madam Speaker, April 1 was yesterday. I cannot believe I'm hearing from this crew over here about tough-on-crime. We have been fighting hoof and tong with the federal government to get tougher and bring bail reform, make sure that people are having a consequence for what they are doing. We have been doing this for eight years. We are achieving some success with the federal government, but not enough, and this group over here has been absolutely no help at all.

1130

BAIL REFORM

Mr. John Jordan: My question is to the Solicitor General. Media reports about criminals reoffending while out on bail have left many people in Ontario worried about the safety of their loved ones. Some criminals are so brazen that they continue to commit violent acts the next day after being let out on bail. We know this cannot continue. This is why our government is taking action to ensure that people feel safe in their communities. We are working to improve bail compliance and continuing to advocate for the federal government to implement tougher bail laws.

Speaker, could the Solicitor General elaborate what steps our government is taking to help law enforcement make criminals comply with their bail conditions?

Hon. Michael S. Kerzner: I've said this before: Show me a government that has had more focus, that's been more determined, that's been a stronger advocate in public safety, and I'll show you our government led by Premier Ford.

To the member from Kingston, let me just say this: It's the Bail Compliance and Warrant Apprehension Grant that our government came forward with. That was over \$24 million. It's the OPP's repeat offender parole enforcement squad, the ROPE unit—\$48 million. It's more money in this current budget to expand programs.

Most importantly, it's the expectation and the tone that this government has set in advocating strongly, as the Attorney General spoke of a few minutes ago, to the federal government: Get your act together, and make laws that will keep the violent and repeat offenders where they belong—in jail.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): Back to the member for Lanark-Frontenac-Kingston.

Mr. John Jordan: Thank you to the Solicitor General for that important update. It's encouraging to hear about the actions our government is taking to get tough on crime and protect Ontario families and communities.

Speaker, constituents have told us they are deeply concerned about repeat violent offenders being released back into our communities, only to commit more crimes. They want to see their governments take charge.

Last week, we debated the Keeping Criminals Behind Bars Act. This legislation includes strong measures that build on our ongoing work to protect communities in our province. Could the Solicitor General give us more details

on how this bill, if passed, will help protect victims and keep dangerous and repeat offenders off the streets?

Hon. Michael S. Kerzner: Well, the mandatory deposits when a person leaves the jail is one example. We can't just have a promise to pay, a get-out-of-jail card and hope that you will honour the terms of your court order conditions. That's why the mandatory security deposits are important.

But I'd say to my friend the member from Kingston, we have to always stand with the law-abiding citizens, and not the drug addicts, the human traffickers, the murderers, the people that violently break into our homes, the people that steal our cars and break into the jewellery stores. Our government has to be strong. Our government is strong.

But I ask the people opposite: Where have you been all these years? Why have you not stood up and said, "People that break the law belong in one place, and that's in jail"?

HOSPITAL SERVICES

MPP Wayne Gates: My question is to the Premier. Eight years ago, this government campaigned on a promise to end hallway health care, but hallway medicine is worse now than it has ever been. It was bad under the Liberals, but the Conservatives managed to take it from bad to worse. Every day, 1,400 people are treated in hospital hallways.

Why is the Premier hiding his failure to end this hallway health care by ending tracking of how many people are being treated in unconventional spaces?

In Niagara, families are seeing first-hand the consequences of this failed government. Speaker, emergency rooms are overcrowded. Patients are waiting longer in waiting rooms—sometimes days—for care. Front-line health care workers are stretched beyond their limits. Seniors are being left in stretchers in hallways.

Will the Premier tell the people of Niagara why he's failing to deliver on his promise and what concrete, immediate action he will take to finally end—

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): I recognize the Minister of Health.

Hon. Sylvia Jones: I guess I will begin by the fact that the member opposite was actually there when we celebrated the South Niagara Hospital. It speaks to what individuals from that party say in this chamber compared to what they say in their community.

The West Lincoln Memorial Hospital, of course—it's a great pleasure to be able to welcome that new facility in Niagara. I've already mentioned the fact that the member opposite was happy to celebrate the South Niagara grand opening and their beam raising. It is an additional 600 beds that will be in the Niagara region serving the people of Niagara.

We'll make those investments because we know when we invest in people, when we invest in capital, we continue to see a world-class health care system in Ontario.

ANSWERS TO WRITTEN QUESTIONS

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): I recognize the member for Timiskaming–Cochrane on a point of order.

Mr. John Vanthof: I tabled written question number 91 to the Minister of Energy and Mines on October 9, 2025. More than 24 sessional days have passed since I tabled my written question, and yet I've received no answer from the minister. The response was due on Wednesday, March 25. When can I expect a response to my question?

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): Minister, I want to remind you that you are required, under standing order 101(d), to file a response within 24 sessional days. Your responses are now overdue. I would like to ask that you give the House some indication as to when the response will be forthcoming.

Hon. Stephen Lecce: I do thank the member for raising the question. There was a technical issue with the Cabinet Office submission to my ministry. Notwithstanding that, the response is now with the Clerk, and you should have it today.

NOTICE OF DISSATISFACTION

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): Pursuant to standing order 36(a), the member for Orléans has given notice of dissatisfaction with the answer to the question given by the Attorney General regarding drinking and driving. This matter will be debated on April 14 following private members' public business.

LEGISLATIVE PAGES

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): I would like the pages to gather in front of the dais, please.

Ladies and gentlemen, it is time to express our sincere thanks to the exceptional group of legislative pages who have been with us for the past two weeks.

To our pages: You have been reliable, dedicated and essential to the smooth functioning of this chamber. We have been extremely fortunate to have you with us.

You began your term on the very day the House returned for the spring sitting, and have been with us for a busy two weeks, including your record-setting delivery of the budget document.

You leave Queen's Park with new friendships, a deeper understanding of parliamentary democracy and memories that will stay with you for a lifetime. You will return home to your studies, and, in time, I have no doubt you will make meaningful contributions to your communities, to our province and to our country. We expect great things from each and every one of you. Perhaps one day you'll return to this very chamber as members or staff. Wherever your paths may lead, we wish you every success. In the meantime, I wish you a wonderful Easter long weekend and safe return home.

I invite all members to please join me in thanking this outstanding group.

Applause.

NOTICE OF DISSATISFACTION

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): Pursuant to standing order 36(a), the member for Ottawa South has given notice of dissatisfaction with the answer to the question given by the Minister of Education regarding special education. This matter will be debated on April 14 following private members' public business.

DEFERRED VOTES

MANDATORY BLOOD TESTING AMENDMENT ACT, 2026

LOI DE 2026 MODIFIANT LA LOI DE 2006 SUR LE DÉPISTAGE OBLIGATOIRE PAR TEST SANGUIN

Deferred vote on the motion for second reading of the following bill:

Bill 84, An Act to amend the Mandatory Blood Testing Act, 2006 / Projet de loi 84, Loi modifiant la Loi de 2006 sur le dépistage obligatoire par test sanguin.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): Call in the members. This is a five-minute bell.

The division bells rang from 1140 to 1145.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): Members will please take your seats. You have 14 seconds and then it's off with their heads. I'm cracking the whip.

On April 1, 2026, Ms. Smith, Thornhill, moved second reading of Bill 84, An Act to amend the Mandatory Blood Testing Act, 2006.

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

Ayes

Allsopp, Tyler	Gallagher Murphy, Dawn	Racinsky, Joseph
Anand, Deepak	Gates, Wayne	Rae, Matthew
Armstrong, Teresa J.	Gélinas, France	Rakocevic, Tom
Babikian, Aris	Gilmour, Alexa	Rickford, Greg
Bailey, Robert	Glover, Chris	Riddell, Brian
Bell, Jessica	Gretzky, Lisa	Rosenberg, Bill
Bethlenfalvy, Peter	Grewal, Hardeep Singh	Sabawy, Sheref
Blais, Stephen	Gualtieri, Silvia	Sandhu, Amarjot
Bouma, Will	Hamid, Zee	Sarrazin, Stéphane
Bourgouin, Guy	Hardeman, Ernie	Sattler, Peggy
Bowman, Stephanie	Hazell, Andrea	Saunderson, Brian
Brady, Bobbi Ann	Holland, Kevin	Schreiner, Mike
Bresee, Ric	Hsu, Ted	Shamji, Adil
Burch, Jeff	Jones, Sylvia	Shaw, Sandy
Calandra, Paul	Jones, Trevor	Smith, Dave
Cho, Raymond Sung Joon	Jordan, John	Smith, David
Cho, Stan	Kanapathi, Logan	Smith, Graydon
Ciriello, Monica	Kernaghan, Terence	Smith, Laura
Clancy, Aislinn	Kernzner, Michael S.	Smyth, Stephanie
Clark, Steve	Khanjin, Andrea	Stevens, Jennifer (Jennie)
Coe, Lorne	Leardi, Anthony	Stiles, Marit
Collard, Lucille	Lecce, Stephen	Tabuns, Peter
Crawford, Stephen	Lumsden, Neil	Thanigasalam, Vijay
Cuzzetto, Rudy	McCarthy, Todd J.	Thompson, Lisa M.

Darouze, George	McKenney, Catherine	Tibollo, Michael A.
Denault, Billy	McMahon, Mary-Margaret	Tsao, Jonathan
Dixon, Jess	Mulroney, Caroline	Vanthof, John
Dowie, Andrew	Oosterhoff, Sam	Vaugeois, Lise
Downey, Doug	Parsa, Michael	Vickers, Paul
Dunlop, Jill	Pasma, Chandra	Wai, Daisy
Fife, Catherine	Piccini, David	West, Jamie
Firin, Mohamed	Pierre, Natalie	Williams, Charmaine A.
Flack, Rob	Pinsonneault, Steve	Wong-Tam, Kristyn
Fraser, John	Pirie, George	
French, Jennifer K.	Quinn, Nolan	

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): All those opposed, please rise and remain standing until recognized by the Clerk.

The Clerk of the Assembly (Mr. Trevor Day): The ayes are 103; the nays are 0.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): I declare the motion carried.

Second reading agreed to.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): Pursuant to standing order 100(h), the bill is referred to the Committee of the Whole House.

Ms. Laura Smith: I'm requesting that Bill 84 goes to the Standing Committee on Social Policy.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): Is the majority in favour of this bill being referred to the Standing Committee on Social Policy? Agreed.

The bill is referred to the Standing Committee on Social Policy. Congratulations.

PLAN TO PROTECT ONTARIO ACT (BUDGET MEASURES), 2026

LOI DE 2026 SUR LE PLAN POUR PROTÉGER L'ONTARIO (MESURES BUDGÉTAIRES)

Deferred vote on the motion that the question now be put on the motion for second reading of the following bill:

Bill 97, An Act to implement Budget measures, to enact, amend or repeal various statutes and to revoke various regulations / Projet de loi 97, Loi visant à mettre en oeuvre les mesures budgétaires, à édicter, à modifier ou à abroger diverses lois et à abroger divers règlements.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): Call in the members. This is a five-minute bell.

The division bells rang from 1149 to 1150.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): On March 30, 2026, Mr. Bethlenfalvy moved second reading of Bill 97, An Act to implement Budget measures, to enact, amend or repeal various statutes and to revoke various regulations.

On April 2, 2026, Mr. Clark moved that the question be now put.

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

Ayes

Allsopp, Tyler	Flack, Rob	Pinsonneault, Steve
Anand, Deepak	Gallagher Murphy, Dawn	Pirie, George
Babikian, Aris	Grewal, Hardeep Singh	Quinn, Nolan

Bailey, Robert	Gualtieri, Silvia	Racinsky, Joseph	Bethlenfalvy, Peter	Hamid, Zee	Rae, Matthew
Bethlenfalvy, Peter	Hamid, Zee	Rae, Matthew	Bouma, Will	Hardeman, Ernie	Rickford, Greg
Bouma, Will	Hardeman, Ernie	Rickford, Greg	Bresee, Ric	Holland, Kevin	Riddell, Brian
Bresee, Ric	Holland, Kevin	Riddell, Brian	Calandra, Paul	Jones, Sylvia	Rosenberg, Bill
Calandra, Paul	Jones, Sylvia	Rosenberg, Bill	Cho, Raymond Sung Joon	Jones, Trevor	Sabawy, Sheref
Cho, Raymond Sung Joon	Jones, Trevor	Sabawy, Sheref	Cho, Stan	Jordan, John	Sandhu, Amarjot
Cho, Stan	Kanapathi, Logan	Sandhu, Amarjot	Ciriello, Monica	Kanapathi, Logan	Sarrazin, Stéphane
Ciriello, Monica	Kerzner, Michael S.	Sarrazin, Stéphane	Clark, Steve	Kerzner, Michael S.	Saunderson, Brian
Clark, Steve	Khanjin, Andrea	Saunderson, Brian	Coe, Lorne	Khanjin, Andrea	Smith, Dave
Coe, Lorne	Leardi, Anthony	Smith, Dave	Crawford, Stephen	Leardi, Anthony	Smith, David
Crawford, Stephen	Lecce, Stephen	Smith, David	Cuzzetto, Rudy	Lecce, Stephen	Smith, Graydon
Cuzzetto, Rudy	Lumsden, Neil	Smith, Graydon	Darouze, George	Lumsden, Neil	Smith, Laura
Darouze, George	McCarthy, Todd J.	Smith, Laura	Denault, Billy	McCarthy, Todd J.	Thanigasalam, Vijay
Denault, Billy	Mulroney, Caroline	Thanigasalam, Vijay	Dixon, Jess	Mulroney, Caroline	Thompson, Lisa M.
Dixon, Jess	Oosterhoff, Sam	Thompson, Lisa M.	Dowie, Andrew	Oosterhoff, Sam	Tibollo, Michael A.
Dowie, Andrew	Parsa, Michael	Tibollo, Michael A.	Downey, Doug	Parsa, Michael	Vickers, Paul
Downey, Doug	Piccini, David	Vickers, Paul	Dunlop, Jill	Piccini, David	Wai, Daisy
Dunlop, Jill	Pierre, Natalie	Wai, Daisy	Firin, Mohamed	Pierre, Natalie	Williams, Charmaine A.
Firin, Mohamed		Williams, Charmaine A.			

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): All those opposed to Mr. Clark's motion will please rise one and a time and be recognized by the Clerk.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): All those opposed to the motion will please rise one at a time and be recognized by the Clerk.

Nays

Armstrong, Teresa J.	Gélinas, France	Shamji, Adil
Bell, Jessica	Gilmour, Alexa	Shaw, Sandy
Blais, Stephen	Glover, Chris	Smyth, Stephanie
Bourgouin, Guy	Gretzky, Lisa	Stevens, Jennifer (Jennie)
Bowman, Stephanie	Hazell, Andrea	Stiles, Marit
Brady, Bobbi Ann	Hsu, Ted	Tabuns, Peter
Burch, Jeff	Kernaghan, Terence	Tsao, Jonathan
Clancy, Aislinn	McKenney, Catherine	Vanthof, John
Collard, Lucille	McMahon, Mary-Margaret	Vaugeois, Lise
Fife, Catherine	Pasma, Chandra	West, Jamie
Fraser, John	Rakocevic, Tom	Wong-Tam, Kristyn
French, Jennifer K.	Sattler, Peggy	
Gates, Wayne	Schreiner, Mike	

The Clerk of the Assembly (Mr. Trevor Day): The ayes are 66; the nays are 37.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): I declare the motion carried.

Mr. Bethlenfalvy has moved second reading of Bill 97, An Act to implement Budget measures, to enact, amend or repeal various statutes and to revoke various regulations.

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

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

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

In my opinion, the ayes have it.

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

The division bells rang from 1154 to 1155.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): On March 30, 2026, Mr. Bethlenfalvy moved second reading of Bill 97, An Act to implement Budget measures, to enact, amend or repeal various statutes and to revoke various regulations.

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

Ayes

Allsopp, Tyler	Flack, Rob	Pinsonneault, Steve
Anand, Deepak	Gallagher Murphy, Dawn	Pirie, George
Babikian, Aris	Grewal, Hardeep Singh	Quinn, Nolan
Bailey, Robert	Gualtieri, Silvia	Racinsky, Joseph

Nays

Armstrong, Teresa J.	Gélinas, France	Shamji, Adil
Bell, Jessica	Gilmour, Alexa	Shaw, Sandy
Blais, Stephen	Glover, Chris	Smyth, Stephanie
Bourgouin, Guy	Gretzky, Lisa	Stevens, Jennifer (Jennie)
Bowman, Stephanie	Hazell, Andrea	Stiles, Marit
Brady, Bobbi Ann	Hsu, Ted	Tabuns, Peter
Burch, Jeff	Kernaghan, Terence	Tsao, Jonathan
Clancy, Aislinn	McKenney, Catherine	Vanthof, John
Collard, Lucille	McMahon, Mary-Margaret	Vaugeois, Lise
Fife, Catherine	Pasma, Chandra	West, Jamie
Fraser, John	Rakocevic, Tom	Wong-Tam, Kristyn
French, Jennifer K.	Sattler, Peggy	
Gates, Wayne	Schreiner, Mike	

The Clerk of the Assembly (Mr. Trevor Day): The ayes are 66; the nays are 37.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): I declare the motion carried.

Second reading agreed to.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): Shall the bill be ordered for third reading? Do you wish it referred to a committee?

Hon. Peter Bethlenfalvy: Madam Speaker, after great reflection and robust consultations, I have decided to refer the bill to the Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): It shall be referred to the Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs.

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Hon. Steve Clark: Under standing order 59:

This afternoon, it's the government's intention to introduce a bill. We'll follow that by debate on the budget motion and then private members' business will be motion number 53.

I wish everybody a happy Easter and a happy constituency week.

Coming back on Monday, April 13, the House will come back at 9 a.m. We'll have second reading debate on Bill 98. In the afternoon, again, second reading debate on Bill 98 followed by debate on the budget motion.

Tuesday, April 14—a very special day, it's not just my daughter Caitlin's birthday; it's also the Clerk of the Legislative Assembly Trevor Day's birthday that day. Clerk, to celebrate your birthday that morning, we'll have debate on a government bill to be introduced, following, in the afternoon, debate on the budget motion. The private member's bill on Tuesday, April 14, is second reading debate of Bill 86.

On Wednesday, April 15, in the morning, we'll have second reading debate on a government bill that will be introduced. I want to remind the House that we will be coming back at 1 p.m. on Wednesday, April 15. We'll also have second reading on a government bill that afternoon, followed by private members' business, second reading of Bill 23.

Thursday, April 16, in the morning, we'll have a government bill debate, followed in the afternoon by debate on the budget motion, and then finally, on Thursday, April 16, private member's notice of motion number 58.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): If I don't see the rest of you before you leave today, happy Easter. Have a safe and happy Easter with your families.

This House stands in recess until 1.

The House recessed from 1200 to 1300.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Mr. Brian Saunderson: It's my great pleasure to welcome a good friend and colleague, Basil Clarke, mayor of Ramara township, but also the warden of Simcoe county.

As well, I'd like to welcome Graham Coveney, chair of Niagara Parks.

REPORTS BY COMMITTEES

STANDING COMMITTEE ON GOVERNMENT AGENCIES

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): I beg to inform the House that today the Clerk received a report on intended appointments dated April 2, 2026, of the Standing Committee on Government Agencies. Pursuant to standing order 110(f)(9), the report is deemed to be adopted by the House.

Report deemed adopted.

PETITIONS

STUDENT ASSISTANCE

Mr. Ted Hsu: I'm presenting a petition entitled "Fix OSAP ASAP." This petition is with regard to the changes in OSAP where, for example, the maximum on the grant portion of student support is cut off at 25%, which impacts lower-income households the most because those are the ones that tended to get the higher fraction of grants.

The petitioners are calling on the government to immediately reverse the announced changes to OSAP, to conduct extensive consultations with all the stakeholders and to uphold Ontario's commitment to accessible, affordable and quality post-secondary education for all.

EDUCATION FUNDING

Ms. Sandy Shaw: I have a petition here to the Ontario Legislature entitled "Reduce Class Sizes in our Public Elementary Schools." Like many people from across Ontario, we are receiving hundreds and hundreds of these petitions, signed by parents and students and educators who are concerned about the increase in the number of students crowded into classrooms in our school boards. These are from Hamilton-Wentworth District School Board.

Parents in this province are expecting more support for their students, not less. And so what I want to say is that with the continual chronic cuts that this province has made in public education, the results are that we are seeing 5,000 educators lost across the province. Right now in the Hamilton-Wentworth District School Board they're looking at 125 layoffs, including 55 elementary school teachers. This is not what our kids deserve. These people agree. They're concerned. They're taking the time to write in.

I completely agree with the people who have signed this petition from all across Hamilton and across Ontario, and I will add my name to it and bring to the table.

ACCIDENT BENEFITS

Mr. Adil Shamji: I'm pleased to present a petition on behalf of one of my exceptional constituents today, entitled "Petitioning the Removal of the Minor Injury Guideline, Sections 18(1) and 18(2) of the Ontario Statutory Accident Benefits Schedule and Incorporate Rebuttal Examination Reports Back into the System."

The issue is that several years ago, a number of regulations were introduced that had the effect of placing a significant limitation on the minor injury guideline cap, which places an undue burden on patients and individuals who suffered injuries and, at a time that they're particularly vulnerable, limits their access to the care that they need and deserve.

This petition seeks to remove that minor injury guideline—specifically section 18, subsections (1) and (2) of the Ontario Statutory Accident Benefits Schedule—and

to restore a more fair process to obtain the funding that they need for their recovery.

This is a most reasonable petition. I believe the sponsor of the petition is watching today. I want to thank him for that, and I'm happy to sign this and share it with page Devlin.

AFFORDABLE HOUSING

MPP Lise Vaugeois: This petition is entitled "Bring Back Real Rent Control." It's been very disappointing in this budget, and this petition addresses that: the fact that rent control was removed from buildings, anything from 2018 and on. There are incredible rent increases taking place. People have been priced out of having any kind of place to live.

I am fully in support of this petition. I will sign it and give it to Else.

HEALTH CARE WORKERS

Mr. Terence Kernaghan: It's my honour to table the following petition to "Stop Privatization and Support Staffing Ratios" from the Ontario Nurses' Association. This petition calls upon the province of Ontario and the Ontario government to mandate safe staffing ratios for nurses and health care professionals across the health care system.

Current staffing leads to burnout. It leads to unsafe working conditions. It forces nurses and other health care professionals to leave, pursue other jobs or to retire prematurely. You would think after the exodus that happened in health care because of this government's Bill 124, the government would want to stop the bleeding.

Understaffing has a devastating impact on patient care. It forces emergency department closures. Safe staffing ratios are a proven solution that reduces burnout for nurses and health care professionals, reduces instances of violence and improves quality of care.

I'm proud to support this petition and will affix my signature. It's time that Ontario joins other provinces and mandates safe staffing ratios for nurses and health care professionals.

SOCIAL ASSISTANCE

MPP Lise Vaugeois: This is a petition to raise social assistance rates. The reality is that government policies have created homelessness, have created incredible and entrenched poverty across this province because the rates for OW and ODSP are below what is possible to get any kind of place to live. And since there's no rent control, people are really winding up on the streets. This is a petition to address that lack of support for social assistance recipients so that they can actually eat and have a roof over their heads.

I will sign this and give it to page Else.

STUDENT ASSISTANCE

Mr. Terence Kernaghan: It's my honour to present the following petition to save OSAP. It goes into quite a great deal of detail. I know myself that I required OSAP in order to go to post-secondary education, and so many young people in the province of Ontario require that now.

This petition calls upon the government to restore the 85% grants, not loans, because without this opportunity, students will be faced with sky-high rents, fewer opportunities and higher costs at every single turn. We have the highest youth unemployment rate in Canada, yet this government is making it even harder for students to get ahead. It's making it harder for them to get their foot in the door. Making OSAP grants into loans will mean students are having a debt sentence for life, with decades of having to pay this back, starting their life off in the hole.

Liberals and Conservative governments have left Ontario ranking dead last in per-student funding in Canada, and these cuts are going to further make life more difficult for young people. People shouldn't have to pay the price for this government's reckless choices with Ontario's budget. So this petition calls upon the government to reverse these cuts, stop these tuition hikes and provide colleges and universities with the direct funding they need so Ontario's youth can succeed.

I fully support this petition and will deliver it with page Jiyana to the Clerks.

STUDENT ASSISTANCE

Ms. Sandy Shaw: I, too, have a petition entitled "Stop the Cuts to OSAP in the Province of Ontario."

We had a private member's bill here just the other day, and that was about reversing those cuts to OSAP. The gallery was filled with students who are concerned, rightfully, about their future. They've worked hard to get accepted to university. They work part-time jobs. Their parents and their grandparents have good hopes for them. Unfortunately, with these cuts to OSAP, the rug is being pulled out right from under them. They're making difficult choices as to whether they're able to graduate with huge piles of debt or whether they can even afford to go to school at all.

This is not only hurting their futures; it's hurting the future of Ontario when we need a workforce that is educated and that is able to meet the challenges of the future. I completely am opposed to those cuts. Unfortunately, the government voted against our opposition day motion to reverse the cuts, but we're not going to stop trying, and the students across the province of Ontario are not going to stop trying either.

So I'll add my name to this petition and fully support the students in the province of Ontario.

SOCIAL ASSISTANCE

Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon: I, too, have a petition today from Ontario's best petitioner, super Sally Palmer

from McMaster University. It's essentially asking for a doubling of Ontario Works and Ontario Disability Support Program, OW and ODSP, because we know we don't want any Ontarian living below the poverty line. We are here to lead and ensure people have a better quality of life.

1310

I am happy to sign my name and pass this forward with page Annie on her last day as a page but maybe not as an MPP.

STUDENT ASSISTANCE

MPP Wayne Gates: Save OSAP: You've heard my colleagues talk about how important it is to invest in our young people. And by changing it from a grant to a loan, that means that young people are going to finish college or university with a debt of \$30,000 or \$40,000. So I'm opposed to this.

When people say there's no interest out there, I went to six different schools that actually walked out of class in high school to oppose the cuts to OSAP, and it was pouring rain on one day. I mean, it was raining so hard, my hair was down to here. It was awful. But you know, those kids stood there for a full hour and a half, from St. Paul school, from St. Mike school, because they cared so much about their education.

I want to be really clear how important it is for young people to go to college and university in Niagara, particularly Niagara College. Niagara College is what we call—it's a school where most people maybe middle- to low-income will go to college instead of going to university because they've got a better opportunity to get a job there. So they get the training in horticulture, they get their training in skilled trades, they get their training in how to brew wine—not a bad thing; I know most of the Conservatives have been to Niagara and enjoyed the wine there—and then they end up opening a small business, but they're coming out of it with not that big of a debt. But you're asking these young people who can barely afford to go to college—they come out with a debt of \$30,000 or \$40,000.

The last thing I'm going to say on this: It's about choices. Choices should always be to support the future of our province and our country, which is young people. They are the future. They're the ones that are going to stand up and fight for our environment. They're the ones that are going to be in the skilled trades in the future. They're the ones that are going to be the winemakers of the future. They're the ones that are going to work in the tourist sector.

That's why we have to support them. And to strap them with a debt of \$30,000 or \$40,000 and paying the interest—that's a whole other story. Should we pay interest, charge kids to go to school and pay interest?

So I fully support this. I'll sign my name to it. Thank you for allowing me to say a few words.

HEALTH CARE

Mr. Terence Kernaghan: The petition I have to read is entitled "Health Care: Not for Sale." With this Conservative government, we have seen such a move towards privatization. The four greatest democratizing forces that we have in this world are, number one, public health care; number two, public education; number three is housing; and number four is the vote.

Tommy Douglas's legacy is that of a Canadian system whereby people got the health care they needed and deserved regardless of the ability to pay. Yet this government has made health care based upon the size of people's wallets.

Privatization will bleed nurses, doctors, PSWs and other health care professionals from our system, and it will make the health care crisis even worse.

Right now we are seeing patients in hallways. You know, this Conservative government has talked about the Liberal government's legacy of hallway health care. And yet that was an anomaly at the time; it was a strange trend. But this government seems to have taken it to the next level, where people are in storage closets. What's next? Are people going to be getting health care in parking lots because of this Conservative government?

This petition calls upon the Legislative Assembly of Ontario "to immediately stop all plans to privatize Ontario's health care system." It is anti-Canadian; it is anti-Canadian values. People believe in our strong health care system. It's what differentiates us from the people in the United States and their system where people go bankrupt simply by getting sick or becoming injured.

This also calls upon the government to license "tens of thousands of internationally educated" trained "nurses and other health care professionals" who are already in Ontario and are waiting years to have their credentials recognized, and also to make education free or low-cost for nurses, doctors and other health care professionals and incentivize doctors and nurses to "choose to live and work in northern Ontario" in Ontario.

Right now, because of the orange dictator to the south, people are looking to flee the United States. We should be attracting all of that talent, all of the highly trained, highly educated people within college, within university, and make sure that they know that they have a safe place here in Ontario, a progressive place. But unfortunately, we don't yet have that place because of this regressive government.

I fully support this petition, will affix my signature and deliver it with page Avish to the Clerks.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): Petitions? Petitions?

I recognize the government House leader on a point of order.

Hon. Steve Clark: If you seek it, you will find unanimous consent to revert back to the introduction of government bills.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): The government House leader is seeking unanimous consent to revert back to introduction of government bills. Agreed? Agreed.

INTRODUCTION OF GOVERNMENT BILLS

BETTER REGIONAL GOVERNANCE ACT, 2026

LOI DE 2026 POUR UNE MEILLEURE GOUVERNANCE RÉGIONALE

Mr. Flack moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 100, An Act to amend the Municipal Act, 2001 and the Municipal Elections Act, 1996 / Projet de loi 100, Loi modifiant la Loi de 2001 sur les municipalités et la Loi de 1996 sur les élections municipales.

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

First reading agreed to.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): Minister, do you wish to explain the bill?

Hon. Rob Flack: The proposed legislation, the Better Regional Governance Act, 2026, will strengthen leadership and improve efficiency in regional and county governments.

It would allow the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing to appoint regional chairs and streamline council structures in Simcoe county and Niagara. These changes will help local governments respond faster to economic and housing challenges, strengthening decision-making and supporting Ontario's continued growth.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

2026 ONTARIO BUDGET

BUDGET DE L'ONTARIO DE 2026

Resuming the debate adjourned on March 26, 2026, on the motion that this House approves in general the budgetary policy of the government:

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): I recognize the member for Ottawa West–Nepean.

Ms. Chandra Pasma: It's an honour to rise on behalf of the residents of Ottawa West–Nepean to speak about the government's budget.

I just want to start by noting that we're in a moment of a real cost-of-living crisis. When people in my riding in Ottawa and across Ontario can't afford to pay their rent or buy groceries, this government tabled a budget that didn't even mention the words "rent" or "groceries." They

managed to find money for a Ferris wheel, but they did not manage to find money to help people who are barely scraping by or not even scraping by. That just shows how out of touch this government is, Speaker.

I also want to note that I will be sharing my time with the members for University–Rosedale and Thunder Bay–Superior North.

I want to spend most of my time this afternoon, Speaker, talking about education, because one of the things that was really shocking about the government's budget was that they admitted that they had underspent their education budget this year by \$462 million. That's at a moment when we have larger class sizes, lack of special education and mental health supports, a shortage of qualified teachers and a growing crisis of violence in our schools. This government couldn't even be bothered to spend their full education budget.

And do you know what, Speaker? This government took control over eight school boards. They swept aside the democratically elected trustees who were selected by parents and accountable to parents, and they imposed government insiders with no experience in education—who are making \$350,000 a year and with a \$40,000-expense account—to make decisions without any consultation with parents, behind closed doors. When the minister made those appointments, he said that their instructions were to get the deficits in order. But also, if they found that there was not enough funding to meet the needs of children, he expected them to say something.

But let's just review the record of these supervisors so far, Speaker. We learned just yesterday that 40 vice-principals in the Toronto District School Board are being fired. The first thing that the supervisor in the TDSB did was cut special education supports, so that children with disabilities and special needs are in larger classes. And next year, it will be every grade 4 to 8 student who is in a larger class because the supervisors also removed cap sizes on those classes.

1320

Just last week, the supervisor in the Toronto Catholic District School Board announced that he's cutting language and literacy classes and firing 72 front-line educators. The supervisor in Peel is firing 300 teachers. In the Thames Valley District School Board, wait times for assessments have doubled under the supervisor.

In the Ottawa-Carleton District School Board, the supervisor cut funding for textbooks, supplies and computers this year by 17%—more than \$5 million, when teachers don't even have paper and pencils in their classrooms.

I also heard from a parent, just last week, that they've been told their school will get no more funding for library books. Parents are expected to fund library books for their children.

When this government didn't even spend \$462 million out of their own budget, why did no supervisor speak up and say that they needed more funding to cover these areas? Why did the Minister of Education allow them to make all of these cuts, and never say, "We have additional

funding that we're not spending elsewhere. We could cover these things?"

Why are kids going without language supports, without teachers or vice-principals? Why are they going without textbooks, supplies, paper and pencils when the government is sitting on money? It just goes to show, Speaker, that the cuts are the point. They are doing this deliberately.

We're also starting to hear, already, the effects of the underfunding on next year. The York Region District School Board just announced today that 78 caretakers, plumbers, electricians and maintenance staff are losing their jobs next year. I don't think there's a single parent in the province who thinks that their child's school should be less clean, should be less safe, should be less well-maintained. And yet, that school board is losing 78 caretakers, plumbers, electricians and maintenance staff.

The Hamilton-Wentworth District School Board announced just this week that they are laying off 125 people, including 55 elementary school teachers. No parent in Hamilton is thinking their kid is getting enough support and that it's okay if their teacher is fired. Parents in Hamilton and across the province want to see more supports for their kids, not less. And yet, in the face of all of that, this government could not find it in themselves to provide the funding that we need to properly support our kids.

They had money for a Ferris wheel, but not money to make sure that every child is safe at school. They have money for a fantasy island in Lake Ontario, but they do not have funding to ensure that there is a mental health professional in every school in Ontario. They have funding to make Billy Bishop open to jets, but they do not have funding to ensure that there is a qualified teacher in every classroom.

And so, I want to go through some of the shortfalls that we're seeing under this government and report some of the stories that I've heard from parents, teachers and education workers around the province—and students themselves.

School boards around the province are spending more than \$850 million more than what they are getting from this government for special education, for a system that is being held together with shoe string and tape. It is badly failing our kids with disabilities and special needs.

A Community Living survey found that 31% of kids with disabilities are being sent home or told to stay at home. Parents for education found that 63% of elementary school principals had to call parents to ask them to keep their kids at home.

The Ontario Autism Coalition found that 6% of kids with disabilities and special needs are excluded from school entirely. That is 21,000 students in the province of Ontario who are not allowed to go to school at all, despite every child having the right to an education under the Education Act.

The number of schools with no access to a psychologist to conduct an assessment to determine what supports a child needs to be at school to succeed has doubled under this government. Now 28% of schools have no access to a psychologist at all.

In the Ottawa-Carleton school board, there is one school with 11 students on the wait list for an assessment as of January, but they got told four months into the school year that they would only get one more assessment for the entire year. That's 10 kids being told, "Just wait. We'll figure it out some other day, what kind of support you need to succeed at school."

In the Renfrew Catholic school board, they were allocated only two assessments per school for the entire school year—the whole board—and most of those students in the Renfrew board are being directed to Ottawa to see a psychologist. That represents a significant financial barrier for many families, to travel to Ottawa to see a psychologist.

In the Thames Valley District School Board, wait times for assessments have doubled under the supervisor, and parents are telling me that his plan to address it is to have 20-minute pre-assessments that determine whether or not you actually get an assessment. The pre-assessment has to recommend an assessment, but they've narrowed the eligibility for an assessment, so they're just going to recommend fewer kids rather than doing more assessments.

The Ontario Autism Coalition says that 11% of parents say their child's IEP, their independent education plan, is not being implemented at all, and 43% say only some of it is being implemented. That's more than half of kids with an IEP who aren't actually getting what their IEP promises.

When there are resources committed, far too often they're not actually being delivered. I heard from EAs in eastern Ontario that frequently there are seven or eight students assigned to one EA, but one of those students will have a one-on-one safety plan, so for seven of those students, they're not actually getting any support, even though they have an EA assigned.

I heard from teachers about classroom evacuations that are happening daily because of children whose needs aren't being met, who are becoming dysregulated, but there's nowhere for the classes to go, so the kids are sitting in the hallway where no instruction is taking place at all.

When other needs are assessed, they're not being addressed. In the Ottawa Catholic School Board, there is one occupational therapist who is assigned to 46 separate schools. There is a school that has 16 students who need speech pathology, but not one of those students is actually getting it.

We're also seeing supervisors close down programs that are supposed to be supporting vulnerable learners. In the Toronto District School Board, Heydon Park and Eastdale schools are not allowing new enrolments. The supervisor is saying there's no demand for it. Parents are saying it's a manufactured enrolment crisis: that families are not being told about the program or they're being advised to go somewhere else.

The OCDSB supervisor keeps talking about needing to make changes to special education, claiming there isn't demand, but principals are being told that they have to discourage enrolments in spec ed and general learning program classrooms, and parents are being denied when they

ask to have their child in the general learning program. Just this week, we learned that the OCDSB will be closing some of those general learning program classrooms where parents want their kids to be, but they're being told that their child may not be.

Another area where there's a significant shortfall under this government's funding, Speaker, is for Canada Pension Plan and employment insurance premiums. These are premiums that are set by the federal government. The Minister of Education would know that, because he's a former member of Parliament. School boards don't decide what those premiums will be; they don't decide how much they're going to pay. They have to pay 100% of the cost, but the government doesn't cover 100% of the cost, so school boards have to take money out of classrooms and out of front-line resources to pay CPP and EI premiums.

School boards are also paying \$253 million more than what they're getting from the government to cover sick leave. Again, it's the government that bargains sick leave at the central table, not school boards, but the government doesn't cover the full cost of that sick leave, meaning that school boards are once again taking resources out of the classroom to cover something that the government is responsible for, but the government is not properly funding.

1330

At the Ottawa-Carleton District School Board audit committee meeting where we finally got some information on what the OCDSB supervisor is doing—because the rest of what he has been doing has been done behind closed doors—we learned that his revised estimates for 2025-26 show that teacher replacements will cost the board \$36 million this year—\$1.9 million more than was budgeted. For EAs, \$4.7 million was added to this year's budget through the revised estimates. That's nearly \$6 million more than what the board is getting from the government. Meanwhile, the government is attacking teachers and education workers, accusing them of absenteeism despite the fact that teachers are number one in lost injury time claims, above firefighters and police officers.

There's a school board with just 21,000 students in Ontario that had 695 violent incident reports between September and November alone. And we know that not every violent incident gets reported because teachers are discouraged by feeling that nothing happens after they file a report or because they could be filing reports all day long. So those 695 violent incident reports are just a snapshot of the real levels of violence in that board.

For student transportation, there's a shortfall of between \$50 million and \$100 million. Student Transportation of Eastern Ontario is projecting a deficit of \$12 million for next year. Even if they make more students in the Upper Canada and the Catholic District School Board of Eastern Ontario walk or be on the bus for more than an hour, they'll still have an \$8-million deficit that will have to come out of classrooms. The government makes school boards bargain with private companies to pay for student transportation, but they don't actually cover the cost for a small business to provide that student transportation, and

that means money is coming out of classrooms once again to fund something this government won't cover.

We're also seeing cuts to transportation to certain kinds of schools. In Kawartha Pine Ridge, funding is not provided for transportation to alternative high schools, which are a school of last resort for many people who have been struggling in school, so students have to be bused to another school and then they have to pay out of pocket for a bus pass to get to the alternative school. This is supposed to be a last chance for kids who are at risk of dropping out. How is making them pay out of pocket and take two buses to get to school going to help those kids to stay in school, graduate and go on with their lives?

Je dois mentionner aussi que ces enjeux ont un impact particulier sur le système francophone. Les Franco-Ontariens ont un droit constitutionnel à une éducation équitable, mais le système n'est pas financé de façon équitable. Il y a une énorme croissance dans le nombre d'élèves francophones, mais ça ne se reflète pas dans le financement, surtout dans les régions de la capitale nationale.

Il y a une augmentation aussi dans la complexité des besoins des élèves : un plus grand nombre d'élèves qui ne parlent pas encore français, de nouveaux arrivants, des élèves autistes, des élèves avec des troubles d'apprentissage et des élèves ayant des besoins spéciaux. Mais le financement ne reflète pas la complexité, et donc les enseignants et enseignantes doivent se débrouiller tout seuls.

Et parlons de transports scolaires. Les conseils scolaires francophones couvrent une plus grande distance, donc ils doivent transporter des élèves une plus grande distance. Ça implique des coûts, et donc la majorité des conseils scolaires francophones ont un déficit. Mais s'ils réduisent l'accès aux transports scolaires pour adresser le déficit, s'ils demandent aux élèves de passer plus de temps dans un autobus, les familles vont choisir d'envoyer leurs enfants à une école anglophone plus proche.

La pénurie d'enseignants et d'enseignantes dans le système francophone est encore pire que dans le système anglophone, mais le gouvernement n'a pas financé les recommandations du groupe de travail sur la pénurie des enseignants et enseignantes, bien que le gouvernement ait participé dans le travail du groupe de travail. Madame la Présidente, c'est un manque total de respect pour le système d'éducation francophone en Ontario, malgré leur droit constitutionnel.

I only have a couple of minutes left, but I want to mention the state of infrastructure in our schools, because the budget projects a cut of 13% for infrastructure funding over the next three years.

Last year, the Financial Accountability Officer said that, over the next 10 years, the cost to bring and keep all schools in a state of good repair and to build the new schools we need is \$31.4 billion. The FAO also pointed out that the government had only committed \$18.7 billion. Instead of listening to the FAO and increasing funding, the government is doing the opposite and cutting funding. So I guess they want to see more schools that are not in a state of good repair.

Then there's the need for new schools. Across the province, we are seeing schools that are incredibly overcrowded. There's a francophone school in Lowertown in Ottawa that is so overcrowded that grade 5 and grade 6 are in a rented space next door. The administrators are running back and forth between the two buildings all day long. If there's a violent incident that happens in one of those buildings, what happens to the students in the other building, Speaker? Where should the principal be?

St. Elizabeth Catholic School in Bowmanville is at 200% capacity, with grade 8 housed in a nearby secondary school.

There's one francophone board in the province that is spending more money on portables, hydro wires for those portables and bringing in waterlines for fire hydrants than they would just to build an addition. The director of education tells me that by the time he thinks the province will finally commit to an addition, they will have spent two to three times the cost of building an addition.

When boards have portables, they don't get more bathrooms, so you have an increased number of kids who are using the same number of bathrooms. At the same time, when a school has fewer students in it, because funding for school operations is based on number of students, the funding for maintenance and cleaning goes down, but the size of the building didn't go down. Now there's less money to maintain and keep safe a building that is the same size, simply because the government's formula can't be bothered to fund safe and healthy schools based on the size of our actual schools.

This is just a snapshot of the many ways in which this government is failing our kids. This budget was an opportunity to fix that. The government didn't take that opportunity, Speaker, and that's a real shame because this is the future of our kids.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): The member had said she was sharing her time; therefore, I recognize the member for University–Rosedale.

Ms. Jessica Bell: It's a pleasure to be here today to represent University–Rosedale to speak on the government's latest budget bill. I believe it is their seventh, and I've got to say, I was hopeful, but what I see in the budget is not great; it's just not great. It is also safe to say that the Conservatives' budget did not pass our test. On all the issues that we hear Ontarians talk about—health care, education, affordability, jobs, the environment and housing—this budget did not pass the test.

It's also surprising to me to see how the government is spending a lot of money, but there's not a ton to show for it. Debt is now going to be \$500 billion—I believe it's next year or the year after—yet at the same time, we have over two million people in Ontario who don't have a family doctor or a nurse practitioner. The deficit is on track to be \$13 billion for this budget, yet at the same time we have overcrowded schools and teacher shortages, as we've heard our education critic very eloquently explain.

I was shocked to see that interest payments for this year total \$16 billion. If we had had that \$16 billion, we could have paid for OSAP for 26 years. We could cover OSAP

and return it to the grants program that it mostly was, and it would pay for 26 years of support for students. Instead, we're making interest payments.

My concern with this is that the Conservatives love to present themselves as prudent fiscal managers, but when we look at this budget, what we see is a lot of waste and a lot of misplaced priorities. The core issues that we're hearing Ontarians really wanting us to address are just simply not being addressed.

1340

I want to go through some of the big issues that we saw in the budget. The first one that we'd like to talk about is affordability. I don't know about you, but in my riding, the high cost of everything is top of mind when I go door to door. The big issue that we hear about is the high cost of rent. Under this government, average rent has gone up 50% since 2018. We know that renters by and large earn less and have less wealth than homeowners, so they're already at a disadvantage to begin with.

Then we also hear people talk to us about how much it costs to go to the grocery store. You go in, you get to the checkout, you look at the bill and you get sticker shock. I'm sure it happens to every one of us. It happens to just about everyone I know. Grocery prices are incredibly expensive, and they're going up faster than inflation, year in and year out. It's true. It just costs a lot of money.

What we would have liked to have seen in this budget are real measures to address those two top financial issues that Ontarians deal with, and we didn't see any of it. We saw no move to reduce or stabilize rent prices. We saw no move to bring in a rent freeze, to bring in stronger rent control, to cap the amount rent-controlled apartments can go up next year. We saw none of that.

We also didn't see measures to stabilize or lower grocery prices. Maybe this government would like to say, "Well, hands up. There's nothing I can do about it," but that's simply not true. It's simply not true. Other provinces have moved forward with measures to lower the cost of grocery prices, and I think a lot of Ontarians would have liked this government to do the same thing. Manitoba, for instance, has just taken the PST off a broader basket of grocery items.

You could have brought in a consumer watchdog to crack down on price gouging. I remember, during the pandemic, when the Premier got really hot and bothered by the hand wipes being really expensive at Pusateri's. He went to the media and said, "This is outrageous, and we're going to crack down on all this. No more price gouging. We're going to have a consumer price-gouging line for people to call."

Well, we did a little bit of research into that, and even though that price-gouging line has actually received tens of thousands of complaints, not a single charge has been laid—not a single charge has been laid. So it's a lot of talk, but where's the action? Where's the action?

Health care: Health care is the Ontario government's biggest expense and, I think many of us would argue, one of the top priorities. What we see in this budget is that while there has been an increase in funding of \$1.1 billion

from last year to this year for health care funding, that is not enough to meet the need when you factor in population growth, the fact that our population is aging overall and the fact that we have something called inflation.

When you look at the health care sector, what we do know—experts have been telling us this for years—is that health care inflation is higher than overall inflation. Things just cost more there. The Financial Accountability Officer tracks this fairly closely, and I'd be happy to send you the report after this conversation.

When you look at what's actually needed in order to maintain existing service levels within the health care sector, you'll see that hospitals need an extra \$2.7 billion and capital needs an extra \$1 billion, but what we got instead was just \$1.1 billion. What that means is we're getting a cut. And what that means is that the service levels that we are experiencing right now, unfortunately, will decline come 2026 and 2027. That is what this budget is telling us.

I've got a few concerns with that. My big concern is that, on all key benchmarks, Ontario lags behind other provinces when it comes to its investment in the health care sector. When it comes to hospital funding per person, we are dead last. When it comes to health care funding per person, we are second last. When it comes to hospital beds per person, we are second last. So we're already doing really badly. It would make sense for us to at least, at a minimum, move up to the provincial average so that Ontarians can get better quality health care. We didn't see that in this budget.

I think it's safe to say that in Ontario our standard is that every person should have access to a primary care provider, be it a doctor or a nurse practitioner, who they can see. People should be able to get a specialist appointment within a timely manner if they've got something concerning and they've been referred. Ontarians should be able to get a test, be it screening or more diagnostic. And hospitals should be there for us when we need it. I think that's the standard. On all accounts, we're not meeting that standard.

What we do see this government invest in, though, is for-profit care. In my riding, we are seeing an increase in the availability of for-profit care. We have a for-profit nurse clinic called Care& where it costs \$75 for a visit to go, and I've met people going door to door who have told me, "Oh, yes, I do go to Care&." I ask them why and they say it's because "I don't have a family doctor and I need to get my prescription renewed," or "I need to see someone and this option is available to me and it's fast. I don't love paying \$75 per visit, but I feel I have no choice." That difficult choice is because the Conservative government is bringing in a two-tiered health care system—there's a for-profit system and then there's the chronically underfunded public system—and it will not improve health outcomes.

In our riding, we also have a recently funded new for-profit surgery centre, also in Yorkville, that will be providing some elective surgeries, and we've also got a lot of concerns about this. The reason why we have concerns about this is because the amount of money this clinic gets

per surgery is much higher than what a hospital would get for the same surgery—this was something that was uncovered by CBC. For instance, if you want to get a minor procedure at this clinic, such as a cataract surgery, the surgery gets \$1,264 per surgery. Then compare that to a hospital and you get a lot less.

There was a quote. This is from an anonymous surgeon once these numbers were read out to this individual: "If I were running that" for-profit "centre, I would be a millionaire," said the surgeon. "There's a tonne of money to be made."

When we're talking about waste and priorities, investing in for-profit health care is a waste of money. It is a waste of money. It doesn't improve health outcomes, and it costs more.

I want to talk about education, second-biggest line item in the budget after health care. My gosh, I have two kids in the public school system—I've said this many times before—so I get to see, week in and week out, the impact of the cuts to our education system.

Recently, we held a press conference about some of the issues at a nearby middle school, and I reached out to the teachers at that middle school just to get a snapshot of what it is like to be a teacher in a middle school in the TDSB today. What I heard was pretty alarming. I heard teachers telling me that they had at the start of the year 35 kids in a class before reorganization happens. In some cases, there were not enough desks for the kids to sit in. Some were sitting on windowsills or on the floor. That's nuts. They told me about heating and cooling issues. This school, King Edward, does not have air conditioning, so come September or June it gets pretty uncomfortable in the classroom. Kids have told me that they often fall asleep, or their parent says, "You don't have to go on that day because it's too hot." And teachers tell me that learning just does not happen in that kind of environment. It's more, "Let's just keep the kids as comfortable as we can so that we can get through the day."

Teachers told me about the fact that there are no textbooks, so everything is online. They told me that the Chromebooks that students are given are often broken, and they're certainly outdated because there's not enough money to update them and repair them. I actually had that experience with my kid's Chromebook. She broke it, so we had to pay for it to be fixed, which was fair enough. That's something that we can afford. It took six months for it to be fixed. And I think about all the other parents who don't have that \$200 or so on available to get their Chromebook fixed. You've got this situation where there's not enough textbooks, kids rely on computers, but the computers are outdated, broken and there's not enough of them. How does learning happen in that kind of environment?

1350

Within the TDSB overall, we're also seeing the impact of the \$350,000-a-year supervisor making some pretty concerning cuts to education. We've seen increases in class sizes for special education, and you can imagine how those parents are going to react to that. We've also seen

the class size cap for grades 4 to 8 being lifted completely, setting the stage for ultra-large class sizes come September. We're also very concerned about the supervisor's decision to cap enrolment for Heydon Park and Eastdale schools, which tells us that this government is looking at closing these schools. And given all the legislation that you've passed over the last eight months, our fear is that this government is going to sell off these schools to the highest bidder. That is a terrible, terrible idea.

It is a terrible idea because once these schools are sold, we are never going to be able to afford to get that land back. And selling off schools is never going to address the chronic, systemic underfunding of schools. It's just never going to do it. It's a one-off final sale. You get the money, you get it once, and then that's it. So what happens in 2029 when we face these same issues again? What school are you going to sell off next? It is very concerning.

The final reason why I think this is just a stupid idea is because Toronto is a growing city. It's a growing city. We have a thousand people a day moving into Toronto and Ontario. So what happens in five years' time when we need these schools because school enrolment has increased? Where do you expect them to go? It's very short-sighted thinking. It's very short-sighted thinking.

Housing: This government has talked until they're blue in the face about their plan to fix housing in Ontario. It's been eight years now and housing has never been more expensive in Ontario. Rent is incredibly high. It's softened a little bit for new apartments, but across the board, rent just goes up and up and up—average rent—year in and year out.

Homelessness: Cities and towns across Ontario—we just did pre-budget consultations. Every stop, we had city councillors, we had librarians, we had social workers, we had teachers come in and say to us, "The homelessness crisis is affecting our town." It's just getting worse and worse. Some 85,000 people are homeless.

And then when we look at housing starts, which is basically how this government measures whether it's successful or not on housing, we see housing starts going down. This Conservative government loves to say, "Oh, it's because of macroeconomic factors and the federal government." Well, then why is it that housing starts in other provinces are going up when housing starts in Ontario are going down? They're going in the other direction.

Ms. Sandy Shaw: It makes no sense.

Ms. Jessica Bell: It makes no sense. And I hope this is a reminder to the government that maybe your plan of just giving developers whatever they want, whenever they want, is not working. It's not building the housing starts that we need and it's doing nothing to address affordable housing.

What we would have liked to have seen in the budget is a plan for government to get back into the business of building non-profit housing. It's what every single other province does except for us. It would mean that we could start building housing that's aligned with the need: supportive housing, larger rental apartments, seniors'

housing, student housing, affordable housing. That is what we need.

And what we would have also liked to have seen is a commitment to bring in stronger rent control so that we can stabilize prices for people who are really struggling to get by, who can't afford the rent, can't afford food, can't afford the bills, and they need assistance.

In my final two minutes I want to talk a little bit about the economy. Once again, the Conservatives love to present themselves as being the experts on the economy, but by all indicators right now, our economy is not doing very well.

I understand that we have a Trump tariff war; we have global economic instability. I don't think anyone here expects miracles, but we do expect more than what you're currently doing. We have over 700,000 people unemployed in the province. These are people who are actively looking for work. They don't include the people who have given up—and a lot of people have given up.

We have a youth unemployment rate of 17%. Everyone who I talk to says that what is happening in youth unemployment is what's going to happen in overall employment. It's the canary in the coal mine, which means things aren't looking good for Ontario moving forward unless we change path, we change approach.

I am very concerned about this government's decision to move forward with their protect Ontario investment fund, and I'll tell you why: because what this looks like is very big bailouts to very big businesses with no strings attached. We don't know who's getting the money. We don't know what they're getting it for, and we don't know what they need to do in order to meet the conditions. Is there a commitment that they just don't have to move down south? We don't know. Is there a commitment that they do not lay off any workers? We don't know. No one knows. It's all secret. We just don't know. We don't know if there's going to be a requirement that they are not allowed to give executives big bonuses once they get all this government money. It's happened before under this government. Look at long-term care. We don't know. There's all this secrecy.

My guess is that come 2027, the protect Ontario fund and the protect Ontario investment fund—it's going to be the new Skills Development Fund. That's what I think it's going to be. Once we follow the money, we're going to find that some of the people who got this money also happen to be big donors to the Conservative Party. That's my hunch, based on past record.

So, with all these key measurables on the issues that Ontarians really care about—health care, housing, affordability, education, jobs—this government's budget does not pass the test.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): I recognize the member for Thunder Bay–Superior North.

MPP Lise Vaugeois: With a tip of the hat to the creators of the cartoon *The Wizard of Id*, I'd like to share a story called, "The Premier Who Would Be Emperor."

"I am the lord over all I can see, but I have nowhere to indulge in a spa. Oh, but here's this company called Therme."

My silly bureaucrats have said that the finances of this company look dodgy, but no matter; I want it, and the public can pay. And have you seen my magnificent white teeth? My dentist must be given \$2 million from the Skills Development Fund. And how about \$10 million for my favourite strip club, \$9 billion to study the tunnel under the 401, a second Ferris wheel in Niagara and a new island on the waterfront in Toronto? I want them all, and the public will pay."

"But kind sir, the people are clamouring to see the records from your very special phone where you make very special deals you don't want the public to know about."

"Ah," the emperor says, "My loyal courtiers, we must then change the law. It doesn't matter that a judge ordered that I hand over these records. I'm going to get rid of the judges I don't like and appoint ones who will do what I say. I am, after all, the emperor of all I behold. And please don't talk to me about the people who can't afford to eat or keep a roof over their heads—tsk, tsk. We are working for the people who pay a thousand dollars a plate to have breakfast with one of my courtiers. We have food banks. Let them eat crumbs. And oh, my goodness, I wanted to shop at an American-owned company on Family Day and found it closed. But I am the emperor. Workers don't need a day off with their families. Let's change the law and get them back to work."

1400

"But Sire, the people can't get health care when they need it, or afford an education."

"Ah, my lords, don't worry about education. We have scapegoats everywhere. For the K-12, let's blame the elected trustees. We've taken \$6.3 billion out of the system, increased class sizes and left buildings crumbling, but with our communication experts I'm sure we'll be able to convince parents and teachers that one plus one equals five. And we've got public dollars to sell the story, so let's do it. After all, our mission is to kill the public and enrich the private, so let's get on with it. Oh yes, and let's control the whole show. After all, too much democracy is bad for us, so let's get rid of those annoying local trustees. Off with their heads!

"As for post-secondary, let's blame the feds. We underfunded post-secondary for years and years. In fact, we spend less per student than any other province. But we can blame it on the feds, so let's do it.

"While we're at it, let's limit what students can think about. After all, we need workers for the great mine in the north at the end of the great road—you know, the road that runs off Highway 11, the one locals call 'the highway of death.' This is the mine where we used pictures from Sweden and a desert in Australia to convince people that the mine is already up and running. That was so much fun. You should have seen it during the Super Bowl. What a fantastic use of public money, to sell something that doesn't yet exist—amazing.

"What if students want to study anything else? What did I call it—basket weaving? Please, we don't want too many people able to think critically about how we run this

place. Otherwise, they might notice that this emperor has no"—how does the story go?

Interjection.

MPP Lise Vaugeois: Yes. But I want to move on to another story told often in this Legislature. It's the story of how Conservative governments never raise taxes. Ah, but it is long overdue to prick a hole into this balloon and reveal the magician's trick. It's called "downloading." It's the magical way to raise taxes while pretending not to.

Let me quote from the Association of Municipalities of Ontario: "'More and more we're seeing the downloading from the province of health care, child care and many social services. These costs are rising every year, and municipalities are bearing the brunt of that,' said Kate Burns Gallagher, executive director of the Western Ontario Warden's Caucus."

"Chief amongst new municipal costs that they want help with, the growing houseless problem....

"The last time the province changed or reviewed their funding model with Ontario's 444 municipalities was in 2008....

"Continued downloading has led to \$4 billion in programs that municipalities say they're paying for, that the provincial government should be" paying for.

Now, this was in 2024, so I'm quite sure that that \$4 billion is less than it is today.

"The Association of Municipalities of Ontario, which represents all 444 municipalities in the province, said Ontario has the second highest property taxes in Canada, but the lowest provincial spending per capita in the country."

I think we need to listen to the sound of that balloon as it deflates.

Health care: We are not getting staffing ratios, something that nurses have told us we need in order to have safe working conditions for nurses, safe conditions for patients and the level of care that people need. Hospitals have deficits in the millions and millions and millions of dollars. Hospitals are having to lay off front-line staff.

Communities in the north have no way of providing medical transportation because, again, it's a cost that's been downloaded to municipalities that don't have the money to do it, so people simply are really struggling to get to their appointments. After 10 years without any increase, we've got family health teams, community health teams. What did they get? A 2.7% increase—that's after 10 years with no increases. It's not even the inflation of today.

But the one thing I want to really point out to my constituents in northwestern Ontario is the Northern Health Travel Grant. The amount for mileage has not been increased in 19 years; they get 41 cents a kilometre. Can anybody here tell me what we get as MPPs per kilometre?

Interjections.

MPP Lise Vaugeois: Sixty-one—60, 61 cents. Clearly, there's no such thing as health equity for people living in the north who have to travel to their appointments.

Now, I want to look at OW and ODSP rates. As of July 2025, Ontario Works rates have been frozen for the

seventh year with no adjustment for inflation. As household costs continue to rise, this marks yet another year where the real value of income provided to social assistance recipients is reduced, effectively.

Ontario Disability Support Program recipients will see a 2.8% increase in core rates. That's sort of inflationary-adjusted. It's the lowest annual increase since—well, anyway, it doesn't matter because what it's increased to is so far below the cost of housing, the cost of food, it really doesn't matter. And the increase doesn't apply to the Special Diet Allowance; that's remained stagnant for years, while food costs soar.

As of July 2025, more than 30,000 people on Ontario Works and ODSP were experiencing homelessness; that is an increase of 72% since June 2019. We had a member on the other side criticizing a bill that would have put some controls around above-guideline rent increases, and what she said at the time was that there could be unintended consequences. My question is, are these unintended or intended consequences?

OW rates have been frozen at \$733 a month for seven years. The average cost of rent for a single room—we're not talking about an apartment; a single room—\$766 a month, so it's more than they're getting. People are going hungry and experiencing homelessness does nothing to prepare anyone for employment or support recovery from a serious accident or any form of chronic disability.

Poverty is rising across most demographic groups and regions in Ontario. Most people are falling behind, unable to afford basic necessities, including housing. Drawing on records obtained from—guess where?—a freedom-of-information request, this analysis uses the province's own social assistance data to show that Ontario's income security policies are driving the surge in homelessness.

People might not know that part of that social assistance is dedicated to housing, but if you're homeless, you're not going to get that money, okay? Now, you're getting maybe \$300 in support, and because you're living on the street, you have no access to that other money that might let you get into a room. We also know that the way ODSP is set up penalizes family formation. If you move in with someone, your benefits are cut, and you are now dependent on the other person for your survival. That is not right.

Finally, loopholes in Ontario's rent regulations have significantly exacerbated this situation. For one, the Ford government's decision to exempt rentals first occupied after November 2018 from rent control leaves rent for new builds to increase at rates that are solely at the discretion of the landlord. Vacancy decontrol also drives rent increases by allowing landlords to increase rents without any limits when a tenancy ends and a new one begins.

The Ontario government's recently passed Fighting Delays, Building Faster Act—that was Bill 60—further erodes the safeguards that protect tenants from unfair evictions and paves the way for landlords to use these loopholes to increase the rent. It brings me back to those thousand-dollar-a-plate breakfasts and who this government believes it serves and who it is quite happy to

abandon. Again, are these unintended or intended consequences?

Now, I'd like to look at forestry. There's nothing new in the budget, certainly nothing for Kapuskasing, but I'd like to talk about Terrace Bay. We know that on June 24, the USW brought a proposal and met with members of the government and many members of staff. This proposal came from a reputable business consortium, but the government has said, "We have not received any viable proposals." In fact, they haven't had the courtesy to even send a reply to the company that made the proposition.

1410

What is interesting about this is that the very same company with the very same proposal has now taken over a defunct mill in Quebec. So the project is completely viable—why it can't be done in Ontario is the question that the people of Terrace Bay would like to know. And, of course, what we do know is that if nothing happens with that mill, they are left with an incredible environmental liability and they are losing their tax base, which puts them in a very, very difficult situation.

I would like to talk a little bit about the amalgamation of conservation authorities—36 into nine. Now, the people of Thunder Bay and people in the Huron conservation area fought like heck to maintain the independence of their conservation authorities, and, frankly, I think we can thank one of the members from the other side for the fact that was successful, because she spoke up on behalf of her constituents and on behalf of science, noting the absurdity of combining Lake Superior and that vast area with Lake Huron and trying to manage the whole thing from down south. But the rest of the communities are not happy about seeing what's happening and, frankly, I think what this is really about, again, is releasing prime parkland to developers and making it easier.

I'd like to read from Caldwell First Nation on the proposed amalgamation of conservation authorities:

"Caldwell First Nation views the province's proposed amalgamation ... as problematic, unnecessary, and harmful to effective conservation and reconciliation, and it has been contemplated without meaningful consultation with us.

"From Caldwell First Nation's perspective, conservation works best when it is local, relationship-based, and grounded in deep knowledge of the land and water. Amalgamating conservation authorities into massive regional bodies risks losing exactly what makes conservation effective. Conservation is inherently place-based, and our lands and waters are not interchangeable....

"A single board will inevitably weaken local voices, including Indigenous ones. Decisions affecting our lands, waters and burial sites should not be made hours away by individuals unfamiliar with our territory."

Their concern is not about resisting efficiency; it is about preserving representation, accountability and informed decision-making. You do not protect watersheds by moving decision-makers further away from them, so they have requested that the province pause this process.

“Decisions affecting lands and waters within our traditional territory must involve us as partners, not as afterthoughts.”

And this is signed by Ogimaakwe Nikki van Oirschot. “Ogimaa” is “chief,” “kwe” means “woman” and Nikki van Oirschot is her name. It’s also signed by councillors from the region.

I have a few minutes left, so I would actually like to talk about tourism and cultural industries.

The Ontario Arts Council: There’s a lot of stuff in the budget about how important tourism is—well, in Niagara Falls, anyway; probably not anywhere else—and I note that the Ontario Arts Council funding was cut 7% in 2019, as was the entire Indigenous Culture Fund.

That also reminds me of how, when this government first came into office in 2018, that they cancelled the Indigenous education program. At the time, there was a group of First Nations elementary education experts—in fact, they already had their plane tickets and were on their way to the airport when they heard the program was cancelled—pretty shocking; not even a pretense of reconciliation. And we can debate how real the whole concept is, but certainly there was not even a pretense there.

So the base funding was removed, that culture fund was cut—I’m missing something; there was something else. Oh, right—they significantly cut the Ontario Music Fund.

What this government doesn’t realize is that the Ontario Arts Council is what makes it possible to have the festivals and arts events across this province, which are what drive tourism. You go to these places because you know that you can see something special, you can experience something special. That’s what the arts council funds. And it has been cut even further. It’s now down to \$60 million. It was at \$69.9 million in 2018. It’s now down to \$60 million. So you can imagine, with the loss of inflationary increases, that’s a very, very significant cut to the work that the Ontario Arts Council is able to do.

Again, what people need to recognize is that the artists are contributing \$2.7 billion to the GDP, and the arts council is supporting 28,600 jobs—and that was in 2022; actually, I warrant it’s less now because there’s less money in circulation for artists.

I could certainly go on and offer many more critiques of holes in the budget, but I’m going to take a moment to celebrate something. The Schreiber Discovery Centre and Railway Museum received one of the Queen’s Park Picks awards. Those picks are to recognize architecture that has been built in the public interest. The Schreiber Discovery Centre and Railway Museum is a fantastic place. It’s right on the highway. You can get off the highway safely there, I must say; it’s important to know. It’s a beautiful building that is built onto a railcar. It has all been put together by local people—actually, volunteers. It’s an amazing museum. It has all kinds of interactive things for kids, for adults.

I want to thank the Queen’s Park architectural group for having chosen Schreiber, and I really want to recognize the incredible work that the community of Schreiber did to create that museum.

I will stop there. Thank you very much for the opportunity to speak.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Further debate?

Ms. Stephanie Bowman: It’s a pleasure to rise today to speak to the budget motion. I will be sharing my time with the member from Ottawa South.

Speaker, before I get into the debate, I want to mention that today is World Autism Awareness Day. I had the opportunity to visit TACT, the Autism Centre of Toronto, in my riding of Don Valley West this morning. They are such incredible leaders in this space and in this field—Dr. Carly Eby and her team. They’re leaders in educating young children with autism, and their philosophy is focused on evidence-based treatment in a positive learning environment. I’ve been there several times before, and the families literally come to tears when they talk about the difference that this organization has made for their children.

Today, I had the chance to speak to a family whose son was just recently diagnosed. They had to pay privately for the assessment. Luckily, they had those resources. They are now paying \$75,000 a year for services supporting their child’s development, because the wait-list is five years long. Their son would be five years old before he got an assessment, if they had to wait for that—well, they do have to wait for that to get the money. But they are now paying out of their pocket \$75,000 a year so that their son can get the treatment that he needs. It was very interesting; this young boy’s mom talked about how, fortunately, they have the resources, and while the government has put more money to the program, she is saying it doesn’t seem to be about the money. The system seems to be broken. “Why do we have to wait five years to have a phone call with somebody—basically, a screener—who will tell us whether or not our child has high, medium or low needs? And that will determine the funding that our child would be eligible for.” They’re now in the queue, I guess. They will wait five years before they will get a penny from this government to help their child.

1420

I just want to again thank TACT for the invitation to be there this morning to acknowledge their amazing work. They’ve just become a charity within the last year, so they are looking to find other sources of revenue so that other children beyond those who can just afford it are able to go. We want to celebrate the strength and resilience of children with autism and their families and recognize that there’s much more work to do to make sure that we have an inclusive and supportive environment that lets all of these children reach their full potential.

Speaker, back to the budget: I’m sorry to say that this budget is a real disappointment to the millions of Ontarians who are feeling the pain of the affordability crisis. There are no new measures to help families, to help the 700,000 people who are out of work, and it gives no hope to the 200,000 young people who are out of work and can’t find a job for all of their trying.

It is another budget of broken promises:

—no middle-income tax cut, like the Conservatives promised in 2018;

—no plan to deliver the 1.5 million homes that they promised—they're not even talking about that number anymore; and

—no measures to make life more affordable.

This is a budget that only pretends to protect Ontario.

Speaker, following my mom's advice to try to say something nice—when you have to give some criticism, always try to say something nice—I do want to acknowledge that the government has taken a step in the right direction regarding small businesses, who have been pleading with them for a tax cut.

I first brought forward a bill calling for a small business tax cut back in 2024. That bill would have cut the small business tax rate in half—the government's budget cuts it by 30%; again, a step in the right direction—and it would have applied to the first \$600,000 of income. The government didn't raise the threshold. That would have been a very bold measure designed to provide relief to small businesses, but sadly, the government voted against that bill, Speaker. They voted against the bill once and then they voted against the motion once as well.

If the government had actually supported the bill then, or the motion, when they first had the chance, those same small businesses would actually have up to \$35,000 more in their pockets today than under this current proposal. Think about what that means. That's money that could have gone towards them hiring another employee, maybe a young person. They could have invested in new equipment to help them become more productive and efficient. They could have maybe grown their operations instead of simply trying to just stay afloat during these tough economic times.

But I am glad that the tired, out-of-touch Ford Conservative government has finally started to listen. So while this is a smaller reduction than I, as well as the Canadian Federation of Independent Business and many small business owners, have called for, it is, as I say, a step in the right direction.

But it was a missed opportunity, Speaker. While they could have done that, instead, the Premier and his cabinet have been deploying the province's fiscal firepower elsewhere on pet projects. We know about the science centre. We know about the spa at Ontario Place.

Just last night, I was in my riding with city councillors and the MPP from Don Valley East to talk about the science centre. That building was built to last 250 years, and the government first said, "Oh, we have to close it because it would be cheaper to build a new one." Well, the Auditor General told them that was not the case. She refuted that with facts. Then they said, "Oh, the roof is going to collapse." Well, we had record snowfalls this year, we've had record rainfall, and the roof is still holding up.

Speaker, our community does want to make sure that that site is geared to science education, and our community is fighting to think about ideas and ways that we can do that. Instead of this government doing things like building

a tunnel under the 401 or a new convention centre in Toronto, or a casino and Ferris wheel in Niagara Falls, there are real needs here in Ontario, and that's what the government should be focused on.

Back to small businesses: We know that small businesses are such an important part of our economy. They used to be 66% of private sector jobs. It's down to 60%, Speaker, so they clearly do need some support and help. We want them to thrive. They create jobs. They build up our communities. They often provide a first job for a young person. So we do want them to be strong and healthy so that they can continue to be an important part of our economy.

You know, Speaker, a month or so ago, when we were off on that very long extended break—102 days when we weren't here, despite these turbulent times—I had the chance to visit Reid's Distillery, a local business here in Toronto. They distill gin in small batches, and they've won some awards. It's run by two brothers, and they're very proud of their business.

We were talking about, "What can governments do to help small businesses like you?" Again, they barely survived through COVID, Speaker. It was a lot of goodwill from their community that got them through. We talked about the youth career fund that that we proposed. That would have, again, helped young people get their first job and given small businesses some financial support. They thought that was amazing because they actually do hire many young people. Even though they're a small operation, many of their workforce are young people from our community who are—again, they said, "Jeez, we've got people with master's degrees and they would just be happy to have a job cleaning the floors." That's kind of what it's come to, Speaker.

Those are the kind of investments that would really have made a difference. That could have been in this budget, Speaker, instead of continuing to talk about the tunnel under the 401 and expanding an airport that they don't even have control over. But again, we know that the Premier is obsessed with being not just the Premier of Ontario but the mayor or Premier of Toronto, and so he's going to spend taxpayer money on that, Speaker.

I want to just kind of step back for a moment and talk a little bit about the overall frame for this budget, Speaker. This government's economic policies have not been spurring GDP growth in revenues. And that means that they have had less opportunity to spend on the things we need. So again, these misplaced priorities really, really hurt us. Those irresponsible spending decisions have resulted in massive debt to fuel that spending—half a trillion dollars, Speaker. I'm not sure if the members opposite will stand up and applaud the finance minister when they reach that number. This is the party, the government, that said reducing the debt was a moral imperative. Well, they've clearly lost their moral compass, Speaker.

About 40% of the debt that they have added to the backs of the people of Ontario is from operating deficits because they can't balance the books. They have yet to table a

balanced budget—absolutely not a fiscally conservative nor a fiscally responsible government, Speaker.

So now they've got all this debt, approaching half a trillion dollars. That means we have rising interest costs. And those rising interest costs, now the fourth biggest item that we spend money on, have put pressure on the government to cut services or spending on the things we actually need: you know, health care, education, the roads in our province, community safety—more on that later too, Speaker. So they're under this pressure to cut spending, therefore they cut services, and that, of course, is making life worse for everyone here in Ontario.

And Speaker, that will only get worse because demographics are working against us. We are getting older. Our population is aging, and, of course, we know that as we age, we need even more health care. So that will put more pressure on the government.

Back in 2018, when this government released its first fall economic statement, it talked about adopting a new approach for managing the province's finances, an approach that would serve "three important objectives: restore fiscal balance, reduce the debt burden and strengthen accountability and transparency." Those are the government's own words, Speaker.

Well, eight years later, this government's track record confirms that none of those objectives are being met. The finance minister likes to talk about prudent fiscal management, but in reality, there's no evidence of that in his budget plan or, in fact, in any of the previous seven budgets of this government.

The budget acknowledges a hard truth that many of us have seen coming for some time now: This government has painted itself into a corner. How did they get here, Speaker? Why is this budget so painful for the people of Ontario? Because a fiscal policy reset is becoming more urgent.

1430

In the last year, yes, we have faced tariffs. Now we have a crisis in the Middle East and further economic uncertainty. But that cannot be the excuse here because long before that, this government had worsening employment. They are spending their money on pet projects, including the spa at Ontario Place with a foreign-owned company—no "Buy Ontario" there—and so these bad decisions are testing the boundaries of the fiscal situation. They're making life harder for people here in Ontario.

So what options do you have when you're in this situation and the pace of borrowing is no longer sustainable? Well, you can choose to do nothing and allow debt to grow, pay high interest costs, but of course that means you have less money to spend on services, as I said. And the easy way out is to hope. It seems like it's a hope and a prayer this government has for a growing economy because their measures aren't working, Speaker. A growing economy would lift GDP and lift tax revenues, and that would allow you to borrow less.

But that gets more complicated when economic headwinds are in the mix, as they are now. That usually involves spending cuts or tax increases. But does any of

this sound familiar? Probably not, because the Minister of Finance has not been upfront about the state, this reality of the province's financial position when he presented his budget—no mention of service cuts, and yet that's the reality that's buried in the details here, Speaker.

So yes, they hope for a growing economy. But under this Premier, per capita GDP growth—which is a widely accepted measure for economic growth—is the second-worst of the last 40 years. Let me say it again: second-worst of the last 40 years. You have to go back to the 1990s and the NDP government to find a worse per capita GDP growth, Speaker. He's got 0.2% per capita GDP growth. That lags behind—listen closely here—three Liberal Premiers: David Peterson, 1.4%; Dalton McGuinty, 0.4%; Kathleen Wynne, 1.4%. All three Liberal Premiers and the economy grew faster than under this government—this failed, desperate, disappointing Ford Conservative government.

But as I say, it happened because of their choices: their choices on where to spend, what to prioritize and what to neglect. They haven't spent enough money or invested in the things that would grow our economy, drive innovation—tax revenues would follow. So now they are boxed in, because while we will apparently have a spa at Ontario Place, I don't think it's going to last 250 years like the Ontario Science Centre.

But let's ask what that \$2 billion could have done. What kind of opportunity and economic growth could that have driven if we had, for example, fixed roads and bridges in every riding of this province? That would have gone a long way to addressing the repair backlog that we hear about every year since I have been elected at AMO, ROMA. We hear especially from small-town mayors and councillors that their roads, their bridges are literally crumbling. That's not just in the last year, Speaker. Eight years this government has had to fix those problems, and the billions that they are spending on things like a spa could help fix those roads, bridges and water systems that we all rely on.

And Speaker, we know that this deal at Therme is a sweetheart deal. The more details keep coming out about it, it just keeps getting worse and worse, just like life here in Ontario under this government. In an email by a senior civil servant, that civil servant told the government that Therme looked like they were not the kind of company we should be investing in so heavily here in Ontario, writing, "I also think the big take-away from me is to try to dig a bit deeper to confirm the financial performance of their existing spas, as right now I don't really have a sense of their true financial performance."

But, of course, what did the government do when this senior, experienced staffer told them this? They didn't dig any deeper. They went right ahead and signed a 95-year lease with this company, giving away some of the best real estate in Toronto, in Ontario, in Canada, to a foreign-owned spa. There is more to come on this. This story is certainly not done.

So we come back to the overall fiscal situation. Because they haven't been able to grow revenues, they now have to borrow money. As I mentioned, almost 40% of their

borrowing is because of operating deficits. We'll be at half a trillion dollars of debt. Again, I'm looking forward to hearing whether or not the members opposite will stand up and applaud. Will they applaud their finance minister for bringing the province to this state, the party who said reducing the debt was a moral imperative?

Speaker, never has a government spent so much to deliver so little. They might be spending record amounts, but they're spending it in all the wrong ways, and the people of Ontario are paying the price.

We know, and the data shows, that the government's policies are not creating enough investment; they're not creating enough jobs or GDP growth. Those are the missing ingredients that would help to grow our economy. Those would be things that would be what you might expect from a Conservative government. But instead, every file is on fire. I've been talking about that since the 2024 budget.

Two million people in this province don't have a family doctor—and of course there's the whole nurse practitioner thing that I won't get into—not because they don't know about the need, but because the planning, the execution of their plan, just isn't there.

Housing targets, as I said, are being missed—not just by a small margin; they're being missed so badly, they're not even talking about it anymore—pushing the dream of home ownership further out of reach for young people.

The government is also now, again, putting the debt burden on the backs of students, saying, "Guess what? We can't afford to borrow the money"—because they've spent so much, wasted so much—"so now we'll make you borrow that money." OSAP grants are down and debt for students is up.

In the coming year alone, we'll have 18 different ministries that will see reductions in their total budgets, and those cuts will be felt. We're already seeing it. I talked last year about classrooms in my riding. I was visiting schools and the principal or vice-principal—soon to be fewer of those too—would say, "Right now, we have two special ed teachers, but in the fall"—so that would be this past September—"we'll have one and a half." Another school: "Yes, we have one and a half special ed teachers. In the fall, we'll have one."

Speaker, this is a time when we know special education needs are growing. We know kids are dealing with mental health crises and situations. We know that we need more adults in the classroom.

But maybe the most telling indicator of all of how sustainable this government's plan has become is that, over the next three years, the amount of money we'll spend servicing the debt will grow four times faster than increases to program spending. So it's kind of hard to boast about your spending and your delivery of programs when you can't actually afford to raise the spending on them very much, despite the growing needs, because you're spending four times more on interest because of the half-a-trillion-dollar debt.

That means less and less of your tax dollars—their tax dollars, my tax dollars, all of our constituents' tax

dollars—will go towards improving schools, supporting hospitals, fixing roads, addressing climate change. Less money will go towards building a stronger, more resilient province, and more money will go towards paying off the costs of their bad decisions. That's the corner they've backed themselves into, and Ontarians will continue to pay the price.

The minister likes to talk a lot about something that's really old news now—yes, the government got some upgrades. You know what he doesn't talk about with upgrades from rating agencies? I kind of find it funny; he's only telling half the story, Speaker. That was in 2024—kind of old news. In 2025, this government did get a downgrade. It got a downgrade in their outlook for the economy. Why? Because of all the things I've just said: debt, borrowing costs going up, 700,000 people out of work, very small—if any—GDP growth to pay for all the things we need.

1440

The Conservative promise to deliver a reduced debt burden? It's just another broken promise. There's just no hope. The FAO has said it won't even begin until probably the end of this decade, in 2030.

We know that households are feeling the pain. We know they are feeling the price of service cuts when they go to their local ER. If they're lucky, the ER is open. We know in rural communities across this province they probably have to phone ahead to see if their ER is open. But when it is open they get there and they are waiting on stretchers in the hallways. It's not better under this government. The numbers are worse. They're so much worse that they're actually just going to stop talking about it. They're going to stop telling us.

Again, there is no more transparency from this government. There is so much less transparency it's kind of comical. FOI: The government isn't just talking about changing it going forward to fix something that they say is broken; they're actually going back years. What are they trying to hide? What is the Premier trying to hide? What is the cabinet trying to hide? What are the senior staff trying to hide? There's something.

Certainly, this side of the House and, I'm sure, the media will all continue to put pressure on this government to reverse these changes because it is just wrong. It's bad for our democracy. We all know that. Again, they're fooling themselves, but they're not fooling the people of Ontario. We know these FOI changes are bad. We know they are being done to protect a small group of people—and those people are sitting in this room—and their staff who support them, and that's just wrong.

We talked about revenues not growing. We talked about what that means for the debt. We talked about what that means for service cuts. But let's just dig in a little more on that in terms of the health sector. We know that in health, as we age, according to the FAO, the health sector spending would need to grow by an average annual rate of about 4% in the next three years just to maintain the current poor service levels that we have—not to improve them, just to kind of keep up. So even by that standard this

year's increase is already falling short. So we know that things will only get worse for people here in Ontario in health care.

We do know that the government likes to spend more money—again, we're not getting our money's worth—but more money on advertising. The government is really good at spin. They're very talented at it. This budget boasts the largest amount of spending to date by any Ontario government, on spending. We're talking about record investments. Well, this is one. Every single year it gets bigger: bigger numbers, bigger headlines, bigger bragging.

We know it's really all about protecting themselves. They're just pretending to protect Ontario—because we talk to our constituents every day about what they're feeling. We know that they're worried about the future. They're worried about if they'll be able to keep the roof over their heads, if their kids will be able to afford a home. Yet this government spends \$111 million on advertising, not on front-line services. That could have been spent on hiring doctors and nurses; it could have built more affordable housing, helped people who are living on the streets. But instead they spend it on ads, patting themselves on the back for all the wrong things. The economy is not growing, as I've described here.

If the economy was doing so well and things were so great, I don't actually think they'd need to spend all that money because it would be apparent to people. But instead, they are trying to brainwash us with all these ads. You see them everywhere: again, online, in papers, on TV, on radio. They're literally everywhere. If you have to spend that much money trying to tell people that you're doing a good job, maybe the reality is you're not doing a good job.

Speaker, I've talked about the youth career fund, young people who are struggling to find a job. Let's talk about another one of the big broken promises: 300,000 manufacturing jobs. They were boasting about that until recently, Speaker. Of course, they've stopped because the reality is they've actually lost manufacturing jobs. We're down 9,000 manufacturing jobs from when this government took office in 2018. I'm sure it's very hard for them to take. It's a hard pill to swallow. I hope for all of the workers' sake that we do bring jobs back here to Ontario, but certainly this government has shown no success in being able to do that.

Speaker, we've talked about young people; we've talked about the fundamental promise that has really been broken. Families used to know that if your kids went to school, got a good education, they could get a good-paying job and they wouldn't be living in your basement when they were 21, 22, 23, 24—whatever it is. I'm not criticizing those young people; they are trying hard. They are getting more and more educated and they're having a hard time finding jobs, and that's because this government is out of touch. Not everybody, like the Premier and the Premier's children, were born with silver spoons in their mouths.

We want to create opportunities for everybody. We want everyone to have equal opportunity to have financial success and fulfillment in their lives and their careers, and that's why we talked about the youth career fund. We know that the need is there. We know that that would actually benefit small businesses, it would benefit our young people and it's a solution that we're hoping that this government would consider.

SDF money: We've talked about the money wasted. It's funny; "Skills Development Fund," that phrase—nowhere in the budget this year. It's not there. They talk about "skills development program," I think—they're rebranding—and that's because job growth is actually down. Everything that should be up in a budget is actually down, Speaker. GDP growth—down. Job creation—down. Housing starts—down. All down from their last budget—16,000 fewer jobs that we will have in this province.

The SDF money, if they'd spent it with people like colleges who've been begging for money, who know how to train people, maybe we actually would be having 16,000 more jobs, Speaker. Those are the kinds of investments that would pay off.

We know the Auditor General took a look at this program and found that \$742 million from the Skills Development Fund was directed to projects that the government's own system for scoring said were medium, low or poor. It's just not a good use of taxpayer money.

It's funny; in the budget speech, the finance minister said that—again, trying to make it sound better than it is—Ontario is one of the few reporting provinces with a path to balance. Speaker, he's changed the path to balance six times. It's kind of not credible anymore when the finance minister stands up and says, "Oh yes, don't worry, we're going to balance the books," and then he just keeps pushing the date out.

As recently as November, just three or four months ago, the finance minister said, "Yes, we'll balance the books by 2028—no problem." Speaker, it's just myth. It's just not the reality, and this government is inept and ineffective at balancing the books and reducing the debt.

The other thing I just want to talk about in my remaining minutes is, again, the crisis in the Middle East. The conflict in the Persian Gulf is creating complications and an uncertain path for all of us. We want a path to peace, of course, and certainly people with family members in the region are very, very worried about them and what's going on there.

Aside from the human consequences, of course, there are severe economic consequences that could come from this. Shipping traffic in the Strait of Hormuz has slowed to a trickle, dropping by 70%, according to experts. And if that persists, which we don't know, it will have far-reaching repercussions, not only for global energy prices but transportation costs. It will limit supplies of other important commodities like fertilizers used in farming, and we know farmers are hurting. This budget would have been another great idea for this government to accelerate the funding for the Risk Management Program and help farmers who are feeling the pain of this right now.

1450

It will affect the price of chemicals, plastics, other industrial materials used in the production of plastics, electronics and other consumer goods.

We are all feeling the higher gas prices we're paying as a result of the 60% spike in oil prices. In a recent interview, the former chief economist for the province noted that each \$10 increase in the price of a barrel of oil, if sustained, could reduce Ontario's GDP growth by up to one quarter of a percentage point. In addition to the slow economic growth I talked about earlier, this crisis and the increase in oil prices will make it even harder. That lower GDP growth will reduce budgetary revenues, tax revenues, and that will make it harder for the government to maintain program spending. The economic assumptions underlined in the government's budget plan see oil prices averaging about \$65 per barrel between now and 2029; that's \$45 below the current price of \$110.

So I recognize the budget would have been done—sealed, done and dusted, as they say—before this was going on, but I think what it does lead us to ask ourselves is whether or not the amounts that the government has set aside, that they've been to afford to set aside in the contingency fund and other measures, will be enough to cushion our economy from a very severe economic shock if this crisis is sustained and oil prices remain elevated.

We know the government reduced the amount of financial cushion to about \$3 billion for this fiscal year. There's about \$1.5 billion in the contingency fund. And that's because they've got limited room because of all their irresponsible spending. I know that they will have pressures as they're negotiating union things, including with the LCBO, which I haven't even talked about yet. There will be significant budgetary pressures if the price of oil remains high.

I can't help but think that if the Conservatives had not wasted so much taxpayer money on their favourite gimmicks and pet projects, they would actually have more financial flexibility to respond to the uncertainties confronting us.

I will just close by saying that, again, this is a budget that promises to protect Ontario. We are at risk, given the further uncertainties facing the world, and this government, for the last eight years, could have been doing so much more to deliver for the people of Ontario: middle-income tax cuts, youth career fund, investments in our health care system—in the public system instead of the private system.

I'm sad to say that this budget means that people in Ontario will not be getting their money's worth. Life will continue to remain harder here in Ontario.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): I recognize the member for Ottawa South.

Mr. John Fraser: I love Thursday afternoons because I feel like I'm in a big empty church and I just hear the echo of my own voice.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): I hear you.

Mr. John Fraser: You hear me? That's so good.

I love my colleague from Don Valley West's analogy about changing the path to balance. I thought, actually, the finance minister has been wandering along the path to balance, not sure what direction he should go in.

It's getting worse—it's not getting better. After eight long years and eight budgets, families aren't any further ahead. Life is harder. It's more difficult, more expensive. The world is a scary place.

So you would think that in this budget, this year, at this time, with the pressures that families are facing—the rising price of groceries, skyrocketing rents, gas, kids' clothing, all those things—that there would be something for them. They're not asking for a lot. They're just asking that they would get a bit of help.

The sad reality is that there's nothing in this budget that's going to help families with their budgets. There's no HST relief on home heating and electricity, just to take a bit of the edge off—nothing. There's no program to help young people get a job—one that we put forward; it's not there. As a matter of fact, I think there's a cut in the—if you'd just give me one sec—Ministry of Economic Development, Job Creation and Trade is being cut by \$40 million. Okay. We have an unemployment crisis: 700,000 people out of work, 200,000 young people can't get a job, and we're cutting the ministry that's supposed to be responsible for that?

This government is tired, out of touch, out of ideas. At a time when life is hard for families, this government is making it harder for them by not recognizing them in this budget, by not putting anything in this budget to help them with their budgets.

Another way they're making it harder is the changes they've made to the Ontario Student Assistance Program. What they said was, "Families, we're going to make you and your kids go deeper into debt. It's going to be harder for you to get post-secondary education. It's going to be harder for you to get a degree. It's going to be harder for you to get a trade." That's what they've said at a time when we've got a jobs crisis and we have to be competitive in a global economy.

So in actual fact, they're not only hurting—

Interruption.

Mr. John Fraser: Sorry. I apologize for the phone buzz; I thought I put it down there far enough.

They're hurting families. They're hurting our economy. The most valuable thing in the global economy: What is it? Highly trained, highly skilled, healthy people, right? That's how we're competitive. OSAP isn't just about students and their families; it's about our collective future. And the government just turned it on its head and said to families, "It's on you. Don't look for us. You're not getting our help. You're going to have to go further into debt."

As a parent—my kids are older now. I know the worry about my kids being in debt. And there are so many students who are in lifelong debt and are looking at lifelong debt now or at least 10 years. It doesn't offer people very much hope when what they're looking for is hope.

Now, my colleague from Don Valley West mentioned jobs. We hear the Minister of Economic Development, Job Creation and Trade say, “We created 300,000 jobs.” It’s like a myna bird; we keep hearing it again and again and again. What he forgets to say is, “We lost 309,000. We’re down 9,000 from 2018.” You’ve all got to remember that. Whenever he says that, remind him that he’s lost 309,000 jobs in Ontario, manufacturing jobs—so, eight years later, less jobs.

There is record job creation, though. Do you know where the record job creation is? Does anybody know? Somebody—

Interjection: The Premier’s office.

Mr. John Fraser: Yes, the Premier’s office.

The Premier’s office has gone from \$2-million salaries in 2018 to \$8 million. That’s almost four times. That is record job creation. I’m not sure that if you are in Amherstburg and you’ve lost your job with the Crown Royal plant that you appreciate that job creation.

The Premier is all talk about the gravy train, right? You used to hear him rail about the gravy train: “Gravy train, gravy train”—he just kept repeating it again and again and again. And I guess what we didn’t actually fully understand is, when he said, “Stop the gravy train,” he meant, “Stop the gravy train so me and my friends can get on.” Right? That’s what’s happening.

Now, if you need further proof: the growth in executive offices in the Ford government. That’s ministers’ offices, deputies’ offices—the executive offices in the government—the people right up there, the people making hundreds and hundreds of thousands of dollars a year. Guess what? Can anybody guess what it was in 2018? You’re right: \$34 million. Do you know what it is right now? Eighty-two million dollars. That’s 243%.

Now, if you’re out of a job anywhere in this province or you’re about to lose your job or you can’t afford your rent or you can’t pay groceries—you look at that, what do you think? It shows a government that’s out of touch, that’s tired, that’s out of ideas. And is it helping the people who need the help most? Is it helping families? There’s nothing in this budget that will help families with their budgets.

1500

When I asked that question earlier this week, the answer that I got from the minister was, “We’ve fixed ticket resales.” So I said, “What are you doing for families?” He said, “We fixed ticket resale.” Nobody can scalp anymore, right? No one can charge a bunch of money on a ticket. The problem is, the message was, “We’re helping families by fixing the thing that we broke.” Because you broke it in 2018. You turned it into the Wild West, and now you come riding in on the white horse and you’re saying, “Hey, guess what we’re doing for you?”

Well, while this government thinks people are focused on the nice-to-haves, they’re actually focused on the need-to-haves: putting food on the table, paying their rent, clothing their kids, making sure you can put gas in the car. When the government says their response for what they’ve done for families in Ontario in the budget is they fixed

ticket resales, that just shows me: out of gas, out of touch, out of ideas, tired, worn out, adrift, lost. You lost the plot.

Families are hurting right now. Life’s hard; we all know that. All they’re looking for is a bit of help. So it’s not only that you’re not giving help; you’re making it harder, because you’re forcing more debt on people because of OSAP.

Two million Ontarians in this province don’t have a family doctor or nurse practitioner, and we all know that what has happened is that people have to use their credit card instead of their OHIP card to get the services that they need. And it makes for hard choices, especially if you can’t afford groceries, especially if you’re trying to buy clothes for the kids. The irony is, they’ve already paid for it, so they have to pay twice.

The minister could have done this in the budget. We’ve been calling on the Minister of Health to make sure that nurse practitioners could be brought under OHIP—reasonable thing to do. The minister said, two years ago, “It’s the federal government. I can’t do anything. My hands are tied.” Well, we put forward a bill that says, “Your hands aren’t tied. You can make funding decisions.” They said no.

So then the federal government said, 15 months ago, “Yes, it is under the Canada Health Act, and you have to fund it.” And do you know what the minister’s answer is this week? It’s not in your budget, but the minister’s answer is, “We’ll do it in a year.” It’s not a priority. All while families are hurting. You’re making it harder for them. The Ford government is making it harder for families in this province.

Families count on their schools, right? They count on having great schools. They don’t want to have to worry about that. They want their kids to have opportunity. But what we find in Ontario right now is that schools aren’t safe places to learn or to work, because class sizes are too big; they’ve gone up. Special education has been starved. Boards look for about \$800 million inside other budgets to pay for what’s not meeting the need right now. The government is not sending enough money.

And then we have a mental health crisis in our schools that’s not being addressed. I told the story last week and again this morning about Marigold. Marigold is a six-year-old child who lives in my riding, a six-year-old girl, and she has an exceptionality. She needs help. She came in with an assessment that was not paid for by the province. It was paid for by her family. Both her parents work full-time; they paid for it. She has waited two years and is still getting nothing. Two years in a six-year-old’s development is a long, long, long time. She’s lucky; she has an aunt. The aunt is paying for her therapy, which she has to do off-site because the person can’t come in, because the school has given them nothing.

Both her parents work and they can’t take time off work, so guess what? Marigold’s aunt, who also works in the school, takes her to appointments once or twice a week. Now, she’s lucky she has got an aunt that will do that for her. There are thousands and thousands and thousands of other Marigolds across Ontario, and they’re

not just bums in seats or heads to be counted. They're kids. They're kids who need certain things to help their development so they can achieve their full potential, and the government isn't focused on that. They're forcing boards to find \$800 million that the government doesn't give them in other envelopes, in other places. It's not right for those kids.

But when you starve special education, when you don't give enough, when a child in a classroom isn't getting what they need—and that classroom is too big—it affects everybody. It affects everybody in that classroom—every child, every adult. That's not helping families; that's making life harder for them. It's already expensive. There's already a lot coming at people. They need to count on their schools, and it's not happening.

In nine boards across this province, the minister has appointed a bobblehead—a supervisor—someone to say yes, someone to do the minister's bidding. The problem is, for people like Marigold, if a parent wants to advocate, there's no one to talk to, right? That's why we said today, who can they call? Well, they'd better call Paul.

The reality is, education is not the kingdom of one person in this province. It's not for one person to issue decrees. It's not for one person to make it all about him. Schools belong to the families and the communities that they serve.

We can talk about democracy, and people glaze over because there's so much going on these days that makes democracy a hard concept to believe actually exists, right? And I'm not talking about here. But the reality is, that school in your neighbourhood, that's your school. That's not our school. That's your school. It's not the minister's school. It's not the member from Ottawa South's school.

You have to be able to respond in a way to parents about that school, about what's happening to their kids. And in nine boards across this province, more than one third of all the kids' schools in this province, there's nobody. There's no one to call. There's no one to advocate. That is making life harder for families. That's what you're doing.

I'm going to list off—I've got lots of time left here, so I can breathe and take a drink and give you all a bit of an aural break.

Hon. Zee Hamid: Thank you.

Mr. John Fraser: You're welcome. Are you all okay? Is everybody good? Everybody is good. You're okay over here? They're not even listening. I don't blame them either.

Let's talk about cuts. Well, first of all, they cut the Ministry of Education. I had to explain to the minister this morning that if you looked at last year's budget and this year's budget and if you subtracted this year's budget from last year's budget, it's \$170 million less. It's a cut. Even by Conservative math, we call that a cut.

But here are some other notables: agricultural food and agribusiness, while we're in a crisis with fertilizer. Crisis in agriculture—it's happening. Prices are going up because of what's happening in the world—\$92 million.

The Attorney General—oh, this is another beauty. Doug Ford—pardon me, I'll take that back. I was wrong.

It just happened. It just came out. I'm sorry, folks. I'm not perfect, not even close—not even remotely close.

But the Premier keeps saying, "Crime is up. Crime is up. My gosh, crime is up. Be afraid, be scared; crime is up." Well, he's been here eight years. What has he been doing over the last eight years? Come on. But here's proof. Don't take what I'm saying. So what is one of the problems in our criminal justice system? What is it? It's that the courts are clogged. We're not getting people through. It's all jammed up. It's not working—Mr. Attorney General, almost \$120 million less this year. So we've got clogged courts. It's not working. They're cutting, and crime is going up. But that's only useful for the Premier to tell you, "Be afraid, be scared, and I can protect you". He's not been doing such a great job for eight years—eight long, hard, tiring years. Trust me; I know. I've been watching it.

1510

Speaker, what else have they cut? Well, colleges, universities, research excellence and security—that's a mouthful. They're cutting it by \$90 million, but they talk about historic funding. I thought they gave historic funding three weeks ago: "It's historic. It's generational"—all the superlatives that you add to any announcement that you make. That's what you said. But you're cutting by \$90 million, and the reality is that the historic funding you're talking about only brings us in line with what the funding was for colleges and universities between 2011 and 2017. Who are you trying to kid? Just because you say it doesn't mean it's right. So that's colleges, universities, research excellence and security—a mouthful, but they're \$90 million less this year.

Economic job creation and trade: \$40 million at a time when jobs are a big issue, right? Record unemployment: 700,000 people out of work. I think it's 17% youth unemployment, but let's cut the ministry that should be doing something about that. But we can send the minister all over the world.

Oh, by the way, have you ever noticed? We're talking about trade. When you talk about trade, you see Premiers and the Prime Minister going all around the world because we know we have to do that now to get trade in other places. Has the Premier been any other place on trade missions other than south of the border? You have to tell me now—come and tell me later. I've been asking this question for about a week. That's the only place he goes. He doesn't even go to Mexico, one of our other biggest trading partners. But do you know what? We cut the Ministry of Economic Development, Job Creation and Trade. The thing I'm sure about is the minister's travel budget isn't cut.

And the points just keep coming. Well, they cut the finance ministry by \$115 million, but maybe he feels guilty because we're half a trillion dollars in debt. What else did we do here? Francophone affairs, \$1.7 million, and public business delivery and procurement was cut by \$1.56 billion. That's a lot of money. That's a lot of money.

Anyway, Speaker, I'm sure the other side knows about all the cuts and doesn't want to hear any more from me on

that. But do you know what? I just want to look at this. I think “protect Ontario” was mentioned 74 times in the budget. And then, on top of that, if you go anywhere—actually, if people have their phones, I’m sure you’ll get a “Protect Ontario” ad within the next two to three minutes depending on what you’re scrolling through. Or you’ll see it when you go into Billy Bishop or on the subway or when you’re just trying to watch a ball game. You’ll see it 80 million times. The government is spending millions and millions and millions of dollars on advertising to tell us they’re protecting Ontario. Who are they trying to kid? They’re not protecting anybody. They’re pretending. They’re pretending that in this budget there’s something for families’ budgets, and there’s not. They’re pretending. They’re great pretenders.

Don’t worry, folks, you’ll all be out of your misery soon. The clock is running down. I don’t want to miss anything here.

Ms. Stephanie Bowman: Middle-income tax cut.

Mr. John Fraser: Oh, yes, thank you very much. It’s great, I’ve got some cues back here to remind me of things that I forgot. One of the things the government could have done is the thing that the Premier promised eight years ago. What did he promise? Does anybody know? A 20% middle-income tax cut. It never appeared—never appeared. Shocking, right?

I do want to go back to the half a trillion dollars in debt, because there was a member, in response to a question last year, who said, “You know, when you guys left government eight years ago”—they forget they they’ve been here eight years. They’re not the solution; they’re the problem. “Eight years ago, you had the largest subnational debt.” And I said that might have been true, but you’ve grown that to half a trillion dollars over there. So I’m not sure that you actually fully comprehend that beyond a talking point, because that’s all it is.

I have to give credit to my colleague from Don Valley West because she coined this phrase: “Never has a government spent so much, borrowed so much, to do so little.” Take a look at the things that people count on. Our schools: They’re not working. Class sizes are too big, special education has been starved and there’s a mental health crisis not being addressed. Families aren’t getting what they need.

Two million people don’t have a family doctor, and too many of them are having to use their credit card instead of their OHIP card just to get the basic care that they need—basic primary care. There are 700,000 people who don’t have jobs, and 200,000 are young people.

Life is not any more affordable. The government is not giving them any breaks. They’re making it harder for young people who are trying to get a post-secondary education and their families by saying, “You need to go further into debt.”

And what are they focused on? What is the Premier focused on? Well, buying Billy Bishop. We all need an airport, or a fantasy island convention centre somewhere in the middle of Lake Ontario. And, of course, there’s a lovely spa, which my colleague over here brought up—all

of my colleagues, not this colleague. Well, maybe you did; I’m not sure. Which is the luxury spa—something that we all want, right?

That’s so important. If you’re in northern Ontario, you don’t give a flying fig about Billy Bishop airport. It’s not important to you.

Interjection.

Mr. John Fraser: What’s that?

Mr. John Vanthof: We also don’t know what a fig is.

Laughter.

Mr. John Fraser: You don’t know what a fig is? A fig is a euphemism, guys. It’s a euphemism. Stay with me. Work with me here. A fig is a euphemism. Let your imagination work, okay?

But if you’re in Timiskaming—or what’s that town up there with the one-armed baboon—you don’t actually care about Billy Bishop airport. It’s not important to you. It’s not going to get you a job. It’s not going to get you the health care that you need.

Of course, I have to finish with the tunnel of love, or the tunnel that the Premier loves. It’s a billion-dollar hole in the ground to shovel money in. If you are somewhere in Ontario and you hear that, even if you’re in Toronto, you go, “What’s going on?”

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Thank you. Seeing the time on the clock, the member’s time is finished.

BURDETT SISLER

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): I recognize the member from Niagara Falls on a point of order.

MPP Wayne Gates: I have some heartbreaking news to say. My good friend Burd Sisler, who was the oldest living Canadian, oldest man in the world, and a hero—he fought in World War II, he was the last living veteran from World War II—has passed away at 110, just 12 days before his 111th birthday.

He fought hard. I had the opportunity to FaceTime him yesterday afternoon. His family was with him the last 24 hours. I just want to say to Burd, you’ll be missed by your family, your friends and your country. May you rest in peace, my friend, until we meet again.

Applause.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Thank you, and I think I speak for all of us when I say that the House will extend its condolences to Mr. Sisler’s family and your community.

1520

2026 ONTARIO BUDGET

BUDGET DE L'ONTARIO DE 2026

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Further debate? I recognize the Minister of Energy and Mines.

Hon. Stephen Lecce: I appreciate this opportunity. I do want to offer condolences to the family, for the loss of a great Canadian who served this country.

That intervention, perhaps, has made me reflect on the next 19 minutes of this speech, but I want to maybe start with something positive: the recognition that in a very divided world, in a chaotic world, a destructive world where there are massive levels of division and political discord—I think it is still special, in the Legislature dining room today, having guests, that members of the opposition and members of government can come together and still dialogue with each other. We can still celebrate together things that unite us.

When I was abroad in the US just a few days ago—I think it is a success in our federation that notwithstanding the federal government and Prime Minister are of a different party for whom I did not vote, when abroad, we presented as a team. I think the triumph of the broader public interest over a political interest is something that should still bring us together in the House.

We think about the big decisions governments have to make when you face a crisis, and I think this government has been tested so many times, more than any government probably has signed up for. The pandemic was one where we all were tested as parliamentarians. Most particularly now, as we go through the last year of chaos because of the Trump administration, our unity is our strength as we work to end and conclude the CUSMA trade review, and so having that symmetry and alignment is so consequential.

And we do face some pretty significant threats. We face headwinds that have not been seen, probably, since the great 2008-09 recession. In that moment, what got Canada through that recession—the first industrialized economy to emerge from it with the strongest economy, first to recoup all of our jobs and return to balance—was a government that was committed to investing in the industrial strengths and pillars of Canada. There's great virtue in reflecting on what worked then that perhaps we can emulate today.

Our Premier and the Minister of Finance have built out a budget document and a long-term fiscal plan: at its core, we say to protect Ontario, but it's fundamentally to inoculate our industries from the shocks of tariff exposure—industries in a country and a jurisdiction that did not sign up for nor enable the administration to have indiscriminately applied a tariff on their largest trading partner.

I think we want to be intellectually honest in the debate, to talk about the economic challenges, to talk about the industrial challenges in key sectors and the challenges on employment in some sectors. To mention that in the Legislature without connecting it to the broader external warfare inflicted by the Trump administration would present an incomplete picture of the challenge that faces the nation—and, frankly, Western democracies, because we're all in the same space from Europe to the Asian Pacific.

So our Premier said we need a plan to grow our economy, but, fundamentally, to protect our workforce. I

believe when often we hear, “Where is a jobs plan to incentivize, to catalyze the employment sector and for young people and people of different skills to get employment and jobs in the province?”, I find that we often conveniently leave out the fact that the government has an ambitious energy program that, at its core, is an industrial policy. It is unemployment. It is a jobs plan.

When governments have turned away from our industrial pillars, this government is turning to a tariff-proof, recession-proof industry of Canada, and that is nuclear. I know for you, Speaker, hailing from Oshawa—a lot of us benefit from the nuclear expansion. We all benefit, to be clear, when it comes to accessing clean, reliable power. But as we look to tomorrow—and for governments to actually think ahead instead of constantly scrambling with plans that are not long-term, not cogent, not in the broader intergenerational interest—I will say to you, this is something we're doing right: a 25-year energy road map codified through this budget to generate power. But beyond the megawatts, beyond the capacity to keep power on affordably and reliably and keeping it clean, we have a plan to create 150,000 jobs through our nuclear expansion, the largest nuclear expansion on the continent that we are leading here at home.

As Canadians and as Ontarians, we should be proud that, among all the large nuclear nations, we are one of six on earth with our own industrial nuclear technology. We produce 25% of global uranium, the largest uranium mine on earth. We are excited by the prospect because we are an energy superpower. I think we have to challenge the psychology of how we communicate on this matter because, when it comes to energy and long-term planning, we're doing something right.

The budget at its core helps to enable jobs for the people of Ontario, and I'm grateful both the Minister of Finance, the Premier and many other colleagues across this government are seized with the plan to create jobs—recession-proof, good-paying jobs for the people of Ontario.

When we think about, in the Minister of Labour, Immigration, Training and Skills Development's community in Port Hope, a plan to build the world's largest nuclear generator—up 10,000 megawatts, power for 10 million homes, a \$235-billion gain to the national economy—how can anyone assert a program that will create, conservatively, 150,000 net new jobs over the coming years is not a case study for a government committed to building a clean energy future, to creating jobs for the young people in the communities where they were raised?

When we think about Bruce Power on the west coast of Ontario—and the Minister of Rural Affairs is a great champion; the member from Bruce-Grey-Owen Sound, a great champion, Mr. Vickers; and others who have said we need to be proud and double down on Canada's nuclear advantage, so we've committed to expand and build a third reactor, Bruce C, 4,600 net new megawatts of power for the GTHA, equivalent to power for almost five million homes, a program that will create tens of thousands of jobs—this gives me hope.

Going back to the first principle of being proud of our country in a divided world, we have a plan for jobs, a plan for industrial growth. I think when we need more power with an energy sector expanding at a quantum of roughly 65% and a high of 90%, now is the time to double down on Canada, a made-in-Canada success story.

The budget also speaks about the propensity of government to buy more Canadian, to purchase more from within, and I am proud that in our nuclear sector, 90% on average of every refurbishment complete has been delivered with a minimum of 90% made-in-Canada procurement. “Made in Canada” stamped on 90% of the products we purchase for our refurbishment at scale—that is a positive success story, because when we refurbished the Darlington Nuclear Generating Station—a project profiled in the budget, a project that will add over \$70 billion of gain to the economy—that initiative, 93% of the entire budget stayed in Ontario, stayed in Canada.

That is the message I want to deliver to members and opposition members today. We can look through the budget and pass through the sections that speak about made-in-Canada jobs, net new employment. We can skip through the industrial benefits and supply chain benefits, the fuel benefits—and we do the fabrication in Port Hope for 25% of global uranium. We could avoid that in the public discourse in this debate, but we cannot turn away from a sector that has been and will always be part of Canada’s global success. So the budget signals an intention to move with speed, to end the unacceptable duplicative nature of how government did it forever.

1530

And I’ll give you a case study, Madam Speaker, that the budget prioritizes, which is the ability of governments to cut the permit timelines for projects of consequence, national interest projects like our critical mineral sector. These are mines that historically could take up to 15 years to build under the former government’s regulatory permitting regime.

Look, no government is perfect. The leader of the third party acknowledged this, and I would agree. But when it comes to permit reform, if you are part of the defence of the status quo, you are the problem, because it is this type of NIMBYistic—the desire of allowing things the way they have been done for a generation to prevail. I would argue you’ve got to pick a lane in this very fast-moving world. Either you are for speed and you are for made-in-Canada infrastructure, or you are going to allow and enable regimes who are working against our national interests—adversarial regimes, non-democratic regimes, human-rights-abusing regimes—to win the day. Why would anyone? Why would any Liberal or New Democrat or Green or Progressive Conservative claim in this Legislature, in the seat of democracy, that those adversarial nations should win? I believe as a proud Canadian this is our moment.

And so, we cut the red tape: one-project, one-process; a 50% reduction in our baseline. We emerged faster than the European Union—a 24-month average turnaround benchmark. We were, in the Fraser report, 15th globally for

attracting mining investment just one year ago. Today, because of those reforms—these are non-monetary; they didn’t require investment; they didn’t require tax dollars; they required a government to rethink and to challenge the status quo—we’ve now emerged as the second-best jurisdiction on earth for attracting mining investment and number one in Canada for the first time. And that is a success for which we should be proud of—

Interjection.

Hon. Stephen Lecce: I know the member from Essex clearly supports this ambitious approach to energy and economic reform, and I would argue all members should be clapping—not applauding the government; applauding the investors, the companies, the workers who are actually doing the work, \$22 billion gained today because of our critical minerals sector.

But the Ring of Fire presents another opportunity for economic growth and for economic self-reliance. You know, we hear these messages invoked in the Legislature; sometimes it seems like a talking point to some. Self-reliance, meaning you depend less on others because you have domestic capacity to scale. Our mineral supplies—when the rare earth elements of the United States and Europe and Canada and many Asian nations are still 93% dependent on China, we become more reliant on the hostile regimes abroad. It could be the US. It could be China. It actually doesn’t matter in this moment. The case is, we have the minerals under our feet. What governments didn’t have is the political courage to reform the system, a sensible approach to get to yes, and so we’ve done that.

The budget not only supports this permit reform; it enables it. It provides financing and financial instruments, because for many of us in this Legislature, Canada has been often ripping and shipping our resources to other markets where the value-added investment goes somewhere else: to Europe, to America, to China. No longer—the budget commits a \$500-million investment over three years to bring and repatriate that investment back to the country. That should unify us. Why are we sending our processing of minerals into any other jurisdiction when we have the energy, the intellectual capacity and we have a government on the side of industry and workers and communities vying to be more resilient and more self-reliant? And so, we’ve allocated a budget that does that for the first time ever: investing directly in those projects to get them to the market and get critical minerals to the world. I believe that is a fundamental pillar of our economic success.

Ten thousand megawatts in Wesleyville, 10,000 jobs alone; we’re talking about a program at Pickering, a project that could have been closed under the former Liberals, which we have now committed to maintain this asset for another 38 years. Some 30,000 jobs are being sustained and created because our Premier said yes to the Pickering Nuclear Generating Station. The former Liberals would have closed that generating station, which is most ironic because they elected a member from Ajax. I would love that member to campaign in the next election on closing an asset that has created 38,000 jobs, a project

that adds \$41 billion to the GDP. For those who purport to be sound financial minds, it's a pretty good ROI. The investment we're making will return 2 to 1 to the people of Ontario. It will create tens of thousands of jobs. Yet in the wisdom of Kathleen Wynne and Dalton McGuinty, they would have turned their backs on tens of thousands of workers. That is a deeply offensive message to the people of Durham today and every day.

That's not only what the Liberals would have done—
Interjections.

Hon. Stephen Lecce: I'm only responding because the member is engaging me, otherwise I would have totally avoided your party, but you've asked for it. So, expect the next four minutes to be singularly focused—

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Through the Chair.

Hon. Stephen Lecce: —on the Liberal Party, Madam Speaker. The NDP could do no wrong at this moment; the Greens will do no wrong—just the Liberals. That's the next four minutes and six seconds.

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): The House will come to order. Through the Chair.

Hon. Stephen Lecce: Madam Speaker, see? Unity, we're bringing unity in this House finally, Madam Speaker.

We think about projects like Darlington—\$90 billion of economic benefit—a project which the Liberal Party voted against. We talk about energy efficiency. This is a party that constrained energy efficiency to 30% of the province, meaning they only allowed energy efficiency programs to 30% of the province instead of them all. We introduced legislation to provincialize. Every jurisdiction today is benefiting from the largest energy-savings program in Canadian history.

We invested—this government, our Premier—\$10.9 billion with a 2-to-1 return on investment. For a party that claims to want to save power and save money, hydro bills increased by 400%, a thousand dollars, every single year. And what is most perverse is not just the increase in cost, it's the decrease in reliability as they planned to negate or remove or deny 70%—seven in 10 Ontarians—getting access to energy efficiency. That is the incoherence of this Liberal Party.

The leader of the Liberal Party actually had the gall to speak about safety in this House. He talked about eight long years of our government, as if the federal government, the former Liberal Prime Minister Trudeau, had not been in power for nearly a decade, literally watering down every tough-on-crime bill—and I'm only speaking about this because the member mentioned it in his intervention.

Let me remind the Liberal Party that we had a bill before the federal Parliament that passed which would have required judges to impose mandatory minimum sentences for the most heinous crimes, including gun crimes, for innocent people, and it was the Liberal Party, in their wisdom, and the member from Don Valley who championed the federal Liberals in those elections, who took the position to remove mandatory minimums for

heinous, violent crimes. In what world is that standing up for families, communities and the safety of this province?

It is shameful, but Madam Speaker, it's incomprehensible. When the government had a policy before this place to impose real bail time on families, what I find most offensive is that the Liberals supported a policy to end the automatic—

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Order.

Hon. Stephen Lecce: Instead of allowing the automatic release of violent criminals on our streets—which the Liberal Party watered down their bail laws; these Liberals in Ontario seem to be Justin Trudeau's greatest champion and enthusiasts today. They are campaigning to reimpose the legacy of Kathleen Wynne. If there is one thing that probably brings nine in 10 Ontarians together, it's that no one wants to go back to the reckless, high-cost, high-tax, highly regulated, highly unemployed province under these Liberals. No sensible Canadian would want to revert back to a policy where families chose between eating and heating.

This Premier is committed to the cause of Canada. He stepped up where Liberals failed in this country. It was our Premier who filled a national void to demonstrate leadership, unity and a focus on the economy.

Interjections.

Hon. Stephen Lecce: And while the Liberals will do whatever they want in heckling in the moment, the truth is, the real haunting legacy that reverberates in this House is the voice of Kathleen Wynne, when she said, "We made a mistake." Will the Liberals today stand in their place and acknowledge that that mistake has cost the ratepayers 20 years of high hydro bills, 10 times above the market?

1540

We will stand up for Canada. We'll stand up for affordability. We'll stand up for all Ontarians.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Questions?

Mr. John Vanthof: I always enjoy listening to the Minister of Energy and Mines. He's one of the best speakers. And, actually, I agreed with a lot of his points.

I have a question regarding the defence of the status quo. You're part of the problem. Currently, in this province—and I'm from northern Ontario—we have huge projects like Crawford minerals, like the Ring of Fire. Both of those projects are served by the Trans-Canada Highway, which was closed 363 times in 2024; we can't get the numbers for 2025. You'll never see the true benefits of those projects if you can't even provide basic infrastructure like safe roads, which families depend on. So by defending the status quo, isn't your government also part of the problem?

There was no money—extra money—in the budget to fix Highway 11 or 17, or even the problems in the short term. Why?

Hon. Stephen Lecce: I'm going to regret my compliments to the NDP in the transcript now. Can I take that back? Can we get a UC motion to remove that?

The member raised an important question. Logistics is foundational. We've got to move commodities, we've got to move people, across the north and across the province.

What I can simply say, more generally, is that the government has invested a historic—and we say “historic” often, but there has never been a budget in this Legislature that has ever been presented that had \$210 billion for infrastructure. Northern Ontario is at the heart of the action. We approved—the first government in a decade—net new hydro in the north, transmission lines. In every one of your northern ridings, I have authorized—our government has authorized.

We're going to keep building and, yes, keep investing in those highways, in all the highway networks, to make sure that people can move safely and our resources can get to global markets so we can grow our economy.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Question?

Mr. Anthony Leardi: I'm going to ask a question about roads too. I'm going to ask a question about the road to the Ring of Fire.

I'm the member from Essex, and I think I'm the member in this House who is the farthest away from the Ring of Fire. But I have a lot of interest in the Ring of Fire because in my area we build automobiles, and we have a great manufacturing plant in our area, which is the NextStar manufacturing plant, and it builds batteries for all sorts of uses. I have a vested interest in the Ring of Fire because I want to see that succeed, and I want to see that road built.

The former Premier, Kathleen Wynne, said she wanted to build a road to the Ring of Fire, but she never got around to it. The previous Liberal government never got around to it in 15 years.

But this government is going to build a road to the Ring of Fire, and I invite the minister to comment on that.

Hon. Stephen Lecce: Our Premier has not referred to the north as “no man's land,” as was said by former Liberals most offensively. We see the north as the economic engine of Canada, increasingly—a place to be, a place to invest.

I've been in Thunder Bay. I have visited communities north, south, east and west. Parry Sound—Muskoka is north-ish, depending on who you ask.

Interjection.

Hon. Stephen Lecce: Depending on who you ask. I know.

I will say, the Ring of Fire plays a tremendous opportunity to grow our economy; 70,000 jobs can be created.

Our Premier had a plan: Accelerate the road by three years. Construction starts this spring. That is a plan of action. We announced a transmission line into Greenstone. That's how we're going to open up and, frankly, create generational wealth for the people of Ontario.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Question?

MPP Alexa Gilmour: I have a question related to schedule 7 of the budget bill and motion before us. My honourable colleague has been here longer than I have, but

I was here the day that Bill 5 passed and the First Nations protested in the galleries. That day, they were sitting with the environmentalists, the workers and many others in a coalition, and they said that they did not trust this government.

Now, the Premier and the ministers, including the honourable colleague across from me, will cover up tracks by limiting the availability to use freedom of information. These are the very tracks that have led to the greenbelt scandal, the skills development scandal.

I'm wondering: Does this minister believe less transparency will breed trust with Ontarians?

Hon. Stephen Lecce: How governments can build public confidence is by actually doing what they say. When governments have said, “We promise to get a road to the Ring of Fire built,” 25 years of political talk, we actually have a plan of action that starts this spring with shovels in the ground.

Governments can build confidence in institutions if they follow their word. When we said we've never raised a tax, we actually have never raised a tax. When the former Liberals introduced the highest tax increase in the history of any province in the nation, after committing in the first election of McGuinty not to increase taxes—that's how you undermine confidence, how you undermine trust. We will stay focused on the affordability agenda. I know the opposition will rightly ask questions of interest.

The priorities in our ridings—in the Beaches, in Parkdale, in northern Ontario and the south—is affordability and the economy, and that's what our Premier will focus on each and every single day.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Question?

M^{me} Dawn Gallagher Murphy: I thank the minister for his remarks.

I'm going to go back to artificial intelligence, because I love that discussion. My question to the minister relates to how AI and our investment in critical technology initiatives will assist the energy and mines area. We know this is the wave of the future. If the minister could tell us a bit about how AI can move this province forward in the energy and mines sector.

Hon. Stephen Lecce: I want to thank the member from Newmarket—Aurora, a wonderful partner and neighbour in York region.

AI is presenting great transformation, disruption in the way commerce and people think and people act. It creates an opportunity as well. Two thoughts; the first is on energy: We are facing an unprecedented spike in energy demand globally. They say Canada's grid will have to double by 2050. The IESO, our system planner, conservatively estimates 65%, according to the most recent forecast. The high is 90%, which is a sobering statistic. It means we have to invest in more transmission and generation of power—reliable power, clean power and I think the priority has to be affordable power.

AI and data centres are creating pressure, so we introduced Bill 40. We actually got a bit ahead of the curve. The bill gives cabinet the authority to come up with

a public-interest regulation, because I do not want Ontario to be like Virginia, where rates have skyrocketed because there were no safeguards in place for the people who pay the bills. We will learn those lessons and make sure we keep energy as affordable as possibly for families and industries.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Question?

Mr. John Vanthof: Thank you very much once again to the Minister of Energy and Mines.

We hear a lot about the Ring of Fire. Last month, I was at the start of the Ring of Fire with a few of my colleagues, at the corner of the Ogoki and the Anaconda Road. That's where the study area is.

My question is a pretty simple one. You've got to go through Geraldton. There is some money to fix the road in Geraldton, but where does that road ultimately end up?

Mr. Chris Glover: Highway 11.

Mr. John Vanthof: Highway 11. Once again, Highway 11 was closed 363 times in 2024; I'm sure more in 2025, and even in 2026. As we were driving, we ended up in Thunder Bay and all the highways were closed all around us.

How will those projects ever reach their full potential, when after eight years of this government, those roads are only becoming more precarious?

1550

Hon. Stephen Lecce: I'm not one to generally refer to these notes, but I do want to read into the record that we have made a series of investments, both in transmission and in infrastructure and roads, to help connect the dots and move people safely and more efficiently, particularly our commodities and our people, in partnership with First Nations. So \$62 million was invested in Geraldton's Main Street rehabilitation project, which yes, is a critical link from Greenstone that will be a gateway to the Ring of Fire.

We announced investments, innovative designs such as a 2+1 highway, which will feature alternating centre passing lanes every two to five kilometres in the south. In the northeast of Ontario, we're widening Highway 69, expanding Highways 11 and 17. We're widening Highway 17 from Kenora to Manitoba. The list goes on because our government is committed to the north.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Further debate?

Mr. Terence Kernaghan: It's my honour to rise today to discuss this government's budget and motion and add the voices of the wonderful people of London North Centre.

Quite frequently, Speaker, we hear this government crow and use the words "the status quo, the status quo, the status quo" and how it isn't working. Well, on this side of the House, I would tend to agree the status quo is not working because the status quo is this government. After seven and a half—almost eight—years, this government is responsible for all of the things in this province, yet they seem to still want to point fingers. They want to divert. They want to distract like a ham-handed circus magician. But I don't think that Ontarians are falling for it anymore.

When you look at this budget and this budget motion, it really lays out some interesting pathways for their connected friends, for their cronies, for their insiders to allow them to reap financial gain from the public services and the investments that this province needs to make. They are making pathways for their friends.

Past behaviour is often the best predictor of future behaviour and, given the RCMP investigation into the greenbelt scandal, where insiders were receiving information from the Premier's office and from the Premier's staff so that this government could turn millionaires into billionaires, letting them know what properties were coming up for rezoning—the Skills Development Fund, where money was going to very questionable recipients, people who were on the lowest part of the list and yet somehow were vaulted up because of their donations, because of their connections and because of who they knew.

With this government, they have failed on all fronts for investments, whether it comes to creating housing, whether it comes to ensuring that people have good jobs, whether it makes investments in education and the things that people count on the most. Does it lower the cost of rent and groceries? Absolutely not. Does it even mention groceries? It does not.

This government would pat itself on the back for the money that they're giving to educators and this pretense, as though they actually stand with educators at this current time. Myself, I am an educator. I am still quite sore with the former Liberal government and their cuts and underfunding of education and how they really, all in the name of inclusion—which we all agree with—used that as an excuse to put kids into classrooms without support. That's not inclusion; that's abandonment. And not only is that detrimental to the child who needs support and deserves support, making them feel less than because they're not receiving support, but because their needs aren't being met, it infects the entire classroom.

This government, they've stripped \$1.4 billion out of classrooms since they were first elected, if we're accounting for inflation, and they would pat themselves on the back because they're giving educators \$750. Well, I can tell you right now, \$750 does not buy an educational assistant.

Let's face it, this government attacking educational assistants with Bill 28, trying to take away their democratic freedoms and their ability to collective bargain—remember Bill 28, the bill that was until it wasn't, the "notwithstanding" clause use? So \$750 will not stop violence in the classroom, \$750 will not mean smaller class sizes and \$750 will not buy the respect of teachers and education workers with a government that has cut funding, made up a snitch line on them, ignored learning needs during the pandemic and wasted education funding with hand-picked crony supervisors to steal money away from classrooms.

Most recently, in the London Free Press, they reported that the two provincial supervisors who have been appointed to the Thames Valley District School Board as well as London Health Sciences Centre do not appear on

the sunshine list. For a government that prides itself on transparency and accountability, they don't seem to want to report what these individuals are being paid in these highly important, but also lucrative, positions. Why is that? Why are their salaries being hidden? Yes, the government will claim that this is a contract—it's not a permanent position—but I think it's because they don't want to admit just how much money they're spending on this.

In addition to the ways in which this government has ignored education, they've also really ignored the needs of young people when it comes to the cuts to OSAP, turning 85% grants into 25% grants and making students pay for their education in the form of loans rather than supporting them and helping build them up. It's really quite disturbing, because the number of kids who are in the middle of their program who are now considering abandoning their program altogether, still with debt that they have already accrued but not being able to have that degree and also limiting their opportunities for the future.

Within this budget as well, seniors only show up in a side mention about transit, and the word "seniors" shows up in a couple of different developments of long-term-care homes. Is that all they really deserve from this government after raising families, building our communities and making it a better place to live in, that they would only show up this few times? For this government, they've really given seniors short shrift.

I am pleased that within the budget there is some tax relief for small businesses, but I will also say that this government has let down small businesses when it comes to so many different things, especially when it comes to alleviating homelessness and dealing with the crisis that we see on our streets with addiction and so many other things.

What is also disturbing is that within this budget this government has also buried their ridiculous removal of the FOI process. It's almost as though this government would like to take their gravy train, which is getting stacked with their friends and stacked with their people—they want to make that gravy train invisible. They want to take away the public's ability to really see what they're doing. They talk about transparency, they talk about accountability, but they refuse to live it, they refuse to exemplify it and they refuse to do anything to allow someone to look over their shoulder.

I also think back to the 2011 gas plant scandal with the former Liberal government. David Livingston, the chief of staff to Dalton McGuinty, as well as Laura Miller, the deputy chief of staff, were up on criminal charges. There was breach of trust, there was mischief, there was unlawful use of computers. They double-deleted emails to try to hide from the FOI process. Fortunately, they were not successful. They actually hired Laura Miller's partner to wipe dozens of hard drives from the Premier's office—they paid him \$10,000 to do so. Obviously, it wasn't entirely successful, because they were caught. I'll quote: It was "a serious and marked departure" from the standards of public trust. They "destroyed records they had a"

legal "duty to preserve." And all of this was to avoid the FOI process. The Minister of Energy was found in contempt of the Legislature, and there was a jail sentence for Livingston.

But I'm thinking that because the Premier's office is currently under RCMP investigation, not only do they want to hide what they're doing now, they also want to hide what they've been doing retroactively. With this change to FOIs, they're actually going to reverse course. They're actually going to protect the previous Liberal government from all of their decisions, because there are also, I'm certain, quite a number of things hidden from their past that somehow didn't seem to make the light of day.

Speaker, before I go on, I do want to mention that I am sharing my time with the member from Toronto Centre.

Now, I had a discussion earlier this afternoon with Sarah Campbell, who's the executive director of Ark Aid Street Mission, and right now, they're calling upon the city and they're calling upon the province for emergency funding. You see, Ark Aid does wonderful work, and they have done for many, many years in my community, but the funding that they are receiving is currently coming to an end.

1600

I've got to really focus on a few of the things that Sarah had to say because it was truly brilliant. She mentioned how—and I think of this analogy similar to a classroom—when there is a child who has special education needs and is not receiving the support, it affects that person, but it also affects every single other person within that classroom. The same is true of homelessness. Not only is the person who is homeless suffering, but our entire society suffers as a result, because when people don't have a home, every place becomes a place where they go, whether it is businesses, whether it is families, whether it is anyone trying to enjoy downtown, everyone is impacted by seeing human suffering.

Speaker, I hope that this government will try to finally live in the shoes of real people in this province and make sure that they improve their investments.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): The member has indicated that he is sharing his time and therefore I will recognize the member from Toronto Centre.

MPP Kristyn Wong-Tam: I'm always proud to rise in this House to speak, especially on behalf of the great people of Toronto Centre.

Today we are debating the government's budget. As we know, the budget is really an opportunity to deliver hope and relief to the people of Ontario, especially those who are struggling with sky-high housing costs, rents, mortgage payments, groceries and a job market that seems to be more and more difficult to navigate every single day.

What this budget has in spades is quite a number of Ds: deficits, downloads and debts. The budget is forecasting a deficit of almost \$14 billion, which is now 77% higher than previously predicted just a year ago. And the government is now borrowing so much that they're paying \$16 billion just to pay interest on debt service. Essentially the

government is now borrowing money to pay for the interest payments on the debt. It's compounding year after year, and it's expected to rise to about \$20 billion in the next three years.

I cannot support this budget, Speaker, because I cannot support this government's mismanagement of the funds on behalf of the people of Ontario. This budget is also imposing austerity on the hard-working people of our province. Voting for this budget means voting to underfund hospitals and schools, take away municipal planning authority and cut funding for housing.

Budgets are about choices. It's a reflection of the values and priorities of any government or any household of the day. This budget reinforces what we already know: This government refuses to put working people and families first. This government is choosing to put their friends and insiders first.

This also includes this Premier's obsession with vanity projects. Instead of giving us the hope and the relief that we all need, this Premier and his government decide to impose massive cuts to education, health care, housing and job creation. There's no money for those priorities. Instead, he's able to find billions of dollars, including a billion dollars to pave over Lake Ontario to expand Billy Bishop airport to allow massive jets to run across our waterfront in the downtown. He's managed to find, somewhere, although it's not mentioned in the budget, \$100 billion for a tunnel under the 401. Talk about missing the mark.

The Premier could have scored real wins in this budget on behalf of the working people of Ontario. He could have lowered the cost of living. He could have invested in health care and education. He could actually build homes that people can afford. He can work hard to build jobs. But he failed on all those counts.

I can't imagine a more out-of-touch budget. This budget cuts nearly \$150 million from education: larger class sizes, less supports for kids with exceptionalities and harder working and learning environments for everyone. There's \$60 million cut from colleges and university, \$347 million cut from housing and a whopping \$486 million dollars from job creation and training. No wonder the economy is going in the wrong direction. And all of this is at a time when unemployment in our province is sitting at 7.6% and over 700,000 Ontarians are out of work, struggling to pay rent, struggling to put food on the table. What an absolute disgrace and disservice to the people of Ontario.

Let me just share with you a couple of examples. These are testimonies specifically from residents in my community who have written to me after learning about what is contained in this government's budget. Last week, I had received dozens of stories; I'm going to highlight just three.

I'm going to talk about a conversation I had with Big Brothers Big Sisters in Ontario. We were all at the reception when they were at Queen's Park. They received \$150,000 to support thousands of children through their one-on-one mentoring program. That means that each

child, through the Big Brothers Big Sisters program, is allocated a value of \$25 of provincial funding. That \$25 gets you what? Mental health supports, it helps reduce crime and gives the children a pathway to continued education by pairing them up with a supportive, stable adult to turn to. That \$150,000 doesn't even start to cover those costs, so Big Brothers Big Sisters of Ontario and Canada are madly fundraising to fill the provincial government gap. That's who is really supporting that program, and yet they came here to tell us that they need more. It wasn't shown in this budget. What could be a better investment than leveraging money to support young people for tomorrow?

FilmOntario has been through this building several times. They have been looking for investments from this government in film and television. Let me tell you what the terrain is that they're working in right now. We are falling behind other jurisdictions. Ontario is no longer the leader when it comes to location for film and television. Other provinces have exceeded what we have to offer because their governments are investing in the proper film credits and the structures so that they can stay and film there. The jobs are now going to Quebec because they are giving film credits to 28%, and BC is throwing 36% out for film credits. What does Ontario put on the table? It's 21%.

You wonder why we are hearing about the job losses in our film sector in Ontario. You don't need to be surprised. You just have to look at your budget. The government's budget priorities are the reasons why we are struggling in the Ontario film and television industry. These are high-value, high-paying, important jobs with multiple spinoffs that push the economy forward. There is barely a mention in this budget, other than general passing, and certainly no money when it comes to art and culture.

The entire sector is struggling, and this government doesn't seem to see that. We have carpenters and trades that work in those sectors. This is skilled labour. So for all the talk about bolstering skilled labour, I don't understand why it's not going to the arts and culture sector. The Premier needs to step up and save those jobs because I can tell you right now, those jobs are leaving. There is no more time to squander because decisions are being made on these multi-billion-dollar projects, and they are not choosing Ontario.

So what is in this budget? In this budget, what we see is the government talking about hiding from scrutiny and making sure that they gut the FOI legislation. Reducing transparency is never in the public's interest. We know that. And so the government has something to hide. They're hiding something from the federal police. They're hiding something from the citizens of Ontario. And they're certainly hiding something from the members of this House.

I want to share with you a story from a constituent. This is heartbreaking story, but I must share this. This is from my constituent Stephanie. Stephanie wrote to me in such deep distress over this budget. I had to connect her with

mental health support, Speaker, because she was so upset. Budgets should not make anybody feel this way.

1610

But this is what Stephanie had to say in her own words: "I have been struggling to find the words to explain how I feel. I'm going to keep it short: The Premier's budget is appalling and seems to be more about eugenics. It is meant to keep poor people poor and helpless, with no options to better their situation. Poor disabled people are routinely offered MAID because their lives are so miserable.

"With MAID available, many Ontarians would gladly choose it over homelessness, living in abusive situations, and the inability to get out from below the poverty line ... It was quite a slap in the face to find out disabled individuals are living thousands of dollars below the poverty line.

"I'm no longer able to provide any support for myself. I can no longer pay for essential medications.... I cannot pay rent.... It's easier for me to choose MAID than for me to live in Doug Ford's Ontario."

What a shame.

I'm going to bring my concluding remarks right there because I think Stephanie had it all right.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Questions?

Mr. Anthony Leardi: I have a question for the honourable member with regard to skilled trades.

I had the opportunity to attend a marvellous skilled trades day in the town of LaSalle in my riding. I met many, many young people who were there to learn about the trades and to try their hand at tools and see if they liked it, get information about it, find out about programs where they could join the skilled trades and get into a skilled trades program to become, perhaps, one of those great skilled tradespeople in the province of Ontario on their way to a great career with a good-paying job and a pension and maybe even benefits.

And so, I would just ask the member if the member has ever had an opportunity to attend one of these skilled trade fairs, and what was the member's experience at it?

MPP Kristyn Wong-Tam: I am very proud to rise to answer that question. In my 16 years of public service, of course, I have attended many job fairs, many fairs related to skilled trades. I've worked with the carpenters' union to build out streetscaping programs. I've worked with pipefitters. I have worked with allied trades—yes, absolutely.

What we need to see is a coordinated effort from this government to ensure that the money that is going to be spent will reach the actual students. When you cut \$69 million from colleges, that is not going to be helpful. When we are seeing a whopping \$486 million cut from jobs training, that is not going to be building up skilled trades or any trades or any labour market, which is absolutely essential for us to build prosperity in this province.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Question?

Mr. Chris Glover: I appreciate the comments from both of my colleagues here. I'll address my question to the member from Toronto Centre.

You ended your remarks with the story of Stephanie. She has a disability. There are 85,000 people who are homeless in this province. Some 30,000 of them have a disability, and many of them are homeless because this government provides \$599 in supports for housing. And they boast that it's going to go up by the rate of inflation. That's 2%, so it's going to be another \$12.

Many, many people with disabilities, because of this government's negligence, are choosing to accept medical assistance in dying. And Stephanie sounds like she's on the brink of that.

Would you say to this government that a \$12 increase will help to bring an end to homelessness for people with disabilities?

MPP Kristyn Wong-Tam: No, \$12 as an increase is not going to help Stephanie or Stephen or the thousands of other people who are living with disabilities, who are living with legislated poverty.

And I deeply regret to say that Stephanie is not the first constituent that I am aware of who is contemplating MAID, nor is she the first resident that I'm aware of who actually will undergo MAID. And that's the shameful part, Speaker. It's that these are all preventable, and the investments are simply not there.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Questions?

Mr. Matthew Rae: Thank you to my two colleagues from across the way for their important remarks this afternoon on the debate on the budget motion that we have here, colleagues.

Speaker, if you'll allow me, it's a very brief email from a constituent I received after we tabled our budget and made some great announcements in it: "I just wanted to send an email to thank you and your colleagues for the additional OAP funding"—the Ontario autism funding—"announced in yesterday's budget. It's a substantial increase in a difficult fiscal period for the province, and this will greatly help families with autistic children. It is truly appreciated."

That's a great email, colleagues, from a family that has an autistic child receiving that support. Can the member from London North Centre explain why they're voting against this budget?

Mr. Terence Kernaghan: I'd like to thank my colleague from Perth-Wellington for the question. I would say that it's a bit like Stockholm syndrome that anyone would thank this government, especially when they're from the autism community. This government has had their foot on the neck of education funding, of autism funding. Maybe it's because, within this budget, they've taken their foot slightly off that person's neck and that person's now thankful for the oxygen and the funding and, really, being able to breathe.

This government would congratulate itself for all of these things that they want to call historic investments, and yet they have underfunded education by \$1.4 billion. They

have cut OSAP, all while claiming it is not a cut. It's really interesting, their ability to try to position something as being completely different from what it is.

I also want to point out their weasel words that have been used in their talk of housing. They say this could—

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Withdraw.

Mr. Terence Kernaghan: I withdraw, Speaker.

They say in their own budget that this could stimulate thousands of housing starts, could support up to 14,000 good construction jobs, but they won't actually commit to anything because they realize they're complete and utter failures when it comes to their housing numbers, and they're just hopeful that maybe their tinkering around the edges will actually come true.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Further questions?

Ms. Jessica Bell: This is a question for the member from Toronto Centre. In response to the budget, the teachers' unions—many of them, including the Elementary Teachers' Federation of Ontario; OSSTF, the secondary school teachers; and OECTA, the Catholic teachers—issued a statement, and it said this education budget fails students. Despite the government's messaging, per-student funding, once adjusted for inflation, remains lower than when this government first took office.

You go to schools; you see what's happening. With this cut that is coming in 2026, what impact do you think this is going to have on the public schools in your riding?

MPP Kristyn Wong-Tam: Thank you very much for that question—to the member from University–Rosedale. What we are seeing in Toronto Centre is the same thing that you're seeing in your own communities to a large effect: larger classrooms, less supports for students. We're seeing less supports, especially one-on-one supports, for students with exceptionalities. We're seeing broken-down equipment that is well past their date of replacement that is being deferred.

In Jarvis Collegiate in my community, we have a green room that's been boarded up I think for over a decade. We've got laboratories that can't be opened. We've got art rooms that can't be opened up because literally the ceiling is falling down on people. We've got commercial kitchens that haven't been repaired. That's what's happening in our communities when this government doesn't make investments in education.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Question?

Mr. Joseph Racinsky: Thanks to the members for their comments. They mentioned—through you, Speaker—prosperity in their comments, but they didn't talk about job creation and they didn't talk about the economy, which is what delivers that prosperity to our province, to our country. Our government has been able to grow our GDP to over \$1 trillion now without raising a single tax. Actually, by cutting taxes we've been able to achieve that economic growth and drive that job creation.

My question to the member is about our small business tax cut. Do they support that tax cut, and will they support this budget?

Mr. Terence Kernaghan: I'd like to thank the member from Wellington–Halton Hills for the question, and I will just direct the member back to my speech where I said I support that measure, but I did say also that this government has let down small businesses in so many different ways.

1620

When it comes to the jobs numbers, the Ford government has no jobs planned. In fact, they would often talk about the 300,000 manufacturing jobs the Liberals chased away, yet this government has chased away yet more.

OPSEU: I wanted to add the voice of them as a stakeholder. They said, "For the eighth consecutive year, the Ford government has unveiled a provincial budget designed to slowly suffocate the public services Ontarians depend on...."

"Year after year, we are offered short-sighted spending plans which prioritize Doug Ford's vanity projects instead of addressing service cuts and staffing shortages.... Workers, students, and families are told the cupboard is bare, but the Premier is more than happy to spend our money on things no one asked for instead of things everyone needs."

It's really frightening when you see the priorities that have happened within budget 2026. This government is not investing in meeting the needs of people who are suffering right now and struggling right now in the province of Ontario. We have a jobs crisis, we have a housing crisis, we have a hallway health care crisis and so many more, and this government is failing to address it.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Further debate?

Mr. Adil Shamji: I rise today to discuss the 2026 budget, a budget introduced at a time when families across Ontario are struggling now more than ever before. After eight long years of this disastrous government—

Ms. Stephanie Bowman: Are you sharing your time?

Mr. Adil Shamji: I will be sharing my time with the member from Ajax.

Anyway, back to where I was: After eight long years of this unambitious, disastrous Conservative government, the cost of living continues to climb, affordable housing is out of reach for younger generations and our health care system is stretched to its breaking point. If this budget was truly about protecting Ontario and the people who call it home, it would have confronted these challenges head-on, and, unfortunately, it does not.

Let's be honest. This budget is about as ambitious its name is original: A Plan To Protect Ontario? That was last year's title, and if you guys had done your job the first time, you wouldn't have to borrow it again. Seriously, it is truly remarkable to me that no one in the Ministry of Finance or the Premier's office could have thought of anything new, but I guess bloated salaries don't always equal better outcomes.

As the Ontario Liberal critic for primary care, housing and Indigenous affairs, I will be focusing my remarks primarily on these three areas.

Health care funding needed to go up by about 5% to 7% this year just to maintain current levels of services. It didn't go up by that. Hospitals needed to be bailed out. They weren't. There were some things that at face value look like they may be beneficial. For example, it's welcome news that the government plans to invest an additional \$325 million into primary care and claims to expand and create 300 primary care teams.

These are positive talking points, but the proof will be in the pudding—because let's talk about some of the things we've been hearing in this very chamber. The Minister of Health has repeatedly been telling us that to date 330,000 patients have been attached to primary care. There's an important thing she always leaves out: that at the same time, the same number of patients lost access to primary care. That is based on Ontario Health data that I have access to.

As the Auditor General made clear in her report, even if we take at face value, even if we give the government the benefit of the doubt that they will follow through on this—the Auditor General made it very clear that without timelines, targets or actual performance measures, there's no way to determine whether these initiatives will actually work, and this government has a very long track record of making very big promises and delivering very little.

One glaring omission that stood out to me from this budget is the entire lack of a plan for health care worker retention. It's astonishing that alcohol is mentioned more than 70 times, while health care worker retention appears only once in passing in reference to the Ontario Learn and Stay Grant. There's no comprehensive strategy to retain health care workers in hospitals or clinics, and they are the bedrock of our health care system.

This comes at a time when health care unions are sounding the alarm about burnout, staffing shortages, backlogs and unacceptably long working hours. Just last week, we learned that more than 700 nursing positions have been cut across the province just since January—that's 700 nursing positions. So yes, expanding access to primary care is important, but without retaining the workers who deliver that care, this strategy is no different than trying to bail out a sinking cargo ship with a mop bucket.

The budget—also in a seemingly positive talking point—proposes a province-wide electronic medical record system for primary care, something that Ontario Liberals have long advocated for. If implemented properly, it would allow primary care teams to communicate seamlessly and reduce duplication of tests. In principle, this is a positive development. But we're all left to wonder whether this government will actually deliver. Beyond the Minister of Health's announcement and a single paragraph in the budget, we have no details. And as we've seen time and time again, this government excels at announcements and fails at follow-through.

Consider the recent Ontario Health atHome data breach, a scandal in which criminals extorted taxpayer dollars from the Premier and his government, while that same Premier and government failed to notify the affected patients. The government has barely acknowledged the attack, let alone explained how it happened or what safeguards will prevent it from happening again. How much was the ransom? I didn't see it in the budget.

I will note that in the setting of this, in the complete lack of transparency, the government is now turning around and asking us to trust them with another private vendor who will, again, be a custodian for sensitive health data, without providing any information on cost, safety measures or procurement processes. It's difficult to understand how trust can be restored when the last vendor was hacked within months.

Madam Speaker, I will turn now to housing. This government loves to boast about building more homes. But just like their struggle to name this budget, they seem to have run out of ideas for naming their housing bills. We've seen More Homes, More Choice; More Homes for Everyone; More Homes Built Faster; Cutting Red Tape to Build More Homes; Protect Ontario by Building Faster and Smarter; and Fighting Delays, Building Faster. Despite all of these very unique titles and all of these incredibly ambitious slogans, housing starts have declined year over year for the last three years, and the government knows that it's failing. In 2024, the government set a target of 125,000 new homes; it built 74,000. In 2025, it aimed for 150,000; it built even fewer—65,000. This year, it is projected to build just 64,000 against a target of 175,000, and if it's projected to build 64,000, that is virtually a guarantee that they will actually build less than that.

This government cannot even build half of what it is promising, and that is reflected in the name of their newest bill: Building Homes and Improving Transportation. It quietly admits defeat by just saying that they will build some homes—not more homes, not faster, just some homes. When you set the bar that low, where all you have to do is build a single home and you've fulfilled the title, you've fulfilled the promise that you made, it indicates this government is just waving the white flag, surrendering, and has entirely failed in protecting Ontarians.

Budget 2026 makes these failures impossible to ignore. Housing starts have plummeted. Homebuilding projections are the lowest on record. And the government's much-touted 1.5 million homes target has all but vanished. If I didn't have such respect for taking moments of silence, we could in fact take one in memory of that 1.5 million homes target.

Credit where credit is due, because I will always be fair: The government is finally cutting the HST on new homes, something that Ontario Liberals have been calling for for more than six months. This government is also reducing development charges by 50% for one year, another measure that we have long been calling for; in fact, it was one of the Ontario Liberal flagship campaign promises. But one year is nowhere near enough time for developers or homebuyers to meaningfully benefit from this change.

On the topic of other ideas that have been stolen from Ontario Liberals, I will acknowledge that this budget does promise a small business tax cut, reducing the rate from 3.2% to 2.0%.

Interjections.

Mr. Adil Shamji: I wouldn't clap for that, because if you'd copied our homework properly, you would have reduced it to 1.6% and you would have raised the threshold from \$500,000 to \$600,000.

Herein lies a fundamental premise of this government: On the rare occasions they ever do the right thing, they find the worst possible way to get it done. They could have cut HST on new primary residences for all homebuyers months ago. They could have cut development charges over a year ago—and they could have gone all the way, not just 50% and not just for one year. And they could have cut the small business tax credit from 3.2% to 1.6% and increased the threshold from \$500,000 to \$600,000. Not only would that save small businesses more money; if they'd implemented it at the time that we called for it, those same small businesses could have already saved up to \$36,000.

1630

But this is not a government that's interested in protecting Ontario. This is not a government that is interested in actually saving money for Ontarians. It's a government that is interested in one thing and one thing alone: not protecting Ontario, just protecting themselves.

I want to make sure that my colleague from Ajax has enough time to share his comments, so I'll just end with this: To say that I'm disappointed in this budget would imply that I expected something better. But when a government shows you who they are, year after year, you eventually stop expecting more. The only worthwhile measures in this budget are pretty much watered-down versions of ideas that the Ontario Liberal caucus has already championed.

So my commitment to the people of Ontario is this: We will continue pushing this government to do better, and we will be perfectly happy if they continue copying and borrowing our ideas. All we ask is that the next time, they copy our homework correctly and stop diluting the solutions that Ontarians actually need.

With that, I turn it over to my exceptional colleague from Ajax.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): I recognize the member for Ajax.

Mr. Rob Cerjanec: I'd like to thank my colleague from Don Valley East, because if this government did fully copy our homework, I think the people of Ontario would have been better off.

It's a privilege to stand in this chamber today on behalf of my constituents in Ajax and speak on the 2026 Ontario budget. I want to be very clear: This budget tells a very clear story—it's a story about a government that's out of ideas. It's about a government that's spending more than ever before, borrowing more than ever before, and yet delivering less where it matters most.

We see a \$244-billion budget, a \$13.8-billion deficit, and a provincial debt approaching half a trillion dollars. It's almost like the Premier and the Minister of Finance are going to be the \$500-billion men.

The question Ontarians are asking is simple: If we're spending this much, then why does it feel like we're getting less? I've been asking folks if, over the last eight years, folks feel their lives have been better under this Doug Ford PC government, and consistently the answer to that question is no. Unfortunately, based on this budget, I think that's going to be the answer for quite some time because, frankly, there isn't a lot new in the budget.

Somebody remarked the other day that it was a copy-and-paste budget from last year, plastering "protect Ontario" all throughout it, like we see the "protect Ontario" signs throughout the province. It might be good for some printers, okay, but it's not good for the people of this province because they're not being protected. It's a government that's simply trying to reannounce policies that have failed to address our province's current situation.

My colleague from Don Valley East said it well: There are things in this budget that we have been calling for, but instead of getting them right, the government has delivered watered-down versions.

Take housing: For years, we've been calling for action to lower the cost of building homes. Now, finally, the government is removing HST on new homes, something that Ontario Liberals called for last year, and I've been calling for going back many, many years prior to even sitting in this chamber.

During last year's debate on this government's housing legislation, I spoke about the need to go further, to remove the land transfer tax on new builds because that property hasn't been transferred before, and to help municipalities around development charges and really set that framework. Instead of waiting for somebody else, these are issues that the provincial government has full control over, could have done many years ago, and still isn't going all the way today—real changes, Speaker, that will actually increase supply.

Instead, we've got a short-term, partial measure, and even with that, housing starts are just projected to be 65,000 this year. We don't hear talk of building 1.5 million new homes anymore because this government has fumbled the ball time and time again. It's nowhere near what our province needs.

The same pattern is showing up in innovation. The government is now talking about an AI strategy, and I think that it is a good thing that they're finally talking about it, because last year they just said government needs to get out of the way. But this is something that Ontario Liberals have already brought forth through legislation that I introduced: a real strategy, one that includes workers, industry, researchers, communities, bringing everyone involved in our province around the table. One that includes accountability, public reporting and long-term planning.

Instead, what we see in this budget's funding announcements is the promise of a strategy—a promise. And while

I'll reserve final judgment for when we can see full details, it sounds like the only people at the table are going to be folks from government itself—even though they said government has got to get out of the way—and representatives from industry just chosen by government.

While that's a start, they're missing some key features: diverse membership, regular reporting on progress and clear goals. I can't say that I'm surprised. This is a government that doesn't necessarily believe in listening to experts and being accountable to the people. So without the right structure, the right voices and without the accountability, we can't be sure that this is the strategy that government will have people's interests in mind.

At the same time, the government is dramatically expanding its finances through this budget, authorizing over \$35 billion in new borrowing, creating funds that will be directed with very limited oversight. We've already seen that movie before. We're seeing it with a spa on the waterfront, talk of a lake infill convention centre and all of these other things, instead of focusing on what the people of our province need. What people are hearing—at least what I'm hearing in my community—is about the need for new hospitals and schools and repairing the infrastructure that we see there.

Ontario is going to spend about \$17.2 billion just in interest payments—more than on post-secondary education. Think about that: more money going to interest than to educating the next generation. And despite all this spending, we're not seeing the results where people need them.

Nowhere in this gap between spending and results is it clearer than in Durham region. Ajax and communities across Durham region are growing rapidly. This budget doesn't reflect that reality. We're seeing gridlock getting worse with no meaningful progress on Highway 401. Transit expansion is falling behind with no real urgency on electrifying the Lakeshore East GO line, and the express train still isn't back.

Health care is under pressure. Emergency departments are overcrowded, and the Whitby hospital project, something that Durham region desperately needs, seems like is going to be delayed by another year.

And that hospital isn't just a project, Speaker. It's part of the solution, taking pressure off existing hospitals, reducing wait times and bringing care closer to home. But instead, it's, "Oh, time to wait for another year." And instead of moving forward, it's going to be pushed further into the future, Speaker. I know these frustrations aren't just specific to Ajax or Durham region. It's what people are feeling province-wide.

Consider property taxes—another issue that this budget ignores. Across Ontario, municipalities are dealing with billions in shortfalls due to provincial downloading. And what does that mean for residents, folks? It means higher property taxes.

So, when this government says it's helping with affordability, people should ask: Why are their property taxes going up? Why are municipalities being left to pick up the bill for services that in other provinces they provide or

cover the cost for? Municipalities are facing a \$4-billion annual shortfall because of provincial downloading. And that burden is falling on homeowners and families.

At the end of the day, this budget was an opportunity. It was an opportunity to help people with the cost of living. There's nothing there on home heating and hydro, nothing to help with groceries. And for families trying to get ahead, that matters, because people are being squeezed from every single direction.

We know that the per-person debt in this province is over \$20,000. The average salary for somebody in this province is a bit over \$60,000 per person. That's a lot of debt that every person in our province is going to be carrying. And this government is taking out the credit card and racking up the bill, putting that on the backs of future generations at a time when we don't know where interest rates are going to go.

You know, I used to think Conservatives may have a more responsible approach to budgeting, but we've seen time and time again, it's actually not true. It's Liberals that are able to do that.

Now, let's talk about health care. The government is pointing to new investments, but that reality tells a different story. Yet there's a little bit of new hospital funding, but it's well short of what hospitals need. Emergency rooms are overcrowded, wait times are too long and millions of Ontarians still don't have access to a family doctor. Spending more is not the same as delivering better care.

1640

Speaker, this budget asks Ontarians to accept more spending, more borrowing and more debt, but in return, the people are getting less—less access to health care, less progress on housing, less support for growing communities, like Durham region, and fewer reasons to feel confident about the future.

Now, the government has started to adopt some ideas from Ontario Liberals, but they haven't gone far enough, and they haven't gotten it right. Ontario doesn't need half measures; it needs a real plan—a plan to build homes, a plan to strengthen health care, a plan to support growing communities and a plan to make life more affordable for every single person in our province. That's what Ontarians deserve, and yet that is what this budget fails to deliver.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Questions?

Mr. Anthony Leardi: On page 45 of the budget, there is some commentary with regard to agreements signed by and with First Nations to unlock the Ring of Fire. It states the following: "These agreements will help to unlock economic development and accelerate construction of the all-season Webequie Supply Road ... and the Marten Falls Community Access Road ... while also supporting each partners' additional key community priorities. Each agreement provides these communities with up to \$39.5 million for community infrastructure and economic supports."

My question to either member who would like to field the question is, what is your view of that?

Mr. Adil Shamji: Thank you to the honourable member for highlighting something in the budget—one of the few things in the budget that refers to Indigenous communities in our province.

I will reflect on the fact that in the budget typically what we see is this government hand-picks a few things that sound very nice—they're usually with some flashy language—and ignores all of the other disasters that they leave on the side. What I will tell you is, rather than focusing on a single cherry-picked paragraph from the budget, I will share with the member much of what I've been hearing from Indigenous communities across the entire province, who I'm quite connected to.

They're telling me that they need help with health care access, they need help with housing access, they need help with meaningful consultation—and they're not getting it. They need someone that will actually reflect on the fact that Bill 5 was rammed through, and they have deep and grave concerns about that, and all of those have been ignored by this government. So maybe he can reflect on what he thinks about that.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Question?

Ms. Jessica Bell: I have a question for the member for Don Valley East; it's about the budget bill. In the budget bill, there's a schedule that limits the ability for the public to use the freedom-of-information process to get access to the Premier's records, the minister's records and their staff, and it's backdated until 1988. It's quite a time period.

What do you think the government's trying to hide?

Mr. Adil Shamji: It is a particularly astonishing finding in the budget—a budget that is titled “A Plan to Protect Ontario,” which very obviously is a plan to protect the Premier and his fellow MPPs. It strikes me as unusual that this is a retroactive bill, no doubt suggesting there's something to hide.

It also strikes me as interesting that this change to the freedom-of-information laws is embedded in the budget bill and isn't a separate bill unto itself. Of course, what that means is the government is afraid of taking it to public hearings. They're also afraid of being accused of time-allocating another bill, because that's all they do. This is their way of hiding behind some promises of doing this and that, here and there, and hoping that people won't have the time and attention or willpower to prosecute them on their efforts to hide their own transgressions.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Question?

Ms. Stephanie Bowman: I want to commend both my colleagues from Don Valley East and from Ajax on their excellent debates.

My question is for the member from Ajax. The government's economic growth has actually been abysmal; it's the worst in 40 years. You have to go back to the NDP government of the 1990s to find worse economic growth: 0.2% growth in GDP per capita. I wonder if you could share a little about how you think innovation and AI and investments in those kinds of sectors could help this

government actually create the kind of growth that Ontario deserves.

Mr. Rob Cerjanec: At a time when we're looking 10 years, 20 years down the road, if we want to be able to have an economy of the future, we need to invest much more heavily into research and development, into our post-secondary institutions to create centres of regional economic growth and development. Instead of seeing programs close, instead of seeing entrepreneurship centres close, we need to invest in our people and having them have less debt so that they can then go on and be entrepreneurs and create the next innovation and not be afraid to do that.

We're not seeing that from this government right now. We're seeing them, actually, in some ways, stick their heads in the sand. We can grow our economy from within instead of just relying on “let's bring manufacturers here”—which is still important, but we need to do a lot more in our province to bring folks from within. I don't see the growth necessary here in this budget in order to do that, Speaker.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Question?

Mr. Anthony Leardi: To the member from Don Valley East: On the very next page of the budget, it talks about the historic agreement, signed with and including Ontario and Canada, being the One Project, One Process and one decision model to streamline environmental approvals for major infrastructure and resource projects. Under this new model, most projects that would previously have been subject to both federal impact assessment and a provincial impact assessment will now be subject to Ontario's world-class assessment process. Moreover, the Impact Assessment Agency of Canada will complete its review of the assessment roads to the Ring of Fire no later than June 2026, which I think is extremely important and perhaps might cause the member to reflect and ask himself whether or not he agrees with that.

Mr. Adil Shamji: This assessment process and some of the other provisions that came through in Bill 5 are the very same provisions that are causing grave concern amongst Indigenous communities across this province.

I will refer the member back to my earlier response, during which I asked him to reflect a little bit on the feedback that he's received from Indigenous communities from across the province. I wonder, perhaps in the next turn, whether he will tell me whether he thinks his government has appropriately consulted with and listened to the concerns of Indigenous people across the province.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Question?

Mr. Chris Glover: There's been some scuttlebutt, some rumours going around about why this government thinks they can tunnel under the 401 and why they would want to build a tunnel under the 401. But there was an inside report that actually said that the reason they're building this tunnel is because they're looking for a place to hide the Premier's phone records.

I'll ask the member from Don Valley East: What do you think? Is that a possibility? Do you think that's why they're digging the tunnel?

Mr. Adil Shamji: I will acknowledge that's a distinct possibility. I actually have another hypothesis. I believe that the Premier has embarked on a project of Americanizing, or trying to Americanize, our province. If you look at many of the things that this government is trying to do—centralizing power, particularly in the education sector—it reeks of Project 2025, which tries to do away with the Department of Education.

There are a number of things that I look at, including some of the efforts that this government does to try and evade transparency, which reek of things that can be found in Project 2025.

The final thing, which brings me to your question about the tunnel under the 401: One of the flagship promises of President Trump during his first election was to build a massive concrete structure that separated the United States and Mexico. I have to wonder if this next massive concrete structure below the 401 is the Premier's attempt to try and do the same.

1650

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Question?

Ms. Stephanie Bowman: A question to my colleague from Don Valley East: This budget is another budget of broken promises—no middle-income tax cut as the Conservatives promised in 2018, no mention of their promise to build 1.5 million homes. I wonder if the member from Don Valley East could elaborate on why this government keeps failing on its promises.

Mr. Adil Shamji: That is probably the hardest question I've received. I cannot fathom how this government consistently manages to do the wrong thing, and to do the wrong thing so spectacularly.

I will reflect on that promise to build 1.5 million homes. The Premier once said that under his leadership, homes would be popping up like mushrooms across the province. Well, I think he was on mushrooms when he said that, because nothing could be further from the truth.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Further debate?

MPP George Darouze: Speaker, it is an honour to rise and speak in support of government order number 14, the budget motion, which was presented by my friend and colleague the Minister of Finance.

This budget motion will lead to sustained investments in key public services, while maintaining the fiscal flexibility needed to respond to changing conditions. Sound financial planning gives us the means to offer more supports for the people of Ontario and to make life more affordable for families.

Speaker, across the country, other governments have made significant funding cuts, reduced the size of their public service and increased taxes. But here in Ontario, under the leadership of our Premier, this government approach maintains a path to balance as part of its fiscal plan while still investing in our province, investing in key

priorities like infrastructure, health care and education. These investments are part of the plan to protect Ontario for today, tomorrow and for generations to come.

I would like to take a few minutes to discuss how the budget will help some of Ontario's most vulnerable individuals and support families. The Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services is the third-largest ministry by annual investment, and last week's budget strengthens that commitment. In fact, this budget boosts our investment in children, community and social services from about \$20.4 billion last year, to \$21.4 billion in 2026-27.

We're continuing to make investments that will allow us to modernize service and improve outcomes for people. Here is a major example: We are increasing our investment in the Ontario Autism Program to \$965 million this year. That's nearly \$1 billion. Our budget includes \$186 million in new spending just for this year, and we're looking—

Interjections.

MPP George Darouze: Thank you.

And we're looking back a few years. Compared to when we took office, that's an increase of nearly \$674 million or 232%. This is more than triple the investments of previous governments. This new investment will enable more children and youth to access core clinical services, while further strengthening the sector's capacity across the province. It also builds on the government's ongoing work to modernize and enhance the Ontario Autism Program to better meet the needs of families. This program was developed in consultation with clinicians, experts, family members and people with lived experience.

Speaker, our government has received terrific support for this new investment. For example, we've heard from Balance Support and Self Care Studios in Hamilton. They wrote in to say, "This increase in funding for the Ontario Autism Program is a vital turning point. By expanding clinical core therapy, we are building the foundation for children and youth to receive the support they need during the critical transition years."

"With these supports in place, they will be better equipped to navigate the transition from school to adulthood, ensuring they have the opportunities they need for meaningful education and future employment."

"This is a transformative step for our entire community and we could not be more thankful to the government for their increased support for the autism community."

Speaker, I cannot talk about autism without mentioning one investment that is particularly important for family in Ottawa, supporting my residents in Carleton. It is at the Children's Hospital of Eastern Ontario.

In fact, last month, the Minister of Children, Community and Social Services and I participated in a virtual ceremony with CHEO. We recognized the final structural beam for an important new building: the integrated treatment centre. Speaker, this will be a new 200-square-foot facility, and it will deliver enhanced care to more than 13,700 children and youth with special needs and their families. The new building will be connected to the CHEO

hospital by tunnel and will bring care providers together in one place so families can conveniently get the services they need. Once operational in 2028, it will provide patients and families with coordinated care for children and youth with multiple or complex special needs, including supports through the Ontario Autism Program.

There will also be rehabilitation service and support therapy on site, such as occupational therapy, physiotherapy, speech language therapy and recreation therapy. As well, it will provide supports and coordinated care through another important program: Extensive Needs Services. And I will have more to say about that in a few minutes.

Speaker, for this year alone, we are investing nearly \$220 million to better support people with developmental disabilities. Our investments will provide new supportive living spaces, as well as additional Passport Program funding, while it will help caregivers to stay in their important job and help community agencies deliver vital services.

With this new funding, we are now providing an historic \$3.9 billion in developmental service support this year. That is an increase of nearly \$1.6 billion from 2017-18.

Our investments have found support from a range of stakeholders within the developmental service community—people like Brad Saunders, the CEO of Community Living Toronto. He said, “This is the third major commitment from the Ford government since 2018, representing significant progress and will bring much-needed stability to a sector that has faced long-standing challenges. This momentum will translate into stronger supports, enabling children, adults, and families across Toronto to participate fully in community life, access meaningful activities, and deepen their sense of belonging.”

Also, Janet Noel-Annable, the CEO of Karis Disability Services, said, “This investment is good for people with developmental disabilities and their families, as well as the dedicated workforce who made developmental services possible across Ontario.

“Additional funding for the developmental services sector strengthens the foundation needed to deliver consistent, high-quality support and signals real progress in addressing long-standing pressures faced by agency, staff, and families.”

Joe Passaretti, Chief Executive Officer of the Meta Centre, said, “Meta Centre is grateful for this much-needed investment from the government of Ontario and we are excited to put the new developmental services funding announced in today’s Ontario budget towards strengthening the services and supports we provide to the people with developmental disabilities.”

And finally, here is one more, from Bryan Keshen, CEO of the Reena Foundation: “This investment will help stabilize critical services, support our workforce, and ensure we can continue to provide safe, supportive housing and community-based care....

“Investing in developmental services is one of the most effective ways to reduce pressure on Ontario’s health care, long-term care, and shelter systems.”

The 2026 budget also contained good news for service providers facing increasing operational costs and the people who depend on their services. We are now increasing investments to address these costs with \$407 million in new money over three years—more than \$135 million per year. This investment strengthens support for individuals with special needs and developmental disabilities, as well as for survivors of gender-based violence or human trafficking.

1700

Speaker, Ontario set the standard in anti-human trafficking investment in Canada and we will continue to be leaders in combatting gender-based violence.

Through the Women’s Economic Leadership and Legacy Fund, WELL for short, we are providing \$11 million over two years. This investment will empower survivors of human trafficking through peer supports and by providing pathways to education and employment, helping them to heal and rebuild their lives. WELL is also designed to foster more supportive work environments for women. It will inform best practices to further women’s advancement in key employment sectors, help increase women’s retention, promotion and leadership and strengthen the leadership of women from diverse backgrounds including Indigenous women.

We know that increasing women’s economic opportunities contributes to women’s safety and well-being. It helps to address gender-based violence and empowers survivors to rebuild their lives while also addressing the province’s labour shortages and supporting economic prosperity. I’m proud to be part of a government that supports women in finding rewarding and well-paying careers in today’s economy.

Speaker, our government continues to take action to support individuals and families, especially those facing the added challenges of living with disabilities or being on a low income. We’ve locked in significant increases to both the Ontario Disability Support Program and the Assistance for Children with Severe Disabilities Program, and we are continuing to index the Ontario Disability Support Program rates and Assistance for Children with Severe Disabilities Program to inflation. We’ve also introduced a measure in May 2025 that exempted the Canada Disability Benefit as income for social assistance recipients. This change allows recipients of ODSP, Ontario Works and the Assistance for Children with Severe Disabilities Program to receive their maximum entitlement under the federal benefit without any reduction to their provincial support.

Speaker, I would like to continue by mentioning a few of our many more capital investments.

We are investing an additional \$50 million over 10 years in the Partner Facility Renewal Program to agencies delivering services. It will cover repairs, renovations and health and safety projects to keep these buildings in good working condition. Last year in Ottawa, this included over \$1.1 million in funding to support 12 children’s and social services facilities.

We also continue to invest in supportive housing options and help Ontario's vulnerable populations connect to the key services that they need. For example, through the Luso Canadian Charitable Society, we are investing \$16 million towards a new supportive housing residence in Hamilton. Aging individuals with disabilities, including developmental disabilities, will call it home. In Toronto, we are investing \$21 million for Safehaven's Bloor site redevelopment project to better support children and adults with complex care needs.

Speaker, our government is working to help children get off to the best start in life.

Before we discuss more of our investments in children, I want to make sure we remember one very special little boy. His name is Liam Riazati. He was 17-months old when he arrived at a child care centre in Richmond Hill on September 10. On that sad day, we lost Liam in a horrible tragedy after a car crashed into the building. To this day, our hearts go out to Liam's parents.

All members of this House are grateful for the loving response of Richmond Hill and neighbouring communities to Liam's family—sorry, I got emotional—and the families of the others who were injured on that day.

As the Minister of Children, Community and Social Services said last December, "The community took action. As lawmakers, we too must take action."

We believe that families deserve the peace of mind that comes from knowing their children are safe in child care facilities. Our government is working to introduce longer-term measures, and in the meantime, the \$20-million Liam Riazati Memorial Fund is already making Ontario's child care centres safer and more secure across the province for both children and staff. Liam inspires us all to make Ontario a more compassionate place for all children.

We are continuing to invest in the development of modern facilities to increase access and improve programs and services for children and youth with special needs, including the Children's Treatment Centre of Chatham-Kent, which is under construction; the Lansdowne Children's Centre in Brantford, which is currently in the planning stage; as I mentioned earlier, CHEO; and we must not forget the new Grandview children's centre in Ajax, which opened its door to patients and their families in November 2024.

When the members dig into the budget numbers, they will see we are investing an additional \$129 million over four years in the Extensive Needs Service. The new program is helping improve outcomes for more than 1,100 children and youth annually with complex special needs like developmental and intellectual disabilities, mental health concerns, chronic conditions and physical disabilities.

Over the last three years, this was a pilot program delivered at Holland Bloorview Kids Rehabilitation Hospital, CHEO and McMaster Children's Hospital. In fact, the pilot program was so successful that our investment in those three great hospitals is now annualized for the years to come.

We are hearing terrific reports from the hospitals that deliver this program.

Here is a quote from Bruce Squires, the president and CEO of Holland Bloorview Kids Rehabilitation Hospital: "This inclusive, innovative, first-of-its-kind model is helping children thrive, supporting family stability and strengthening communities across Ontario."

Dr. Tamar Packer, the interim VP of women's and children's health and president at McMaster Children's Hospital, had this to say:

"With permanent funding, more children and families will be able to access the right care, at the right time, in their own communities.

"We are grateful to the provincial government for this important and life-changing investment for Ontario's children."

Vera Etches, the president and CEO of CHEO, said: "We're very proud of what the Extensive Needs Service has made possible—reducing the barriers that families sometimes face when navigating the health care system by bringing together experts from many different disciplines."

These affirmations confirm that this budget is making critical investments to support people who need it most.

Speaker, I would like to finish by outlining some key investments that our government is making in eastern Ontario. We are improving highways, roads and bridges. This includes replacing 20 bridges that will accommodate the future widening of Highway 401 in eastern Ontario; expanding Highway 17 between Renfrew and Arnprior from two lanes to four lanes; and continuing to improve the Highway 401 corridor through the Kingston area.

We have a whole list of school investments, including an addition to Notre Dame Catholic school in Carleton Place; two new French elementary schools in Orléans; two more elementary schools in Ottawa; an addition to St. Thomas Aquinas Catholic High School in Russell; a new English Catholic elementary school in Amherstview; a new French public secondary school in Clarence-Rockland; and a new French Catholic elementary and secondary school in Kemptville.

We are also investing over \$5 million to develop learning resources that reflect the French language and francophone culture.

As for health care, at the Ottawa civic hospital, we are investing in the building of a state-of-the-art campus which will serve as the lead acute care centre for Ottawa and eastern Ontario.

A hospital doesn't serve only one riding; it serves everyone who lives in Ontario. It serves our community. It serves all our residents to make sure they have the health and the care they need. That's what this budget delivered to our communities across Ontario.

We are building and supporting high-quality long-term care. At Maxville Manor, we are adding 38 new beds and upgrading 122 more. We are building 192 new places at Southbridge in Ottawa.

1710

Speaker, we are able to accomplish all this precisely because of the sound fiscal planning from our Minister of

Finance and the leadership of our Premier—under his leadership, the leadership of this government, these ministers and the people here in the Legislature.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Effie J. Triantafilopoulos): Questions?

MPP Kristyn Wong-Tam: Thank you to the member from Carleton for his presentation.

The member will recognize that the unemployment rate in the province is 7.6%. There are over 700,000 Ontarians currently looking for a job. The budget calls for a cut of \$486,000 from job creation and training.

How is that going to help the unemployed workers of Ontario?

MPP George Darouze: Thank you to the member for the question.

Madam Speaker, through you, this budget—if you look at it and you start looking where you cut, and where there's no cut—delivered a balanced budget. We're making sure our budget balances all the sectors, from a job creation perspective, and from being able to support our communities and our people in Ontario.

So if you look at it from any perspective—if you're talking about cuts, there are no cuts. If you listened to my speech and you listened to the additional dollars we're spending to support the families here in Ontario—in our hospitals, in our care for our children—through all the programs we deliver, I don't think we're really cutting any money.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Effie J. Triantafilopoulos): I recognize the member for Don Valley West.

Ms. Stephanie Bowman: Thank you to the member from Carleton for his remarks.

Just to make sure he has the facts: The deficit is not balanced. This government has yet to table a balanced budget. The budget is showing a deficit of \$13.8 billion. Never has a government spent so much to deliver so little.

I will note that among the numerous projects that the member mentioned, which of course are all with borrowed money—let's talk about that half a trillion dollars—he didn't mention once the Kingston hospital.

I wonder if he could explain why this budget does not have any mention of the new Kingston hospital that's so desperately needed.

MPP George Darouze: To the member: If you look at the budget and you see how much we are providing in small business taxes to the residents and the businesses in Ontario, you'll see how much we are helping.

We're also investing in hospitals. Do you know how much money we're investing in the Ottawa Hospital alone? We are investing so much money in hospitals—

Ms. Stephanie Bowman: You're not.

MPP George Darouze: I'm just trying to explain to you that the budget we are delivering right now—maybe you're forgetting we're talking about the deficit or the budget.

We are forgetting that we're protecting Ontario, we're protecting our communities. We're realizing the pressures that are coming to us, to all communities in our country, from the United States, and what the budget is trying to

deliver to keep making sure we have job creation, and that the people in Ontario will be able to get paycheques and pay their bills and pay their rent.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Question?

Hon. David Piccini: I enjoyed listening to the member's speech. We talked a lot about hospitals. I know hospitals. Certainly, I recall—and one of the reasons I ran, the Liberals' devastating record on hospitals: Campbellford—they didn't get it done; Trillium.

The hospital in your riding that we had the privilege of visiting with unionized construction workers all over the National Capital Region—these historic investments—not to mention schools like the schools the Liberals shut down in my riding. We're now building a Newcastle school. We're building another school soon to be announced in Cobourg; I don't want to scoop it.

But could the member maybe speak to what those infrastructure investments mean—we're investing in hard infrastructure after decades of neglect—and what it means for workers of our economy?

MPP George Darouze: Thank you to the member.

We visited those sites, yourself and I. We talked to the people that work the labour—they are building those hospitals, building that infrastructure and the schools that we are building here in Ontario. Last year alone, I myself went to three school openings in my community. Our communities are growing. This government is the only government investing in so much infrastructure in education and schools. My colleague the member here is so jealous because of how many schools I opened. But you know what? That shows how much this government cares about labour, employment and job creation. When we are in a time—in a crunch like that, investments like our government is doing today, that's what is going to keep us going, that's going to keep building Ontario and that's what's going to protect Ontario.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Question?

MPP Alexa Gilmour: I want to thank my honourable colleague for his speech. You will recall that, in question period yesterday, the Minister of Children, Community and Social Services and I had an exchange about the Ontario Autism Program. There's a small bump in the budget for that program. But later, on Ontario Today, families said the minister was incorrectly attributing the entire program to what the families had asked for. They're asking for a clearing of the 67,000 children on the waitlist. They're asking for a streamlining of the administration in the program and core clinical services. I'm wondering if you can say why the government didn't listen to the autism families.

MPP George Darouze: Thank you to the member for the question. I will remind the members in this House that the MCCSS minister, Minister Parsa, works so hard with the families to build the autism program, and this government was fixing that program. He worked very closely with stakeholders.

This program that we deliver was built by the community. It was built by the caregivers. It was built by the families. It was built by the parents—all the feedback they gave us, all the information we got from them. We built that program. Year after year, if the member heard me correctly—how much money we're investing in that program. This year alone in that new budget, we just added over \$186 million of new money.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Question?

Mr. Jonathan Tsao: I want to thank my honourable colleague for his remarks on the budget today. Today being World Autism Awareness Day, I thought it would be good to continue on the theme of autism and follow up on that question.

We've seen an increase, yes, but we've also seen significantly higher increases to the wait-list. Currently in Ontario, the wait-list for core clinical services is at 64,805 and only growing. We saw an increase to OAP in the last budget, yet we still see those numbers continue to increase.

What is this government going to do not just to throw money at our problem but to actually ensure that the children and families who are stuck on this wait-list—64,000 people—will actually get some sort of service?

MPP George Darouze: Thank you to the member for the question. I really appreciate the question because I totally understand where you're coming from. That's why, in our budget this year, we made the announcement of how much new money we are putting in. I agree with you that throwing money at the issue is not going to fix the problem, but that program, we are delivering on.

What's happening right now in that sector is us listening and our ministry working with the families, the sector and the caregivers—because that program was designed by the community to serve that community.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): A very quick question from the member for Bay of Quinte.

Mr. Tyler Allsopp: Thank you so much, Speaker, and thank you to the member for Carleton for the great presentation today.

It was really such a joy to be able to tour around the province. I was able to go out with SCOFEA a couple of times and talk to the people that matter the most, the constituents and stakeholders all across Ontario. We saw so much of what we heard at those committee meetings reflected in this budget, whether it's the \$1.1 billion for home care or the billion more for our hospitals. We just talked about the OAP program, almost \$1 billion now and only \$250 million under the previous Liberal government. Thousands more families are getting the support they need. Look at the \$66 million that we put forward for teachers to get supplies in the classroom—so many things that make a huge difference in our ridings.

I was just wondering which part of the budget you think is most impactful for the residents of Carleton.

MPP George Darouze: Thank you very much for the question. I really appreciate it. You highlighted a lot of programs and all the money in the budget. But the most important things that we are seeing in that budget, if you

really look at it from the beginning page to the end page, is all that we're trying to do to serve the residents of Ontario and to protect them. The small business tax: That's going to be amazing for my small community. A small community in rural Ottawa, like in Carleton, it's going to help them. That's what's going to keep them going. Instead of us reaching out always to their pocket and taking their taxes, we're going to be—

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Thank you. Further debate?

1720

MPP Alexa Gilmour: Good afternoon. It's an honour to rise on behalf of the people of Parkdale–High Park to speak to the budget measures set out in Bill 97, Plan to Protect Ontario Act.

Budgets are about choices, and they show us the government's true intent. Cut through all the rhetoric, the bombast, and the numbers do not lie. Is this a government that chooses to uplift the people it serves, one that will truly protect Ontario, as the budget purports? Or is this a government that serves its own interest and its wealthy friends?

Speaker, in the lead-up to the government's tabling of this budget, I surveyed my constituents in Parkdale–High Park about what they wanted to see prioritized, and here is what they told me: First and foremost, they believe that public health care is a fundamental Canadian value, and they want our government to make our health care system truly universal and accessible to all Ontarians. That is a direct quote from one of my constituents. This means ending hallway health care, not hiding the numbers; fixing the family doctor crisis and stopping the slide towards privatization and the two-tier system like the US.

My constituents want us to fix our affordability crisis. It's been eight years. What this Conservative government is doing is not working. We need policies like real rent control, a government watchdog to crack down on grocery price gouging, to double the social assistance rates so Ontarians can get out of survivor mode and follow their dreams again. We heard a devastating story about someone thinking about the use of MAID as an alternative because the social assistance rates are simply too low. We need to invest in our future.

The people of Parkdale–High Park want to see real investments in public education, both K-to-12 and post-secondary, and they want us to reverse the harmful OSAP cuts that are going to force young people to choose between their rights to an education and a lifetime of debt.

They urgently want us to tackle the climate crisis, because my constituents are tired—many Ontarians are tired—of our planet, our only home, taking a back seat to the priorities like the Premier's fantasy tunnel. They want to see robust environmental policies that mitigate climate change and protect Ontario's green spaces for future generations.

Speaker, I want to make sure that you know that I am going to be sharing my time with the member from Spadina–Fort York today.

But before I hand it over to him, I want to tell you about the overwhelming number of my constituents that are concerned about corruption, about political overreach, especially when it comes to the Premier's meddling in municipal affairs. They are urging us to stop the government's takeover of the Billy Bishop airport and accommodating jets that pollute our waterfront and ensure that this Conservative government respects consultation and local decision-making authority.

And above all, my constituents believe that the Ontario government should be accountable and transparent to the people of this province. They know that to protect Ontario we must oppose the changes to the freedom-of-information laws that will allow the Premier and his ministers to cover their tracks so that they can get away with scandals like the greenbelt and the Skills Development Fund.

These are the issues that my constituents want to see prioritized in this year's budget. I know from my colleagues that they are hearing similar concerns from people across this province. Budget 2026 was an opportunity to deliver not just relief but hope to Ontarians during a very difficult time.

But this Conservative government has made other choices. They have chosen not to protect our public health care system. This budget does not reverse the ongoing privatization. There are no new investments to keep emergency rooms open, so we are going to see an alarming trend of closures, especially in northern and rural communities. There's inadequate funding for hospital staffing, at a time where we're seeing layoffs and the Ontario Medical Association tells us that we are still on track to have two million or more people without access to family doctors. This is a shame, Speaker.

Budget 2026 does nothing to protect families who are feeling those daily shocks of the affordability crisis. Nearly 700,000 Ontarians are out of work. They're struggling—struggling—to make ends meet, yet this budget delivers nothing for renters, nothing for sky-high grocery prices. It cuts \$347 million from housing. Who is this budget protecting?

With education too, we are seeing massive cuts—it's really unbelievable—\$147.9 million from K to 12, another cut of \$69.2 million from post-secondary, and no reversals of the harmful OSAP cuts to the grants. How can a budget protect Ontario if it doesn't protect children's futures?

This budget continues to show the Conservatives' disregard for our environment. There's no climate plan, which, quite frankly, is very frightening. Last year, I was very proud to co-sponsor the NDP urban wildfires bill to protect Ontarians from the emerging threat of fires, like the ones we saw in Los Angeles. Not only does this budget not touch on urban wildfires, it cuts over \$100 million from our emergency fund for fighting forest fires, at a time where record wildfire seasons are regularly polluting skies and forcing evacuations around the province, especially on First Nation lands. It goes without saying, Speaker, but this does not protect Ontario. It puts people and our land at great risk.

These are just some of the cuts to our public service, to our social safety net. This budget also cuts \$33 million from the Ministry of Community, Children and Social Services. It does nothing to expand affordable child care or to open child care spaces that the government committed to by 2026 this year. These are dangerous cuts and they are especially dangerous to Ontario's women and girls.

As official opposition shadow minister for women's social and economic opportunities, I must sound the alarm. This budget that invests in manufacturing and the skilled trade—yes. But when it comes to our care economy, those fields where women work, it's cuts all the way down: health care, child care, education, community services. The care economy is foundational to our entire economy, and this government's refusal to invest, to shore up Ontario social infrastructure, weakens our entire province. It directly harms women and gender diverse people, who disproportionately work in those sectors and disproportionately rely on those services.

To achieve pay equity, we must fund the care economy. To end gender-based violence and empower women financially to escape abuse, we must fund the care economy. My women in the workforce motion put forward a plan that would do just that. The government voted it down and, sadly, this budget continues to deprioritize women and gender-diverse people to the detriment of our economy and all Ontarians.

And then, Speaker—oh, boy—there is the Premier's obsession with Toronto's waterfront. His takeover of Billy Bishop airport for an undisclosed amount of money—why? One of my constituents said to me, "I have never seen this much deterioration of public institutions so fast." And right here is the reason: the Premier's vanity projects, from this airport expansion to his fantasy island, to the fantasy tunnels, to the luxury spas, while the public system we rely on is being suffocated.

It's nonsensical. Toronto's waterfront sees 26.5 million visitors a year. You and I wouldn't put an airport on top of a tourist destination like Niagara Falls, would we? But this shortsighted Premier is planning to expand the airport at Billy Bishop. With the UP Express delivering travellers from Union to Pearson in 28 minutes, there's no need to desecrate Toronto's iconic islands. The Premier seems to want it for the jet-setting crowd. The islands and those lands have to belong to everyone. The pollutants of the jets, the chemicals and the noise are going to harm people and our wildlife who call the waterfront their home.

1730

So in closing, Speaker, I want to amplify my constituents' concerns about the Premier's choices and changes to Ontario's freedom-of-information laws. This is one of those most dangerous items in the budget. It's going to allow the government to cover their tracks on which one of the Premier's friends may be benefiting from the deals like the airport expansion or the Therme spa. It is a direct threat, yet again, to our democracy.

Woven through everything this government does, I've learned, is a disdain for the parliamentary system, for democracy, for the voters who sent their representatives to

speak for them in their will, and the common good. It's hurting Ontario, Speaker.

My pledge today to the constituents of Parkdale–High Park and to all Ontarians is that we in the Ontario NDP, with our leader, Marit, will use every moment in this chamber to oppose this government's secretive ways and to build an Ontario where everyone can thrive.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): I recognize the member for Spadina–Fort York.

Mr. Chris Glover: It's a pleasure to stand up and speak on the budget bill today.

We have, in this Conservative government, the most incompetent, corrupt and fiscally irresponsible government in Ontario history. They have spent eight years giving away—

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): I'm going to caution the members on speaking unparliamentarily. I'm going to have the member withdraw.

Mr. Chris Glover: I withdraw.

This government spent eight years giving away our assets and handing over our tax dollars to the Premier's friends and donors. There has been real estate scandal after real estate scandal.

That's what I'm going to focus on, because within this budget, this government is seizing control of a parking lot just south of the CN Tower. There has been no explanation, there was no preamble, there were no reasons. We don't know who's going to benefit from this, but I can tell you who will lose.

This parking lot is not just a parking lot; it's the one just immediately south of the CN Tower and the SkyDome. Toronto has one of the most iconic skylines in the world, and the highlight of it, the centerpiece of it, is the SkyDome and the CN Tower. If this parking lot is built over, it will block the view of the CN Tower and the skyline. So the question is, who's behind this deal? Why is the government seizing control of this parking lot?

This government's record on real estate has been abysmal. In 2018, this Premier sold the Hearn gas plant to his friend, developer Cortellucci, for \$16 million. That's 16 hectares of property. Cortellucci is now proposing to build 7.5 million square feet of residential and commercial space on that. And at \$100 a square foot, which is typical in Toronto, that's \$750 million. So Cortellucci bought this property for \$16 million. The value with this development on it would be \$750 million, so he would stand to make a profit of \$734 million.

In 2019, just before the Ontario Line was announced, the De Gasperis family bought the 60-acre site of the former IBM Celestica campus, right near what was the Ontario Science Centre. How did De Gasperis know to buy that? When the Ontario Line was announced just a few months later, the value of that property increased manifold.

In 2020, the community was shocked that demolition crews started to roll in and started to demolish the heritage buildings at the Foundry. It turns out—and I quote from the Globe and Mail here—that the province secretly agreed to sell this land in September 2020 for a proposed

development consisting of three residential buildings, and it was bought by the De Gasperis family.

The greenbelt scandal, 2022—let's go through the timeline here. In August 2022, the Premier's daughter gets married. There's a stag and doe where the guests are asked to make a donation of at least \$1,500 to the couple, and a lot of the wedding guests, in September, went out and bought farmland on the greenbelt—so, a month after the wedding.

In October, the government introduces legislation to remove the greenbelt protections from that land. The Auditor General said that the increase in value from removing those greenbelt protections—the developers spent about \$300 million buying that property. They stood to sell it for \$8.3 billion—an \$8-billion profit.

The Ontario Place scandal: a \$2.2-billion taxpayer subsidy and a virtually free 95-year lease on public parkland to a company that lied. They said they owned six spas in Europe when they only owned and operated one. And to meet the financial requirements, they claimed as equity money that they expect to earn from a spa that's still not yet built in Germany. What is the connection with the Premier? Well, it turns out the financial director of Therme used to be the chief financial officer of Ares Management, which bought the Premier's Deco Labels company in Chicago.

Highway 413: The Toronto Star and the National Observer found that eight powerful land developers and their companies bought 3,300 acres of land along the route, much of it just before the government announced they were going to be building the 413. Some of the developers' names are very familiar: De Gasperis is one of them; Guglietti, De Meneghi, John Di Poce, Benny Marotta and Rice. The same developers keep coming up again and again in the government's scandals.

The Bradford Bypass: Again, similar developers own 3,100 acres along the Bradford Bypass.

Now, this brings me back to the Rogers Centre, which is in this bill—the Rogers Centre parking lot. Bill 97, the budget bill, cancels the SkyDome Act, which required that 305 Bremner Boulevard be available for parking. But it also makes it available so that the skyline includes a view of the Rogers Centre SkyDome and the CN Tower.

Every time, with each of these scandals, the government keeps bumping into laws. With the foundry, they violated the Heritage Act. Thanks to my colleague from Toronto Centre, the Friends of the Foundry and the St. Lawrence Neighbourhood Association went to court and got a judge to grant a—I'm losing the—

Interjection.

Mr. Chris Glover: What's that?

Anyway, the judge said that you had to stop the demolition.

MPP Alexa Gilmour: An injunction.

Mr. Chris Glover: Yes, an injunction. Thank you. I was looking for that word, "injunction"—grant an injunction to stop the demolition of the foundry. That's how it was saved. The government came back and introduced legislation to gut the Heritage Act.

With the greenbelt, they violated the conservation act, so they gutted the conservation act. At Ontario Place, they violated environmental, heritage and other laws. They may not even know what laws they passed because they've passed a new law called the Rebuilding Ontario Place Act, and this allows the government to clear themselves of any breach of contract, breach of tort or any act of misfeasance by a minister or a government member. "Misfeasance" means an abuse of government power. So the government is saying that with the Ontario Place deal, they've probably broken a bunch of laws, and they're just saying, "Well, those laws no longer apply to the Ontario Place deal."

Then, they went even further and passed Bill 5, which allows the government to declare any part of Ontario, or the entire province, a special economic zone where they can break any provincial or municipal law. And the first application of Bill 5 is going to be, according to what the Premier has said, the Billy Bishop airport. They're going to not have to follow any environmental laws, safety laws, planning laws with the redevelopment of the Billy Bishop airport.

The question is, how did the De Gasperis family and these other developers know that the government was going to announce the Ontario Line? How did they know that they were going to announce the 413? How did they know they were going to be removing the greenbelt protections on the lands that they bought? Who in the government made the secret deal for the Foundry with De Gasperis? The answer is we may never know, because the other thing that's in this budget bill is a gutting of the freedom of information act.

1740

The courts have ordered the Premier to release his personal phone records with which he admits that he was doing government business. His response to that court order is not to release the phone records; his response is to gut the freedom of information act to protect his phone records forever so that we will never know how these deals have been made. It's absolutely shameful what this government is doing.

This budget may contain the next real estate scandal with that parking lot right south of the SkyDome.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Questions?

Mr. Jonathan Tsao: I want to thank my colleague for highlighting the failures of this government's budget, because I think they're very clear, so thank you for that.

But I will also note, the only plan I've heard in recent days from any member of the NDP about how to tackle the affordability crisis is state-run grocery stores. So my question to my colleague would be, how do you expect the people of Ontario and the public in general to take either of your parties seriously?

Mr. Chris Glover: Okay, well the biggest cost that the people of Ontario are facing is the housing crisis, and the housing crisis started—when the NDP was in power, we built 15,000 units of affordable housing. We had another 17,000 online. The Harris Conservative government got in and cancelled it. The Liberals were in power for 15 years

and did not build any affordable housing. In fact, in the early 1990s, the federal Liberals under Chrétien cancelled the National Housing Strategy, and then they introduced real estate investment trusts so that when we are buying housing—if you are buying a house, I'm not competing with you for the house; we're competing with a corporation, because these real estate investment trusts have allowed the corporations to seize up and suck up all of the real estate so that, now, when you're trying to buy a house, you're competing with these corporations.

So, the thing that we would do in the NDP: We would start building not-for-profit housing. The last time not-for-profit housing was built was under the last NDP government.

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Stop the clock.

We're on the home stretch, folks. If we could keep the side conversations so that I can actually hear what I'm supposed to, it would be appreciated. Thank you.

Questions?

M^{me} Dawn Gallagher Murphy: I appreciate hearing the words from the member from Danforth, and I wanted to talk a little bit about the Ontario economy and specifically Ontario's real GDP, which is expected to grow by 1% in 2026. It's expected to pick up in subsequent years, with a projected increase of 1.7% in 2027 and up to 2% by 2029.

Now, since April 2025, Ontario has announced nearly \$30 billion in relief and support for workers and businesses to help protect this province from the impacts of the US tariffs, to help build us long-term economic resilience. So my question to the member is, do you disagree in supporting economic resilience with our businesses?

Mr. Chris Glover: The problem with this government is they keep handing away our assets and our tax dollars under the guise of doing something. I went through all the real estate scandals. Each one of those, the government announced, "Oh, we're doing this to build housing faster." Well, this government has got the worst record in Canada on building houses. We're the lowest level of housing starts per capita of any province in the country.

The money that you're talking about, the \$30 billion to help businesses and workers get through the tariffs—absolutely, we need to be investing in that. But this government had the Skills Development Fund, a \$2.5-billion slush fund, and 80% of the money went to Conservative donors and the Premier's friends—\$2 million went to the Premier's family dentist for staff training; \$10 million went to a friend of the Premier's who owns a strip club, again, for staff training—although they said it wasn't for that business; they said it was another business owned by the same company.

So it's good to invest to help companies through this tariffs crisis, but it's actually got to be invested in businesses and workers, not in this government's friends.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Questions?

Mr. Tom Rakocevic: Just before I ask my question, I've just got to say I love when Liberals talk about Bob

Rae in this House, because they thought he did such a terrible job they made him federal leader of their party. But we've come to understand that Liberals get to say whatever they want. I mean, it's just part of the identity, right?

But look, when the budget was released, there were sightings of pigs flying. And why? Because they were talking about an NDP idea, which was to make ticket resale illegal unless it's at face value, something we had talked about, something they had argued against, something they said was unenforceable. And lo and behold, in the budget—we were really pleased to see that appearing there.

Now, my question: What they're going to have to do is enforce it. We all know that ticket resellers are their base. We know that StubHub and Ticketmaster are also part of their base. What are they going to do? Do you trust—because I really hope they will—that they will have the guts to enforce when people do break the rules under this new law, should it pass?

MPP Alexa Gilmour: I want to thank my colleague for the question. It was exciting to see the pigs fly on the day that the government brought forth the NDP idea to stop those ticket scalpers. But we've seen multiple times that these really good ideas usually, in this government's hands, go nowhere. My fear is that this is actually simply a distraction from the other news items that same week—a government that was hiding its cell phone, a Premier who is facing historic police investigations. This is really something that should be brought up, but in all likelihood it will only be brought up when the NDP forms government at the next time around.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Further questions?

Mr. Jonathan Tsao: Housing was just brought up. Before I entered this House, one of the professions I was most proud of was working for Habitat for Humanity—
Interjections.

Mr. Jonathan Tsao: Thank you very much—where we saw the importance of home ownership.

So when the NDP speaks about the housing crisis in Ontario, the only answer I ever hear is that the government needs to be producing more houses and that the people of Ontario should only be renters and never achieve that dream of home ownership. I can tell you, home ownership changes lives. It totally changes the trajectory of people's lives and their future. I truly and fundamentally believe in the purpose and the value of home ownership.

So I would like to ask my colleagues in the NDP, beyond simply believing that the government needs to make us all renters in some sort of socialized system, do they have any other plan to help people obtain the dream of home ownership?

Mr. Chris Glover: The first housing plan brought in by the Ontario government was just after the Second World War, and it was the war house project. So the government was building housing—they were building prefabricated strawberry-box houses—and then they were selling them and giving mortgages to the soldiers that were returning. That was the first housing plan. We need to get

back to that as well, but we also need other housing. We need co-ops. We need affordable housing, because not everybody can afford even rent right now. We need the full spectrum of not-for-profit housing.

When we form government, we will be the government that actually builds not-for-profit housing so that everybody will have an option. People will be able to buy housing, they will be able to rent, they will be able to live in a co-op, and if they need supportive housing, if they have a disability or a mental illness, then they will have supportive housing with the supports that they need, and there will be nobody homeless.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): There's time for a quick question from the member from Essex.

Mr. Anthony Leardi: I'm only asking easy questions tonight.

1750

On page 45 of the budget, it says Ontario “signed a shared prosperity agreement with Aroland First Nation to drive economic growth and upgrade infrastructure in northern Ontario. This agreement includes support for upgrades to Anaconda and Painter Lake Roads, which are important connections on the road to the Ring of Fire, as well as major new investments in infrastructure and energy transmission in the region, including the Greenstone electricity transmission line.”

I invite either member of the NDP to offer their opinion and views on that.

Mr. Chris Glover: I used to live up there. I used to live in Geraldton, Ontario. I've got friends from Aroland. I know that road that they're talking about. It's great that the government is going to improve that road. The problem is, that road ends at Highway 11. Highway 11 was closed 364 days in 2024 because this government refuses to invest in expanding the highway, adding extra lanes. They refused to invest in checking in on these truck driver training companies that are actually scamming the drivers and not actually giving them proper training to drive the trucks. So there are accidents all of the time. They also refused to provide funding for proper highway maintenance.

The Ring of Fire—that area is going to be developed, but it's not going to be developed—

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Thank you.

Further debate?

M^{me} Lucille Collard: I will start by indicating that I will share my time with the member for Kingston and the Islands.

Madame la Présidente, c'est vraiment toujours un honneur de me lever en Chambre pour prendre la parole au nom des résidentes et résidents d'Ottawa-Vanier. C'est pour cela, en fait, qu'ils m'ont élue : pour porter leur voix, pour porter leurs préoccupations et leur réalité ici à Queen's Park et pour proposer des solutions concrètes aux défis auxquels ils font face.

C'est pour ça qu'on aime avoir l'oreille du gouvernement lorsqu'on fait ce genre de proposition-là. On pense qu'ils ne nous écoutent pas assez souvent, mais c'est la réalité des choses.

Je dois dire, aujourd'hui ce que j'entends sur le terrain, c'est vraiment clair. Les gens ont l'impression de faire tout ce qu'il faut : ils travaillent fort, ils contribuent à leur communauté, mais malgré cela, ils ont de plus en plus de difficultés à s'en sortir.

Malheureusement ce qu'on voit avec le budget, c'est un gouvernement qui n'écoute pas vraiment ce que les gens ont à dire. Après huit ans au pouvoir, la vie des Ontariens est devenue plus difficile, pas plus facile. La vie est plus chère, plus incertaine, plus fragile, et ce budget-là n'offre aucune vision, pas d'espoir et aucune réponse à la hauteur des défis que l'on voit aujourd'hui.

As a former school board trustee in Ottawa and as a mother of four, I have seen first-hand the transformative power of education, but also the growing strain on our system.

Education is not just another line item in a budget; it is a foundation of opportunity, of social mobility and of long-term economic strength.

As legislators, we have a responsibility to build a strong and inclusive and resilient education system where every child can succeed. But what we see in this budget falls far short of that responsibility.

Across Ontario, our schools are quite literally crumbling. I talked about that this morning in question period. The Financial Accountability Office has estimated that it would take over \$31.4 billion over the next 10 years to address the backlog in school repairs. And yet, this budget offers no meaningful plan to close that gap, so the only thing we have to hope for is for our kids to continue to go to schools that are degrading and that ultimately create some health hazards. In communities like Ottawa–Vanier, this is not abstract. Parents see it, teachers live it, and students learn in it.

Our children and educators deserve safe, healthy and modern learning environments. Instead, they are being asked to learn and work in buildings that are deteriorating, buildings that do not reflect the value we claim to place on education. And in some cases, the situation is not just inadequate; it's actually unsafe.

Many schools across the province are dealing with elevated levels of lead in their drinking water. The federal government strengthened safety standards in 2019, lowering acceptable levels to five parts per billion, but this province has chosen not to align with that standard.

In my own riding, Manor Park Public School was identified as one of the top 10 schools in Ontario exceeding provincial limits for lead in water. That's not reassuring for any parent or anybody who has to frequent the school.

Madam Speaker, no level of lead exposure is safe for children. And yet, we're not seeing the urgency nor the investment required to address this issue in a systemic and lasting way. This is not just about infrastructure; it's about trust—trust that when we send our children to school, they are safe.

Quant aux écoles de langue française, la situation est tout aussi préoccupante. Nous faisons face à une pénurie importante d'enseignantes et d'enseignants francophones. Et pourtant, la demande est en croissance. Les écoles de langue française connaissent une augmentation significative des inscriptions—preuve de leur qualité et de leur importance dans nos communautés. Mais cette croissance n'est pas soutenue par des investissements adéquats.

En 2021, le propre groupe de travail du gouvernement a formulé des recommandations claires pour répondre à cette pénurie. Cinq ans plus tard, les écoles attendent toujours. Et ce budget n'apporte aucune solution.

Nous avons besoin de plus de places dans les programmes postsecondaires en français. Nous avons besoin de mécanismes efficaces pour intégrer rapidement les enseignants formés à l'étranger. Et surtout, nous avons besoin d'une volonté politique de soutenir l'éducation en français. C'est une volonté qui semble durement manquer. Parce que soutenir l'éducation en français, ce n'est pas un luxe; c'est, en fait, une obligation.

When we look beyond education, we see the same pattern repeated. This budget consistently avoids structural investments and instead offers partial, delayed or insufficient responses to major challenges.

When it comes to small businesses, I will acknowledge that the government has finally moved to reduce the small business tax rate. So that's good.

I thought I was going to get some applause for that.

Interjections.

M^{me} Lucille Collard: Thank you. Thank you for that.

And yes, this is welcome.

In Ottawa–Vanier, small businesses are the backbone of our local economy. They create jobs. They animate our communities. And they provide essential services. But they are under pressure like never before, facing rising rent, supply costs and labour shortages. Once again, this measure falls short. It is less than what the Canadian Federation of Independent Business has been calling for and less than what we on this side of the House have been advocating for—too little, too late. And that has become a pattern with this government.

Pendant ce temps, aucun soutien ciblé n'est prévu pour les librairies francophones en Ontario, et j'avoue que c'est une grande déception pour moi. Si vous vous souvenez, j'avais présenté un projet de loi pour soutenir nos librairies francophones en s'inspirant d'un modèle québécois qui avait fait ses preuves et qui fonctionne très bien. Malheureusement, le gouvernement l'a rejeté. J'espérais vraiment que, peut-être, il y aurait un coup de pouce—

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): I'm sorry to interrupt the member, but it being 6 o'clock, it is now time for private members' public business.

Debate deemed adjourned.

Report continues in volume B.

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Rae, Matthew (PC)	Perth—Wellington	
Rakocevic, Tom (NDP)	Humber River—Black Creek	
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		Minister Responsible for Ring of Fire Economic and Community Partnerships / Ministre responsable des Partenariats économiques et communautaires pour le développement du Cercle de feu
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Rosenberg, Bill (PC)	Algoma—Manitoulin	
Sabawy, Sheref (PC)	Mississauga—Erin Mills	
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Sarkaria, Hon. / L'hon. Prabmeet Singh (PC)	Brampton South / Brampton-Sud	Minister of Transportation / Ministre des Transports
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Sattler, Peggy (NDP)	London West / London-Ouest	
Saunderson, Brian (PC)	Simcoe—Grey	
Schreiner, Mike (GRN)	Guelph	
Scott, Chris (IND)	Sault Ste. Marie	
Scott, Hon. / L'hon. Laurie (PC)	Haliburton—Kawartha Lakes—Brock	
Shamji, Adil (LIB)	Don Valley East / Don Valley-Est	
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Smith, David (PC)	Scarborough Centre / Scarborough-Centre	
Smith, Hon. / L'hon. Graydon (PC)	Parry Sound—Muskoka	Associate Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing / Ministre associé des Affaires municipales et du Logement
Smith, Laura (PC)	Thornhill	
Smyth, Stephanie (LIB)	Toronto—St. Paul's	
Stevens, Jennifer (Jennie) (NDP)	St. Catharines	
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Thompson, Hon. / L'hon. Lisa M. (PC)	Huron—Bruce	Minister of Rural Affairs / Ministre des Affaires rurales

Member and Party / Député(e) et parti	Constituency / Circonscription	Other responsibilities / Autres responsabilités
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Triantafilopoulos, Effie J. (PC)	Oakville North—Burlington / Oakville-Nord—Burlington	Deputy Speaker / Vice-Présidente Chair of the Committee of the Whole House / Présidente du Comité plénier de l'Assemblée législative
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Watt, Tyler (LIB)	Nepean	
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