

Legislative
Assembly
of Ontario



Assemblée
législative
de l'Ontario

Official Report of Debates (Hansard)

F-29

Journal des débats (Hansard)

F-29

Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs

Building a Strong Ontario Act
(Budget Measures), 2023

Committee business

1st Session
43rd Parliament

Wednesday 10 May 2023

Comité permanent des finances et des affaires économiques

Loi de 2023 visant à bâtir
un Ontario fort
(mesures budgétaires)

Travaux du comité

1^{re} session
43^e législature

Mercredi 10 mai 2023

Chair: Ernie Hardeman
Clerk: Vanessa Kattar

Président : Ernie Hardeman
Greffière : Vanessa Kattar

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



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

ISSN 1180-4386

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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

**STANDING COMMITTEE ON
FINANCE AND ECONOMIC AFFAIRS**

Wednesday 10 May 2023

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

**COMITÉ PERMANENT DES FINANCES
ET DES AFFAIRES ÉCONOMIQUES**

Mercredi 10 mai 2023

The committee met at 0901 in room 151.

**BUILDING A STRONG ONTARIO ACT
(BUDGET MEASURES), 2023**

**LOI DE 2023 VISANT À BÂTIR
UN ONTARIO FORT
(MESURES BUDGÉTAIRES)**

Consideration of the following bill:

Bill 85, An Act to implement Budget measures and to amend various statutes / Projet de loi 85, Loi visant à mettre en oeuvre les mesures budgétaires et à modifier diverses lois.

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): Good morning, everyone. I call this meeting of the Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs to order. We are meeting today for clause-by-clause consideration of Bill 85, An Act to implement Budget measures and to amend various statutes.

Julia Hood, our legislative counsel, is here to assist us with our work, should we have any questions.

Also, before we begin, I understand that there have been more amendments introduced that will be distributed as we go forward.

Before we begin with considering the specific sections of the bill and—

Interjection.

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): No, I guess we won't. We have to take a small recess. The Clerk has to arrange the amendments, so we will recess for a few moments while the Clerk finishes.

The committee recessed from 0903 to 0915.

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): We will move on. I think the committee have all received copies of the amendments—the ones that were filed electronically and the ones that are being filed this morning.

Before we begin with considering the specific sections of the bill and accompanying schedules, I will allow members to make comments on the bill as a whole. Afterwards, debate will be limited to the specific amendments, sections or schedules under consideration.

Are there any comments, just generally, on the bill that we'd like to make? MPP Fife.

Ms. Catherine Fife: Thanks for your indulgence with the late amendments.

This is the time when we get to say some broad comments about the budget process, about what we learned, and about the budget bill.

We travelled together, we met some really good people, and we spent some quality time together.

This report that went to the minister was tabled after the budget was tabled, but the report was designed to inform the budget process, and, in our opinion—this will not surprise you—it does fail to address the key budgetary pressures and inflationary concerns that we heard during delegations.

The official opposition encourages the government to act upon the advice provided by witnesses to the committee, and appropriately address the challenges faced by Ontarians.

Some high-level things that we wanted to see and the people of the province wanted to see in the budget were—to invest in proactive solutions to Ontario's public health care system and provide immediate support for mental health programs and services; to abandon its appeal of Bill 124 and make meaningful investments in order to combat the devastating impact of burnout for impacted health care workers.

We wanted to see this budget address the burdens on municipal finances under Bill 23, More Homes Built Faster Act, 2022.

We were hoping to see some direct funding for affordable, attainable housing in this budget.

We wanted to address the cruel social assistance and ODSP rates.

We heard compelling commentary on protecting and investing in Ontario's libraries.

Specifically on health care, we did hear solutions. Beyond Bill 124, which is obviously problematic—and that court ruling will happen in 41 days—witnesses presented pragmatic solutions to the challenges in our health care system. For instance, the Ontario College of Family Physicians said that funding for up to 19 hours per week of admin help would add capacity equivalent to nearly 2,000 new family doctors, serving two million more patients, which is obviously needed because we have 2.1 million Ontarians who do not have a family doctor. They also advised around funding for wraparound community-based health care, including the Peterborough community health care centre, for the treatment of complex health needs and ensuring people—there's a direct connection, we heard along the way, between access to health care and housing and the economy.

The Canadian Cancer Society recommended that OHIP cover life-saving take-home cancer drugs, which would free up valuable hospital resources and better support patients with cancer as they go through that journey. For the life of us, we don't understand why the government is not amenable to take-home cancer drugs. This is something that has come before this committee for years.

The RNAO outlined the importance of nurse practitioner-led clinics, which would prove critical in the effort to ensure Ontarians have access to primary care.

These are solutions that were offered to the government and are not reflected in the budget bill.

In Kenora—this was one of the more compelling things that we heard: The Canadian Mental Health Association explained that the funding model for their sector has been broken for decades. Their branch, for example, has received just a single 2% base budget increase over the past 22 years.

This was another delegation that really struck us as very powerful: Mayor Paterson from Kingston stated that they are experiencing an opioid and mental health crisis and that they, themselves, as a municipality, had invested in trying to support folks who are going through that crisis so that they don't go to the emergency room—really good, really strong commentary.

0920

On housing: In a written submission, the Association of Municipalities Ontario stated: “The provincial government’s assertion that the housing supply crisis can be solved by limiting municipal access to infrastructure financing, eliminating environmental protections or changes to municipal governance is unsound.” AMO explained that housing cannot be built without the associated critical infrastructure required and Bill 23 has created an estimated \$1-billion annual shortfall for municipalities. There was a promise that was made by the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing that he would make municipalities whole; this budget bill was an opportunity for him to do so.

The profound connection between housing and health care is a theme that came up repeatedly from the Canadian Mental Health Association—that housing is health care, so it’s all connected. And the budget bill was really an opportunity, as we see it, to connect those issues.

Education, obviously, is a very timely issue. OSSTF expressed concerns, highlighting that in the previous budget year funding for education was underspent by \$1.4 billion. This was confirmed by the FAO report. In Ottawa, a local school board indicated that they are unlikely to meet the 2025 deadline for full accessibility under the Ontarians with disabilities act. So if we’re not supporting school boards to reach those targets through financial support, then we’re intentionally leaving out students in the education system.

I’ve been on this committee for 10 years, and libraries have, every single year, made a compelling case for investment. The Cochrane Public Library in Timmins shared with the committee how their community uses the library for vital services, including accessing the Internet to find housing and apply for jobs. Libraries are often the hubs for those who are marginalized in our communities. They made a case for an increase, but also just to provide stable

funding. Additional funding support to boost the Ontario Digital Library would help pool resources between urban, rural and northern libraries to save funds and make sure that every Ontarian has access to important online resources.

These comments were in our dissenting opinion. Clearly, they did not have the impact that we wanted on the finance minister. As a result, the budget bill for 2023 did not meet the moment and did not address the cost-of-living crisis that so many Ontarians are facing.

We do hope to make budget bill a stronger bill through some amendments. I hope that my colleagues across the way are amenable to working with us on that.

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): Further comments? MPP Crawford.

Mr. Stephen Crawford: In terms of the budget, I guess I would have a different perspective than the member opposite in terms of meeting the moment.

When our government took office in June 2018, we inherited a province that had the largest sub-sovereign debt in the entire world: well over \$300 billion. With the excessive spending of the previous Liberal government, what did we have to show for that spending? Did we have new subways? Did we have new schools, hospitals, infrastructure? No, we didn't. Did we have manufacturing and investments coming into the province? No, we didn't.

Since we've taken office—and I think this budget certainly propels even further—we've managed to improve the economy significantly. We now are 400,000 jobs short in this province. That's a problem, but it's a good problem to have. From taking office, where jobs were leaving the province in droves, we are now seeing enormous investments in every corner of Ontario, from Windsor to St. Thomas to Oakville to Oshawa to Alliston to Kitchener-Waterloo. We're seeing enormous investments by companies, and the reason that companies are coming here—what they're telling us—is that they're seeing a government that has put in place the environment for them to actually want to be here, for them to prosper, create jobs, manufacture.

The previous government had given up on manufacturing. They thought it was now moving to a service economy—“we don't need manufacturing jobs in this province.” Nothing could be further from the truth. It's not all a service economy. Manufacturing jobs are good, high-paid, often-times union jobs that are critical to creating a middle class and prosperity in the province, and they are coming back in droves.

With this budget, Bill 85, we're bringing in a manufacturers' tax credit to help manufacturers reinvest in tooling and equipment to update their facilities, to further encourage and propel manufacturing growth in the province of Ontario—and no doubt, that's happening. There is some short-term volatility in the marketplace right now with interest rates rising and a little bit of uncertainty with what the Bank of Canada and the US Fed may or may not do, but beneath the surface of the short term, the fundamentals of the Ontario economy are in sound, strong shape, and I'm excited about the future of Ontario. We have so much to look forward to. There are always things we can do better,

no doubt, and we'll continue to improve, but we're on a good path.

We're also, I might add, on a path to balance. After years and years of deficit spending, I think you'll see the province of Ontario getting back to black in the next 12 to 24 months, which is incredible, considering the state we were in just a few years ago—and that's not being done by any spending cuts. We have the largest budget in the history of Ontario: over \$200 billion. We're investing in homelessness, which municipalities are absolutely thrilled about. We're doubling the GAINS for low-income seniors. So we're supporting those in need, but at the same time we're investing and incenting businesses to invest in our province to carry this province forward over the next few years. So I think we've got a bright, bright future ahead of us, and I think this bill puts us and continues us on a good path.

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): Further debate? MPP Kernaghan.

Mr. Terence Kernaghan: The committee travelled to many places. It was great to get to know many of the committee members, and I have a great deal of respect for all the people who shared this journey.

I did want to flag for the committee that the official opposition became aware of alternate dates which were sent out by the government under the guise of the pre-budget consultations, yet these were dates that were not provided to the official opposition—dates where the minister travelled to communities that the committee should have travelled to. People in those communities were given the impression that these would be heard by the entirety of the Legislature but, unfortunately, that was not the case. This was something that was not shared with the official opposition.

Also, I wanted to add my thoughts about the budget itself. From where we sit in the official opposition, this was a budget that really missed the moment on many different counts.

In regard to Bill 124 and the appeal that is currently under way, in every single place we stopped, people were not in support of wage-restraint legislation that has been handed down or forced upon people in the nursing field and other sectors. I believe that the word used to describe this piece of legislation and the appeal was “humiliating.”

In every place we stopped, we heard from many delegations who were concerned about the very meagre, inadequate social assistance rates, and how people had been subject to and placed into poverty by legislation. In that regard, this budget misses that moment. We heard from many delegations who wished to double social assistance rates to make sure that people are able to buy healthy food; that they're able to rebuild their lives. Also, we heard from folks who were concerned about the housing allotment or the shelter allowance through ODSP, and how that is not adequate coverage for their incredibly high cost of living. It is truly disturbing that this has been a pattern since the 22.5% cuts in the 1990s, with social assistance rates languishing for over 15 years. I don't think it's enough for this government to pat itself on the back with a paltry 5% increase, regardless of whether it's indexed to inflation,

because that is not enough to bring people above the poverty line. It misses the moment.

Further, we heard concerns about the cap on the number of supervised consumption sites in our province. I also wanted to turn to the thoughts about the wraparound services that many people call for when we discuss supervised consumption sites. Those are wraparound services that the province does not fund in many communities. We heard from the mayor of Kingston, who invested a great deal of municipal funding to make sure that they have those supports so that people can rebuild their lives. Those were supports that the municipality had to do on their own, without provincial support.

0930

There were also suggestions that we should expand the COAST program—something that's found within my riding—which is a collaboration between mental health care practitioners, community supporters as well as the police, to make sure that when people call 911 for a mental health emergency, that call is going to be attended by somebody who is ready to help de-escalate the situation, somebody who is trained with mental health supports. We know our front-line police officers are not trained in that and that is not their job. Their job is to enforce law and order; it is not to provide mental health supports that the province needs to fund.

Further, within this budget, the amount that has been provided, \$202 million, for homelessness funding across the province is nowhere near enough. That absolutely misses the moment. Poverty has an enormous social as well as financial cost. If we do not provide that upstream investment to make sure that people have a safe place to call home, they lack a foundation. It will cost more with interactions with the health care system, with the criminal justice system. Poverty costs a great deal of money. Not only is it an abdication of our human responsibility, but it's an abdication of our legislative responsibility to make sure that these people have a safe place to call home. Housing is health care.

Further, school violence was brought up again and again by delegations, and yet it's not mentioned within this budget. We know that students have struggled as a result of being in the jurisdiction that had the longest closure of schools—because we didn't see movements towards smaller, safer classes to ensure that classes could stay open—and now we see the results of that. We need to find further investments within schools to make sure that there are mental health care practitioners.

Further to the topic of housing, we see that there has been a request to reinstate rent control. The government's movement toward creating more rental housing was to remove rent control from all buildings that were first occupied after November 2018, and that has meant that unscrupulous corporate landlords can raise rents to whatever rates they wish; there is no control. There is no thought about what renters have to experience, what they live through. Many people who are inhabiting these units did not know that they were getting into a building where the Ford government had given up on rent control, and they found that

out one year after their tenancy; they found that out when it came time for them to renew or go month to month, what have you, and that was when they were subject to these enormous increases which are utterly unfair and do not help the regular people in our province.

We also would like to see vacancy decontrol and that loophole that was created by the Liberal government closed. That is something whereby there is an unwritten incentive for corporate landlords to kick long-term, good tenants out to make room, because they're allowed to charge whatever rent for a new, incoming tenant.

I think of seniors in my area, in the Cherryhill apartments, who are fighting to stay in their apartments. The management company made a switch and is looking to replace these long-term tenants with students who come year to year because they can charge them whatever the market allows. That is an absolute disgrace.

We heard from AMO. We heard from many municipal folks. There has been a promise to make municipalities whole; we have not seen that in writing. That is something that we need to see for our municipalities so they can provide those services that our communities need.

Altogether, I think the government should do some more soul-searching, should do some more thinking, and should perhaps listen better to the comments and the requests that were made across the province, because there were themes here and these themes were missed within budget 2023.

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): Further debate? MPP Bowman.

Ms. Stephanie Bowman: I have a great deal of respect for the member across, MPP Crawford—but since he started talking about, “What do we have to show for the previous Liberal government,” I guess I have to make an attempt here to convince him otherwise that there were a number of things accomplished.

First of all, let's talk about the 300,000 jobs. At that time, the Canadian dollar was at par. The world was recovering from the global financial crisis. Jobs were leaving not just because of the government; they were leaving because of the dollar and economic situation. Let's talk about what was started under that government: the Eglinton Crosstown that this government will open. What else do we have to show for it? All-day kindergarten. What else? The greenbelt. Highway 412. The GO expansion. The Liberal government banned coal plants, so we don't have pollution in our air and grey skies. We brought high school graduation to a first-world level. We created the Great Lakes agreement to make sure we have clean drinking water for ourselves and future generations to come. We also started the Cortellucci Vaughan Hospital that Premier Ford had the privilege to open. I won't go on—I could go on, but I won't. I just wanted to set the record straight on a few of those things.

Getting back to this bill: Certainly, there are a number of shortcomings that we've highlighted before. I will just briefly summarize a couple of things that have been stated. For the record, again, Bill 124—we heard repeatedly in our hearings, as MPP Fife said, that that bill is a problem and has created a crisis, which this government refuses to

take accountability for. The finance minister did not answer the question about how much the government is spending to defend that bill in court. We have school boards across the province talking about the impact of wage suppression on their workers and the impact in classrooms for kids in low-income communities, in particular, who are struggling, especially after COVID.

In the 2019 budget, this government made a 30% reduction to funding for Legal Aid Ontario, and that left a disastrous impact on those who are vulnerable people seeking justice in our province. As we travelled the province, witnesses talked about that and the need to restore funding to make sure that justice is accessible.

Nurse practitioner-led clinics—let's talk about health care for a moment: That was, again, one of the many, many solutions offered to address the health care crisis, in addition to repealing Bill 124.

There was a lot around Indigenous health care that this government could have tackled. The Indigenous Primary Health Care Council requested funding for an integrated health hub and asked the province to invest \$75 million to support Indigenous primary health care.

Child care: We're not seeing the increase in child care spaces that the national program is ready and willing to offer, so just to match inflation, there needs to be an increase of \$240 million, per the Ontario Coalition for Better Child Care. We know that we need more educators, actually. The YMCA talked about the number of vacant spots they have and that they can't put children in those spots because we don't have early childhood educators, because of the wage suppression from Bill 124.

Those are things that this budget could have fixed and this bill could have fixed.

We talked about French education. We heard from people in the northern part of the province about the need to improve funding for French post-secondary education, in particular, so that Franco-Ontarians can access education in their communities in their language.

We heard a lot from municipalities about the impact of Bill 23. Their ability to protect the environment—this budget does not do that; this bill does not do that. Those municipalities will face a significant financial shortfall that will affect the quality of life for all Ontarians.

We heard from the CAMH, the Canadian association of mental health, that they needed an 8% increase. Again, while this budget did provide some increase to base funding, which of course will help, it is not the bare minimum that the CAMH said they needed just to provide the critical funding to support many people suffering from mental health issues, in addition to COVID, and especially to help people on the streets who are suffering from addiction and mental health challenges.

Again, we could go on and on, Chair—I'm not sure how much time I have—but those were some of the things I wanted to highlight.

We've talked about how this bill does miss the mark, and it's disappointing that the government has not responded more appropriately to the feedback from the citizens of this province.

0940

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): Further debate? MPP Brady.

Ms. Bobbi Ann Brady: I'd echo much of what my colleagues have said. I feel that there was really nothing dynamic in this budget. The past three years have been very difficult. We have government for a reason, and it's government's job to look after the people and make tough decisions. I didn't really see any tough decisions being made and there's very little help for families in the budget. It fails to address some of the major crises we're witnessing in the province—our education system; the weaknesses in our health care, long-term-care and home care systems, especially. We heard about that in the remote and rural areas.

I am a fiscal conservative, but I think there has to be more targeted and sensible spending on key areas—and I'll try to not touch on things that my colleagues have. Affordability measures, in general, to help with inflation-related costs would have been nice. Tax cuts or legislation enacted to counter price gouging would have also been welcome news.

The province has this ambitious plan to build 1.5 million homes in 10 years, and 72,000 more workers are required. Credit where credit's due—I guess the government continues to invest in skills training, apprenticeship and skilled trades, to encourage the trades as a career. I think that's good stuff. And the Skills Development Fund, with an additional \$75 million over the next three years—that's good news. I guess my overarching concern with the aggressive housing target is that I don't see any oversight to ensure proper housing is being built.

With respect to contraband tobacco—and I'm like a broken record: Tobacco is mentioned in the budget document, but Ontario is ground zero, and contraband tobacco is ruining the social fabric of many of our small and rural communities. During the pre-budget consultations, we did hear from folks who recognize the damage that illegal tobacco is doing to our communities as well as to the economy. This province is losing out on over \$750 million a year in tax revenue. We also hear from small businesses that are selling tobacco legitimately, and they're also losing out. It would have been nice to see Ontario adopt the Quebec model, which we know is the recipe to dealing with contraband tobacco. That recipe to deal with it was actually scheduled to be in the 2019 budget, and now we're at 2023 and we're still not seeing it in the budget. So I am going to continue to talk about contraband tobacco until we deal with it.

Another issue in the budget is that there seems to have been a change with respect to the Tobacco Tax Act. There's some ambiguous terminology in there—"contraband," "illicit" or "illegal" has been changed to "unregulated," and I noticed that in the budget again. That's very disheartening, because it makes it very difficult for our law enforcement officials and anyone upholding the law to actually work around such an ambiguous term.

So that's all I would have to offer.

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): Further debate? If not, we thank you for the comments. We will carry on now with our issues.

As you will notice, Bill 85 is comprised of three sections and 10 schedules. In order to deal with the bill in an orderly fashion, I suggest that we postpone the first three sections of the bill in order to dispose of the schedules first. This will allow the committee to consider the contents of the schedules before dealing with the sections on the commencement and the short title of the bill. We would return to the three sections after completing the consideration of the schedules. Have we got unanimous consent to do that? Okay. Thank you very much for that.

There are no amendments to schedule 1. Therefore, I would propose to bundle sections 1 and 2. Is there agreement? There is an agreement for that. Is there any debate on sections 1 and 2 of schedule 1? Hearing no debate, shall I call the question? All those in favour? All those opposed? The motion is carried.

Is there any debate on schedule 1 as a whole? If not, shall I put the question? All those in favour? Opposed? The motion is carried. Schedule 1 is carried.

There are no amendments to schedule 2. I therefore propose that we bundle sections 1 and 2. Is there agreement? Is there any debate on sections 1 and 2 of schedule 2? No debate. I'll put the question. All those in favour? Opposed? The motion is carried.

Is there any debate on schedule 2 as a whole? If not, shall I put the question? All those in favour? All those opposed? Schedule 2 is carried.

We have a new schedule introduced in an NDP amendment. MPP Fife.

Ms. Catherine Fife: This is our attempt to address one of the issues in long-term care. I'll move it as it's written, in front of everybody.

I move that schedule 2.1 be added to the bill:

"Schedule 2.1

"Fixing Long-Term Care Act, 2021

"1. Subsection 80(1) of the Fixing Long-Term Care Act, 2021 is repealed and the following substituted:

"Continuity of care—limit on temporary, casual or agency staff

"(1) In order to provide a stable and consistent workforce and to improve continuity of care to residents, every licensee of a long-term-care home shall ensure that the use of temporary, casual or agency staff in each category of employment in the long-term-care home does not amount to more than 10 per cent of the employees in that category.

"Exception, minister may increase percentage amount

"(1.1) The percentage amount referred to in subsection (1) may be exceeded during a time period specified by the minister if the minister considers it necessary due to an emergency or exceptional and unforeseen circumstances."

"2. This schedule comes into force on the day the Building a Strong Ontario Act (Budget Measures), 2023 receives royal assent."

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): To the committee members: According to Bosc and Gagnon, as noted on page 771 of the third edition of House of Commons Procedure

and Practice, “An amendment is inadmissible if it proposes to amend a statute that is not before the committee or a section of the parent act, unless the latter is specifically amended by a clause of the bill.” I therefore rule the motion out of order because the Fixing Long-Term Care Act, 2021, is not opened by this bill.

Schedule 3: There are no amendments to schedule 3. Therefore, I propose that we bundle sections 1 to 3. Is there agreement? I call the question. All those in favour? All those opposed? The motion is carried.

Is there any debate on schedule 3 as a whole? If not, shall I put the question? All those in favour? Opposed? The motion is carried. Schedule 3 carries.

0950

Schedule 4: There are no amendments to schedule 4. I therefore propose that we bundle sections 1 to 7. Is there agreement? Having agreement, is there any debate on sections 1 to 7 of schedule 4? No debate. Shall I put the question? All those in favour? Opposed? The motion is carried.

Is there any debate on schedule 4 as a whole? Shall I put the question? All those in favour? Opposed? The motion is carried. Schedule 4 is carried.

Schedule 5: There are no amendments to schedule 5. Therefore, I propose that we bundle sections 1 and 2. Is there agreement? Is there any debate on sections 1 and 2? No debate. Shall I put the question? All those in favour? Opposed? The motion is carried on sections 1 and 2.

Is there any debate on schedule 5 as a whole? If not, shall I put the question? All those in favour? All those opposed? The motion is carried. Schedule 5 carries.

Schedule 6: There are no amendments to schedule 6. I therefore propose that we bundle sections 1 to 7. Is there agreement? Is there any debate on sections 1 to 7 of schedule 6? Seeing no debate, shall I put the question? All those in favour? All those opposed? Section 6 carries.

Interjection.

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): Is there any debate on schedule 6 as a whole? Shall I put the question? All those in favour? All those opposed? Schedule 6 carries.

Schedule 7: There are no amendments to schedule 7. I therefore propose that we bundle sections 1 and 2. Is there agreement? Shall I put the question? All those in favour? All those opposed? Schedule 7 is carried—

Interjection.

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman):—sections 1 and 2.

Is there any debate on schedule 7? Shall I put the question? All those in favour? All those opposed? The motion is carried. Schedule 7 carries.

There’s a new NDP amendment for schedule 7.1. MPP Fife.

Ms. Catherine Fife: I move that schedule 7.1 be added to the bill:

“Schedule 7.1

“Ontario Disability Support Program Act, 1997

“1. Section 11 of the Ontario Disability Support Program Act, 1997 is amended by adding the following subsection:

“Doubling of income support

“(2) As of the day the Building a Strong Ontario Act (Budget Measures), 2023 receives royal assent, the amount of income support to be provided is the amount payable under the regulations multiplied by two.

“Appropriation required

“(3) The amount payable as described in subsection (1) shall not be paid unless money has been appropriated for that purpose by the Legislature.”

“2. This schedule comes into force on the day the Building a Strong Ontario Act (Budget Measures), 2023, receives royal assent.”

This creates a new schedule to double the Ontario Disability Support Program amounts by multiplying the amount payable under the regulations by two. I’m happy to debate it.

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): To committee members: An amendment is inadmissible if it proposes to amend a statute that is not before the committee. I therefore rule the motion out of order because the Ontario Disability Support Program Act, 1997, is not opened by this bill.

On to schedule 8: There are no amendments to schedule 8, sections 1 to 4. I therefore propose that we bundle sections 1 to 4. Is there agreement? Is there any debate on sections 1 to 4 of schedule 8? No debate. Shall I put the question? All those in favour? All those opposed? Schedule 8, sections 1 to 4, carries.

Interjection.

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): Schedule 8, sections 1 to 4.

We have an NDP amendment.

Ms. Catherine Fife: This one is in order.

I move that section 4.1 be added to schedule 8 to the bill:

“4.1 The act is amended by adding the following section:

“Payment, January 1, 2024 to June 30, 2024

“5.2(1) The amount of increment payment to an eligible person for the period beginning on January 1, 2024 and ending on June 30, 2024 is the amount payable under section 2 multiplied by 2.

“Appropriation required

“(2) An increment payment amount described in subsection (1) shall not be made unless money has been appropriated for that purpose....”

If I could speak to that, this applies to the GAINS tax, GAINS increases, and the proposal in this budget 2023 leaves a gap, and so we’re simply trying to address the gap. It’s a reasonable amendment; it should be given some consideration by government members. If they’re not amenable to that, I think we at least should have a discussion about why this gap was put into this budget bill.

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): You’ve heard the motion. Discussion?

Mr. Todd J. McCarthy: Mr. Chair, are you certain that this is in order? Because technically amending section 5.1 would be out of order—

Ms. Catherine Fife: Can you speak into your mike, please?

Mr. Todd J. McCarthy: Sorry. Thank you.

Interjection.

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): MPP McCarthy.

Mr. Todd J. McCarthy: Yes. So, amending section 5.1, as this motion proposes to, would be out of order, as that section is not being amended under schedule 8.

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): I'm informed that it is in order.

Ms. Catherine Fife: Chair?

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): MPP Fife.

Ms. Catherine Fife: That's an interesting point, but just to give you more context for the amendment, this amends the timeline for the GAINS increase in schedule 8. The government proposes to increase GAINS starting in July 2024. At present, there's a temporary increase in GAINS until December. This amendment would ensure that the new GAINS increase would start in January instead of July to ensure there is no gap in the GAINS increases.

I'm often asked, are there some good things in this bill? This is one of them, but for some reason, the government has either intentionally or unintentionally left a gap. So in order to streamline and perhaps even reduce some red tape along the way, I think that this amendment should be given some consideration by the government members—or perhaps some discussion as to why the gap was put there.

It's really engaging today. Thanks very much, Chair.

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): Any further debate?

Ms. Catherine Fife: A recorded vote, please. I'm requesting a recorded vote.

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): Okay. Any further debate? No further debate. A recorded vote has been requested. Shall I put the question?

Ayes

Bowman, Brady, Fife, Kernaghan.

Nays

Anand, Byers, Crawford, McCarthy, Skelly, David Smith, Triantafilopoulos.

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): The motion is lost.

Next, we have schedule 8, section 5. Any debate on schedule 8, section 5? If no debate, shall I put the question? All those in favour? All those opposed? The motion is carried.

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Is there any debate on schedule 8? If not, shall I put the question? All those in favour? Opposed? Schedule 8 carries.

We have an amendment for schedule 8.1.

Ms. Catherine Fife: I move that schedule 8.1 be added to the bill:

“Schedule 8.1

“Ontario Works Act, 1997

“1. Section 16 of the Ontario Works Act, 1997 is amended by adding the following subsection:

““Doubling of basic financial assistance

“(1.1) As of the day the Building a Strong Ontario Act (Budget Measures), 2023 receives royal assent, the amount of basic financial assistance to be provided is the amount payable under the regulations multiplied by 2.

“Appropriation required

“(1.2) The amount payable as described in subsection (1.1) shall not be paid unless money has been appropriated for that purpose by the Legislature.”

“2. This schedule comes into force on the day the Building a Strong Ontario Act (Budget Measures), 2023 receives royal assent.”

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): An amendment is inadmissible if it proposes to amend a statute that is not before the committee. I therefore rule the motion out of order because the Ontario Works Act, 1997, is not opened by this bill.

There's another one. Further debate?

Ms. Catherine Fife: Thank you very much, Chair. This is a new schedule.

I move that schedule 8.2 be added to the bill:

“Schedule 8.2

“Protecting a Sustainable Public Sector for Future Generations Act, 2019

“1. Section 40 of the Protecting a Sustainable Public Sector for Future Generations Act, 2019 is repealed and the following substituted:

““Repeal of this act

““40. This act is repealed.”

“2. This schedule comes into force on the day the Building a Strong Ontario Act (Budget Measures), 2023 receives royal assent.”

This refers to the repeal of Bill 124.

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): An amendment is inadmissible if it proposes to amend a statute that is not before the committee. I therefore rule the motion out of order because the act is not opened by this bill.

We have another amendment. MPP Fife.

Ms. Catherine Fife: Thank you very much, Chair. This is another schedule.

I move that schedule 8.3—

Mr. Todd J. McCarthy: Point of order. The proposed 8.3 and 8.4—I submit they're both out of order.

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): The motion must be read into the record.

MPP Fife.

Ms. Catherine Fife: I move that schedule 8.3 be added to the bill:

“Schedule 8.3

“Public Hospitals Act

“1. The Public Hospitals Act is amended by adding the following section:

““Continuity of care—limit on temporary, casual or agency staff

““23. (1) In order to provide a stable and consistent workforce and to improve continuity of care to patients, every board of a hospital shall ensure that the use of temporary, casual or agency staff in each category of employment in the hospital does not amount to more than 10 per cent of the employees in that category.

““Exception, minister may increase percentage amount

““(2) The percentage amount referred to in subsection (1) may be exceeded during a time period specified by the

minister if the minister considers it necessary due to an emergency or exceptional and unforeseen circumstances.

“Agency staff

“(3) In subsection (1),

““agency staff” means staff who work at the hospital pursuant to a contract between the hospital and an employment agency or other third party.

“2. This schedule comes into force on the day the Building a Strong Ontario Act (Budget Measures) 2023 receives royal assent.”

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): An amendment is inadmissible if it proposes to amend a statute that is not before the committee. I therefore rule the motion out of order because the act is not opened by this bill.

MPP Fife.

Ms. Catherine Fife: I move that schedule 8.4 be added to the bill:

“Schedule 8.4

“Residential Tenancies Act, 2006

“1. Subsection 6(1) of the Residential Tenancies Act, 2006 is amended by striking out ‘6, 7 and 8’ in the portion before clause (a) and substituting ‘7 and 8’.

“2. Subsection 7(1) of the act is amended by striking out ‘6, 7 and 8’ in the portion before paragraph 1 and substituting ‘7 and 8’.

“3. Subsection 8(1) of the act is amended by striking out ‘paragraph 6 of subsection 30(1) and part VII do not apply’ and substituting ‘part VII does not apply’.

“4(1) Subsection 20(1) of the act is repealed and the following substituted:

““Landlord’s responsibility to repair

“(1) Subject to section 34, a landlord is responsible for providing and maintaining a residential complex, including the rental units in it, in a good state of repair and fit for habitation and for complying with health, safety, housing and maintenance standards.

“(2) Section 20 of the act is amended by adding the following subsection:

““Same

““(3) For greater certainty, a landlord is in breach of subsection (1) if the landlord fails in any way to maintain the residential complex, including the rental units in it, in a good state of repair, fit for habitation and in compliance with health, safety, housing and maintenance standards regardless of any efforts on the part of the landlord to maintain the residential complex.”

“5. Paragraph 6 of subsection 30(1) of the act is repealed.

“6. The act is amended by adding the following section:

“Application based on mediated settlement, prior order

“31.1(1) If a landlord has failed to complete specified repairs or replacements or other work within a period of time specified in a settlement or prior order a tenant may, without notice to the landlord, apply to the board for an order under this section.

“Same

“(2) The tenant shall include with the application a copy of the settlement or prior order and an affidavit setting out the work that has not been completed.

“Order for payment

“(3) If the board finds that the landlord has failed to comply with the settlement or prior order, the board may make one or more of the following orders:

“1. Order the landlord to pay to the board an administrative fine not exceeding \$1,000 per day until the landlord satisfies the board that the landlord has complied with the order or settlement.

“2. Order an abatement of rent until the landlord satisfies the board that the landlord has complied with the order or settlement.

“3. Order an abatement of rent in the amount of the reasonable costs that the tenant will incur in completing the repairs or replacements or other work as set out in the order or settlement.

“Amendment to settlement, order

“(4) In an order under subsection (3), the board may amend the settlement or prior order if it considers it appropriate to do so.

“Time limitation

“(5) No application may be made under subsection (1) in respect of a work order made under section 225 until the time limit for applying for a review of the work order under section 226 has elapsed and the landlord has not applied for a review or, if the landlord has applied for a review, the board has made an order under subsection 226(2).

“Definitions

“(6) In this section,

““prior order” means either an order of the board made under paragraph 4 of subsection 30(1) or a work order made under section 225; (“ordonnance antérieure”)

““settlement” means a settlement mediated under section 194. (“règlement”)

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“7(1) Subsection 37(7) of the act is amended by adding ‘and’ at the end of clause (a), by striking out ‘and’ at the end of clause (b) and by striking out clause (c).

“(2) Subsection 37(9) of the act is amended by striking out ‘clauses 7(a), (b) and (c)’ and substituting ‘clauses 7(a) and (b)’.

“8. Section 113 of the act is repealed and the following substituted:

“Lawful rent for new tenant

“113. Subject to section 111, the lawful rent for the first rental period for a new tenant under a new tenancy agreement is,

“(a) any amount that is equal to or less than the last lawful rent charged or that ought to have been charged to the previous tenant if the rental unit was previously rented in the last 12 months;

“(b) with respect to a rental unit that has not been rented in the last 12 months, an amount that is equal to or less than the sum of,

“(i) the last lawful rent charged or that ought to have been charged to the previous tenant,

“(ii) all increases to the rent that the landlord would have been permitted to make under this act if the rental unit had been occupied, and

“(iii) all decreases to the rent that the landlord would have been required to make under this act if the rental unit had been occupied; or

“(c) the rent first charged to the tenant if the rental unit was not previously rented.’

“9. Section 114 of the act is amended by striking out ‘6, 7 or 8’ wherever it appears and substituting in each case ‘7 or 8’.

“10. Subsection 115(1) of the act is repealed and the following substituted:

“Application by tenant

“(1) A tenant, other than a new tenant who occupies a rental unit described in clause 113(c), may apply to the board for an order determining the maximum amount of rent that the tenant may lawfully be charged.

“Same

“(1.1) If at the time of the application an order made under paragraph 7 or 8 of subsection 30(1) prohibits the landlord from giving a notice of a rent increase to the tenant or taking any rent increase for which notice has been given with respect to the tenant’s rental unit, the board’s order will set out the amount of rent that the tenant may lawfully be charged,

“(a) until the prohibition in the order ends; and

“(b) after the prohibition in the order ends.

“Same

“(1.2) If the board determines that the landlord has charged the tenant a rent that exceeds the maximum lawful rent, the board shall order that the landlord rebate to the tenant any rent paid by the tenant in excess of the maximum amount of rent that the tenant may lawfully be charged.

“11. Section 117 of the act is repealed and the following substituted:

“Compliance by landlord, no notice required

“117(1) Despite section 116, but subject to subsections (2) and (3) of this section, if an order was issued under paragraph 8 of subsection 30(1), no notice of rent increase is required for the landlord to take a rent increase that the landlord would have been entitled to take in the absence of the order.

“Limitation

“(2) Subsection (1) applies only where the landlord,

“(a) has completed the items in work orders for which the compliance period has expired and which were found by the board to be related to a serious breach of a health, safety, housing or maintenance standard; and

“(b) has completed the specified repairs or replacements or other work ordered under paragraph 4 of subsection 30(1) found by the board to be related to a serious breach of the landlord’s obligations under subsection 20(1) or section 161.

“Effective date

“(3) The authority under subsection (1) to take an increase or charge an amount without a notice of rent increase is effective on the first day of the rental period following the date that the landlord completed,

“(a) the items in work orders for which the compliance period has expired and which were found by the board to

be related to a serious breach of a health, safety, housing or maintenance standard; and

“(b) the specified repairs or replacements or other work ordered under paragraph 4 of subsection 30(1) found by the board to be related to a serious breach of the landlord’s obligations under subsection 20(1) or section 161.”

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): If we could just take a breath there and come back at 1 o’clock and carry on with the recitation.

With that, this committee is recessed.

The committee recessed from 1015 to 1302.

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): I call the meeting back to order. We will now resume clause-by-clause consideration of Bill 85.

When we recessed, we were on NDP amendment number 5. I look to MPP Fife to resume reading the amendment.

Ms. Catherine Fife: Thank you so much, Chair.

“Date of annual increase

“(4) In determining the effective date of the next lawful rent increase under section 119, an increase taken under subsection (1) shall be deemed to have been taken at the time the landlord would have been entitled to take it if the order under paragraph 8 of subsection 30(1) had not been issued.’

“12. Section 120 of the act is amended by adding the following subsection:

“Exception

“(1.1) Despite subsection (1), a landlord who has not filed a statement in respect of a rental unit in accordance with section 182.3.2 may not increase the rent in respect of that unit until the statement is filed.’

“13. Subsection 123(2) of the act is amended by striking out ‘and despite any order under paragraph 6 of subsection 30(1)’ at the end.

“14. The act is amended by adding the following part:

“Part XI.1

“Rent Registry

“Rent registry

“182.3.1(1) The board shall establish and maintain a rent registry for all rental units to which this act applies and shall make the information available in accordance with section 182.3.3.

“Content of registry

“(2) The board shall include in the registry any information contained in a statement or notice filed with the board under this part and any order made by the board under paragraph 7 or 8 of subsection 30(1) or subsection 126(10).

“Updates to registry

“(3) The board shall take reasonable steps to ensure that the information contained in the registry is accurate and may correct or update any information contained in the registry.

“Landlord to file statement

“182.3.2(1) Every landlord of a rental unit to which this act applies shall file with the board a statement in a form approved by the board within 30 days after entering into a lease respecting the rental unit.

“Content of statement

“(2) The statement shall set out the following information:

“1. The landlord’s name and address.

“2. If the landlord is not ordinarily resident in Ontario, the name and address of the landlord’s representative or agent in Ontario.

“3. The municipal address of the rental unit.

“4. The rent charged to the tenant as of the date of filing, including whether the rent amount includes rent attributable to services described under subsection 123(1) or utilities and the amounts attributable to each.

“5. Any other prescribed information.

“Updates respecting rent

“(3) Every landlord of a rental unit in respect of which a statement has been filed under this section shall, within 30 days after a change to the rent charged to the tenant takes effect, file with the board a notice specifying the change to the rent charged and its effective date.

“Copy to tenant

“(4) The landlord shall also provide a copy of any statement or notice filed with the board under this section to the tenant.

“Tenant application

“(5) The tenant may apply to the board, on notice to the landlord, for an order determining the accuracy of the information in the statement or notice with respect to the tenant’s rental unit.

“Board may make order

“(6) If the board determines that the information in the statement or notice is not accurate, the board may correct the information or order that the landlord file another statement or notice, as the case may be.

“Time limitation

“(7) No application may be made under subsection (5) more than 60 days after the tenant has received the copy of the statement or notice.

“Transition

“(8) If, on the day section 14 of the schedule 8.3 to the Building a Strong Ontario Act (Budget Measures), 2023 comes into force, a rental unit to which this act applies is rented, the landlord shall file with the board a statement referred to in subsection (1) within 30 days after that day.

“Disclosure of information

“182.3.3(1) The board shall disclose any information contained in the registry about a particular rental unit to any of the following individuals who request it:

“1. The landlord or an individual authorized by the landlord.

“2. The tenant, an individual who ceased to be a tenant of the rental unit within 12 months prior to the request or an individual authorized by the tenant or former tenant.

“3. A prospective tenant who has applied to the landlord to occupy the rental unit.

“Same

“(2) The board shall take reasonable steps to verify that an individual who requests information in respect of a particular rental unit is a person described in subsection (1).

“Information respecting rent

“(3) The board shall make the following information contained in the registry available to the public in accordance with subsection (4):

“1. The municipal address of each rental unit contained in the registry.

“2. The rents charged in respect of each rental unit contained in the registry, along with the effective date of any change to the rent.

“Same

“(4) The board shall make the information referred to in subsection (3) available to the public by,

“(a) publishing it on a website maintained by the board; and

“(b) providing it to members of the public upon request.

“Disclosure to tax authorities

“(5) The board may disclose any information contained in the registry to a ministry, department or agency of the government of Canada or Ontario that administers or enforces the Income Tax Act, the Taxation Act, 2007 or the Income Tax Act (Canada).’

“15. Subsection 196(1) of the act is repealed and the following substituted:

“Board may refuse to proceed if money owing, statement not filed

“(1) Upon receiving information that an applicant owes money to the board as a result of having failed to pay any fine, fee or costs or has not filed a statement in accordance with subsection 182.3.2(1),

“(a) if the information is received on or before the day the applicant submits an application, an employee in the board shall, in such circumstances as may be specified in the rules, refuse to allow the application to be filed;

“(b) if the information is received after the application has been filed but before a hearing is held, the board shall stay the proceeding until the fee, fine or costs have been paid or the statement has been filed, as the case may be, and may discontinue the application in such circumstances as may be specified in the rules; or

“(c) if the information is received after a hearing with respect to the application has begun, the board shall not issue an order until the fine, fee or costs have been paid or the statement has been filed, as the case may be, and may discontinue the application in such circumstances as may be specified in the rules.’

“16. Clause 227(a) of the act is amended by striking out ‘monitor’ and substituting ‘ensure’.

“17. Section 233 of the act is amended by adding the following clause:

“(g.1) provides false information in a statement filed with the board under subsection 182.3.2(1);’

“18.(1) Clause 234(k) of the act is repealed.

“(2) Section 234 of the act is amended by adding the following clause:

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“(r.1) fails to file a statement with the board under subsection 182.3.2(1);’

“19(1) Paragraphs 12, 29, and 30 of subsection 241(1) of the act are repealed.

“(2) Subsection 241(1) of the act is amended by adding the following paragraph:

“61.2 governing the rent registry established under part XI.1;”

“Legal Aid Services Act, 2020

“20. The Legal Aid Services Act, 2020 is amended by adding the following section:

“Legal representation for the LTB

“4.1(1) The corporation shall provide legal aid services in the form of legal representation before the Landlord and Tenant Board to tenants who request such legal representation and who are directly affected by an application to the board for an order permitting the rent charged to be increased by more than the guideline determined under section 120 of the Residential Tenancies Act, 2006.

“Same

“(2) The conditions of eligibility to receive legal aid services referred to in section 7 do not apply with respect to the provision of legal aid services under subsection (1) and the corporation may not require an individual to contribute towards the costs of providing the legal aid services under section 9.”

“Commencement

“21. This schedule comes into force on the day that is six months after the day the Building a Strong Ontario Act (Budget Measures), 2023 receives royal assent.”

And that is how you do rent control properly in the province of Ontario.

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): That amendment was very well read, but an amendment is inadmissible if it proposes to amend a statute that is not before the committee. I therefore rule the motion out of order because the Residential Tenancies Act, 2006, is not opened by the bill.

We’ll now go to schedule 9. There are no amendments to schedule 9, sections 1 to 10. I therefore propose that we bundle sections 1 to 10. Is there an agreement? Agreed. Any discussion on schedule 9, sections 1 to 10? Further debate? Shall I call the question? All those in favour? All those opposed? The motion is carried.

Is there any debate on schedule 9 as a whole? No discussion. Shall I call the question? All those in favour? Opposed? Schedule 9 is carried.

Schedule 10: There are no amendments to schedule 10, sections 1 to 18. Therefore, I propose that we bundle sections 1 to 18. Is there an agreement? Okay. Any debate on sections 1 to 18? No debate. Shall we call the question? All those in favour? All those opposed? Sections 1 to 18 are carried.

Shall schedule 10 carry? Any further debate on schedule 10? No further debate. Shall I call the question? All those in favour? All those opposed? Schedule 10 carries as a whole.

That concludes the schedules. Now we go back to the first three.

Section 1: Further debate on section 1? No further debate. Shall I call the question? All those in favour? All those opposed? Section 1 carries.

Section 2: Further debate on section 2? No further debate. Shall I call the question? All those in favour? All those opposed? Section 2 carries.

Section 3, the short title: Any discussion on the short title? If there’s no debate, shall I call the question? All those in favour? All those opposed? Section 3 carries.

Shall the title of the bill carry? All those in favour? Opposed? Carried.

Shall Bill 85 carry? Debate?

Ms. Catherine Fife: Recorded vote, please.

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): A recorded vote is requested.

No debate? I call the question.

Ayes

Anand, Byers, Crawford, Cuzzetto, Dowie, David Smith, Triantafilopoulos.

Nays

Fife, Kernaghan.

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): The motion is carried.

Shall I report the bill to the House? All those in favour? All those opposed? I shall report the bill to the House. It carries.

That concludes the issue of Bill 85, so I thank everybody.

COMMITTEE BUSINESS

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): Are there any further comments or questions?

MPP Crawford.

Mr. Stephen Crawford: Thank you, Chair. I have a motion I’d like to read.

I move that, pursuant to standing order 63(d), the following time be allotted to the consideration of the estimates of the ministries or offices selected by the committee:

—the Ministry of Economic Development, Job Creation and Trade for two hours;

—the Ministry of Finance for three hours;

—the Ministry of Labour, Immigration, Training and Skills Development for two hours;

—the Treasury Board Secretariat for two hours;

—the Office of the Premier for two hours;

—the Cabinet Office for two hours; and

That the ministers responsible for those respective ministries be invited to appear before the committee; and

That for the review of the estimates of the Office of the Premier and the Cabinet Office, the government House leader be invited to appear before the committee; and

That for each ministry, Treasury Board Secretariat, Office of the Premier and the Cabinet Office, the minister be allotted 20 minutes to make an opening statement followed by a question and answer in rotations of 20 minutes for the official opposition members of the committee, 10 minutes for the independent members of the committee as a group and 20 minutes for the government members of the committee for the remainder of the allotted time; and

That the committee meet for the purpose of considering the estimates of the selected ministries or offices at the following times:

—on Tuesday, June 6, 2023, from 9 a.m. until 10:15 a.m. and from 3 p.m. until 6 p.m.; and

—on Tuesday, September 12, 2023, from 9 a.m. until 10:15 a.m. and 3 p.m. until 6 p.m.; and

—on Wednesday, September 13, 2023, from 9 a.m. until 10:15 a.m. and 1 p.m. until 6 p.m.; and

That if any invited minister is unavailable to appear before the committee, the parliamentary assistant or parliamentary assistants may appear before the committee in their place.

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): You've heard the motion, and it's printed. Debate?

MPP Fife.

Ms. Catherine Fife: Thanks to MPP Crawford for bringing the motion forward.

We articulated our discontent with the level of time that has been allocated for these respective ministries. In past years, the finance ministry, for instance, received 15 hours of debate, of discussion. And in the interests of transparency—the allocated amount of time that has been assigned to these ministries is insufficient to hold the government to account and for the government to prove, really, transparency in their expenditures.

This is a government that has been identified as putting money in a budget—allocating certain amounts of money to specific initiatives, like education, like health care, like the environment—and the money does not flow. This is actually a new pattern, I would say, for any government. The Financial Accountability Officer has clearly identified a new trend where the government has unallocated contingency funds, which reduces our ability as legislators to hold the government to account and to clearly trace the money, where it is going. This actually is an obstruction of democracy, because we are part of a Westminster democracy, where legislators on all sides—the independent members, His Majesty's official opposition, and government members, for that matter—have the ability to speak to where the money is going or where the money is not going. This government has allocated some \$4 billion in

the unallocated contingency fund, which is a significant departure away from transparency in government spending.

We understand that the government does not want to do a thorough review of the estimates in these respective ministries: Ministry of Economic Development, Job Creation and Trade; Ministry of Finance; Ministry of Labour, Immigration, Training and Skills Development; the Treasury Board Secretariat; the Office of the Premier; and the Cabinet Office.

As I said, this is a huge departure from the way that this Legislature has held the government to account and demonstrated to the people of this province that the significant amounts of money that have been allocated actually get to where they should be going.

On the issue of calling the ministry responsible for the Office of the Premier, we would like Premier Ford to appear before this committee. If this Premier is so proud of where the money is going, of the pattern of behaviour around re-prioritizing various ministries, this needs to be done in a very public and transparent manner. So we would like to issue an invitation to the Premier of this province to appear before this committee to explain the increase in the expenditures in the Office of the Premier and, indeed, the Cabinet Office, if he's inclined to do so. It would speak to trust, I think, in our democracy if Premier Ford chose to appear before this committee.

I must say, on my own part, I would very much enjoy questioning the government on the pattern of spending, on the lack of transparency, on the neglect around the accountability of where the funding is going, and I'm extending a personal invitation, on behalf of His Majesty's official opposition, to appear before the finance committee on any of the dates that the member from Oakville has indicated in this motion.

Thank you for your indulgence.

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): Further debate? If there's no further debate, shall I call the question? All those in favour of the motion? All those opposed? The motion is carried.

Any further business? If not, then the committee stands adjourned until Tuesday, June 6.

The committee adjourned at 1323.

STANDING COMMITTEE ON FINANCE AND ECONOMIC AFFAIRS

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Mr. Rick Byers (Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound PC)

Mr. Stephen Crawford (Oakville PC)

Mr. Rudy Cuzzetto (Mississauga–Lakeshore PC)

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