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Assembly
of Ontario



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Mercredi
15 novembre 2023

Speaker: Honourable Ted Arnott
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Président : L'honorable Ted Arnott
Greffier : Trevor Day

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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
OF ONTARIO

Wednesday 15 November 2023

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE
DE L'ONTARIO

Mercredi 15 novembre 2023

The House met at 0900.

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

Prayers.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

TAXATION

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): I recognize the member for Lanark–Frontenac–Kingston.

Mr. John Jordan: I move that, in the opinion of this House, the government of Canada should take immediate steps to eliminate the carbon tax on fuels and inputs for home heating.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Mr. Jordan has moved private member's notice of motion number 70.

Once again, I recognize the member for Lanark–Frontenac–Kingston to lead off the debate.

Mr. John Jordan: It's a pleasure for me to rise today and speak in support of my private member's motion, stating, "That, in the opinion of this House, the government of Canada should take immediate steps to eliminate the carbon tax on fuels and inputs for home heating."

Mr. Speaker, we currently live in very uncertain times and, for many Canadians, quite difficult ones at that. According to Statistics Canada, the nation's inflation rate rose to 8.1% last year alone, marking the fastest annual increase in the cost of living in decades, reaching a 39-year high. Additionally, a major factor of inflation was food prices, which rose by around 10.3%. A recent report by Dalhousie University predicts that food prices will increase by another 7% in 2023.

The challenge for hard-working Canadians to make ends meet grows with every new announcement. In July 2023, the Bank of Canada raised the benchmark interest rate to 5%, its highest rate since 2001. Prices are rising fast and people across the province and across this country are finding it difficult to make ends meet and afford the basic services and essentials.

The necessity of heating homes is not a luxury, but a fundamental requirement for Canadians. The looming prospect of a tripling carbon tax raises questions about the feasibility of such a plan, especially given the existing economic challenges faced by Canadians across the board. Sadly, currently 14% of Canadians find themselves grappling with inadequate heating in their homes, a situation exacerbated by the economic challenges of our time. Not

surprisingly, one in 10 individuals has been forced to forgo paying a heating bill within the past year.

The repercussions of eight years of the federal Liberal policies, marked by carbon taxes and inflationary spending have resulted in a staggering reality: one and a half million people now rely on food banks, and seven million Canadians have been compelled to reduce their dietary intake due to the soaring costs of essential groceries.

To put it bluntly, Speaker, in a country where nine out of 10 young people feel they may never realize the dream of owning a home, and where one and a half million Canadians rely on food banks, the carbon tax seems out of touch with the daily realities of Canadians. It's not just a tax; it symbolizes a broader economic predicament, pushing one in five Canadians to skip meals due to the financial strain of putting food on the table. But instead of backtracking from their failed carbon tax, the federal government has continued down this reckless path.

We already saw how last year's heating costs, tied to the price of natural gas, spiked as much as 30% for Ontarians. Now we see that not only has the federal Liberal government failed to not completely halt the arbitrary and cruel tax on Canadians' heating bills, but they have continued with the scheduled increases. This is contributing to a cost-of-living crisis, plain and simple.

Natural Resources Canada states that the cost of home heating for households in Canada in 2023 could be 70% higher than it was in 2020. We need to do everything we can to correct this trend. Rural residents in particular are confronting the possibility of a doubling of their home heating bills. This escalation in expenses adds to the broader economic strain experienced by Canadians.

Mr. Speaker, during a time when house prices have doubled and now home heating prices are doubling, with costs expected to rise as much as \$6,000 for a single family to heat a home in communities in northern Ontario, now is not the time to be increasing the financial burden this tax has already caused. The only thing this tax has ever done is raise costs on people's energy use—energy to heat their homes. People do need to heat their homes. This is not a luxury good; heating is a necessity—we should all understand that—especially in a Canadian winter and especially in places like rural Ontario, where there's a greater dependence on oil or gas for heating.

Additionally, taxing energy essentially impacts everything, given its integral role in various activities such as extraction, construction, transportation, temperature control and agriculture. Energy analysts anticipate that Canadians could witness a staggering 50% to 100% increase in their home heating bills this winter. The impli-

cations are profound and paint a stark picture of the economic challenges faced by a significant portion of the population.

The concerns raised about the economic impact of the government's carbon tax are underscored by the Parliamentary Budget Officer's assertion that 60% of individuals paying the tax will end up contributing more than they receive in any rebate. A critical examination of the history of this tax reveals a series of false promises and miscalculations. Initially touted as a measure that would leave citizens financially better off, the reality as confirmed by the federal Parliamentary Budget Officer paints a different picture: Individuals will end up paying approximately \$1,500 more in carbon taxes than they receive in rebates. Also revealed by the Parliamentary Budget Officer was that the latest carbon tax initiative is poised to disproportionately impact the most economically vulnerable individuals, amplifying the financial strain on those with the least means. This regressive impact arises from the fact that energy expenses constitute a more substantial proportion of the family budget for lower-income households, increasing the economic disparity.

Simply put, across the board this tax on home heating imposed by the federal government is hurting Canadians—and Canadians know this. They are well aware that their monthly bills for basic necessities have been steadily increasing; that is, the majority of Canadians want the carbon tax on home heating removed.

Take, for example, a recent Leger poll that revealed that close to 60% of all Ontarians and close to the same number of Canadians nationwide demand the federal government to remove the carbon tax from everyone's home heating bills. The prevailing opinion suggests that the majority of Canadians find it unjust for the government to force taxes on individuals for the essential act of heating their home. This sentiment is echoed across all regions of the country, underscoring a shared belief that providing relief on home heating bills for only a select group of people is inherently unfair.

0910

The resounding call from Canadians is for the federal government to heed this collective voice and promptly remove the carbon tax from home heating bills nationwide. The argument extends beyond a mere aversion to taxation and encapsulates a fundamental belief in the necessity of equitable policies that do not disproportionately burden certain segments of the population. While the federal government has taken a step by announcing the removal of the carbon tax from home heating oil for a three-year duration, the impact of this relief is limited, benefiting only a mere 3% of Canadian households. This fact underscores the need for a more comprehensive and inclusive approach to carbon tax relief that addresses the concerns of the majority. The data from the Leger poll serves as a barometer of public sentiment, and it reinforces the urgency for policymakers to consider a broader strategy that aligns with the values and expectations of Canadians.

As discussions on tax policies continue, it is imperative for the federal government to engage in a dialogue that genuinely reflects the needs and desires of its citizens, fostering a sense of fairness and inclusivity in the implementation of taxation measures related to essential services, such as home heating. Economic hardships are attributed to seven years of what is characterized as the government's inflationary policies. The interplay between taxation, inflation and the rising cost of essential services raises valid concerns about the long-term sustainability of such economic strategies. As Canadians navigate these challenges, there is a growing call for re-evaluation of policies to ensure they align with the well-being of the citizens they are meant to serve.

Becoming increasingly panicked by new polling data coming in, like the one aforementioned, the federal Liberal government finally acknowledged how harmful the carbon tax is when the Prime Minister announced that they are removing the carbon tax on home heating oil entirely for the next three years. Unfortunately, Speaker, instead of offering any reprieve, this new measure was just another slap in the face to the millions of Canadians struggling under rising heating costs. Statistics Canada reports that, in 2021, only 3% of households nationally and 2.5% in Ontario relied on home heating oil. What about the people heating with natural gas? What about the people heating with propane?

This Ontario government knows that the federal Liberals' decision to exempt only home heating oil, which is used by just 2.5% of Ontarians, from the carbon tax is not fair. Just this year alone, the federal carbon tax is adding about \$290 to the average household's annual natural gas bill, or more than \$24 a month. The same goes for households that heat with propane, which are already paying \$250 in carbon taxes alone for home heating this year. For many individuals and families, especially in northern Ontario, the use of fuels to heat their homes is a necessity, not a luxury, and not an option. Unfortunately, for many people in rural and remote communities, they are extremely limited in the options they have when it comes to heating their homes. That's why I put forward this motion in Ontario's Legislature formally calling on the federal government to take immediate steps to eliminate the carbon tax on all fuels and inputs for home heating.

It's bad enough that the Prime Minister's panicked carbon tax flip-flop doesn't benefit the vast majority of Canadians; it's also a highly discriminatory, arbitrary, and unfair move that chooses a small number of Canadians to be winners and a much bigger pool of Canadians to be losers, and all depending on where they live.

From an emissions point of view, that just doesn't make sense. According to data compiled by the US Environmental Protection Agency, home heating oil generates approximately 42% more greenhouse gas emissions than natural gas when producing an equivalent amount of energy. In effect, Speaker, the Prime Minister's decision to postpone the taxation on home heating oil until after the election comes with a sinister twist: He intends to retain the tax on lower-emission fuels, natural gas heating, which

will result in an imminent spike in bills in the coming weeks as colder temperatures set in, but the tax won't apply to the higher-emission heating oil.

So not only did this exemption leave the majority of Canadians out in the cold; the Prime Minister decided to tax the significantly more environmentally friendly home heating sources. Nothing about this move makes any sense and it prompts serious questions about the consistency and fairness of such policies. It brings the intent of this limited exemption and the carbon tax into question. Targeted exemptions like these call into question whether this arbitrary and limited home heating exemption is more about politics and less about what is best for both Canadians and the environment—or is it just a tax grab?

Any attempt at playing divide-and-conquer politics using the cost of home heating as a consequence is absolutely unacceptable. That is exactly why we have this motion to eliminate the carbon tax on fuels and inputs for home heating for all Canadians.

This motion is something that the majority of Canadians across the board support. Regardless of where they live, who they voted for or their income levels, the vast majority of Canadians desperately want to see their home heating bills exempt from the federal government's carbon tax.

Polling data unequivocally shows that Canadians want the Prime Minister to cut the carbon tax on all home heating and that his decision to lift the levy on heating oil for a select group of one million households is unfair. The people of this country want something that would benefit all Canadians during this winter period and not just a select few.

According to a recent survey conducted by Abacus Data, a significant majority of Canadians are in favour of the Liberal government providing additional exemptions for home heating; 72% of the survey's respondents said the federal government should exempt other types of home heating fuels, like natural gas and propane, from the carbon tax for a few years to help people deal with the rising cost of living. Conversely, only a meager 28% of those surveyed supported the government's current position.

By now, we all know that that the ambitious targets set forth by the Prime Minister, once lauded as bold initiatives, have succumbed to a series of setbacks and inevitable shortcomings. Over the past decade, seven out of eight key objectives have failed to be met, raising significant doubts about the effectiveness of current climate policies. The government's promises to lead the charge in mitigating climate change have fallen short, and the discrepancy between rhetoric and action is becoming increasingly evident.

Despite the Liberals' assurances that the implementation of the carbon tax would herald a transformative era for environmental conservation, the stark reality paints a drastically different picture. Canada's standing on the global stage for climate action is disheartening, currently positioned at a sobering 58 out of 63 nations. The nation, as the sole G7 member unable to curtail emissions below 1990 levels, bears the weight of a conspicuously deficient environmental track record.

Adding to the growing skepticism is the latest revelation unveiled in the environment commissioner's report. The findings cast a shadow over the feasibility of achieving the 2030 targets set in the Paris accord under the current administration.

As Canadians grapple with the implications of these revelations, there is a pressing need for a thorough re-assessment of environmental policies and a renewed commitment to sustainable practices. The urgency of addressing climate concerns demands a recalibration. It is plain and clear: all of this is not helping the environment, nor is it helping Canadians. It's a tax on the cost of living, plain and simple.

Actually, when it comes to protecting the environment while at the same time promoting the economy, the federal Liberals, for all their talk, could learn a lot from the Ontario government. Unlike the federal Liberals, we don't pit ourselves against the people we came here to represent. We don't penalize them for heating their home, commuting to work or buying groceries. Instead, we offer positive solutions to protect the environment and make life more affordable. We provide both the tools and incentives to empower Ontarians, giving them the resources they need to create a more prosperous province, both in terms of the economy and the environment.

Speaker, let me take a moment to outline some of the initiatives our government has launched to promote environmental protection that comes without penalizing the people of this province. When it comes to energy, Ontario boasts a world-class grid fuelled by a mix of diverse resources, such as hydroelectric, nuclear, natural gas, solar, wind and bioenergy.

0920

The Minister of Energy has unveiled Powering Ontario's Growth, the latest instalment in the province's clean-energy narrative. This plan outlines our commitment to delivering dependable, cost-effective and environmentally friendly power to both households and industries. Moreover, Ontario is embarking on a comprehensive energy strategy including the first large-scale nuclear build at Bruce since 1993 and three small modular reactors at Darlington.

New transmission lines are being constructed for the conversion from coal to power electric arc furnaces at Algoma Steel and to support growth in northeastern Ontario, Ottawa and eastern Ontario. Pumped hydroelectric storage projects are under way along with optimization of hydroelectric power generation. The future involves energy efficiency programs, competitive procurement for clean resources and the development of Ontario's first long-term integrated energy plan emphasizing affordability to support electrification across the economy.

Look at the great work of our Minister of Economic Development in promoting the EV industry right here in Ontario. Speaker, when it comes to transport, the Ministry of Energy collaborated with Ontario Power Generation regarding Ivy, reporting charging speeds of 150 kilowatts at ONroute locations. The Ministry of Transportation is investing \$91 million to expand public EV charging infrastructure beyond urban centres.

This government remains committed to the environment. It remains committed to addressing affordability in Ontario. Only as you make the green transition and green tech more available and affordable to consumers and business alike can we lower emissions in a sustainable way over the long term.

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): Further debate?

Mr. Peter Tabuns: I have to ask myself, what are we really doing here with this motion this morning? Two weeks ago, we were debating a Conservative motion on carbon taxes on groceries and my colleague the MPP for Timiskaming–Cochrane told a story about three envelopes, about governments on their way out leaving three envelopes for those who would replace them—I can’t do justice to the story; I thought he was brilliant. I’ve replayed the video, I think the man has a future in standup and shouldn’t be blocked—but, frankly, I’ll note that the first envelope was a recommendation that if the government was facing a sea of troubles that it blame the previous government. I was around for Dwight Duncan and company, and I got to hear all about how—this was seven years on—the previous Conservative government had made things impossible for the Liberals in 2010. We’re getting kind of long in the tooth with the Tories here now—five, six years—blaming the previous government. It’s wearing thin. They’re going, as my colleague said, to the second envelope of advice when you’re facing a sea of troubles, and that’s to go after another level of government—blame that level of government.

It seems to be that we’re at that second envelope today. Here’s a government besieged by police investigations, findings that it’s undermined municipal government action on housing, newspaper articles showing that their minister’s zoning orders—supposedly used to speed things up for housing and for jobs—do no such thing, facing further investigations by the Auditor General on the very smelly Ontario Place deal. This is a government very desperate to divert attention, to as they say, change the channel, and that appears to be why we have this motion before us today.

Now let’s be very clear: The cost of home heating, the cost of living is a profoundly serious matter. People are being squeezed, people are being hurt. And so, since it is so serious, one would think that this government would be using its powers to actually address the issue rather than asking another level of government to act.

People in Ontario wish that someone would take action to protect them from being gouged, from being squeezed—somebody with political power and authority who could actually use that power and authority to make a difference in their lives. But that’s not what we’re getting here. Here we have a government with the power to bring in laws to protect people, with a treasury that can spend money to help them, with officials that can use existing laws to protect people against gouging, for instance, in groceries, in services, in auto shops etc. Actually, this government could protect people from being charged for medical services. They have all these powers, and we’re

not getting a discussion about that today. We’re getting a discussion about another level of government: “Please, sir, do something for us.” That is not a serious approach. Really, it is not a serious approach to the difficulties that people in Ontario are facing. It is not.

This government has a lot of power to do things that will actually help people, to actually make a difference in their lives, and yet we’re spending time on a resolution to ask another government to do something. Did Ontario suddenly go broke overnight? Finance critic, have you heard the news that they suddenly don’t have any money to help people with anymore? Did legal counsel go on strike so they can’t write new laws to protect people or new regulations? Did ministers declare they were no longer going to direct civil servants, so that there’s no government machinery to help people here in Ontario, someone else has to do it? How lame can you get? Apparently, very, very lame.

The late-night comedian Stephen Colbert refers to something like this as a “Pop-Tart full of sadness.” It’s insubstantial, it has some sugar crystals on the crust, so it’s shiny, but at the heart of it, it’s just this whine, this wistful call for help from another level of government. Ontario, within this federation, with the biggest population and the biggest economy, is saying, “We can’t help people. We need the federal government to help people.”

Well, frankly, we are big players. We can make things happen. We can shape this country. We can shape its future.

We could, here in Ontario right now, help people with the rising cost of housing by bringing in real rent control. We could help people with energy by investing heavily in cutting people’s energy use and their energy bills. We could help them with food by protecting farmland rather than paving it over, making sure we have a steady supply. And frankly, we could protect people from overcharging in medical care, but that’s another matter—a lot of things.

This is a government that, in the past, has taken action against affordability around energy. In 2018, Ford cancelled the Green Ontario program, a program to help people cut their energy use and their energy bills. That meant an end to the program helping Ontarians with home upgrades like energy-efficient windows, smart thermostats, heat pumps and installations. In 2018—what’s that, six years ago? Six years of efforts to reduce energy use and make life more affordable—they cancelled that. They cancelled that, and there’s no word today about any restoration. Then, in 2019, because they hadn’t finished bombing heavily enough—they had to bounce the rubble, as they say—they went after the program of energy efficiencies that were delivered by local distribution companies, energy utilities, further cutting back people’s ability to cut their energy bills. So this government has had the opportunity to give people assistance to cut their bills, but it has, in fact, cut the help that would allow them to reduce their energy bills and their energy costs.

We need to talk about how to cut people’s energy bills. What can we do here in Ontario in this Legislature? And what we’re getting is a motion to request another level of government to act.

How do members of this government defend cutting those money-saving programs that help people? I heard the arguments that were made by the member, and he's right: people are hurting. So how do you defend the fact that you cut the programs that help them? How do you do that? Why did they do that, and why are they now saying that they're going to do something about affordability?

In my opinion, if you can do something and you refuse to do it and you put forward a motion that really is rhetorical, is for show, it's because your government is so besieged with problems it has created—a government where I'm sure senior civil servants and politicians are meeting with their lawyers now in preparation for their interview with the mounted police, in a situation where former civil servants and former ministers are meeting with their lawyers, going through their records, going through their calendars, their day-timers, their texts to see if there is anything that can get them in trouble or, if there is something that is there that can get them in trouble, trying to figure out a story, like, "Officer, I'm sorry, I don't have the records; my dog ate my iPhone. Sorry about that."

0930

Instead of sending out a "please, sir" note to the federal government, Ontario could actually help people cut their electricity bills by investing in their homes and businesses to cut demand. You could do that. You've got the money. You've got the legal authority. You've got the machinery. You need to do it.

Ontario is looking at potential big increases in electrical demand. To meet that demand, there are a variety of options before us. What this government wants to do is go on a spending spree to build and expand gas plants in Ontario. That is very expensive. That is very expensive on the face of it, but also, we're in a world where we have wildfires in ways that we've never seen before, flooding we haven't seen before, heat waves that we've never seen before. Because of that, we may well have to shut down these new gas plants a decade ahead of their normal life-span. That will cost many billions as well.

At the same time, there are cheaper options. I'll go to the Royal Bank of Canada, which has recently come out with a report talking about this investment, this rush to invest in gas plants. What the Royal Bank says is, "What can the province do to bide its time and avoid making an early call on costly natural gas generation?" I'm not the only one who calls this costly.

"One way is to use policy levers to delay demand. Energy conservation can buy the province time to build large-scale, cleaner power sources...."

"Deferring hefty financial commitments will keep electricity affordable and gives Ontario time to redefine itself as a low-carbon manufacturing hub that attracts companies involved in electric car supply chains, green metal production, and clean tech.

"The good news," from Royal Bank: "Technology exists that Ontario can use to navigate the looming demand rush and delay committing" fully "to natural gas-powered generation. Changing consumer attitudes and behaviours to promote flexible demand and energy efficiency will

also be key to unlocking significant savings and alleviating grid pressures." I underline: "significant savings."

"By 2040, Ontario could meet nearly 20% of its expected demand ... via economically viable conservation. Doing so could save Ontario ratepayers ... \$500 billion" a year. Not just one time—half a billion a year. That's real money. In today's dollars, half a billion actually counts.

So this government could save money. It could help millions of homeowners cut their energy use and cut their bills rather than dramatically ramping up gas-powered generation. It wouldn't have to ask the federal government for anything. It could use the power it has in its hands today to help Ontarians. And yet that's not what's before us. That is not what is before us.

This government, this feral government, is focused on the even sweatier problem of media coverage: day after day of articles, social media posts, question period broadcasts with MPP Stiles putting lead questions to a silent and muzzled Premier about what really happened in Vegas, at the wedding, at the stag and doe, at the meeting with the developer who wanted a rewrite of urban boundaries. What really happened in those places? So the government is seized with a question: How do we move the cameras away from us? How do we focus them on something else and not on our, let us say, bad ways? Let us say just "bad ways."

So a cry goes out within the government caucus: "Can't we talk about something else? Something we aren't really doing anything about, but something people care about?" Within the government caucus: "Home heating, the impossible cost of living? Now, there's a great thing: We don't actually have to do anything. We'll ask another level of government to act, but we'll divert attention"—because this is an emotionally powerful issue. People are being hurt. People are being squeezed. This government is not actually helping them, but it can sound like it's doing something. And that is what we're dealing with today.

It's quite extraordinary watching the Premier when he is asked questions about his bad ways. There was recently an interview he did with a number of reporters, and Mike Crawley from CBC actually recorded questions and responses. I don't know if anyone here will notice, but the attempt at diversion is pretty substantial. I'll give you a few samples.

Richard Southern, City News: "How on earth did so many MZOs go to people who were present at that wedding, sir?" The Premier: "The interest rates are killing us. The Bank of Canada froze the interest rates both times now and I appreciate that, but that's not good enough. They have to start lowering interest rates that make it more attainable for people to buy homes."

Well, interest rates are a problem, but I don't think he's exactly answering the question. He's moving again—as they say, he's "pivoting"—to divert people's attention.

Jeff Gray, Globe and Mail: "Why was your staff running around so concerned about those lands which are owned by a man identified as your friend, or co-owned by, Shakir Rehmatullah?" The Premier: "I had a great meeting, by the way, with Mayor Chow. What a wonderful person she is."

I can't argue that. I think Mayor Chow is a wonderful person, but it's not exactly a response to the question. Would you agree? More of a diversion, a pivot—ah, man, it's just too much. Anyway, his responses time after time after time were exactly this. They were a diversion. They were a shopping basket full of distractions.

So let's get back to this motion. I'm sure the premise of the motion—and it was set out in the speech by the member—was, how do we help people with affordability? Well, if you want to do that, if you want to do something right now, change the rent control laws. Because I have to tell you—the member referred to people at food banks. I have a number of food banks in my riding. The one at Cosburn and Pape is in an area with many apartment buildings. The lineups at that food bank have grown dramatically, and you don't have to ask too many people to figure out what's going on: They can't afford their rents. The rents are being cranked up constantly.

I had a visit to an apartment building recently and talked to a tenant there who had been a postal worker. He had to retire early because of health problems and was thus on a reduced pension, and he and his wife were just sort of able to make things balance. They had been in the unit about 20 years, so compared to the neighbours on his floor, he was paying a substantially lower rent. Notwithstanding that, his wife died and so the two-pension-income household became a one-pension-income household. For the last few years, the landlord has continuously been applying for and getting above-guideline rent increases. He had this to say to me: "When I finish paying rent, I've got \$200 a month for everything else: food, clothing, transportation, phone, whatever I can get." This man is up to here, up to his neck in financial difficulty, and his landlord is pushing that financial difficulty ever higher.

This government could actually change the legislation, either abolish the above-guideline increases or change them so that they can't be used as a tool to drive people out. This government could make sure that when one person leaves the unit, the next person coming in isn't charged double or 50% more or triple. You could actually control the rents on units, and that would have a huge impact on people's ability to pay for the necessities of life. But I'm not seeing any of that from this government—none of that from this government.

Speaker, my time is shorter than I want. I'll just say very quickly—and I'll steal from my colleague from Waterloo. She gave a brief history of how we came to be where we are today. We had a cap-and-trade system in Ontario in 2018 when this government came in calling it a carbon tax. They said they were going to fight the federal carbon tax and abandon the cap-and-trade system, which, by the way, had a lower cost than the carbon tax.

In any event, I had the opportunity to attend the press conference when the then Solicitor General was speaking about the matter going to the Supreme Court. What was fascinating to me was watching as she tried to respond to reporters' questions, who were saying, "How are you going to win this? Where's the legal legs? Do you think you can win this?" There was more bobbing and weaving

than you see in a heavyweight title fight; it was really impressive. I could tell that the Solicitor General had actually had professional legal advice on this and been told, "This is a dog of a case. If you want to put on a show that you're doing something, sure, but don't expect to win this," which, in the end, was the case.

Now, you have to understand that this government does run its own carbon tax—on the big emitters. It's exactly what Doug Ford called a carbon tax. So I'll use his words: Doug Ford is running a carbon tax system, and that is projected to collect billions of dollars from big industry between now and 2030. I know this sounds really wild. Maybe it's just completely beyond the pale.

0940

You will actually have billions of dollars that you could put into people's homes and businesses to cut their energy use and cut their energy bills. You don't have to go to big daddy in Ottawa. You could actually use your own power, authority and treasury to help people directly now. And the question that one has to ask is, why aren't you doing that? As I suggested earlier, the answer is, we're dealing with a project of distraction and diversion away from this government's scandals, from its corruption and its difficulties with the police.

When my kid came to me when he was small and said, "Daddy, can I have something to eat?"—and I'd say, "Well, yes. There are bananas on the counter. There are some apples in the fridge. I've got bread, peanut butter. But you know what? Go to the neighbours and ask them if they can give you a sandwich. I'm not really going to give up my bananas or apples or bread or peanut butter to you. You're just my kid. Go to the neighbour. See if they'll feed you." That's what we've got here. We've got a government saying, "We aren't going to use our own power, authority and funds. We're going to tell you, 'Go and ask someone else.'" Well, I don't think that's defensible. I don't think it's defensible at all.

This resolution should be addressing the serious problems of affordability and home heating. This government should be doing that, but it's not. It's diverting. It's distracting. It's trying to move focus.

Speaker, if this government used the power and finances that it has, it could actually help people.

Interjection.

Mr. Peter Tabuns: I think there's a chihuahua barking somewhere. I don't know if you can do anything about that. In any event, Speaker—

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): Order.

I'll ask the member to withdraw the unparliamentary comment.

Mr. Peter Tabuns: It's amazing to hear—the "creatures of the night," as they refer to it on late-night television.

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): I am sorry; I need to ask the member to withdraw this unparliamentary comment.

Mr. Peter Tabuns: I withdraw.

I think, Speaker, I've made my point.

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): We're going to move to further debate.

Mr. Stephen Blais: It's a pleasure to be here with you all this morning to debate this motion to once again ask the government of Ontario to write a letter to the Prime Minister. At this point, the Premier is becoming quite proficient at writing letters, and I'm not sure if it's because it's his preferred form of communication or if, like the former President of the United States, he just likes signing his name in giant Sharpie pen. I think that's yet to be determined.

What we do know for sure is that climate change is real. Climate change is an existential threat to our society. It's an existential threat to our communities. Whether it is Ottawa, whether it is Brampton, whether it's Barry's Bay and Renfrew and Arnprior, climate change is and will continue to have a real impact on how all of us, all of our kids and all of our grandkids will live their lives.

In Ottawa, in the last five or six years, we have seen two once-in-a-century floods, in 2017 and again in 2019. I remember, because I was down there over the Easter weekend both years and for the next six or eight weeks, filling sandbags to help residents save their homes. I was there when the Premier of the day came to east Ottawa, came to Cumberland to see the damage and the impact of the flooding for herself. I was there the next summer, when the Premier returned to meet the baby who was born during the flooding, outside of the view of cameras and the media, just because she wanted to see how the community had recovered. And I was there two years later when the Canadian Forces came, when reservists from across Ontario came to give up their jobs as lawyers, architects and students to fill sandbags, to support the residents of east Ottawa, to protect the water filtration facility in the city of Ottawa and otherwise help residents deal with the flooding situation that was ongoing.

Two once-in-a-century floods over the span of three years, Madam Speaker: It's undeniable that climate change is having a true and real impact on our communities, and it's beyond time that all governments do something about it.

In addition to these flooding events in Ottawa and eastern Ontario more broadly, we have seen devastating windstorms; windstorms that have ripped through communities; windstorms that have ripped through many rural and agricultural communities—in east Ottawa, in Navan and in Sarsfield and Carlsbad Springs, where the derecho ripped through these small, vibrant farming communities, causing enormous damage to barns and to silos. These farmers were left in the lurch by this government. There were no supports offered to these farmers to help repair this damage.

The disaster relief assistance program wasn't activated in Ottawa. It was, for some reason, activated in Uxbridge for the same storm, but it wasn't activated anywhere in the city of Ottawa. Moreover, despite the fact that the Premier came to Orléans and went to a fire station to thank the firefighters for their work during the recovery of this storm and committed to being there for the city of Ottawa, my

understanding is not a single dollar has flowed from the government of Ontario to Hydro Ottawa, which incurred tens of millions of dollars of expenses in cleaning up downed lines and supporting residents who were without power for weeks on end, and it's my understanding that not a single provincial dollar has flowed to the city of Ottawa to support their tens of millions of dollars in expenses.

As a result, both hydro and the city are facing difficult financial decisions, and this, of course, is going to end up meaning that the residents of Ottawa are going to pay higher property taxes because of the failure of this provincial government to support the city. So in an affordability crisis, as a result of inaction from this government, every resident in the city of Ottawa is going to end up paying higher property taxes as a result.

So it's clear that climate change is real. I even think I heard the member from Brampton over there agree that it was real. It's clear that the government needs to do something about it. It's also clear that, to date, at least in the city of Ottawa, they haven't really been there to support residents or the city or the hydro company in their efforts to deal with the costs of these disasters and help reduce the burden on families.

But at the same time as we're dealing with this existential threat as a result of climate change, we are, as a society, as a community, going through what is, I think, widely understood to be a comprehensive affordability crisis. Families are having trouble paying the bills. They're having trouble paying rent. They're having trouble making their mortgage payments. They're having trouble putting food on the table for their families. More and more families are using the food bank. Not just in our biggest cities, but in most communities across the province, food bank usage is up. That means parents are having to make the difficult decision every morning on whether their kids get breakfast before they go to school.

I heard of one family where there were three or four or five kids in the household, and it was clear—the teacher relayed this to me. It was clear that the family was needing to make a decision as to which children got to bring lunch to school. The oldest boy in the family was going to school without a lunch so that his younger brothers and sisters could go to school with a lunch. Those are the kinds of decisions that families are being forced to make as a result of the affordability crisis that we're in.

And the government has had an opportunity to respond. They introduced an economic update to the province's finances a week and a half ago, and there was virtually nothing in there to support middle-class families—in an economic crisis, when the costs of living are up, almost virtually zero support for middle-class families.

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Families are sitting back and asking themselves, "After five years, are we better off?"

When you look at it, after five years the cost of groceries in Ontario is up. After five years the cost of hydro is up. After five years the cost of basically all living expenses is up.

At the same time as the costs of living your life in Ontario are up, this government's actions have led to supports for the middle class going down, supports for our cities going down, supports for public transit going down.

In fact, Madam Speaker, this week the city of Ottawa, our hometown, because of the lack of support from this province, is making drastic cuts to public transit service in Ottawa. The city budgeted for an enhancement of public transit supports from this government. It was baked into their budget last year, largely based on the rhetoric of the Premier and others in the government that they would be there for cities. Don't worry; they would be there for cities, and public transit is their most important priority.

The cheque was never written to the city of Ottawa. The money never came. As a result, city council is debating reducing public transit service in the city of Ottawa by the tune of tens of millions of dollars. Of course, if public transit usage goes down and support for public transit goes down, it's very likely that greenhouse gas emissions will go up and it will have an even worse impact on the challenge we're all trying to combat, which is the impact of climate change.

The government talks a good game about their desire to combat climate change and their investments to do so. In real terms, in terms of support for families, they really haven't delivered the goods. They've asked other governments to deliver the goods, but they themselves have not delivered the goods.

That's why at this time I'd like to introduce an amendment to the motion.

I move that this motion be amended by removing everything after the word "should" and inserting "in conjunction with the government of Ontario, remove the harmonized sales tax on fuels and inputs for home heating."

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): Mr. Blais has moved that this motion be amended by removing everything after "should" and inserting "in conjunction with the government of Ontario, remove the harmonized sales tax on fuels and inputs for home heating."

The member for Orléans may continue.

Mr. Stephen Blais: We know that HST is a tax that we see in real life, in real time, all the time. If you heat your home with electricity, when you get your hydro bill you see the HST right there. You know exactly how much HST you're going to pay when you pay your bill. When your natural gas bill comes, you see exactly how much HST you're going to pay on natural gas. If you heat your home with propane, you see exactly how much HST you're going to pay on propane. I suppose there are some who use outdoor wood furnaces still or a wood stove in the home; I'm hoping that if you're buying cords of wood from someone in town that you're seeing how much HST you're paying on the wood you're buying.

By the government of Ontario removing HST from the sources of home heating fuel and working with the government of Canada to have that portion of HST removed from home heating fuel as well, this will lead to a direct and visible and countable savings for families. Every

month when they pay their gas bill or their electricity bill or for propane delivery, they're going to know exactly how much money they and their family are saving on HST to heat their homes as a direct result of actions of this Legislature and this government—not simply writing a letter, hoping that another government takes action, but taking action themselves to provide real relief for families.

It's time, given the environmental and climate crisis that we're in, given the affordability crisis that we're in, that everyone but especially this government take off its ideological blinders and open itself to the entire view of the situation. Every dollar will count, Madam Speaker. If we can save families \$15, \$20, \$25, \$30 a month on HST for their home heating, that could be the difference between putting Johnny or Jane in soccer next spring. That could be the difference between ensuring Johnny or Jane has breakfast before going to school in the morning. That might be the difference so that that boy I was talking about before doesn't have to go without a lunch to ensure that his younger brother and sisters go to school with one, that that family will have money to buy him a sandwich or a Lunchable to take to school for lunch.

This is the kind of small, incremental savings that the government has direct responsibility for. They can provide this direct impact to families, and they can do it relatively quickly. We can debate this motion today, which we're doing. We can pass it. There's a fall economic statement. There's a bill there. That bill is going to go to committee. This could be a quick amendment at committee—I'm sure it would have unanimous support from all parties—to take the HST off of home heating. I don't think that any political party in Ontario could possibly oppose taking the HST off of home heating during an economic crisis, during an affordability crisis. As the snow is falling, as temperatures are dropping, there's no one in their right mind who could possibly refuse the idea of taking sales tax off of the costs of heating your home in the winter.

These are actions that the government can take. They can take them today. They can take them tomorrow. We could have this thing wrapped up by the middle of next week, providing real relief for families before the holidays, before Christmas, more money in their pocket for them to support their families. We'll see if the government and if the New Democrats decide to support this common-sense approach to providing real relief for families.

Now, as it relates to the carbon tax more specifically, what's clear is that recent actions from the government of Canada have created a division within our country—a division that provides the appearance that one area of the country is receiving a benefit that is not being received by all other parts of the country, and this is creating a wedge and a division. Of course, I support the elimination of that wedge and division and would happily support the removal of the carbon tax from all sources of home heating, and I've relayed that concern and that position to my member of Parliament.

But the point of my amendment, and the point of all of us getting elected here is not so that we can simply ask other elected officials to do work. We didn't ask to get

elected so that we can ask other people to take action to help our constituents. We asked our constituents to vote for us so that we could take action, so that we could propose ideas, so that we could get things done within our purview to deliver benefit to them and to their families. The HST is a way in which the government of Ontario can take real and direct and concrete action on the sources of heat and the energy bills that Ontarians are facing. Especially as we approach winter and the holidays, it is my sincere hope that all parties in this House will take off their ideological blinders and do the right thing and help families save money on their utility bills as we head into winter and the holiday season.

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The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): Further debate?

Mr. John Yakabuski: I want to thank the members earlier, and I do want to begin by thanking my colleague Mr. Jordan from Lanark-Frontenac-Kingston for his motion, which is so appropriate for the world we're living in today and the cost-of-living issues we're dealing with today. Every day you hear about things on the news, so I want to thank him for bringing it forward.

But I also want to thank my colleague for sitting here in this House and joining our team here and what a tremendous contribution he's already making here in the province of Ontario and his community. I want to say, as the parliamentary assistant to long-term care, how important his contribution has been, because his experience in the health care field has been tremendously helpful to me, personally, quite frankly, in our quest to bring improvements to long-term care in our communities. I want to thank my friend Mr. Jordan for his work in that regard.

I must say, I had the pleasure of sitting through the address by the member for the NDP, the energy critic and environment critic and many other things, and of course the member for Ottawa-Orléans. The member for Danforth made a reference to bananas, and, my God, how appropriate to that—when I have to listen to members on the opposite side and the way that they try to bring together what they think is logic, I think of bananas. And we all know what BANANAs is a connotation for.

But I really want to talk about the motion today and the absolute hypocrisy of the federal Liberals and the Prime Minister of Canada to bring forth a bill, a regulatory change, that would remove the carbon tax from a portion of the people of Canada on oil for home heating.

Mr. Graham McGregor: Division.

Mr. John Yakabuski: Division—you don't want to talk about divide. Under the Constitution, any federal laws are to be applied equally across this country, so they get around it, I guess, with some regulatory change. But any criminal code has to be applied equally across Canada, and the laws fall under the same category. So we are now deciding that, on the whim of the Prime Minister, for political reasons and political reasons alone, he is going to divide Canadians and he's going to make Ontarians and the people in the other provinces—particularly, from our point of view, Ontarians—suffer a different fate.

So the Prime Minister is spiralling down the toilet very quickly, in the electoral sense. Spiralling down—

Ms. Catherine Fife: Just like Ford.

Mr. John Yakabuski: You might want to check the polls, my friend from Waterloo. You might want to check how ineffective you people have been. But anyway, let's get back to the thing. I'll have the conversation with you later—

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): Order.

Mr. John Yakabuski:—when you've had more sleep, maybe.

So here we are talking about the Prime Minister, who is absolutely tanking, and he's asking himself, "Is there a way that I can survive this crisis in the Liberal Party?"—which is dividing his own party, by the way, as well. He is just self-destructing. You should read Rex Murphy's column on the carbon tax and Trudeau. He's self-destructing on the issue of the carbon tax because he is so conflicted about what his actions are going to be.

Now he's deciding: "You know what we're going to do? Where do we hold a significant majority of the seats? Atlantic Canada. We're going to remove the carbon tax from home heating fuel in Atlantic Canada for three years, but we're not going to do it across the rest of country." How duplicitous can you be to actually say, "We're going to look after these people, but we're going to make the other ones pay"? That is as un-Canadian as you can possibly be, but that's Justin Trudeau for you.

It's hard to look at that and say, "How can somebody have even come up with this other than for crass political reasons?" Crass political reasons to divide the country in that way—and it is so frustrating for the rest of the Premiers.

I've got to tell you that—it's probably our last winter, but we actually heat with oil in our home. I'm going to have to make a choice because my oil tank is expiring. I've got to make a choice, so I expect this is the last because I'm not going to put in another, wait for my oil furnace to get old and have to change it, and then maybe the insurance company won't even insure us because we're doing oil and oil is on the way out. Oil is on the way out, so why are you now penalizing those people in Ontario—

Interjection.

Mr. John Yakabuski: Not me, but what about somebody who just put a furnace in three years ago? You're penalizing them for heating with oil.

The other thing that is so hypocritical on the part of the federal government: Oil is the highest emitter of any heating fuel.

So here's this person who believes—his whole political life since he became Prime Minister is about this carbon tax and how, being Justin Trudeau, "I'm going to save the world by bringing in this carbon tax"—which has been so penalizing to the people of Canada—"but now I'm quite prepared to remove that carbon tax for a portion of the population if it works to my political advantage." So he believes in the carbon tax—as the opposition wants, this is the existential issue of our times—but, "If I need

something to save seats in Atlantic Canada, I will remove the carbon tax.” Could he not have thought of something else, like maybe we will build some more new roads? “Oh, no, can’t do that. We’re going to remove the carbon tax on home heating and pit you against the rest of the country.”

Mr. Stéphane Sarrazin: Nonsense.

Mr. John Yakabuski: It is absolute nonsense, and there’s nobody with an ounce of fairness and belief in equality who can support it. Even the provincial Liberal member who just spoke, from Ottawa-Orléans, said he’s going to support our motion. He’s going to support our motion because even he sees the hypocrisy in it. He sees how wrong it is for the federal Liberals to be doing this. Then, of course, he wants to talk about some other things that can be done, and I hope I have some time.

Then we talk about the cost of living. How does the carbon tax impact our cost of living? Every way, every day. Recently, we’re having this conversation about restaurants and how they’re struggling. Restaurants are struggling all across the country, and certainly there’s more restaurants in Ontario than anywhere else. There’s more people in Ontario than anywhere else in the country. They say restaurants are struggling, and then you will have the survey that says it’s food cost. Well, hello, what do you think is driving up the cost of food? The carbon tax is driving up the cost of food, and we had that discussion not so long ago.

But it’s not just the cost of food that the carbon tax is driving up; it’s driving up the cost of everything else. When people say, “We’re not going to restaurants anymore. We can’t afford to eat at restaurants”—yes, the price of meals at a restaurant have gone up, like everything else. “We can’t afford to eat at a restaurant.” Why can’t they afford to eat at a restaurant? Because they can’t pay their heating bills. They’re now worried that they can’t pay their mortgage. They can’t pay all of the other cost-of-living issues that have gone up so much. They’re worried about everything, so they’re not going to the restaurant. It’s not just because the restaurant prices have gone up. They’re not going to the restaurant, period, because they can’t afford their bills, period.

All you have to do is look at the news out there about how people are so afraid of whether they will be able to meet their monthly obligations in the cost of living. And what is driving up the cost of living? The carbon tax is a huge component, and the parliamentary budget—

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): I am sorry. I need to interrupt the member because I would like to remind the member that there is an amendment on the table that also needs to be debated. I understand that the full motion is under debate, but there is an amendment that needs to be considered as well, if you can turn your attention to that. Thank you.

1010

Mr. John Yakabuski: Thank you very much, Speaker. I’m aware of the amendment. We won’t be supporting it, and that’s my debate on that amendment. Thank you very much. I appreciate you interrupting me to remind me of that.

So let’s get back to what I’m talking about: the cost of living and what is driving that up. What is driving that up? It is significantly being driven up by the carbon tax, and it is not that complicated. All you have to do is ask yourself, what’s the carbon tax accomplishing? They can live in their dream worlds all they want, but the carbon tax has been a bitter disappointment, a total failure from its implementation, because it has robbed people of their hard-earned pay and the money that they earned to provide for their families. It has taken that money out of their pockets and allowed the government to play its cute little games with their money—most of them political.

But has it done anything to reduce our carbon footprint? Has it done anything to reduce our emissions? We’re a failure. As my friend said, we’re 58th out of 63 countries in the success of reducing our CO₂ emissions, and we’re just a small portion of the world. In the meantime, we give China and India a free pass on emissions. But little old Canada with our 40 million people, somehow, if we just tax our people to death with the carbon tax, we’re going to solve all the problems. We’re not going to solve the problem, but we’re creating a tremendously difficult problem for families in this country and in this province by impacting them every day with the carbon tax.

Of course, the federal government, they have this rebate program. So every so often you get a rebate, but that doesn’t do you any good when you pay the carbon tax every single time you go to a cash register and every single time you pay the heating bills.

I had a conversation with Sean Fitzgerald from McCarthy Fuels in Killaloe last week about how it’s impacting them. McCarthy saw the reality. They were a fuel oil distributor, and now they’ve branched into propane. Well, now when I drive by their yard, most of the time if I drive, I see one oil truck if I’m driving by on the weekend—one oil truck and five propane trucks sitting in their depot, because that’s where we’re going. We’re doing everything we can to convert to sources of heating that are cleaner.

And propane is the cleanest of the three; if you look at home heating oil, fuel oil, natural gas and propane, propane is the cleanest, but it’s also the one most prominent in rural Ontario because we have an awful lot of places that natural gas hasn’t gotten to. It’s tremendously convenient, natural gas. You don’t have tanks to fill up—all of those kinds of things. You don’t have the truck delivering it; it’s coming by pipe. But we don’t have it everywhere in rural Ontario. And they are just flabbergasted. Sean was just flabbergasted at the unfairness of this and that we’re not going to extend this to other forms of home heating. Of course, the vast majority across the province use natural gas, but here in the Ottawa Valley and my county of Renfrew county, many, many, many people are on propane. So they do the things to be as conscious as possible about the impact of CO₂, but they’re penalized by this federal decision to simply remove the carbon tax from home heating fuels.

We’re doing the things to help people with the cost of living. One of the biggest things that I’ve seen my

colleague, the Minister of Economic Development—we've reduced business taxes in this province, taxes and burdens and fees, by \$8 billion a year. Now, if those were still in place, that \$8 billion would be passed on to the consumer. So when we reduce the cost of business by \$8 billion, we're ultimately reducing the cost to the consumer, because business must pass those costs on or they won't be in business. It's as simple as that. That's just one thing that we're doing for the people of Ontario. We've reduced the gas tax. We removed hundreds of thousands—maybe millions—from the provincial tax roll completely, and they pay no provincial tax. We took away the cost of licence plate stickers. We're doing the kinds of things, Speaker—because I know I'm going to get cut off here—that reduce the cost of living and help families across Ontario. The government of Canada is doing the thing that does nothing to reduce the costs here in Ontario. All it does is divide—

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): I hesitate to interrupt the member for Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke, but I'm compelled to by the standing orders. It's now 10:15 and time to commence members' statements.

Debate deemed adjourned.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

DIWALI

BANDI CHHOR DIVAS

Mr. Amarjot Sandhu: I am honoured to rise today to speak about two significant festivals that hold immense cultural and spiritual importance for millions around the world: Diwali and Bandi Chhor Divas. I would like to wish the people of Ontario who celebrated a very happy Diwali and Bandi Chhor Divas.

Diwali, also known as the Festival of Lights, is celebrated by people of various cultures and religions. The festival spreads across many borders. It symbolizes the victory of light over darkness and good over evil. Homes are lit up with diyas and colourful rangolis. Diwali is also a time for reflection.

Bandi Chhor Divas is also celebrated on the same day and it is a significant day for the Sikh community. It commemorates the day the sixth guru of Sikhs, Guru Hargobind Sahib Ji, and 52 kings were released from imprisonment. On Guru Hargobind Sahib Ji's return to Amritsar, the Golden Temple was lit up with lights, marking the festival's association with lights.

Both Diwali and Bandi Chhor Divas underscore the themes of freedom, light and the triumph of good over evil. May the lights of Diwali and the spirit of Bandi Chhor Divas fill our lives with joy and guide us toward a future filled with hope and harmony.

CONFLICT IN MIDDLE EAST

Mr. Joel Harden: Last Friday, I sat in the gym of Lady Evelyn public school with my friends Wanda and Robin from the local Legion. As we remembered the sacrifices

of veterans, the children sang, "Let there be peace on earth / And let it begin with me."

Those are powerful words, but in Gaza right now peace seems impossible: babies in intensive care clinging to life, mass graves being dug at Al-Shifa hospital. Meanwhile, some are taking this moment to call for more violence. But then I think about Vivian Silver, a Canadian Israeli peace activist who we lost on October 7. Vivian spent every day of her life working for peace. She helped sick Palestinians go to Israeli hospitals. Her whole life she demanded a political solution to decades of suffering and military occupation.

Like her, we must also persevere. We have to organize for peace. Even if some people call us haters, we should demand a ceasefire, for the release of all hostages and for the investigation of all war crimes. History will not be kind to those in this moment who acted in vengeance. History will remember people like Vivian Silver, like the Palestinian families I have met at home who, in their grief, have spoken out about family members they have lost and who have built a peace movement that must continue in this country.

Let there be peace on earth, Speaker, and let us all have the courage to fight for it.

REMEMBRANCE DAY

EXPO HAWKESBURY

Mr. Stéphane Sarrazin: I would like to start by thanking everyone who participated in the many Remembrance Day ceremonies across Glengarry–Prescott–Russell in the last few weeks. Thanks to the organization for organizing these ceremonies. Thanks to the Legions, the cadets and all the people involved in organizing these Remembrance Day events year after year. Let's make sure that we do our best to gather every year for many generations to come to remember the sacrifices of these men and women who fought for our liberty.

Sur une autre note, j'aimerais aussi féliciter les organisateurs, commerçants et visiteurs qui ont contribué au succès de l'événement Expo Hawkesbury qui se déroulait le week-end du 11 et 12 novembre dernier, la fin de semaine passée—la première en son genre depuis plusieurs années au complexe sportif Robert Hartley à Hawkesbury. J'aimerais dire un merci spécial à la chambre de commerce de Hawkesbury.

1020

Ça a été une super occasion de rencontrer les gens de la région et de créer des liens avec différents représentants d'entreprises. De pouvoir échanger de belles conversations et de réitérer les priorités des citoyens de Glengarry–Prescott–Russell est quelque chose d'important pour moi, en tant que leur membre de Parlement provincial. Nous savons tous que c'est primordial pour notre gouvernement, et nous continuons à être à l'écoute des Ontariens de toutes les régions de la province.

HEALTH CARE

Mr. Peter Tabuns: Speaker, it came out just the other day that this government is paying substantial bonuses to

private clinics for surgery that is done in public hospitals. It was revealed that the payments to the Don Mills Surgical Unit, part of the Clearpoint Health Network—it is getting paid almost double the amount that public hospitals get paid for cataract surgery, double the amount for knee surgery.

This government is engaged in a straightforward project of privatizing our health care system. That project is one which will result in less medical care for people; which will result, ultimately, in people being able to pay for their surgery and health care if they have the money and having to go without if they don't. It is a disastrous course of action.

I call on the government to end the privatization of our health care system, to stop paying bonuses to private clinics, and to actually protect the health care of the people of this province.

VOLUNTEER PETERBOROUGH

Mr. Dave Smith: I want to take a moment today to talk about a great initiative that was started by a couple of friends of mine.

During COVID, Lois Tuffin watched as a number of volunteer organizations saw a huge decline in the number of people willing to volunteer, while simultaneously having people reach out to her and ask her if she knew of places they could volunteer to help the community. So she enlisted a few other powerhouse people in our area, like Sarah Budd from the chamber of commerce, and came up with the idea of Volunteer Peterborough. It's like a dating app for volunteers and volunteer organizations.

Since launching in July, Volunteer Peterborough has signed up more than 400 volunteers eager to connect with a cause and more than 90 organizations looking for that perfect volunteer match.

Volunteerpeterborough.ca basically works like a dating or a job-hunting site. It matches people's interests, skills and time with organizations that are looking for helpers. You can sign up for their newsletter to stay up to date on volunteer opportunities and learn more, or you can jump right in and go through the opportunities that are already available.

Whether it's an hour a day, an hour a week, or an hour a month, if you're looking to make a difference in Peterborough, look at www.volunteerpeterborough.ca.

Of course, if you're an organization that needs volunteers, volunteerpeterborough.ca is also the place for you to go to find eager volunteers.

HOMELESSNESS

Ms. Bhutla Karpoche: I'd like to discuss a problem that all of us see daily. In fact, when we walk out of the Legislature, we cannot walk more than 100 metres in any direction without seeing an unhoused person. Some are in tents; some are not. Some have covers on; some don't. In the park that is right across the street, there is a tent. This is right under our nose.

There are an estimated 10,000 homeless people in Toronto alone. Now multiply that in every city, every region across this province.

Does this Conservative government not see that we have a major problem? Municipalities see it. That's why they're declaring states of emergency on homelessness. But there's only so much they can do. This is a province-wide issue, and the province must do something as well.

Winter is here, and the shelter system is going to be overloaded; we know it because it happens every year. Where are the homeless people supposed to go? Where are they supposed to sleep—in the subways, in ATM vestibules, in front of small businesses, in parks and playgrounds?

I'm urging this government: Take this issue seriously. Everyone is impacted by it. Declare a state of emergency on homelessness.

CONSUMER PROTECTION

Mr. Billy Pang: This June, I took the initiative to propose a motion requesting the Ministry of Public and Business Service Delivery to conduct a comprehensive investigation into the issue of notices of security interest, a.k.a. NOSIs, and report its findings to the House by the end of this year. I am pleased that this motion garnered support and was passed by the House.

Recently, I was delighted to see that the ministry is conducting a public consultation on the issues to address the harmful and inappropriate use of NOSIs. The issue of NOSIs has been extensively covered by the media, shedding light on the challenges faced by unsuspecting homeowners.

Regrettably, homeowners in Markham–Unionville are no exception to these difficulties.

A NOSI serves as a registration on the land registry system. It notifies third parties of a lender or a lessor's vested interest in a fixture on the land. While NOSIs play a crucial role in the business landscape, they can, unfortunately, lead to disputes. Some unscrupulous businesses have exploited NOSIs as leverage when consumers attempt to sell their homes or seek to refinance their properties. These tactics can place an unfair burden on consumers. Consumers are forced to pay excessive amounts or engage in costly and time-consuming legal battles to have the NOSI discharged.

This ministry's engagement with the public and stakeholders underscores the government's unwavering commitment to creating a fair and just marketplace for consumers and businesses. I truly appreciate—

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Thank you very much. Members' statements?

HOUSING

Ms. Stephanie Bowman: Every day in this province, people are struggling to pay rent and put food on the table. In my riding of Don Valley West, residents in Thorncliffe

Park are resorting to rent strikes because they're facing repeated years of above-guideline rent increases.

Take John, a veteran on disability facing a 12% increase, who said, "My pension does not increase by 12% each year." Joe has called the Premier and the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing to ask them to do something to limit rent increases for those on disability and pensions. Like John, I anxiously await their response.

Speaker, building new housing that's affordable is part of the solution, but what is the government doing now for people like John and tenants in Thorncliffe Park who are struggling with \$300-a-month rent increases because the government removed rent control in 2018? We know the government thought that allowing a few developers to make \$8.3 billion in windfall profits was a good idea, but now we need good ideas that help those struggling to pay rent and buy food.

As Steve Pomeroy, a prof at McMaster's housing evidence collaborative, said recently to CBC, "An ideal approach would limit the volatility of rent increases for non-rent-controlled units while ensuring new projects still make financial sense for developers."

Speaker, it's time for the government to take the affordability crisis seriously and take serious action to help people who are choosing between paying rent and buying food.

SHIFA GALA 2023

Mr. Stephen Crawford: The Shifa Gala 2023 is just around the corner, and I'm genuinely excited by what we're going to accomplish together for our Oakville Trafalgar Memorial Hospital. This event is more than just a night out; it's a community coming together for a cause that touches all of us: the health and well-being of our town.

A heartfelt thanks goes out to Raza Hasan and every member of our local Oakville Muslim community for their commitment to local health care. Seeing the people of Oakville unite to support our hospital is truly inspiring. Having access to top-tier medical care right here in Oakville is essential, and your contributions are making a difference.

Let me express my sincere gratitude to the health care heroes at Oakville Trafalgar Memorial Hospital. Your dedication and tireless service have not gone unnoticed. You are the cornerstone of our community, and your relentless commitment to care is what propels us forward.

Every contribution matters. The essential medical equipment for our hospital relies entirely on community support. So let's come together to make this event memorable, and one to have a lasting impact on our families and neighbours.

Mark Sunday, November 19, 2023, on your calendars for the Oakville Legacy banquet. This year is about action. It's about ensuring our hospital continues to serve our community at the highest level. I look forward to seeing everyone there.

1030

RAPID DOSE THERAPEUTICS INC.

ROOTREE

Ms. Effie J. Triantafilopoulos: Last month, during Small Business Week and Manufacturing Month, I had the pleasure of visiting Rapid Dose Therapeutics and Rootree, two stellar examples of made-in-Ontario innovation in my community of Oakville North-Burlington.

Rapid Dose Therapeutics has developed a game-changing drug delivery system. Its patented oral thin film platform offers a unique delivery with a rapid absorption when placed in the mouth, eliminating the need for needles or swallowing pills. It also saves transportation costs and eliminates the need for deep-freeze storage.

Rootree is spearheading a global movement to achieve a greener packaging identity that addresses all parts of the eco-friendly packaging life cycle. Already recognized as an industry leader for its sustainable packaging and product co-packing, the company is a shining example, unafraid to dream big and keep innovating. Rootree is also conducting research into how to use waste cooking oil as an alternative feedstock, further building on its innovative solutions for reducing waste.

Please join me in celebrating these two made-in-Ontario, made-in-Burlington success stories.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Mr. John Vanthof: I would like to take this opportunity to introduce my granddaughter Lena and her loving mom, Noël Clement.

Mr. Kevin Holland: I'd like to introduce four members from Thunder Bay who are in the House with us today: Kelsey Hoogsteen and Katrina Hill from the Lakehead Nurse Practitioner-Led Clinic as well as Shawn Harrison and Matthew Sombrutski from the Thunder Bay Police Service. Welcome to your House.

Mr. Terence Kernaghan: As a former teacher librarian, it's my great pleasure to welcome members from the Ontario Library Association as well as the Ontario School Library Association for their library days at Queen's Park: Michael Ciccone, CEO and chief librarian at the London Public Library; Wendy Burch Jones, the vice-president of OSLA and with the Toronto District School Board; Johanna Gibson-Lawler, the president of OSLA and with the greater Essex school board; as well as Sarah Vaisler, who is the chief librarian and executive officer at Ajax Public Library. Welcome to Queen's Park.

Mr. Mike Schreiner: It's an honour to rise today and welcome all members of the Police Association of Ontario to Queen's Park. I'd like to give a special shout-out to PAO president, Mark Baxter, and former Guelph PA president, Matt Jotham, who are over in the gallery. Welcome to Queen's Park.

Mr. Steve Clark: Good morning. I, too, had a meeting this morning with the Police Association of Ontario. I want

to welcome to the members' east gallery Patti Murphy and Jeff Hepburn from the Brockville Police Association and Tyler Brett from the Smiths Falls Police Association. Welcome to Queen's Park.

Miss Monique Taylor: I would also like to welcome the police association. I had a meeting this morning with the Hamilton Police Association: president Jaimi Bannon, Jason Leek and Wes Wilson. Welcome to Queen's Park.

Ms. Laura Smith: It is my very great honour to also welcome from the Federation of Ontario Public Libraries—and from Vaughan—Margie Singleton, Rebecca Hunt, Dina-Marie Raggiunti Stevens. It's also my pleasure to introduce Melanie Mills, Caroline Goulding and Nathan Etherington, all from the Ontario Library Association, visiting us today.

MPP Jamie West: I would like to also recognize the police association for coming here, in particular Matt Hall, Jacques Roberge, Mauro Gianfrancesco and Steve Train from the Sudbury Police Association.

M^{me} Lucille Collard: C'est mon grand plaisir de présenter à la Chambre des très chers amis à moi, mes collègues également, Linda Savard et Alexandre Moricz, qui sont ici à Queen's Park pour la première fois. Welcome to Queen's Park.

Ms. Goldie Ghamari: I'd also like to welcome everyone from the Ontario police association—specifically, from the Ottawa Police Association: president Matthew Cox and directors Barmak Anvari, Jim Irving and Devon Archer. Welcome to Queen's Park.

Ms. Catherine Fife: I'd like to welcome Tim Reparon, vice-president of the Waterloo Regional Police Association; Mark Egers, president of the Waterloo Regional Police Association; and Teresa Dawson, civilian director of the Waterloo Regional Police Association. I genuinely look forward to our meeting later on today.

Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon: Good morning, everyone. It's great to be back with you.

I'd also like to introduce the Ontario Library Association and the Federation of Ontario Public Libraries. I know we're all big bookworms here.

Members who are here who weren't mentioned yet, I believe, are David Harvie, Johanna Gibson-Lawler, Wendy Burch Jones, Christine Row, and an amazing city councillor and my colleague, Councillor Paul Ainslie.

Hon. Michael S. Kerzner: In addition to welcoming the PAO, under the leadership of Mark Baxter, I also want to acknowledge representatives from the Ontario Provincial Police Association, led by John Cerasuolo, Rob Jamieson and Mike Adair.

Also, two very special ladies: Shelley Atkinson and Brenda Orr from Survivors of Law Enforcement Canada. Your voices have helped our province find our way.

Welcome to the Legislature.

MPP Jamie West: I believe they're behind me or on their way up from the press conference that MPP Lise Vaugeois had this morning advocating for workers' rights. Sandy Kinart from ODRA; Eric Jonckheere, who came from Belgium, from ABEVA; Carol Moore from ONIWG; and Shari Scarpelli are joining us today.

Welcome to your House.

M^{me} Dawn Gallagher Murphy: I would like to introduce the over 50 nurse practitioners here for the nurse practitioners of Ontario advocacy day, including their president, Barbara Bailey.

As well, I am pleased to introduce members of the Canadian Cancer Survivor Network, who are here today for a lunch reception to mark Lung Cancer Awareness Month in Canada, as part of the Right2Survive coalition—and including a welcome to president and CEO Jackie Manthorne.

Ms. Jennifer K. French: I'm also pleased to welcome the police association here to Queen's Park, and I'm looking forward to my meeting with the folks from DRPA: Darryl Rice, Keith Aubrey and Tim Morrison. Welcome to Queen's Park.

Mr. Adil Shamji: This morning, I would like to welcome the Nurse Practitioners' Association of Ontario and my friend Krystal Fox.

I'd also like to welcome the Canadian Cancer Survivor Network, Lung Cancer Canada and the Lung Health Foundation—specifically, Jessica Buckley, CEO; Jess Rogers, VP of programs, research and public affairs; and Riley Sanders, manager of public affairs.

Welcome to Queen's Park.

Mr. Will Bouma: I'd like to sincerely welcome Kris Reid from the Brantford Police Service. It's great to have you in your House.

Mrs. Lisa Gretzky: It's my pleasure to welcome, from the Police Association of Ontario, Rick Derus, Pete Mombourquette and Mike Hradowy—and I've been told his sister Martha is the best sister in the entire world.

I'd also like to welcome the Ontario Library Association and the Federation of Ontario Public Libraries, folks I'll be meeting with later today—more specifically, their president Johanna Gibson-Lawler, who is with the Greater Essex County District School Board back in my hometown.

Mr. Andrew Dowie: I've got a few guests I'd like to acknowledge today.

First—just following the member for Windsor West—is Kent Rice from the Windsor Police Association, who's here.

Also, from the Survivors of Law Enforcement, from Windsor: Shelley Atkinson, as well as another founding member, Brenda Orr.

Welcome to Queen's Park.

1040

Mrs. Jennifer (Jennie) Stevens: Good morning. We have several individuals from the police association: Adam Kitson, Colin Campbell, Derek Watson—there are a couple of others that I missed. I apologize.

I also would like to introduce Willie Noiles from my St. Catharines riding association, representing injured workers from Niagara. Welcome to your House.

Hon. Doug Downey: Adding to the welcome for the Police Association of Ontario, the Barrie Police Association in particular: John Brooks and Patrick Brouillard.

Ms. Peggy Sattler: I am looking forward to my meeting later today with members of the London Police Association. I want to welcome Gary Bezaire, Kyle Tedball and Ozzie Nethersole, who are with us today at Queen's Park.

Mrs. Daisy Wai: I just want to welcome the Police Association of Ontario visiting Queen's Park. I'd also like to welcome Cara Everson, Heath Miller and Jarrett Thomas from Richmond Hill. I look forward to our meeting later.

M^{me} France Gélinas: I am pleased to welcome members of Lung Cancer Canada here today, part of the Right2Survive coalition. They are Winky Yau as well as Julia Kulczynski.

I'm also pleased to welcome the Nurse Practitioners' Association of Ontario and my good friend Jennifer Clement and, of course, the Sudbury Police Association that is here: Jacques Roberge, Steve Train, Mauro Gianfrancesco and Matt Hall. Welcome to Queen's Park. Welcome to your House.

Ms. Natalie Pierre: I'd like to welcome Ellie Bale, president of the Halton Regional Police Association. Welcome to Queen's Park.

Ms. Doly Begum: I would also like to welcome members that I'm really looking forward to meeting this afternoon from the Police Association of Ontario: Anne Brennan-Walsh and Jim Mulligan. Welcome to the House.

Mr. Andrew Dowie: With sincere regrets, I missed two from the Windsor Police Service who are here: Kate Mitchell and Dave Kellam. Welcome to Queen's Park.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): That concludes our introduction of visitors for this morning.

LEGISLATIVE PAGES

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): It is my privilege and honour to inform the House that we have a new group of legislative pages. I would like to ask them to assemble for their introductions.

From the riding of Sarnia–Lambton, Muhammad Mustafa Arif; from the riding of Brampton West, Jessy Ashraph; from the riding of Cambridge, Shahan Awan; from the riding of Kanata–Carleton, Elliott Bernier; from the riding of York–Simcoe, Brooke Cake; from the riding of King–Vaughan, Angela Di Donato; from the riding of Don Valley West, Harris Elahi; from the riding of Ottawa Centre, Emma Forster; from the riding of Mississauga–Erin Mills, Scarlett Hao; from the riding of Hastings–Lennox and Addington, Henry Hasler; from the riding of Barrie–Springwater–Oro-Medonte, Chloe Hassberger; from the riding of University–Rosedale, Leo Kemeny-Wodlinger; from the riding of Kingston and the Islands, Peter Meligrana; from the riding of Scarborough–Guildwood, Keya Patel; from the riding of London–Fanshawe, Eoife Scott; from the riding of Etobicoke Centre, Walter Martel Spracklin; from the riding of Haldimand–Norfolk, Fouegap Tegomo Nguempi; from the riding of Don Valley North, Alina Wu; and from the riding of Eglinton–Lawrence, Angela Yue.

Welcome to the Legislature. We're delighted to have you here.

Applause.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The member for Scarborough–Guildwood has a point of order.

MPP Andrea Hazell: Mr. Speaker, I seek unanimous consent that, notwithstanding standing order 45(b)(iv), the time for debate on opposition day motion number 4, regarding two-way GO rail service along the Kitchener GO corridor, be apportioned as follows: 56 minutes to each of the recognized parties and eight minutes to the independent members as a group.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The member is seeking unanimous consent that, notwithstanding standing order 45(b)(iv), the time for debate on opposition day motion number 4 be apportioned as follows: 56 minutes to each of the recognized parties and eight minutes to the independent members as a group. Agreed? I heard a no.

QUESTION PERIOD

GOVERNMENT ACCOUNTABILITY

Ms. Marit Stiles: Good morning, Speaker. My question is for the Premier. The Premier has been caught repeatedly using his personal phone to conduct government business, contrary to guidelines. This appears to be a way to avoid freedom-of-information disclosures.

It seems that this culture of non-compliance has evidently spread to other ministers. Global News found the ministers for education, finance, health, housing and transportation either never or rarely made calls on their government-issued phones during crucial moments when key and very controversial government decisions were being made.

So, Speaker, to the Premier: Is it standard practice for ministers to avoid accountability in this way?

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): To reply, the government House leader.

Hon. Paul Calandra: Thank you, Madam Speaker—or Mr. Speaker.

Interjection: It's early.

Hon. Paul Calandra: It's early, yes.

Look, Mr. Speaker, the ministers and the Premier, of course, follow all the rules as set out by the Integrity Commissioner and the information commissioner. But at the same time, the ministers and the caucus members of this government have been very, very accountable to the people of the province of Ontario, and that is why we won a massive majority from the people in the last election. That is why the ranks of the Progressive Conservative caucus have grown.

Primarily, it is because we have been focused on what matters to the people of the province of Ontario: building more homes, improving the economy—groundbreaking legislation that had seen us bring over \$27 billion worth of investments to the province of Ontario. At a time when the

rest of the world was being challenged, Ontario was thriving. That is a level of accountability I will take each and every day, and it is why the people of the province of Ontario have supported us in larger numbers, election after election.

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

Ms. Marit Stiles: Speaker, the Minister of Health didn't make a single call on her government-issued phone in January this year. That's odd because that month, the minister was preparing to open up the public health care system to private, for-profit surgical clinics. You'd think she would have been on the phone constantly. Indeed, you see, because of those sweeping changes, a for-profit clinic owned by Clearpoint now gets paid more than twice what a public hospital gets paid for procedures.

Speaker, back to the Premier: Did the Minister of Health discuss these changes in advance with Christine Elliott, her predecessor as health minister and now a lobbyist for Clearpoint?

Hon. Paul Calandra: Speaker, what an odd line of questioning from the Leader of the Opposition, right? She's searching out when people are using their phones.

I'll tell you what the Minister of Health is doing. Like every other minister of the government, we're not contemplating how many times did I turn my phone on each and every day. There are other ways of communicating. You know, my iPad—actually I can text-message on my iPad.

1050

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Order.

Hon. Paul Calandra: Here's a massive innovation that has never obviously occurred to the NDP: It's called looking at somebody across the table and saying, "What is the advice that you have for me?" It's about bringing people in and talking to them, right?

Now, I know they don't like to do that over there. They don't want to do that over there because when they talk to each other, they divide. So the less they talk, the better it is for the NDP. But in this caucus, Progressive Conservatives enjoy each other. We enjoy the public, and that is why the public has put their confidence in us. That's why businesses are coming back and investment has increased.

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

Ms. Marit Stiles: The former Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing made only about 20 minutes of calls using his government-issued phone last November. Now, think back, Speaker: This was the month the minister announced changes to the greenbelt, as well as the forced expansions of the urban boundaries of Hamilton, York, Peel, Ottawa and other municipalities. There is evidence the government gave preferential treatment to the favoured speculators who benefitted from these changes.

To the Premier: Did the minister stay off his government-issued phone to avoid leaving a record of who he was talking to?

Interjections.

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

Government House leader.

Hon. Paul Calandra: That's a standing ovation from the NDP, right? Actually, Speaker, I hope my daughters aren't watching this today because I fight with them to stay off the phone all the time. I tell them, "You know what you can do? Talk to people. Use Zoom. If you want to see somebody face to face, invite them in, have round tables."

I know the Minister of Finance and the parliamentary assistants are criss-crossing the province, doing—do you know what? Not talking to people on the phone; they're meeting face to face, getting ideas on what we should have in the next budget. That is what this caucus is doing. We do it all the time.

My gosh, I know the Minister of Agriculture and a number of caucus members were at the Royal Agricultural Winter Fair. You know what they were doing? Talking to people about the great things that are coming. We're in a chamber that does what? Talks to each other, Mr. Speaker.

I would suggest to the Leader of the Opposition—I know that their party is based on the principles of 1933, but the modern age has many other ways of communicating, not just the old technology that is a phone.

GOVERNMENT ACCOUNTABILITY

Ms. Marit Stiles: Speaker, it's pretty clear this government will try absolutely anything to avoid accountability, but they can't hide forever. The RCMP has started their investigation into this government's shady greenbelt grab. The unit that's handling this case, called the sensitive and international investigations unit, is responsible for "high-risk matters that cause significant threats to Canada's political, economic and social integrity."

My question is for the Premier. Has the Premier, or anyone in his staff, been in contact with the RCMP regarding the investigation into the greenbelt grab?

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing.

Hon. Paul Calandra: Like I said right from day one, we will work with the RCMP, the Information and Privacy Commissioner or the Integrity Commissioner. We will assist them in their investigation. The Premier has also been very clear that we would do that, and we will continue to do that.

But, make no mistake, Mr. Speaker: We will not be sidetracked from what our mission is, and the mission is to build 1.5 million homes for the people of the province of Ontario.

Our mission is to get people out of their parents' basements and into their first home. Our mission is to ensure that people who graduate from college or university, who are going into the trades or having their first job, can enjoy the same dreams that almost every single one of us in this chamber had: the value and the dream of a home of their own.

That is what we are focused on. We will not be sidetracked on that mission, despite the fact that the NDP and

the Liberals worked so hard for 15 years, put obstacles in the way that the largest land mass in the country has a housing crisis. We'll disentangle that, we'll get the homes built, we'll get people out of their parents' basements and into the homes that they deserve.

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

Ms. Marit Stiles: Speaker, I guess they won't answer that question. Let's try another one.

Earlier this month, the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing confirmed that the RCMP has been in touch with his ministry. They are already sniffing around the cabinet and other members of government caucus who have deep connections to these land speculators. This scandal has already cost the government two cabinet ministers and multiple staff members, not to mention a full year wasted on speculator-friendly policies that had to be reversed because they did not meet the needs of Ontarians.

My question is for the Premier: How many current or former cabinet ministers or political staff have been contacted by the RCMP?

Interjections.

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

Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing.

Hon. Paul Calandra: Speaker, we'll let them do their job, and we'll work with them as they require it, and we'll assist them in doing so. But the Leader of the Opposition is correct about one thing: We are reversing a lot of the damage that was done by the Liberal and NDP coalition. We're having to do that.

Now, listen, the NDP have a candidate in their current by-election. Do you know what she's known as? She's known as the queen of NIMBY. Do you know why? Because she's turned down a 1,174-unit development downtown; another 10-storey, 132 units in downtown; 532 residential units, which also was in downtown, which contained thousands of extra dollars for affordable housing. Do you know why she turned that down, the NDP candidate? Because it was too close to a pickleball court.

Now, I think I'm too young to play pickleball, Mr. Speaker, but I'll tell you what, this is a culture of the NDP: Turn down everything and then find an excuse. Blame it on the pickleballers. That's—

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

The final supplementary.

Ms. Marit Stiles: The government members know they're in big trouble, and that's why they're trying so hard to change the channel, but they are out of time and their house of cards is falling. The Auditor General and the Integrity Commissioner reports exposed rampant preferential treatment for donors and insiders of this government. The RCMP has even appointed a special prosecutor because of the scale of this government's dirty dealings.

Speaker, to the Premier, what is it going to take for you and your government to come clean with the people of Ontario? My gosh.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): I'm going to caution the Leader of the Opposition on the use of the expressions that she's using.

I'm going to call upon the member for Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke to please come to order.

And I'll recognize the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing to reply.

Hon. Paul Calandra: Well, Mr. Speaker, my goodness, that was one heck of a question. Listen, I'll tell you what, we went to the people of the province of Ontario and we said, "We want to build more homes," and the people of the province of Ontario put their faith and confidence in us and they increased the members of this party by, what, I think 10—historic levels of support for the party—because they wanted us to continue what we were doing: building more homes, building an economy that works for more people in the province of Ontario.

The only party that is having trouble in this place, outside of the van party, is the opposition leader's party. They can't even caucus together, because every time they caucus together, they fight. I mean, this is a Leader of the Opposition who ran unopposed for the leadership of the party. Do you know why? Because nobody wanted to lead the party.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Order.

Hon. Paul Calandra: That is why the people of the province of Ontario put their faith in Progressive Conservatives: because right from day one, it has been Progressive Conservatives who have built roads. It has been us who have built schools, colleges, universities. It is us who have built an economy that works for all people.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): I'm going to call the member for Hamilton Mountain to order.

The next question.

HEALTH CARE

M^{me} France Gélinas: Ma question est pour le premier ministre. Yesterday, CBC reported that privately owned Don Mills Surgical Unit was paid rates "noticeably higher than what the province provides public hospitals for the" exact "same procedures." This government paid \$1,200 for cataract surgeries at the for-profit clinic versus giving \$500 for the same surgery in a public hospital. Even worse, the Ford government paid \$4,000 for a meniscectomy in a for-profit clinic versus \$1,200 in our public hospitals.

Can the Premier explain why he is willing to pay private clinics 240% to 333% more than what he pays to our public hospitals for the exact same procedure?

1100

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Health, the member for Eglinton–Lawrence.

Mrs. Robin Martin: As announced last January, our government's expansion to further leverage community surgical and diagnostic centres was and has always been about finding capacity where there is capacity within our publicly funded health care system. Our government is

taking action to deliver more publicly funded procedures to reduce wait times for people and to reduce the surgical backlog.

Since 2020, our government has also invested nearly \$1 billion through the surgical recovery fund to open hospital operating rooms on weeknights and weekends. But we knew more could be done. That is why we initiated four new cataract surgery clinics, and I'm very pleased to say they added 14,000 extra cataract surgeries this year, which means 14,000 grandmothers and grandfathers are able to get back to work, read to their grandchildren and do other things that make life worthwhile.

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

M^{me} France G elinas: Well, Speaker, unlike public hospitals, which provide care based on our needs, the number one goal of a private clinic is to make money. These clinics only accept clients that are easy; they send the riskier, the more complex, the more expensive patients back to the public hospitals, yet our public hospitals have better outcomes.

This government is making sure that Centric Health Corp. makes a lot of money off the backs of sick people at the expense of taxpayers. Centric Health Corp. is a division of Kensington Capital Partners, whose stated goal is "to create top-performing investment solutions for our investors." Does that speak of quality care?

Can the Premier explain why he is paying two to three times the price to a private, for-profit clinic whose goal is to provide "top-performing investment solutions" to their investors?

Interjections.

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

To reply, once again, the member for Eglington-Lawrence.

Mrs. Robin Martin: The member opposite has been here for many years. She's been a member in this Legislature, and she knows that this government is actually funding hospitals and surgical clinics the way they have been funded for years. Frankly, we're making sure that we have more surgeries done for patients, but the member opposite is making an apples-and-oranges comparison. Hospitals receive funding through a budget for the entirety of their operations; community surgical and diagnostic clinics receive one-time funding for procedures only and have to take capital and operating costs out of that funding. These centres have higher costs because they're purchasing equipment, or renting equipment in some cases, because of their one-time funding.

All of this goes to make a different apples-and-oranges comparison, but what we can tell you is more people are getting access to care faster, paid for with their OHIP card, and that's what people care about.

TAXATION

Mr. Will Bouma: My question is for the Minister of Energy. Over the past few weeks, I have heard from many

of my constituents who are deeply unhappy and very concerned about the impact of the carbon tax on their day-to-day lives.

When the federal government forced the carbon tax on Ontario, hard-working families were slapped with a 14.3-cent-per-litre increase on the price of gas, costing them hundreds of dollars a year. As if that wasn't already expensive enough, the federal carbon tax is costing families more in grocery bills every month. The costs are passed on to the consumer when transportation, refrigeration and electricity prices increase because of the carbon tax.

Speaker, can the minister please explain how the federal carbon tax negatively impacts the people of Ontario and what our government is doing to provide support?

Hon. Todd Smith: Thanks to the member opposite for the question, Mr. Speaker.

Since we took government, we've been doing everything we can to try and make life more affordable for the people of Ontario as the federal government continues to jack up the carbon tax year over year over year. We brought in a number of initiatives, including removing 10 cents a litre off the price of gasoline; bringing in the Ontario Electricity Rebate, lowering electricity bills by 15%; taking the tolls off highways; sending people back a rebate on their licence plate sticker fees and eliminating those fees—and so much more: the CARE, the LIFT and the staycation tax credits, just to name a few.

We've been trying our best to make life more affordable for the people of Ontario. The federal Liberals continue to drive up the carbon tax. These Ontario Liberals haven't learned a darn thing. Liberals driving people into energy poverty at the federal level and the provincial level—not only are they happy with the current carbon tax; they want to see it triple by 2030.

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

Mr. Will Bouma: Thank you, Minister, for that response. I was very pleased to see the strong leadership shown by our Premier at the recent Council of the Federation meeting regarding the impact of the carbon tax. It was remarkable to see that Premiers from NDP, Liberal and Conservative governments across Canada share the same view regarding the harmful impacts that the carbon tax is having on our provinces and territories.

The collective support by Premiers in calling on the federal government to remove the carbon tax on heating pumps and for fairness for all Canadians confirms that this issue is creating significant burdens everywhere across this great country. That is why it is so astonishing that the Liberal and NDP members in this Legislature continue to work against any efforts to make life more affordable for Ontarians.

Speaker, can the minister please explain more about the negative impact that the carbon tax has on so many Ontarians?

Hon. Todd Smith: Thanks to the member opposite for the question this morning. It's about time that the federal

Liberal government and our Ontario Liberal counterparts realize the impact that an increasing carbon tax is not just having on the price at the pumps, but the impact it's having on inflation in our province. It's impacting particularly people in rural Ontario and in the northern part of Ontario, but it's impacting everybody.

We're surrounded by police officers here this morning, I can only imagine the impact that the carbon tax is having on our police services and our municipalities when they go to fill up their police cruisers to make sure our communities are safe.

We've heard from the agriculture minister the impact it's having on the price of food because of increased costs on farmers.

But these Liberals in Ontario are rock solid in their support of the federal carbon tax. It's making it more expensive for the people of Ontario every single day.

GOVERNMENT ACCOUNTABILITY

Ms. Jessica Bell: My question is to the Premier. Last month, the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing was asked about ministerial zoning orders. He said, "What I'm concerned with are those MZOs that have led to no action being taken. The MZOs that I'm pleased with, of course, are the ones that the Minister of Long-Term Care has asked for...."

Well, it turns out that the Toronto Star looked at several MZOs issued for long-term-care homes and found that, in most cases, there was no action being taken with them either. This includes MZOs issued for long-term-care homes on government-owned land.

My question is this: Why is this minister so pleased that his MZOs are not getting long-term-care homes built?

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing.

Hon. Paul Calandra: I don't know what's going on here today, Mr. Speaker, because the member in her question highlights the exact reason why I'm bringing bills to the House to actually untangle the mess that was left behind by the NDP and the Liberals.

Look, just the other day, we opened up the largest long-term-care home, I think, in Ontario. That was Wellbrook Place. I have to thank Tess Romain. She's doing a great job there. They're the largest long-term-care home in the province there—over 600 beds. Now, that was getting done because under the Liberals and the NDP—you'll remember, colleagues—there were fewer homes built across the entire province in the 15 years that they governed together, than that one home has in that one community.

I have said that I will remove the obstacles that municipalities are putting in the way of building long-term care. I thank you for your support of that. I will bring a bill forward to this House to make sure that long-term-care homes get built—

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

The supplementary question? The member for London North Centre.

Mr. Terence Kernaghan: Good morning, Speaker. My question is back to the Premier.

Last week, the Toronto Region Board of Trade's report warned that this government's changes to planning rules are putting 1.5 million jobs at risk. The Trillium reported that major Conservative Party donors successfully lobbied the former minister to punch a hole in Peel region's employment zone plans, undermining the integrity of this crucial employment area against the recommendation of civil servants.

1110

When will the Premier stop putting jobs at risk and stop giving preferential treatment to his speculator friends?

Interjections.

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

The Premier.

Hon. Doug Ford: Is it the same Toronto board of trade that I went to, that had overwhelming support on our policies of creating economic development, creating 700,000 jobs, making sure we're building new homes?

We're getting shovels in the ground. We're going to hit our 1.5-million target.

Mr. Speaker, compared to the NDP and Liberals that lost 300,000 jobs, didn't open up long-term care, didn't build hospitals, closed 600 schools, we're doing the opposite. We're building schools, building highways, building bridges, making sure that we get the infrastructure—the \$184 billion we're spending on infrastructure to make sure we continue going, make sure we're a leader in North America in economic development, job creation and housing.

Thank you for the question.

TAXATION

Ms. Goldie Ghamari: My question is to the Minister of Natural Resources and Forestry. The carbon tax negatively impacts businesses in communities across my riding of Carleton, in Ontario, and especially in the north. For example, the punitive nature of the carbon tax leads to higher prices for raw materials. This will, in turn, mean increased prices for consumers on basic building materials like concrete and wood.

Because of the carbon tax, good companies like Carmeuse, who operate a lime kiln near Blind River, are being negatively impacted. The majority of the carbon dioxide they produce is part of the process of turning limestone into lime. They have no other way to reduce those emissions.

Speaker, through you: Can the minister please share what impacts the carbon tax is having on the natural resources sector, and what actions our government is taking to support its continued growth?

Hon. Graydon Smith: Yet another example of how the carbon tax is hurting Ontarians—and there's a better way. Of course, there are industries that can't help but produce CO₂ in what they do to make our lives better every day.

You can have a carbon tax that's punitive against everyday individuals, or maybe you can go about it in a different way, like this government has gone about it; like this Premier, like this Minister of Economic Development, Job Creation and Trade—by supporting electric arc furnaces in Hamilton and Sault Ste. Marie, taking the equivalent of two million cars off the road. That's an incredible number. And you can go about it a different way, in opening up the opportunities for carbon capture and storage in Ontario, like we're doing through my ministry, to make sure that that CO₂ never hits the air and is safely stored for eternity—or provide options around green hydrogen. There are other ways. It's called supporting business, not being punitive to the families in Ontario with a carbon tax that achieves absolutely nothing.

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

Ms. Goldie Ghamari: Speaker, through you: Thank you to the minister for the response.

It's truly shocking to see that the independent Liberals and opposition NDP continue to support this punitive carbon tax that is making manufacturing materials so much more expensive. The carbon tax is raising the price of everything and impacting all industries throughout our province. This means fuel prices will increase, creating a chain reaction of rising costs throughout the economy. Any barrier that creates delays and financial hardships in this sector negatively impacts Ontario's growth and economic prosperity.

Speaker, through you: Can the minister please explain the impact of the carbon tax on the natural resources sector and what actions our government is taking in response?

Hon. Graydon Smith: I have one word for the impact of the carbon tax on the natural resources sector: terrible—just as it's terrible for Ontarians.

But here we are—again, a government that's taking steps to make Ontario greener and cleaner. The Minister of Energy is expanding our nuclear fleet. The Minister of Mines is working on building that road to the Ring of Fire, which will extract those precious metals to support the EV battery capital of the world here in Ontario, thanks to the great work of our Minister of Economic Development, Job Creation and Trade and the support that this government has shown for what the future of automobiles will be.

There's so much opportunity to support businesses in Ontario. Through my ministry, our forest biomass program, a \$20-million program, is looking towards innovation, looking towards a green economy: use of wood products in medicine, bioplastics, 3D printing green economy, biodiesel, even jet fuel—fewer emissions, more jobs. Fewer emissions, more jobs, Mr. Speaker: It's that easy. That's what innovation looks like.

This carbon tax is punitive. All it does is beat up the wallet. Well, we're not going to support it. We're going to support businesses here in Ontario.

CHILDREN'S MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES

SERVICES DE SANTÉ MENTALE POUR ENFANTS

Mrs. Lisa Gretzky: My question is to the Premier. The Toronto Star has begun releasing a series on the conditions impacting children in Ontario. They revealed there are nearly 30,000 children—those are kids under 18—on the wait-list for mental health care in Ontario. Provincial funding levels are grossly inadequate and don't meet the needs of an increasing number of struggling children. Some kids wait up to two years for access to treatment; some don't get it at all. Some experiencing mental health crises go to an emergency department and get discharged a few days later without a treatment plan. Some return to hospital, some self-harm and some die by suicide.

Premier, why is your government making children languish on wait-lists for mental health support, and what do you have to say to the families who have lost a child to suicide while waiting for help?

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The Associate Minister of Mental Health and Addictions.

Hon. Michael A. Tibollo: Thank you for that question. We all know in this House that children and youth need accessible and reliable services if they're to grow into healthy adults. That's why, since 2019, \$130 million has gone into children and youth mental health services via the Roadmap to Wellness. This includes, in addition, through the road map, another \$170 million over the next three years; in education, \$90 million for school-based supports; and \$20 million for an across-the-board 5% funding increase.

In addition, we're extremely proud of our youth wellness hubs and the investments that we've made that are providing mental health and addiction, primary care and early interventions, all on a walk-in basis and the warm hand-offs that result to community providers from them.

Mr. Speaker, children and youth are our future, and our government is making and will continue to invest in them.

Les enfants et les jeunes sont notre avenir, et notre gouvernement continuera d'investir en eux.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The supplementary question? The member for Hamilton Mountain.

Miss Monique Taylor: Back to the Premier: In 2022, mental health disorders were the number one reason for hospitalization among children and youth ages five to 17, so obviously the road map is not working. After languishing for months or years on wait-lists, vulnerable youth who turn 18 find themselves at the back of the line on an adult wait-list.

Our communities need urgent funding for long-stay beds, supportive living accommodations and respite care, among other supports, for children and their families dealing with mental illness. Supporting our youth mental health is not only the responsible thing to do; it is the right thing to do.

Back to the Premier: When will his government properly fund community mental health programs to meet the growing needs in our communities?

Hon. Michael A. Tibollo: In fact, we have seen and will continue to make investments in children and youth because we know that those needs are there. The demographics show this, and we're making those investments. It's not just idle talk. It's actually investments on behalf of the government.

In 2022, we invested another \$31 million in new annual funding to reduce wait-lists that support the mental health and well-being of children and youth. We're innovating on new ways to treat children and youth and new means for them to have access: \$3.5 million in Step Up Step Down live-in treatment programs; \$2.1 million in virtual walk-in counselling, connecting youth to a clinician by phone, text or video chat; a \$1-million child and youth tele-mental-health service; a \$4.5-million One Stop Talk virtual walk-in.

These initiatives are working, and they're making a difference. We're increasing access to supports. We're addressing the increased demand subsequent to the COVID pandemic. We're decreasing wait times, and we're improving the quality of care—

Interjection.

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

MENTAL HEALTH AND ADDICTION SERVICES

M^{me} Lucille Collard: My question is also for the Minister of Mental Health and Addictions. Consumption and treatment services sites have a role to play in harm reduction, but their implementation, and specifically their placement, need to be carefully considered. There are four of those consumption sites in the entire city of Ottawa, and three of them are located in my riding of Ottawa–Vanier. And they are all located within 600 metres of one another and right by the ByWard Market.

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As a result of this cluster and the proximity to, namely, elementary schools, the surrounding community has been severely impacted. Residents have seen an increase in violence, thefts, open drug dealing, drug use and people overdosing, which is even a bigger issue due to the high number of children attending school in the area. In fact, a daycare even had to close their door because they could no longer expose the children and their staff to the hardship created by the situation.

My question to the minister is, can the minister explain how the concentration of these three consumption sites were allowed in this one area, and what steps are being taken to limit the impacts on the community?

Hon. Michael A. Tibollo: Well, let me state it very, very clearly: For us, public safety is a primary concern. As we said, there is an ongoing review with respect to the consumption and treatment sites in the province as a result of the tragic incident that occurred at Leslieville this summer.

That review is going to help us determine the path forward and how we can better protect the people using the services in the communities where they're located.

Again, public safety is a primary concern. Until the review is complete, decisions about the sites are on pause. I can, however, assure you that your concern is noted, and I would love to continue discussing that with you in terms of how this came to be and where things stand and perhaps look at that specifically as part of that review process.

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

M^{me} Lucille Collard: I do appreciate the answer from the minister. I want to underline that consumption sites have a role to play in addressing the opioid crisis, but the solution cannot end there. People who have challenges with addictions are health care patients needing treatment. Providing those who are addicted with a safe place to use drugs may protect them from overdose in the short-term, but it does nothing to address the underlying illness.

We need to take a holistic approach to addiction in this province. Last week, I did ask the Minister of Health to approve the request for a proposed nurse-practitioner-led clinic that could provide much-needed addictions and mental health services. Consumption sites cannot be stand-alone facilities. They must be truly connected to health care and mental health treatments, food banks, housing and other social services so that we can actually help address the underlying issues that lead to addiction.

What step is the minister taking to ensure that the consumption sites in my riding actually connect those who are addicted with the health care and social services that they need to get better?

Hon. Michael A. Tibollo: I'd invite the member opposite to take a look at the Roadmap to Wellness and look at the plan. We have been discussing—I have raised this and have said it many, many times in the House—that continuum of care requires there to be an entire and complete process within community, so when we talk about withdrawal management, when we talk about addiction treatment, when we talk about the supports that are required subsequent to that, including the housing.

This government—the first government to have a minister responsible for mental health and addictions—is looking at these problems from the standpoint of a multi-ministerial approach to ensure that the investments are there for the individual, so that once the treatment is completed, they have an opportunity to reintegrate into housing, a job and everything else the rest of us want in the province. That's what this government is doing, and we will continue doing that.

TAXATION

Mr. Anthony Leardi: My question is for the Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs. Farmers in my community of Essex county are being punished because of the federal carbon tax. Many farmers need to use massive fans to dry down their crops in order to store them over long periods of time. If not properly dried, their grains and

their corn will grow mould. Many of those fans are powered by natural gas, which is now subject to the federal carbon tax. Because of this regressive and crippling tax, farmers are having to pay additional costs of approximately \$2,000 or \$3,000 every year.

Farmers in my community of Essex county need our government to stand with them and oppose this regressive and harmful tax. Speaker, can the minister please explain how the federal carbon tax is negatively impacting farmers in Essex county and across Ontario?

Hon. Lisa M. Thompson: I do appreciate the question because it allows us to shine a spotlight on the fact that the regressive, horrible carbon tax is pressing the farmers to no end.

Ladies and gentlemen, the grain corns coming off the fields—in our farm, we harvested last weekend and our corn ran at 23% moisture. We were happy about that because it meant we would have to use less propane to dry down the corn so it wouldn't spoil in storage. Why does that matter? It matters because we want a good-quality product that is food grade so we can be producing food close to home.

The member is absolutely right when he says the carbon tax is driving up the cost of doing business on farm, because it's driving up the cost of drying our crops and it's driving up the cost of heating our farms.

The Grain Farmers of Ontario have said by the time the carbon tax triples in 2030, it's going to cost farmers 2.7 billion extra dollars. And who is ultimately going to pay that? Consumers.

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

Mr. Anthony Leardi: Moe Chauvin and many other farmers in my community of Essex county are hard-working and dedicated people. Like so many other farmers in Ontario, Moe worked hard, he followed the rules, and he helped provide food for the people of our province.

But because of the federal carbon tax, many farmers are being hurt financially. Many farmers now have to pay thousands of dollars more in natural gas bills because of the regressive and harmful federal carbon tax. That's not right and it's simply not fair.

That's why we need all members of this Legislature, especially the independent Liberals and opposition NDP, to understand the financial pain that the federal carbon tax is causing on so many people.

Speaker, can the minister please explain what impact the carbon tax is having on families in Ontario?

Hon. Lisa M. Thompson: Simply put, Speaker, the impact of this regressive carbon tax—it absolutely needs to be shelved. It's the cost of food across Ontario and across Canada, and it's making our businesses less competitive.

I had the honour of opening the Ontario pavilion at the largest food show in North America on Monday in Chicago, the Private Label show. I was so proud of our Ontario businesses—from Georgetown to Newmarket and all places in between. When I spoke to them, they were doing their best, but they're concerned about their com-

petitiveness because the cost of their products coming from the millers in terms of baked goods is going through the roof. Why? Because that carbon tax is making its way through every step of the value chain.

I would respectfully submit to the independent Liberals that they need to jump in their minivan, drive to Ottawa, and tell those senators to stop playing games and vote and support C-234.

ACCESS TO JUSTICE

MPP Kristyn Wong-Tam: This government is failing to adequately staff Toronto's newest Ontario Court of Justice facility. In September, a man charged with sexually assaulting a minor walked free because his case took too long to get to trial. Last week, another sexual assault charge against a rapist was stayed and his case was also thrown out because of the long court delay. What a waste of Toronto police resources.

Speaker, despite this government's claim that they are fixing the courts, the Ministry of the Attorney General saw a base-funding cut in the fall economic statement. How is the Premier justifying funding cuts to the court system when he is already failing survivors?

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): To reply, the Attorney General.

Hon. Doug Downey: Mr. Speaker, it's so rich coming from that member, from that party.

I want to say, when we put \$6 million to increase staffing, these members voted against it. When we put \$72 million for the criminal case backlog, these members did not support it. Mr. Speaker, when we talk about funding the police, they say, "Defund the police." When we say support victims, they say, "Build the administration." When we say we want to modernize, they say, "No, we like our fax machines."

1130

I'll take no lessons from that member, from that party.

Interjections.

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

MPP Kristyn Wong-Tam: Despite the political spin, what we do know is that there is a base-funding cut from this ministry. In this incident, Judge Brock Jones said, "There is no reason this case could not have been completed ... had the courts been properly staffed. Instead, two full days of court time were" wasted "and [the case] adjourned."

In an interview with CTV, Emily of Fergus, Ontario, the survivor, was devastated after her case was tossed, and she shared this comment:

"I crumbled," she said. "It took so much to even do that first step of giving my statement to the police and [going to] the hospital. Then, a year and a half later, I decided to go back to Toronto to do this trial, face this man, and tell my story.

"Now it's just over."

Speaker, what does the Premier have to say to Emily and all the survivors seeking justice after allowing their rapist to walk free?

Hon. Doug Downey: I will reiterate that any lost trial and any closed courtroom are not acceptable to this government. That is why we're picking up the pieces that were left behind by this group, and this group—because although they feign concern, they're just chasing headlines and politicizing people's tragedies. They're doing nothing—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Order.

Hon. Doug Downey: While we're standing up for the people of Ontario, they sit on their hands. Every time we vote to support resources, modernization, the police, technology, improving classification of workers—everything that we're doing—they're sitting on their hands. They manifest change, but they do nothing.

ONTARIO FARMERS

Ms. Bobbi Ann Brady: My question is to the Minister of Agriculture. At the beginning of October, the beef farmers were here for their annual lobby day, and during question period, the member from Peterborough–Kawartha lobbed a question over to the minister asking how the government is ensuring the beef sector continues to fuel the economy. The minister reiterated contributions beef farmers make but made no mention of the requested \$100 million bump-up to the Risk Management Program, the number one reason the beef farmers were here that day. RMP not only benefits beef but also fruit, vegetable, grain/hort, oilseed, lamb, veal and pork producers.

Speaker, that same day the minister said, "Ontario beef farmers understand that they finally have a government that listens and understands." And this morning, we keep hearing about the carbon tax and how it is hurting our farmers. It is indeed regressive and unfair, but there's a saying where I come from: Maybe you should stick to your knitting. Because this government has an avenue, it has an opportunity to support our farmers.

If this government and the minister have listened and understood, why haven't Ontario farmers seen an increase to RMP?

Hon. Lisa M. Thompson: I'd like to share with the member opposite that it's our government, under the leadership of Premier Ford, that listens to the beef farmers and all of our commodity organizations in our coalition that were asking for support. When we came into power in 2018, we listened and we responded by increasing the Risk Management Program—and that program is working. That program has done so well. I can tell you with absolute certainty that our grain farmers of Ontario were kept whole because of the progressiveness and assertiveness we've addressed that program with, and beef farmers of Ontario have benefited from the manner in which the Risk Management Program is being facilitated in this province. It actually worked for them this year and they're being kept whole—and I can't wait until next Monday when I make an announcement that absolutely demonstrates how we continue to support farmers in Ontario.

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

Ms. Bobbi Ann Brady: No commitment from this government this morning, but you know who are committed? Our farmers. They're committed to feeding all of us and ensuring Ontarians have access to safe, healthy, top-quality food. And what we've heard again this morning is the minister cherry-picking items we've already heard but refusing to acknowledge the biggest concern of most of our farmers—a concern that, if addressed, would help support succession planning and give farm families to weather an often fluctuating and unstable environment.

The return on investment is highly profitable. For every dollar paid through RMP and SDRM, gross economic output is increased by between \$2 and \$3.60. We need the next generation of farmers to take responsibility for producing food, and the RMP plays a critical role in ensuring that will happen.

When will the minister strengthen Ontario's food security and the sustainability of the ag sectors by increasing RMP funding to \$250 million?

Hon. Lisa M. Thompson: I can give the member opposite certainty when I say that we have an amazing working relationship with the coalition that receives support through the Risk Management Program. We continue to listen, and we continue to work towards programs that make sense. I can tell you, what we've done to date is putting our farmers in the best position possible to be competitive not only across Canada and North America but around the world.

Ladies and gentlemen, I can't wait to share our announcement on Monday as a perfect example of how our government continues to listen and we continue to get the job done for Ontario farmers.

TAXATION

Mr. Ric Bresee: Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Energy.

With the carbon tax set to increase rapidly by 2030, this will mean substantial increases in the cost of heat, gas and grocery bills for hard-working individuals and families.

In rural and northern Ontario, families are struggling to keep the heat on. In some areas of this province, the temperature can drop to minus 30 in the winter.

Increasing the carbon tax will only mean higher expenses at a time when Ontario families are already struggling because of high interest rates.

For those of us who live in Ontario's rural, remote and northern communities, the effects of the carbon tax are disastrous. It's not fair or right that rural and northern Ontarians are being forced to pay more because of where they live.

Can the minister please share his views on the disparity of the federal carbon tax and its negative impact on the rural people of Ontario?

Hon. Todd Smith: Thanks to my colleague the member for Hastings–Lennox and Addington and my neighbour in eastern Ontario.

Do you know what else doesn't work? The federal carbon tax. It doesn't work for anybody. It doesn't even work for the federal government. The federal government told us, when they implemented the carbon tax, that it was going to reduce emissions and that people were going to get back more than they put in through the carbon tax rebate. We now know that both of those things aren't true. The Bank of Canada has confirmed that the carbon tax is driving up inflation across our province, making things more expensive. And we now know that a federal agency, the Commissioner of the Environment, has reported that the federal government is going to miss their own emissions targets.

So what have we accomplished here? All we have accomplished with the federal carbon tax is driving people into energy poverty. They didn't drive down emissions; they drove up the cost of everything. They're 0-for-2, Mr. Speaker.

It's time to scrap this tax.

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

Mr. Ric Bresee: I have to agree. The carbon tax is driving up the cost of utilities, as it is driving up the cost of everything else. People across this province are struggling. Life is more unaffordable today because of the imposition of the federal carbon tax.

While the federal government recognizes the hardship that this tax is causing for Atlantic Canadians, apparently they fail to understand that many individuals and families across Ontario are also struggling. By exempting only heating oil from Atlantic Canada from that carbon tax, the federal government sends a strong message that not everyone is being treated equally. The people of Ontario should not be punished by this regressive and harmful tax while other provinces are being exempted.

Can the minister please share his views about the far-reaching negative impact that this regressive carbon tax is having on the lives of so many Ontarians?

Hon. Todd Smith: Speaker, we've been clear since day one that the carbon tax wasn't going to be effective. We fought the federal government all the way to the Supreme Court of Canada on this issue.

We know that the federal carbon tax is just driving up the cost of everything. It's making it more expensive for that mom taking her kids to hockey practice. It's making it more expensive for our local police services to operate because the price of rolling vehicles through our streets to make sure they're safe is driving up the cost for them.

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For people that are heating their home, this is having a negative impact. The federal government chose to carve out Atlantic Canada from the carbon tax, yet the federal Liberal caucus makes up half of their caucus in Ottawa. Why are they not carving out home heating costs for the people of Ontario? It's a very, very fair question. And why is the Ontario Liberal caucus, as small as it is, continuing to support their federal cousins in Ottawa? It's time to scrap this tax once and for all.

FOOD BANKS

Ms. Doly Begum: My question is to the Premier. A new report released by the Daily Bread Food Bank and North York Harvest found that one in 10 people in Toronto are now making use of food banks. That is double the rate of 2022. There were over 2.5 million visits in the past year to food banks in Toronto alone, a 51% increase. Food banks across Ontario are reporting similar increases as well.

It is clear that we are facing a food insecurity crisis in this province. Food banks themselves know that distributing food will not solve the issue. Food insecurity is a public policy issue requiring public policy solutions. My question to the Premier is, how is this government going to address the growing food insecurity crisis in Ontario?

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The Minister of Children, Community and Social Services.

Hon. Michael Parsa: I thank my honourable colleague for that very important question. Mr. Speaker, I can tell you, with the rising cost of everything now in the province, we know that the people are feeling it, which is why the Minister of Energy clearly mentioned that we need to do better at all levels of government to make sure we get rid of the punishing carbon tax that adds a cost to everything.

I can tell you, as a government, through a \$96-million investment that we're making through the Ontario Trillium Foundation to community partners, including food banks—on top of that, for our students, so that students don't go hungry, we increased the Student Nutrition Program. We raised the minimum wage. We're removing tolls from highways. We kept the 10% savings at the gas pump. Mr. Speaker, we are making life more affordable for Ontarians at a time when we know life is more unaffordable. We ask the opposition to support us in this.

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

Ms. Doly Begum: Food banks are not the solution. We need a public policy solution and the minister knows that. The 2023 Daily Bread Food Bank report also shows that there has been a 36% increase in people relying on food banks in my community of Scarborough. People just simply do not have enough. They're working multiple jobs and they do not have money left over after they pay their rent or other bills. People just do not make enough, even after working multiple jobs, to pay for food. That's the reality in this province. Why is the government turning a blind eye to the surge in Scarborough residents and residents across this province who are resorting to food banks due to the soaring cost of living?

Hon. Michael Parsa: I think I mentioned in my first response that we are there to provide the supports for Ontarians who need it. But you know what I can tell you, Mr. Speaker? I thank the Minister of Economic Development, Job Creation and Trade, who is going out to bring those high-paying, good jobs to the people in this province. We don't want people to be in poverty. We will fight for them to make sure that they have more income, bigger paycheques.

The supports will be there for Ontarians who need it, but under the leadership of Premier Ford, the manufacturing jobs—those good-paying jobs that left the province of Ontario—are coming back, thanks to this Minister of Economic Development, Job Creation and Trade.

Again, I ask my colleagues across to work with us, to ask the federal government to remove the punishing carbon tax that adds to the cost of everything in this province, and let life be—

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

TAXATION

Mr. Dave Smith: I have a question for the Minister of Natural Resources and Forestry. When I was back in the riding last week, I heard repeatedly how the federal carbon tax is making life more unaffordable for people. The carbon tax is increasing the cost of everything for the people in my riding: the fuel in their cars, the groceries they buy and the electricity they need to heat their homes. Many individuals and families have also told me that the carbon tax is even making hunting, fishing and travelling in rural, remote and northern parts of our province too expensive. It's not right, and it's not fair that this regressive tax negatively impacts the quality of life for so many people in Ontario.

Speaker, can the minister please explain about the negative impact that the carbon tax is having on so many households and how it's impacting the cost of living for so many?

Hon. Graydon Smith: I appreciate the question. In northern Ontario, hunting and fishing is a way of life. It's actually a pastime for many people all throughout Ontario who want to enjoy that. Of course, now when they want to try to do it, well, a family loads into the truck. If they want to go to the camp, they've got to stop at the gas station. They get to pay some carbon tax. They get to fill up the gas tanks to run the genny at the hunt camp; they get to pay carbon tax. This tax is really—it's just part of everything we do now, and it is providing absolutely no positive benefit.

If the Liberals want to help out our friends across the way, maybe they should spend some time not kneecapping each other during their leadership race and try to find productive ways to talk about how to get rid of the carbon tax—once somebody gets to be the leader that gets to drive the van.

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

Mr. Dave Smith: Once again, my question is for the Minister of Natural Resources and Forestry. The carbon tax will only worsen. The cost is expected to nearly triple by 2030. This will mean that fuel prices will increase, creating a ripple throughout the economy and raising the cost of absolutely everything. This is only making life harder and more expensive for people living on a budget, like our seniors or for our families throughout Ontario. This is especially true for people living in northern

Ontario, who have a greater reliance on their vehicles for transportation.

Speaker, can the minister please explain how the carbon tax impacts people in Ontario's rural, remote and northern communities?

Hon. Graydon Smith: Three words, Mr. Speaker: outrageous, egregious, preposterous.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): That concludes our question period for this morning.

NOTICE OF DISSATISFACTION

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Pursuant to standing order 36(a), the member for Toronto Centre has given notice of their dissatisfaction with the answer to their question given by the Attorney General concerning long court delays. This matter will be debated today following private members' public business.

This House stands in recess until 1 p.m.

The House recessed from 1148 to 1300.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Mr. Deepak Anand: Mr. Speaker, it is an absolute pleasure to welcome Nixon Charles and Joy Charles from Joystar TV, who have been serving the community for over five years, since 2018. Welcome to the House of responsibility, Queen's Park.

MPP Jill Andrew: It was a pleasure to meet with the Ontario Library Association and the Federation of Ontario Public Libraries. I would like to give a deep, heartfelt thank you to Margie Singleton, the CEO of Vaughan Public Libraries; Rebecca Hunt, the CEO of Temiskaming Shores Public Library; Dina-Marie Raggiunti Stevens, executive director of Federation of Ontario Public Libraries; Melanie Mills, president of the Ontario Library Association; Wayne Greco, treasurer, Federation of Ontario Public Libraries; Caroline Goulding, the vice-president of Ontario Library Association; David Harvie, board member, Federation of Ontario Public Libraries; Johanna Gibson-Lawler, Ontario School Library Association president, teacher librarian, Greater Essex County District School Board; Wendy Burch Jones, Ontario School Library Association vice-president, Toronto District School Board; Christine Row, CEO, Mississippi Mills Public Library.

Also, I had a chance to chat with some visitors to Queen's Park today: Zenia Menezes, a new Canadian citizen—it was her first time visiting Queen's Park—and Stephanie Gomes, Zenia's cousin. It was a pleasure to meet everyone, and libraries are such an important part of our community.

PETITIONS

SCHOOL SAFETY

Mr. Terence Kernaghan: It's my great honour to present the following stack of hundreds of petitions on

behalf of the hard-working teachers of the Elementary Teachers' Federation of Ontario Thames Valley Teacher Local. The petition reads:

"Keep Classrooms Safe for Students and Staff.

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas students and education workers deserve stronger, safer schools in which to learn and work;

"Whereas the pressure placed on our education system has contributed to an increase in reports of violence in our schools;

"Whereas crowded classrooms, a lack of support for staff, and underfunding of mental health supports are all contributing to this crisis;

"Whereas the government of Ontario has the responsibility and tools to address this crisis, but has refused to act;

"Therefore, we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to:

"Take immediate action to address violence in our schools;

"Invest in more mental health resources;

"End violence against education workers and improve workplace violence reporting."

I fully support this petition—I could not support it any more. I will affix my signature and deliver it with page Emma to the clerks.

NURSES

Ms. Catherine Fife: This petition is entitled "For Fair and Equitable Compensation for Nurses," and I'm pleased to present it on behalf of RNAO and health care professionals from Etobicoke, Scarborough, Mississauga and Brantford. It reads as follows:

"Whereas the government has a responsibility to ensure safe and healthy workplaces and workloads for nurses by enhancing nurse staffing and supports across all sectors of the health system;

"Whereas the RN-to-population ratio in Ontario is the lowest in Canada and Ontario would need 24,000 RNs to catch up with the rest of the country;

"Whereas there are over 10,000 registered nurse vacancies in Ontario;

"Whereas nurses are experiencing very high levels of burnout;

"Whereas registered nurses have experienced real wage losses of about 10% over the last decade;

"Whereas the government of Ontario needs to retain and recruit nurses across all sectors of the system to provide quality care for Ontarians;

"Whereas the Ontario government needs to retain and recruit RNs to meet their legislative commitment of four hours of daily direct care for long-term-care ... residents;

"Whereas wage inequities across the health system make it particularly difficult to retain and recruit RNs to community care sectors, such as long-term care and home care;

"Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to implement evidence-based

recommendations to retain and recruit nurses, including fair and equitable compensation that is competitive with other jurisdictions in Canada and the United States."

It's my pleasure to affix my signature and give this petition to page Scarlett.

HEALTH CARE

Ms. Chandra Pasma: It's my honour to rise on behalf of the residents of Ottawa West-Nepean to present a petition entitled "Health Care: Not for Sale.

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas Ontarians should get health care based on need—not the size of your wallet;

"Whereas Premier Doug Ford and Health Minister Sylvia Jones say they're planning to privatize parts of health care;

"Whereas privatization will bleed nurses, doctors and PSWs out of our public hospitals, making the health care crisis worse;

"Whereas privatization always ends with patients getting a bill;

"Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to immediately stop all plans to further privatize Ontario's health care system, and fix the crisis in health care by:

"—repealing Bill 124 and recruiting, retaining and respecting doctors, nurses and PSWs with better pay and better working conditions;

"—licensing tens of thousands of internationally educated nurses and other health care professionals already in Ontario, who wait years and pay thousands to have their credentials certified;

"—10 employer-paid sick days;

"—making education and training free or low-cost for nurses, doctors and other health care professionals;

"—incentivizing doctors and nurses to choose to live and work in northern Ontario;

"—funding hospitals to have enough nurses on every shift, on every ward."

I wholeheartedly endorse this petition, will add my name to it, and will send it to the table with page Brooke.

ONTARIO PLACE

Ms. Doly Begum: I have a petition here to save Ontario Place.

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas Ontario Place has been a cherished public space for over 50 years, providing joy, recreation and cultural experiences for Ontarians and tourists alike and holds cultural and historical significance as a landmark that symbolizes Ontario's commitment to innovation, sustainability and public engagement;

"Whereas redevelopment that includes a private, profit-driven venture by an Austrian spa company prioritizes commercial interests over the needs and desires of the people of Ontario, and it is estimated that the cost to prepare the grounds for redevelopment and build a 2,000-

car underground garage will cost approximately \$650 million;

“Whereas there are concerns of cronyism by Therme Group Canada’s vice-president of communications and external relations, who was previously the Premier’s deputy chief of staff;

“Whereas meaningful public consultations with diverse stakeholders have not been adequately conducted and the official opposition has sent a letter of support for a public request to begin an investigation into a value-for-money and compliance audit with respect to proposed redevelopment of Ontario Place;

“Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to halt any further development plans for Ontario Place, engage in meaningful and transparent public consultations to gather input and ideas for the future of Ontario Place, develop a comprehensive and sustainable plan for the revitalization of Ontario Place that prioritizes environmental sustainability, accessibility and inclusivity, and ensure that any future development of Ontario Place is carried out in a transparent and accountable manner, with proper oversight, public input and adherence to democratic processes.”

I fully support this petition, will affix my signature to it, and give it to page Peter to give it to the Clerks.

ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION

Mr. Anthony Leardi: I’d like to thank the Elliott family for this petition.

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas the Ontario government assisted in the preservation of 123 acres of ecologically significant lands at Upper Cedar Creek in Harrow and Hillman Sand Hills near Hillman Marsh in Essex county; and

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“Whereas the Ontario government is a leader in conservation within Canada; and

“Whereas Ontario’s world-class system of protected areas, which includes 340 provincial parks and 296 conservation reserves, covers almost 11% of Ontario and grows every year;

“Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

“That the Ontario government continue to consult with the public, stakeholders and Indigenous communities as we continue to expand Ontario’s vast network of protected lands and secure our natural heritage for future generations.”

I endorse this petition. I will sign it and give it to page Eoife to bring to the Clerks’ table.

SOCIAL ASSISTANCE

Ms. Chandra Pasma: It’s my pleasure to rise to table a petition entitled “To Raise Social Assistance Rates,” with signatures collected by the tireless Dr. Sally Palmer, who actually gave me these sheets personally when I had the opportunity to meet her in person recently.

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas Ontario’s social assistance rates are well below Canada’s official Market Basket Measure poverty line and far from adequate to cover the rising costs of food and rent: \$733 for individuals on OW and \$1,308 for ODSP;

“Whereas an open letter to the Premier and two cabinet ministers, signed by over 230 organizations, recommends that social assistance rates be doubled for both Ontario Works (OW) and the Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP);

“Whereas small increases to ODSP have still left these citizens below the poverty line. Both they and those receiving the frozen OW rates are struggling to survive at this time of alarming inflation;

“Whereas the government of Canada recognized in its CERB program that a ‘basic income’ of \$2,000 per month was the standard support required by individuals who lost their employment during the pandemic;

“We, the undersigned citizens of Ontario, petition the Legislative Assembly to double social assistance rates for OW and ODSP.”

I wholeheartedly endorse this petition. I will add my name to it and send it to the table with page Scarlett.

HEALTH CARE

Ms. Sandy Shaw: I have a petition entitled “Health Care: Not for Sale.

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas Ontarians should get health care based on need—not the size of your wallet;

“Whereas Premier Doug Ford and Health Minister Sylvia Jones say they’re planning to privatize parts of health care;

“Whereas privatization will bleed nurses, doctors and PSWs out of our public hospitals, making the health care crisis worse;

“Whereas privatization always ends with patients getting a bill;

“Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to immediately stop all plans to further privatize Ontario’s health care system, and fix the crisis in health care by:

“—repealing Bill 124 and recruiting, retaining and respecting doctors, nurses and PSWs with better pay and better working conditions;

“—licensing tens of thousands of internationally educated nurses and other health care professionals already in Ontario, who wait years and pay thousands to have their credentials certified;

“—10 employer-paid sick days;

“—making education and training free or low-cost for nurses, doctors and other health care professionals;

“—incentivizing doctors and nurses to choose to live and work in northern Ontario;

“—funding hospitals to have enough nurses on every shift, on every ward.”

I fully support this important petition. I will add my name to the thousands that have already signed it, and I will pass it to page Eoife to take to the table.

OPPOSITION DAY

GO TRANSIT

Ms. Marit Stiles: Speaker, I move that:

Whereas Kitchener is one of Ontario's key economic hubs and is home to three world-class post-secondary institutions; and

Whereas a lack of reliable transit options impedes quality of life and growth opportunities for the region; and

Whereas the official opposition NDP has been advocating for two-way, all-day GO service between Kitchener and Toronto since 2012; and

Whereas the government has failed to deliver a GO Transit strategy for Kitchener despite years of promises; and

Whereas the previous Liberal government also failed to deliver on their promise to implement all-day GO service to Kitchener;

Therefore, the Legislative Assembly calls on the government to provide a firm funding commitment and a clear timeline for the delivery of frequent, all-day, two-way GO rail service along the full length of the vital Kitchener GO corridor.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Bhutla Karpoche): Ms. Stiles has moved opposition day number 4.

I return to the leader of the official opposition for her remarks.

Ms. Marit Stiles: Thank you very much, Speaker. I'm very pleased to table this motion as the leader of the official opposition NDP. The need for two-way, all-day train service between Kitchener and Toronto isn't new. In fact, it's something that my NDP colleagues and I have been calling for for years—11 years, actually, Speaker. That's how long the NDP member for Waterloo has been working on this file: 11 years.

Interjections.

Ms. Marit Stiles: Yes. Eleven years ago, she worked with the communities of Kitchener and Waterloo on the business case for two-way, all-day GO service between Kitchener and Toronto. It's a sound business case, because Kitchener-Waterloo is a major economic engine for this province.

At that time, the research indicated two-way, all-day train service would create as many as an additional 30,600 jobs and generate \$2.5 billion in income and \$542 million in personal income taxes. Speaker, those are 2013 dollars; it's an awfully safe bet that those figures are much, much higher today.

The Liberal government at the time said that it "makes a lot of sense," and in March 2014 they promised to make it happen by 2024. They made announcement after announcement. They even went so far as to blanket the airwaves with paid ads for the Liberal

Party of Ontario, trumpeting two-way, all-day GO to Kitchener. As my colleague from Waterloo said at the time, just because you put it in an ad or just because you stand up in this House and say it's so does not make it so. The truth is, they couldn't get the plan on track. Two-way, all-day GO service for Kitchener fell lower and lower on the Liberals' priority list.

Flash forward, and two-way, all-day GO between Kitchener and Toronto is a promise the Conservatives have maintained; although they revised the timeline from 2024 to 2025, and just last month, their million-dollar man, Phil Verster, CEO of Metrolinx, said that Kitchener-Waterloo would finally get trains "every 15 minutes or better on the Kitchener line." Only now, the Conservative government does not have a credible timeline for this work. When asked for one, all Metrolinx can muster is "it depends," and when she was the Minister of Transportation, all the member for York-Simcoe could muster was, "We're continuing to work closely with CN to increase service." Speaker, this Conservative government is giving the people of Kitchener-Waterloo the runaround.

Interjection: That's right.

Ms. Marit Stiles: Right? They offer no timelines, no major updates, no firm funding commitment, no transparency, no accountability, and now it's impossible to see how this government can get this project done, given how long they've been dragging their heels and how long it has been delayed.

Speaker, it's a bit of a cliché, maybe, but I'm going to use it anyhow: Failing to plan is planning to fail. This government doesn't have a plan to get two-way, all-day GO service up and running for Kitchener, and the people of Kitchener have been waiting for nearly 10 years now. We're a month and a half away from that original promised timeline. How much longer must people wait? Because the people of Kitchener-Waterloo have waited long enough.

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Now, the demand for this service is more than evident. Just this past May, the weekend GO buses between Kitchener and the GTA were so full, they were leaving people behind on the platform. There are times when the bus service is so bad that it can take as long as three hours to travel between Kitchener and Toronto. That is simply unacceptable. No one—no one—should be left behind on a platform or spend three hours just to travel 110 kilometres.

What's even worse is it compromises people's already shaky confidence in intercity public transit at a time when we need more people to take transit and not their cars. Because right now, the overwhelming majority of trips between Kitchener and the GTA are by car, adding to congestion, growing our carbon footprint and worsening Ontario's economy. In 2016, commuters, shoppers and students took 64,000 daily trips between Waterloo region and the GTA, but less than 2% were by GO train, given the state of the current service—less than 2%. Of the commuters, only around 10% were taking GO trains or buses; 86% were taking the car.

Anyone who's tried to make it between Kitchener-Waterloo and Toronto on the 401 knows just how congested it is. That time spent in traffic negatively impacts our productivity. It limits the economic potential of Kitchener at a time when we really need it and it's just not okay. It means that families are spending more time away from their kids, parents commuting instead of spending that critical time with children, who we know right now are really struggling.

It means that families who are struggling right now feel even more hopeless. Because, Speaker, the cost of everything is through the roof right now—rent, mortgages, groceries, everyday essentials—and the congestion cost people even more. Let's point out, Speaker, this is a government that's been in power for five years—five and a half years now, I guess—and things are just so much worse for the people of Ontario. Instead of helping people, the Conservative government is just making things worse. They're rigging the system to help a select few of their insider friends get even richer. They're driving up the cost of housing by fuelling rampant land speculation with their greenbelt grab, unilateral urban boundary changes and sketchy MZOs, preferential treatment for which they are now under criminal investigation by the RCMP.

I can tell you, Speaker, the official opposition NDP stood up to this government and we saved the greenbelt, along with all those farmers and environmental activists and community members from all across this province. We got that greenbelt grab reversed, but we will not stop fighting until we get true accountability, truth and integrity back to the province of Ontario.

Meanwhile, this is a government that is rewarding the CEO of Metrolinx, the person in charge of failed project after failed project, with a million-dollar salary.

Interjection.

Ms. Marit Stiles: Really, shame on them.

This is a government where we have seen rents skyrocketing 37% in Kitchener, and this is a government that voted against bringing back real rent control.

Instead of helping Ontarians who are frustrated and struggling to make ends meet, the Conservative government would much rather spend \$650 million—public money—for a private luxury spa in downtown Toronto. That tells you everything you need to know about this government's priorities. This is a government that is failing to deliver for regular people in this province, failing to deliver for the people of Kitchener-Waterloo.

In fact, Speaker, all this government has been able to deliver for the people of Kitchener-Waterloo so far are excuses after excuses, and excuses aren't going to help the people of Kitchener-Waterloo get to and from work. They won't help students get home on the weekend or during reading week. Excuses will not help those who are being left stranded on the platform in Kitchener because the buses are too full to board. They won't bring more jobs and economic opportunities to the Kitchener-Waterloo region. Speaker, excuses won't get people the two-way, all-day GO service that they deserve. The people of Kitchener-Waterloo require a comprehensive plan with

clear timelines and a firm funding commitment, and this plan needs to be completely transparent to the people of Ontario, and especially to the people of Kitchener, who are still waiting to this day.

Our motion today is calling for the government to finally make two-way, all-day GO service to Kitchener a priority. It's a priority for those of us here in the official opposition NDP, and we think it should be a priority for this government too, because the people of Kitchener have been left waiting long enough, and they deserve better.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly): Further debate? Further debate?

I recognize the member for Waterloo.

Ms. Catherine Fife: I want to thank our leader for weighing in with such passion and drive. I want to tell you, that's exactly what the people of Kitchener-Waterloo are looking for. They're looking for a leader who's going to back up those words with action. The community of Kitchener-Waterloo—the region, in fact, which is highly dependent on this rail service, because the 401 between Kitchener-Waterloo and Toronto has turned into a 100-kilometre parking lot. It is unacceptable to wait for so long just even to have a timeline, just even to have a funding commitment.

I don't usually do this, but I'm going to start at the point of frustration and give the House some sense of the tipping point that the people of Kitchener and Waterloo are feeling right now. This came into my office—and I've been getting these emails for 11 years. This is one commuter who posted and also reached out to my office. He said, "I've been commuting for five years, and the last 12 months have been absolute" garbage—he uses another word. "The parking lot is tiny and cannot accommodate the number of people that ride the train right now. Basically, if you want to guarantee yourself a spot, you need to take the 5:35 a.m. train or the 6:15 a.m., because by 6:20 it's full and people are parking on the bloody grass. The exit is just a nightmare too. One entrance in and out. People double-parking, waiting to pick up folks, cutting the line. It's pure chaos."

For those of you who don't know, we don't actually have a GO station in Kitchener, even after all these years. We have a Via Rail station that is sometimes open and sometimes not. I can tell you, as a woman who does commute on the Kitchener line, there have been times when I've arrived very late and that station has been closed and it is dark. I want to raise the bar on this debate around health and safety, because the chaos that ensues around the Via Rail station in Kitchener is dangerous and it is unsafe, and it is time for this government to recognize that this substandard level of service is beneath even this government.

This person went on to say that this is only going to get worse as more people are forced back to the office. This is the work-life balance piece. And what's worse is, no improvement or development plan has been implemented.

Also, I want to say, there are people in Kitchener-Waterloo who see other communities getting their nice, shiny GO stations—and we're happy for them, but many

of them have not been waiting as long as us. So that is part of the reason for today's debate—to ask the government, what is actually going on over there, and why do we keep getting bumped down the list of priorities? It is only going to get worse. And as I said, it truly is a safety issue.

This is another reader: “The Kitchener GO station is completely inadequate for the amount of people who are now riding.”

There's nothing that we can do in the short term, but there are things that we can do in the long term, and one of the calls is to actually have the station be part of the Metrolinx strategy, at least—because this actually impacts ridership, because public transit will only work if it's working for the people who need it. It needs to be affordable, it needs to be fast, it needs to be reliable and it needs to be consistent.

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Currently, right now, it takes an hour and 47 minutes to go one way. There are no plans to have even one express train. There is no train that leaves Toronto in the morning that can get people to Kitchener in the morning, to a job—where there are jobs available, in Kitchener. The tech sector is hiring. The tech sector has been lobbying for this for over a decade. Companies like Google, for instance, have pretty much given up on this government. They value their employees, these very talented individuals who have specialized skills. They're not trusting those employees with the GO train, with unreliable service. Plus, there is no train that gets there in the morning unless you leave at 9:34 and then you arrive at 11:21. That's a good chunk of the morning, right? Not too many bosses are okay with that.

I did have a unique opportunity here to go down memory lane a little bit, because I've been here what feels like, on a day like today, a very long time. However, when I look back at all of the governments and all the Ministers of Transportation that I've had to deal with, it's astounding. When I go back to 2012, this headline in the paper is “GO Train Must Be Faster to Keep, Grow Ridership,” because there was a real reluctance for people to get on a GO train that was going to take two hours and five minutes to travel 100 kilometres. And you can't really blame them. This was when there was a 7:07 train. This is when Kathleen Wynne, the previous Premier, came to town and we had two slow trains and she promised four slow trains. She doubled—this is what we like to call a Liberal over-achievement and perhaps a stretch goal.

One of the students at the time—and I'm going to talk about the students because their voices are often left out of this debate. This is a student from the Ontario College of Art at the time, Christina, and she says that she hedges her transit options and takes a mix of GO trains, GO buses and Greyhound buses to downtown. You will know that we lost Greyhound. I also used to commute on the Greyhound. Boy, you can do a lot of casework on a Greyhound bus in the morning, I can tell you. She said that the addition of an express train, which stops at fewer stations, should be the government's number one priority. Why is this thinking not even on the table? If there are four trains, at least one of them could truly be an express train, and then you give

another community their express train, and you grow your ridership. You build confidence in the system as a whole and you actually run a competitive and competent train service in Ontario.

At this point, back in 2012, there were nine stops, and it took over two hours. So, at this point in the game, the Liberals of the day were dealing with their own scandals. It's kind of like Groundhog Day sometimes around here. They had their OPP scandals, the Premier that had pro-rogued the Parliament, and so they were desperate to change the channel. Now, does this sound familiar to anyone around here? The Liberals were trying to change the channel. They took a very dramatic and creative approach. They promised us a bullet train.

Interjection.

Ms. Catherine Fife: I know. It was Glen Murray, the Minister of Transportation. He stood in his place, and he told the people of Kitchener-Waterloo that they were going to have a high-speed rail train and it was going to take half an hour.

I remember, then, taking the article at the time—because it's actually published—over to my friend there Mr. Yakabuski and I said, “Look at this.” They had, even, a diagram. It was like a cartoon, if you will, that someone had drawn up, obviously, on the back of a napkin. They promised a high-speed bullet train and then they actually came ahead of the 2014 election and got on a GO train and had the GO train come into the station and everybody is waving. I wasn't invited to that particular announcement, as you can imagine. They came and they promised us GO service every 15 minutes, both ways. Of course, there was no plan, no strategy to actually make that happen, and so my community feels burned, actually. Trust has been compromised, which is why the official opposition has brought forward this motion here today for your consideration.

Then we go just later in 2014, which says, “Road Ahead: We're a Long Way from Two-Way GO Trains.” This is from Jeff Outhit, who's a Record reporter. Anytime we mention GO trains, Jeff calls me, because we've had this conversation many, many times.

Listen, there were aspirational goals, I want to say. Actually, this train is referred to as an aspirational goal in a Metrolinx report. It's aspirational for the communities along the line; there are aspirations of maybe having a strategy, a plan. But I will make this one point: That every time Metrolinx puts out a report about this particular train on the Kitchener line, our train gets pushed down the line. The latest number is 2030—full implementation by 2030. We've been promised so much, Madam Speaker. We still, to this day, have no weekend train, not one weekend train, which is why I have the petition before the House.

When you think of the economic potential of connecting Kitchener-Waterloo, which is essentially the silicon valley of Ontario—and Canada, to be honest; our IT and tech sector is second to none in this country. Their sense of frustration with a government that moves at a slug's pace has really compromised the confidence in our potential as a community. That important corridor between Toronto and the GTA and KW—the research is

done, the councils have endorsed it and all politicians at all levels have said how important and crucial it is to reach our potential as a community. Yet we cannot get this government or this arm's-length agency, Metrolinx, to actually make the full commitment—and make the funding commitment, because resources are actually in question.

In this particular article, it ends by saying, “A plan to bring two-way trains to Kitchener will only ... emerge, and may be a low priority as ridership underwhelms.” So this is the challenge. As the service continues to not improve—it almost has reached a point of stagnation—then you have people getting so frustrated that they're walking away from the service. So it's a self-fulfilling prophecy actually. But boy, if the government came out with a strong strategy, a strong plan: “This is 2024. We are going to have two-way, all-day GO service,” as the Premier promised in the 2018 election, as he stood on that platform and as he said, “We're going to do the environmental assessment on high-speed rail”—boy, they got sold a bill of goods on that one, I can tell you. The fact that the Premier actually said “environmental assessment”—I believe the last time those words were used was in that particular sector.

We're going to move on to 2017, when we actually brought forward my private member's bill. So it's not like we haven't been trying to work with the government. In 2017, we introduced a motion, and the quote is here—it's a pretty good quote, I have to say: “Fife said the region is losing on economic potential as the region's tech workers waste time stuck in traffic as they travel back and forth” on the 401. I go on to say—I'm quoting myself—that I had “tabled a motion asking the Ontario government to hold a vote on whether or not it will provide a ‘firm funding commitment and clear timeline’ to deliver all-day, two-way, GO train services along the Kitchener-Waterloo corridor.” This was obviously following through on the previous Liberal promise.

Now, we forced a debate on it. You'll remember there was this fellow, Mr. Yurek, who was part of that at the time. Promises were made and he said, “Let's just go in the hallway and have a conversation about this. Let's see if we can get this done.” I mean, is that really the way you do business?

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Having a master transportation plan for the province of Ontario is traditionally how responsible governments have planned for transit projects. There's a reason why it's 10 years: It's because transit projects do take a long time. There's a reason why it is a master plan: because you actually need a road map. But, boy, when you throw the cottage highway in there, the Bradford Bypass, and then your developers ask you to build the 413, that knocks down all these other important local projects. It also destabilizes, once again, confidence in a government that has said on many occasions, “No, no. We're going to do this.”

But this new PC government came in, very similar to the Liberals in many, many ways. We heard the Premier make his promise. He said it's doable, according to whatever napkin he was reading from on that day. But Jeff

Casello actually is a planning expert, and he weighed in at the time, because once the majority was won, then there was sort of a revisionism happening around this timeline. Mr. Casello says—and this a direct quote—“There's really no technical reason, no physical reason why we can't have two-way, all-day GO service by 2024,” and he's the University of Waterloo school of planning professor. He says, “It's time for the province to be serious about this connection.” We agree. It is time for the province to be serious about the Kitchener GO train service. We've waited long enough.

And then you flash forward, and now we're in 2018. I just want to remind the government members, because this is on all of you, right? It's on all of you to make sure that this connectivity piece comes to be a reality. This was an interesting time, because Kathryn McGarry, at the time the Liberal transportation minister, was calling into question their numbers. I found the whole thing very amusing in some regards, because they were both calling out each other for not having strategy.

The Progressive Conservative leader at the time said—it's right here in writing—that they would “fund all-day, two-way GO trains and continue with the environmental assessment for high-speed rail if elected in June.” He says, “We're going to fund that. We're going to” get it done “as quickly as possible.” Well, here we are, five years later, and the train still takes an hour and 46 minutes. There's still no train that gets workers who need jobs from Toronto to Kitchener-Waterloo, where those good jobs exist. What a wasted opportunity, right? It really is about priorities, though, I would have to say.

Now, Mr. Ford wouldn't provide a timeline for when the PCs would be able to reach that goal if elected, but he said that he would cut some red tape and get it done as possible. Well, if it was red tape—it's more like “blue tape” right now, because this is a government that thinks that there's some way to get some things done in those back rooms, just with those conversations, much like Mr. Yurek actually thought: “Let's just have a conversation. Let's just take the criticism off the heater, and let's just be reasonable and be rational.” Well, can someone please say that to Phil Verster at Metrolinx? If you want to talk about red tape: 59 vice-presidents at Metrolinx? A million-dollar salary?

Interjection.

Ms. Catherine Fife: What was that? How many was it?

Ms. Bhutla Karpoche: Nineteen C-suite executives.

Ms. Catherine Fife: Nineteen C-suite executives? I mean, goals, man—seriously.

He said—this is a direct quote from the Premier of the day—“We're going to have the pedal to the metal, and we're going to move forward, we're going to cut all the red tape and bureaucracy that gets in the way of these projects.” Well, that didn't happen, you know. That did not happen.

I think it also bears to mention that as Kitchener-Waterloo keeps getting bumped down the highway or the rail track, other communities are also really struggling.

Niagara's GO is not rolling out as fast as it should. Hamilton's LRT—what a shemuzzle that was; we saw the Minister of Transportation actually run out of the back side of a building when that got cancelled. And the Eglinton Crosstown—I mean, I feel so badly, and I know our MPPs have been really advocating for the completion of that, but the Ontario Line is at \$1 billion for a kilometre.

So these public-private partnerships that this government has been selling to the people of this province are not a good deal. It's just not a good deal for the people that we're elected to serve. It's not smart business, nor is a 95-year lease for Ontario Place. Who with any kind of business degree or any business acumen or any business experience would ever tie the hands of an organization with a 95-year lease? It certainly doesn't make any sense at all.

In this article, I actually say, "I think if anyone really wants to see all-day, two-way GO service finally come to Kitchener-Waterloo, they should keep Mr. Ford as far away from government as possible." That is my quote, and I still stand by it, I will say.

So then we're in 2018, and this is when we find out that the report from Metrolinx indicates two-way all day GO trains are "unlikely in Waterloo region before 2025 and it could take until 2030 to become a reality." This is when we got into a really interesting back-and-forth between the government members—you know, we do work well together when we can, when we find common ground. I think the Kitchener line two-way, all-day GO service should be something we should be able to work together on. I think it's actually what the people of KW expect, and even though some of the other MPPs sort of surround KW, it certainly is something that people in the entire region have come to depend on.

The GO expansion full business case report from this point in time lists the GO rapid rail services or the Kitchener line as being between 2025 and 2030, and this was sold as a positive turn of events. I said, again, "Our province will never be able to compete globally if Kitchener-Waterloo and Toronto are separated by a 100-kilometre-long parking lot." This is the truth. It really is. I mean, the potential is so profound if this is actually realized and if we could get the ridership to buy back into this line.

But at that time, Mr. Yurek says, "I think you're going to be happy with our announcement," because they're so good at announcements. But I came back and said we'd really received radio silence. That is another problem. It really is a lack of transparency. I know my colleagues across the province have been trying to get answers on their transit projects. They've been asking for some clarity around contractual agreements, because ultimately, even though Metrolinx is an arm's-length agency, it actually is funded by the people of the province, so the people of the province deserve to know what they're paying for services that they're not receiving.

Because I can't get any answers from this government, I actually recently wrote to the federal infrastructure minister. I said, "Listen, the federal government has

flowed \$786 million to the province for this project. Can you please find out where that money is, where it has been invested or where it has not been invested?" He essentially sent me back a letter saying, "Yes, good luck with that. We can't get any answers either." It's unfortunate, because we hear from the Conservatives all the time, "Hey, there's only one taxpayer." Well, that one taxpayer wants answers, and so do we.

So here we are, and this is when Mr. Yurek actually said to me: "Listen, do you know what? Let's just take the conversation out in the hallway." This is just after a debate, I have to say. They actually did support it, but then they just told us to stay tuned. I just want to say, the region is hoping to see all-day, two-way service to Toronto by 2024, as the Premier had promised.

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I remember when this government first got elected, they were really fond of saying, "Promise made, promise kept." It was built on a house of cards, because so many promises have not come to fruition, so many promises have not been honoured in this Legislature.

And then, this is later in 2018, when then-MPP Fee took to Twitter and said, "We are going to get this done. Don't worry about it"—I said, "Well, maybe you'd like to look at the report." The report very clearly indicates that 2030—"GO rapid rail services launch on Lakeshore West, Kitchener, Barrie, Stouffville, and Lakeshore East lines." This is where we are on the timeline, so I hope my colleagues understand why people are so frustrated and, certainly, why we were motivated to come forward with this.

I want to talk a little about the students. When MPP Mulroney was still the Minister of Transportation, I did ask a question in this House, because what has been happening is that students—we have three post-secondary institutions in Kitchener-Waterloo. We have Laurier, an excellent institution; University of Waterloo—they were here recently—an amazing research institution; and then we have Conestoga College. Because affordable housing for students is such an issue in the KW area, we're actually seeing students go to school in Waterloo but find housing in Brampton or Bramalea or in more affordable areas. So they've become incredibly reliant on the GO train and then the GO bus to get into KW to go to school—some of them, also, to get jobs—and it's so overcrowded that they were literally being left on the platform. So it's not just that you have made promises that you've not kept; it's not only that you have timelines that you have not honoured; it's not only a lack of transportation, on the funding, but you are literally and figuratively leaving Kitchener residents on the platform. That is literally what is happening. And it's well past the point of trust here. There really has to be an honourable commitment from the government to follow through on the words of the Premier—as he did in 2018. That literally has to happen. So this is more than commuting convenience for these students; this is the increased access to educational opportunities—which we hear often in this House.

I have mentioned how international students have become a revenue generator for some of these post-

secondary institutions, only because the government has reduced funding, based on inflationary costs, by 12% to the PSE sector. The University of Waterloo is going to be running a \$15-million in-year deficit this year. That's huge money for the PSE sector. You can draw as many international students into that sector as you wish, but at the end of the day, those students need housing and they need food. They're the highest—one of the growing number of food bank users in KW, up 222% from this time last year. Those students deserve to have a quality of life, when they come to Ontario—isn't that what we want? We want them to be successful if they're coming to Ontario. Meanwhile, they're trying to get to school and they're being left on the platform.

So the increased access to educational opportunities should be a motivator for this government. There are cost savings. Owning a car or using ride-sharing services can be expensive for students. These students are very resilient. They've started their own apps. You can get a—it's a ride-share program, and it essentially came out of a sense of desperation, I want to say, that they didn't have any other options.

And then, of course, there's a need for flexibility in scheduling. I myself have used this. I would love to take the GO train in on a Sunday, late afternoon, early night, to come here to work. It would mean you could spend more time with your family on a Sunday. All of us know across all of the benches in this place that we make a great sacrifice to be away from our families to do this job. So having a GO train on a weekend to get to work for the week would be a game-changer for so many people. The economic driver actually on a weekend train—a professor at the University of Waterloo did this work around tourism, around supporting small businesses, reducing the environmental impact of the parking lot called the 401. These are huge—these should be issues that motivate the government to follow through on clear timelines and clear funding commitments, and I just want to say that the enhanced quality of life should not be underestimated.

The economic impact that was mentioned actually by our leader has been very true, and the focus on connectivity and value for productivity, economic returns and the environmental impacts of having a two-way GO service between these centres, as I said, has been well-documented. Transit connectivity enhances productivity by providing efficient, reliable transportation options. Yes, we can all agree on that, I hope. Transit connectivity is a critical component of a sustainable and thriving economy. Yes, I hope we can agree on that.

The connectivity contributes to economic returns by stimulating business activity and attracting investment. This is especially true for Kitchener-Waterloo. When you look at the companies that have been attracted to our community, the biggest hurdle I think for the decision for a US or a European company to come into K-W is connectivity. Because Toronto is the economic engine of Ontario, so having connections and having access to Toronto has been confirmed by the local chamber of commerce president, Ian McLean. It has been confirmed by the

Toronto Region Board of Trade—they have been long-standing advocates for this connectivity. Also, it's 2023. For the love of humanity, why can't we have a train that actually works? Why not?

This is why we're here right now, debating this issue. It does highlight a number of ongoing and emerging patterns of behaviour from this government. I always say that when people show you who they really are, then you should believe them. So our way as the official opposition to try to hold the government to account, which is our job as Ontario's official opposition—there are only two recognized parties in this House right now. I often say, as the finance critic, that you do give me a lot of material to work with, and sometimes I'm thankful for it and sometimes I'm not, but this latest time in June and July of this year—I have to say, when push came to shove with Metrolinx, it really exposed how unaccountable Metrolinx is in this whole discussion.

I understand that the government likes this arm's-length agency. They're about to create an arm's-length bank called the Ontario Infrastructure Bank, and I believe the concept that was really “modernized,” if you will—that was a Liberal word that they used all the time—but the Liberals loved removing their responsibility from any issue, really, and that's how we got Infrastructure Ontario, how we had these health agencies that are sort of arm's length because then the government can say, “Well, Phil Verster won't call me back.” This has actually happened in the House. Phil Verster had a press conference—and this is also connected to the Ontario Line too—and he said, “We don't want to mislead people. We don't want to give them false hope on the timelines of certain projects.” You could see the Minister of Transportation had not been looped into that conversation, right? However, her office was fairly significantly involved in ensuring that our Toronto members who were concerned about the Ontario Line didn't get the full memo and didn't get the information.

1400

That's a pretty serious thing to say, I have to say, because we are all duly elected. We all take an oath to serve the people of the province. The people in our communities expect us to have access to the information so that we can make informed decisions in this Legislature.

As I just mentioned, the 2019 business case report from Metrolinx notes that the expansion of rail service between Kitchener and Toronto “has been a key aspiration for communities” along the corridor. However, in 2021—and I just want to remind you, this is within your purview as a government, because this government is very, very good at saying “the Liberals”; they're still blaming the Liberals. But in 2021, the preliminary design business case report does not mention 2025 as a possible opening year. So not only do we have this 2030 date, potentially, but 2025 is not even anywhere on the reporting system. This leaves us with even more questions around this timeline.

But then Phil Verster, the president and chief executive officer of Metrolinx, told CBC Kitchener-Waterloo in 2021 that he was not prepared to announce any timeline

for the project. So who is holding the president and CEO of Metrolinx to account? You just renewed his contract and you gave him a \$1-million salary, and you're happy? You're content with this kind of delivery of service? Because I can tell you, the people of Kitchener-Waterloo are not happy with that promise.

He goes on to say, "What we're trying to avoid is a sense of exuberance to over declare dates very early in the projects.... We find it's much more conducive and positive if we declare dates when we have more certainty."

The question remains: Why don't you have certainty? Why can't you work backwards, at least, and try to figure out what is needed? And if something is needed, why can't you tell the people what is needed? Are we actually asking for too much here? I really don't think so.

In the early days of two-way, all-day GO, it was listed as something that is for sure going to happen: "It's not that difficult. We'll get it done. We've got to figure out this freight line piece and we'll have some conversations with them." It's all very loosey-goosey. But then, in 2021, when the whole timeline is shot forward to 2030, he's saying that this is a massive undertaking.

The story on two-way, all-day GO keeps getting more and more convoluted and complex. What we are doing here today is asking the government to hold Metrolinx to account, find out what the obstacles are. If it's political will, then obviously we have an issue. But one fellow just said to me the other day, "It's feeling really personal. It's feeling personal because we keep getting bumped down the line."

I would say, given the 11 years of having this conversation—some days it does feel a little bit like Groundhog Day on this file—it is certainly worth fighting for, Madam Speaker. Fighting for greater connectivity from an economic perspective, from an environmental perspective and from a quality-of-life perspective is worth fighting for. We are not going to stop fighting for two-way, all-day GO service to Kitchener. It just is not going to happen.

That's where it stands—lots of photo ops for lots of politicians.

Finally, I do want to thank some city councillors over the years who have really continued to keep this issue on the radar. As I said, I can work with almost anybody and there are some really good councillors who brought forward motions, like Kitchener councillor Jason Deneault. He brought forward a motion just this past June 26—I know the member knows about it—at a council meeting asking for the city to advocate to GO Transit and the province to prioritize the Kitchener line and ensure "continued timely improvement and expansion."

This is not so much to ask for. And then he goes on to say, "Having that connectivity to the largest centre in the country I think would be a huge boon for not just Kitchener but also Waterloo as well. So let's try to reach outside of our own region" and connect with people in the GTA. Because the business case is very much there.

Mayor Berry Vrbancovic said, "We need to keep that pressure on" to ensure two-way, all-day GO trains happen. And this motion passed unanimously at city of Kitchener.

I want to thank all the councillors at the city of Kitchener for voting for this and for keeping the pressure on.

But then, CBC News had reached out to the region of Waterloo to see when officials last received an update on two-way, all-day GO trains, and a spokesperson for the region directed questions to Metrolinx or the Minister of Transportation's office. So the communication is getting worse; it's not getting better. The story seems to be changing as the narrative in the province also changes, as the province and this Premier decides which of his favourite transit projects he's going to pull out of the Treasury Board, because let me tell you, if you actually go ahead with 413 without an environmental assessment—and Highway 413 goes through the greenbelt, I believe, does it not?

Interjection.

Ms. Catherine Fife: Yes, it does. So this is sort of like the next fight, but it's interesting because that highway has been costed out at \$10 billion—actually \$10.4 billion. This was not on the transit strategy radar for the province of Ontario even five years ago. So this leaves people in Kitchener saying, "Okay, you're going to do that 413. That means—where are we in the general mix-up of transit projects?"

Then you also tagged on that nice cottage highway so people can get to their cottage faster through the Bradford Bypass. That one is going to be—actually, I should say, there's just estimates that we have. If you do the costing in 2023 figures, it's around \$10 billion. Of course, this highway is not going to get built for another 10 years, but the money has to be allocated, so that's money that this Premier and this government are taking away from established, proven, well-researched transit projects like expansion of the two-way, all-day GO service.

If the business case is there, why would your gift of a highway to developers trump our Kitchener line? It doesn't really make any sense whatsoever. So we have to say—

Mr. Mike Harris: How many seats do we have in Brampton?

Ms. Catherine Fife: Oh, the member from Kitchener—Conestoga is saying, well, you know, the GO service goes to where they have seats. Yes, you know what? That makes a lot of sense.

Interjections.

Ms. Catherine Fife: Yes, that's what you said.

So news reached—

Mr. Anthony Leardi: If you're going to quote another member, you've got to get it accurate.

Ms. Catherine Fife: That's what you said: How many seats—

Mr. Anthony Leardi: If you're going to quote another member, you've got to get it accurate.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly): I apologize. I will ask the member from Essex to withdraw.

Mr. Anthony Leardi: I withdraw.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly): The member from Waterloo, please continue.

Ms. Catherine Fife: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker.

So that is really interesting, because how transit projects are getting planned in Ontario has drastically changed. You wouldn't know that because you're the new—

Interjections.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly): I apologize once again to the member.

I will ask the member to come to order.

Once again, back to the member from Waterloo.

Ms. Catherine Fife: Thank you so much, Madam Speaker.

I'm happy, actually, that the conversation has gone in this direction, because it does show how this government prioritizes some projects over others. I mean, we've seen this with the MZOs—the MZOs “R” Us. There's a reason why there is a criminal investigation by the RCMP into this government. This is why—I mean, you forced us to bring this motion to the floor of the Legislature, because people do not trust this government, without a question, and so we need to get you on the record. Will you be supporting clear timelines, clear funding commitments, for the two-way, all-day GO service to Kitchener? Will you be voting with us on this or will you say no?

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We know who you say yes to; this is for sure. We know who gets MZOs. We know who gets their certain parcels of property outside of urban boundaries. We know who gets inside information around when a piece of property is going to be carved out of the greenbelt. We know this for sure. What we don't know is why government members don't use their government-issued phones to actually do government business. This is very true. So if it takes a few more Conservative members to actually—

Interjection.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly): The member for Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke will come to order.

Ms. Catherine Fife: It's okay. It's all right. It doesn't really bother me at all. What bothers me is a government and a Premier that says, “We're going to get it done for Kitchener-Waterloo. We're going to make sure that the people of Kitchener have access to a reliable, affordable, consistent train,” which continues to not happen. It bothers me that the pickup and drop-off in Kitchener at the Via Rail station—that there's no GO train station there; that it compromises the health and safety of the people who are trying to do their job. They're trying to get to their jobs. What do you have against people trying to get to their workplace, trying to do it safely and trying to be productive people in the province of Ontario?

Mr. John Yakabuski: You mean those people in Brampton who need the 413?

Ms. Catherine Fife: I know the people in Brampton have a nice, shiny GO station.

Mr. Mike Harris: How many seats do you have in Brampton?

Ms. Catherine Fife: I know that they have a few members over there, and I know that they got a good station. What I want to say is that we hope you vote for us. We hope that you vote for a brighter future for the people of Kitchener. We hope that you honour your commitment and your promise to make sure that two-way, all-day GO trains actually happen for this community, because for 11 years they have been waiting for leadership, and continually you have failed them.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly): Further debate?

Mr. Mike Harris: It's a pleasure to be able to rise today and take part in the opposition day motion. Since the member from Waterloo has sort of opened the door a little bit and seemed as though she wanted to talk a little bit about Brampton and Highway 413, I want to take an opportunity just before I get into my remarks here: The opposition lost, I think it was—colleagues, was it two seats in Brampton over the last election or three seats, because they were in opposition to the 413? People in Brampton are very, very excited to get shovels in the ground and actually see the 413 be built, so I think it's really important that we put that on the record, especially the fact that in interjections it was in fact that that I was talking about, not necessarily what the member was inferring in regard to the Kitchener GO line.

But I do want to sort of digress back into what we're here to talk about today. That, of course, is the official opposition motion that is before us. This is an issue that I've certainly risen in the House to talk about on many occasions, because it is certainly near and dear to my heart and of course near and dear to my constituents' hearts, that being because I obviously represent a portion of Kitchener. Of course, I'm always going to stand up to the call for expansion of services along the Kitchener GO line. That is why I'm proud to be part of a government who is actually getting the important work done on this project.

We haven't really heard much from the opposition today about the actual things that are happening, but a lot of rhetoric, a lot of conjecture, and a lot of personal opinion—in fact, the member quoting herself multiple times in the different iterations of her speech. I don't want to go back too far in history; I want to focus more on the road map to the future and where we were at over the last five or six years to where we're at now. But it was the NDP that scrapped the GO train from Guelph in 1993, so I just want to make sure that we got that on the record today, because I think that's important if we look back in history.

Also, under the previous Liberal government, the Kitchener line—and this is in 2017, just before we took power in 2018—only had eight trips per day. There were only eight trips per day on the Kitchener line. I'm proud to say that we have increased that service to 19 trips per day on the Kitchener line.

Since 2018, Metrolinx has completed—we're going to get into some of the factual stuff here, and I do hope that the members opposite are listening to this, because these are facts and I think it's important that we get the facts into the conversation today. Since 2018, since we've taken

power, Metrolinx has completed track upgrades on the Kitchener line so people can get to where they need to go 15 minutes faster.

In 2021, engineering crews worked on track through the city of Guelph, and this is an interesting one. I've talked about this—actually, I think I talked about it a couple of weeks ago. Poor track conditions and multiple crossings had reduced train speeds, Madam Speaker, to 16 kilometres per hour, if you can believe that. That's slower than some people can run through the city of Guelph. Due to the work that Metrolinx has done under our leadership, those trains now travel that same stretch of track at 40 kilometres an hour.

The total travel time between Kitchener and Toronto, thanks to these types of improvements, will soon reach just 90 minutes. Prior to us taking power, it took over two hours to get from Kitchener to Union Station, and that's of course going to make it a much more attractive option than having to take Highway 401. This work, of course, is very critical to getting more trains and moving them faster.

So we've gotten a lot of work done, and of course we're not going to stop here, Madam Speaker. Metrolinx has undertaken several improvements and is working towards achieving two-way, all-day GO service between Kitchener and Union Station.

Transforming the Kitchener line into a two-way, all-day rapid transit line is a massive undertaking made up of many different packages of work. The first phase of work supporting the Kitchener extension beyond Bramalea is under way, and that includes constructing a second platform at the Guelph Central GO station, building a new storage track for maintenance vehicles west of Guelph and constructing a passing track in Breslau, just east of Kitchener, to allow trains travelling in opposite directions to pass each other. We are also expanding the Shantz Station Road bridge, which is well over a century old.

Work is also under way to expand the segment of rail corridor between Union Station and Bramalea to accommodate two-way, all-day service. Once completed, it will allow more trips from Kitchener GO to operate express, which is very important, and I did hear the member from Waterloo talk about that. It is extremely important to have those express trains, and that's why those passing tracks are extremely important.

The Kitchener line between Bramalea and Georgetown GO is owned by CN Rail, and GO trains must share those tracks with freight traffic, so to enable two-way, all-day service on the Kitchener line, additional infrastructure is needed to accommodate both freight and passenger operations, and agreements with CN are required. Metrolinx continues to work with CN to deliver increased service to Kitchener, and there will be more information to share on those negotiations in the future.

Speaker, you'll also remember that in October, GO Transit ran additional trains between Kitchener and Toronto on back-to-back Saturdays to accommodate students before and after reading week, and I did also hear the member from Waterloo reference that specific situation, where we did understand that there was an increased

need and we were able to provide those services for those students.

This month, our government included a brief section on Kitchener GO rail extension in the fall economic statement, and I want to quote from page 48 in the 2023 Ontario Economic Outlook and Fiscal Review: "Following its contract award in May 2022, Metrolinx has begun work on the Guelph Central GO station to construct a second platform, a new storage track for maintenance vehicles and a passing track in the community of Breslau to allow trains moving in opposite directions to pass each other. Metrolinx has begun work on a new fourth track between Lansdowne Avenue and Dupont Street and to realign the West Toronto Railpath, which will facilitate the new track to be installed and allow for more trains to be added to the Kitchener line." That was from the fall economic statement that was just released a couple weeks ago.

So I will say, Madam Speaker, it does seem like there is indeed quite a lot of work being done to get us towards that two-way, all-day service that we in Waterloo region are desperately looking for. There is clearly work being done. I did not hear any of that from the members opposite. And one wonders a little bit on the timing of why this motion might be introduced. Some people—not me, Madam Speaker, but maybe some more cynical people may notice that they waited until a by-election in Kitchener Centre was called to introduce this motion.

Unlike the NDP, we don't wait for by-elections to get things done. We'll continue to work for the people of Ontario, and we are going to get it done.

1420

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly): Further debate?

Ms. Peggy Sattler: As we wrap up this debate, I want to thank my colleague the member for Waterloo for her advocacy over the last decade on getting that connectivity that she so eloquently expressed the people of Kitchener need and deserve.

I will be sharing my time with the member for Davenport.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly): Further debate?

Ms. Marit Stiles: I want to start by thanking the member for Waterloo for her comments—I would say probably one of the best parliamentarians we've ever had in this place, as witnessed by that exceptional speech today. I want to say that they were important comments. She brought some of the lengthy history here of broken promises, of promises made, promises broken by Liberal and Conservative governments year after year. People in Kitchener-Waterloo region have seen all the flashy announcements, they've seen the big publicly funded paid ads, but what they haven't seen is the service that they so desperately need.

People across this province see a mess of over-promising, under-delivering, increasingly costly, constantly delayed, deeply flawed, over-budget transit plans. But in Kitchener-Waterloo, they have been totally left

behind. This is a government so obsessed with giving out favours to their land speculators friends and donors—they're under criminal investigation by the RCMP—instead of focusing on projects like two-way, all-day GO that would connect workers to good jobs, good opportunities, that would ensure the people of Kitchener-Waterloo would have reliable, safe, healthy options to get to work, to family, to school. This government is so obsessed with coming up with a plan behind closed doors to deliver a \$650-million publicly funded private spa in downtown Toronto, but they can't figure out how to deliver two-way, all-day GO to the people of Kitchener-Waterloo region.

This is about responsible government. This is about asking this government to support our call for a firm funding commitment and a clear timeline for the delivery of frequent, all-day, two-way GO rail service along the vital Kitchener GO corridor. Will this government support this motion? I certainly hope they do.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly): MPP Stiles has moved opposition day number four. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? I heard a no.

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

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

In my opinion, the ayes have it.

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

The division bells rang from 1424 to 1434.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly): MPP Stiles has moved opposition day number 4.

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

Ayes

Andrew, Jill	Gates, Wayne	Schreiner, Mike
Armstrong, Teresa J.	Gélinas, France	Shamji, Adil
Begum, Doly	Gretzky, Lisa	Shaw, Sandy
Bell, Jessica	Harden, Joel	Stevens, Jennifer (Jennie)
Bowman, Stephanie	Karpoche, Bhutula	Stiles, Marit
Brady, Bobbi Ann	Kernaghan, Terence	Tabuns, Peter
Burch, Jeff	Mamakwa, Sol	Taylor, Monique
Fife, Catherine	McMahon, Mary-Margaret	Vanthof, John
Fraser, John	Pasma, Chandra	West, Jamie
French, Jennifer K.	Sattler, Peggy	Wong-Tam, Kristyn

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

Nays

Anand, Deepak	Harris, Mike	Quinn, Nolan
Bailey, Robert	Hogarth, Christine	Rae, Matthew
Barnes, Patrice	Holland, Kevin	Riddell, Brian
Bethlenfalvy, Peter	Jones, Trevor	Romano, Ross
Bouma, Will	Jordan, John	Sabawy, Sheref
Breseer, Ric	Kanapathi, Logan	Sandhu, Amarjot
Byers, Rick	Kerzner, Michael S.	Sarkaria, Prabmeet Singh
Calandra, Paul	Khanjin, Andrea	Sarrazin, Stéphane
Clark, Steve	Kusendova-Bashta, Natalia	Saunderson, Brian
Coe, Lorne	Leardi, Anthony	Scott, Laurie
Crawford, Stephen	Lecce, Stephen	Smith, Dave
Cuzzetto, Rudy	Lumsden, Neil	Smith, David
Dixon, Jess	MacLeod, Lisa	Smith, Todd

Dowie, Andrew	Martin, Robin	Surma, Kinga
Downey, Doug	McCarthy, Todd J.	Tangri, Nina
Dunlop, Jill	McGregor, Graham	Thanigasalam, Vijay
Fedeli, Victor	Mulroney, Caroline	Thompson, Lisa M.
Flack, Rob	Pang, Billy	Tibollo, Michael A.
Ford, Michael D.	Parsa, Michael	Triantafilopoulos, Effie J.
Gallagher Murphy, Dawn	Piccini, David	Wai, Daisy
Gill, Parm	Pierre, Natalie	Williams, Charmaine A.
Grewal, Hardeep Singh	Pirie, George	Yakabuski, John

The Clerk of the Assembly (Mr. Trevor Day): The ayes are 30; the nays are 66.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly): I declare the motion lost.

Motion negatived.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

BUILDING A STRONG ONTARIO TOGETHER ACT (BUDGET MEASURES), 2023 LOI DE 2023 VISANT À BÂTIR UN ONTARIO FORT ENSEMBLE (MESURES BUDGÉTAIRES)

Resuming the debate adjourned on November 14, 2023, on the motion for second reading of the following bill:

Bill 146, An Act to implement Budget measures and to enact and amend various statutes / Projet de loi 146, Loi visant à mettre en oeuvre les mesures budgétaires et à édicter et à modifier diverses lois.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly): Further debate?

Mr. John Vanthof: It's always an honour to speak in the House and have the opportunity to speak on behalf of the residents of Timiskaming-Cochrane, and thank you for the opportunity, Speaker. I have a little bit of time left on the clock, speaking on Bill 146.

I believe when we hit 6 o'clock last night, we were talking about the government's new infrastructure bank and how it was a bit confusing because the federal Conservatives have very strongly criticized the federal infrastructure bank. Actually, the leader of the Conservative Party federally—I believe his name is Mr. Poilievre—basically panned it as a complete, total failure, and I don't think the provincial Conservative government got the message. They must have heard him say that he thought it was a success because they copied it completely. It's a totally failed federal Liberal idea, and they import it to the province.

1440

Actually there are a few problems with the infrastructure bank. Just from my own personal experience, I actually used to be a director on a community foundation. They're great. Community foundations are great for communities. They invest in things to help the community. They take donations and they invest them and they use the profit from those investments to further the community.

I was a member of the Timiskaming community foundation. I believe at this point they have invested over \$4 million back into the community. They're great. That's actually where I learned about public-private partnerships. The investment company that was advising the community foundation basically told us that these are probably one of the best investments you can make, but you're really not allowed to make them as a community foundation because they're not—he didn't use the word "ethical," but we are just not allowed to use them.

The reason that they were so good to invest in is because they paid a higher rate than almost anything else. But why that's not good for the public is, the public are the ones paying the higher rate, so actually it's costing the public more money. The infrastructure bank is kind of the same deal. They want the private sector to start putting money into the infrastructure bank so they can use that funding to build public infrastructure. But the only way you're going to entice the private sector to invest in the infrastructure bank is to pay higher rates than anyone else. As a result, the people of Ontario will be paying more money than anyone else for capital to build public infrastructure. That just doesn't make sense from a public perspective. Now, it makes sense from a business perspective, if you're the business investing in the infrastructure bank, but if you're actually the public it doesn't make sense at all.

You know what it's kind of like? It's kind of like the government's big belief—and this is another good example—in agency nursing. Today we had the nurse practitioners come to talk to us. I was talking to one of the nurse practitioners. The member for Kiiwetinoong was with me. I asked her if her facility used agency nurses and she said, "Quite frankly, we can't afford to," because for an agency nurse, the discount rate was, I believe, \$90 an hour. And she said the problem is that the nurses are going to the agencies because they're paying more. Then the agency puts their profit margin on top and then that gets charged to the public sector—great for the agency. And it makes the nurse a little bit more money than the public sector is willing to pay or that the government is allowing the public sector to pay. If the government actually paid the nurses—and I'm using nurses as an example; it's all through the public health care sector—what they were worth so they weren't forced to go to the nursing agencies, it would actually save a whole lot of money.

The government says, "Oh, we're spending more money in health care than ever before." I'm not disputing that, but you're also funnelling more money into the agencies, into the private sector, than ever, ever before. That's what you're going to do with the infrastructure bank and that's what you keep doing. You are thinking of the province as your own business, and that's not how the government should run.

The government should always work in the interest of the public. I think this government—the Ford government—has forgotten that. That's why the RCMP is investigating the Ford government. I was trying to think of notes for this and I just couldn't get the RCMP out of my

mind. Think of it yourselves. Did you ever think that you would be part of a government that is going to be remembered for the RCMP investigation, for the special prosecutor? That's what you're going to go down as, and this is another example.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly): Questions?

Hon. Todd J. McCarthy: I submit that one of the most important things this government is noted for and will be remembered for is—the government that stands up for the people of Ontario, the government that stands up for cutting costs, the government that stands up for affordability.

Will the member support this bill, at least in part, on the basis that we're extending the gas tax cut, and what that means to families and individuals and businesses in such a good, positive way throughout Ontario?

Mr. John Vanthof: I thank the member for the question. I strongly disagree that this government is going to be remembered for standing up for the people of Ontario. It's going to be remembered for homeless encampments. It's going to be remembered for RCMP investigations. It's going to be remembered for closed emergency rooms throughout rural Ontario. That's what it's going to be remembered for.

I talked about the tax—

Mr. John Yakabuski: Mark my words: three consecutive majorities.

Mr. John Vanthof: I seem to have gotten under the member's skin.

Interjection.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly): The member from Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke, come to order.

Mr. John Vanthof: I talked about the tax cut the last time I spoke on this bill. The issue with the tax cut on gas is, there's no guarantee that that tax cut actually goes to the people at the pumps. Given this government's record, it is just as easy that it gets eaten up by the gas companies.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly): Further questions?

Ms. Catherine Fife: The member from Timiskaming–Cochrane rightly points out the concerns around this government's infrastructure bank in Ontario.

In fact, I'm reading from a Conservative press release that says, "Trudeau's bank invested \$655 million in a \$1.7-billion project to build an underwater electricity cable that is now dead in the water due to financial volatility...."

"What's worse is that there has been no transparency" with the federal infrastructure bank. "Only when Conservatives demanded answers last week in Parliament did the government or the bank provide any update on a massive project.... That's unacceptable for a taxpayer-funded bank."

This government has a criminal investigation by the RCMP. Who on that side of the House thought that creating a new bank while you're under criminal investigation, which is unprecedented, was a good idea? What does the member say to that?

Mr. John Vanthof: Thank you for that, member for Waterloo. It is interesting that while they are under a

criminal investigation, they are trying to create an arm's-length corporation to distance themselves from private sector investments.

Interjection.

Mr. John Vanthof: Yes, who will be on that board? That is going to be really interesting.

Public infrastructure is fairly simple. The government—levels of government—can access money, credit, at a lower rate than almost anyone. So through good planning, which this government also lacks, you decide what you're going to build, and then you look for the funding and you build it. But what this government is doing is—we create a separate infrastructure bank so we can funnel a little bit more money of that off for our friends.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly): Further questions?

Ms. Peggy Sattler: I appreciated the comments from my colleague the member for Timiskaming–Cochrane. I wanted to ask if he had a chance to look at a very interesting analysis of the budget from the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives. They raise concerns about the size of this government's contingency fund. It is now over \$5 billion—very much a departure from the traditional practice in Ontario of allowing a contingency of about \$1 billion.

1450

Does the member have any thoughts as to how that \$5 billion that's socked away into contingency that may or may not be spent—often, it's not spent, as we have seen from previous budgets. But what does he think the government should be doing with those funds?

Mr. John Vanthof: Thank you to my colleague for that question—

Interjection.

Mr. John Vanthof: The member from Renfrew, I'm really getting on his nerves, and I know that the government side is very touchy about the RCMP investigation. He's trying to allay his fears, but that's fine.

A contingency fund—for some it would be known as a slush fund. Contingency funds under this government are bigger than ever—bigger than ever. While emergency rooms continue to close, while tent encampments continue to increase, the contingency fund grows. The level of accountability continues to decrease. They like to talk about accountability, but they don't like it. My father told me, "Beware of people who talk about being honest, because they're usually not the ones who are."

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly): Questions—

Interjection.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly): Would the member for Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke please come to order.

Further questions?

Ms. Jennifer K. French: I'm pleased to ask a question of the member, because he's been here a while and has seen different budgets, different fall economic statements. What we have in front of us and the conversation we're

having is pretty personal. I think what we have been sharing on our side of the House and what I'm looking forward to sharing is about the experience of people in our communities.

So when you look at this, what is it that we can say to the people in our communities is going to be better for them, because they have called this the Building a Strong Ontario Together Act. Which part in front of us builds a stronger Ontario together?

Mr. John Vanthof: Thank you to the member from Oshawa. That's a good question, and I'm going to be upfront: There are a couple of things in this legislation that we agree with. But actually building a stronger Ontario—you need to build a stronger Ontario for everyone. I think they missed the mark big time on that, because I don't think anyone is going to deny that they've been in power for five years and the average person in Ontario is under much more financial pressure than five years ago. There's no denying that—rent, food, everything.

They are going to say, "Oh, yes, but we wrote a letter to the federal government. It's all their fault," but they've been in power for over five years with—they won a pretty big majority. I agree with the member from Renfrew. They have a big majority. Are they going to get a third one? I highly doubt it if they keep on this path.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly): Further questions?

Ms. Sandy Shaw: There are so many things missing from this. Our finance critic said very clearly that this bill or this fall economic statement clearly misses the moment. You have identified some of the things that we all are seeing in this moment, in all of our communities: People living in tents and under bridges in our communities, people not being able to access any kind of affordable housing.

This 200% increase in food bank usage in Hamilton, and all of our communities—and I find it so ironic that this fall economic statement doesn't mention the word "affordability" once. There's actually nothing in here that concretely will provide relief for people when it comes to their bills.

They don't talk about increases to ODSP, which are some of the people living in the deepest poverty. I mean, we've identified here what's missing. Can you add to this what's missing for people in your community that could use support from this government right now?

Mr. John Vanthof: Thank you to my colleague for that question. It is stunning that this bill doesn't include not only the word "affordability," but the sense of it or the understanding of it. I don't know if I'll be able to explain all of this in 45 seconds, but a lot of people say, "Well, do you know what? Government needs to run like a business." I've had a business my whole life, but the difference between government and business is that in my business, on my farm, if I didn't make money doing something, I didn't do it anymore.

That's the way government looks, but if government sees people that way—"Well, they don't get a profit from people on ODSP, so we'll just forget about them." Unless

they get a profit out of the health care system, they're not happy; they don't care if people don't get service out of the health care system. A government should support the economy, but it shouldn't run like a business. This government is running it like a private business, and it's—

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly): Further debate?

Hon. Todd J. McCarthy: It is a privilege to rise this afternoon and address my colleagues in this assembly on this important initiative, the fall economic statement, which I strongly support, along with many of my colleagues—in fact, all of my colleagues, I anticipate, on the government side. It's appropriately called the Building a Strong Ontario Together Act.

It's not unprecedented in this House that we can work together. I urge the members opposite, despite their partisan critiques thus far, to come together with us to support this initiative, to help build a strong Ontario together with this proposed legislation.

I would preliminarily like to extend my sincere thanks to the Minister of Finance and his parliamentary assistants for their dedicated work on this crucial legislation. This brings a wide range of measures, if implemented, and the plans that it would, if implemented, bring to the table are very, very important to build upon those issues, those plans, those proposals that we are already delivering to the people and the businesses of this great province, while others help us signal a promising future for their well-being as we look years and decades ahead. That's what building Ontario is all about.

This legislation and the fall economic statement associated with it underscore the need for assurance and confidence. It cannot be underscored enough. It cannot be spoken about enough. At this time of uncertainty within the province, across the country and worldwide, we need leadership and assurance. We need a plan for stability and growth. This is a time when we can be optimistic, even in spite of uncertainty, as we propose transformational growth. We cannot always control external factors, shifts in global trends and technological advancements, but we can do what we can do for our fellow citizens here in the province.

The work we do for the well-being of Ontario is something that I am reassured about with the leadership of the Premier, the Honourable Doug Ford, and our Minister of Finance. I am reassured with this proposed legislation of our ability to safeguard our province's best interests, thanks to our government once again proving that we refuse to stand idly by in the face of adversity and uncertainty. Instead, we are delivering a plan that will help us continue to build a stronger Ontario together.

This bill is a testament, I submit, to our vision for a better province, a better future, and so I would like to explore some of its key elements—14 schedules in all in Bill 146—which I believe will help us achieve the goal of both growth, stability and confidence in the future.

This begins with the tax initiatives, Speaker. This bill showcases our government's commitment to affordability and economic growth. It does so through the proposed

extension of gas tax cuts and fuel tax rate cuts until June 30, 2024. At a time when the cost of carbon is growing steadily thanks to continued taxation policies coming from the federal government in Ottawa, this kind of tax relief that is proposed in this bill has become an essential support for millions of hard-working Ontarians who are feeling the rising cost of living. We all hear it in our constituency offices. We all hear it in our constituency offices. We all hear about it as we walk among the members of our community and speak to members in our own communities and our extended families. I have spoken about the undue burden brought on by this tax before, so I am proud to see the work our government is doing to help make life more affordable for Ontarians.

1500

These tax rate cuts that were initially effective from July 1, 2022, a fulfillment of our campaign pledges in the 2022 election, have indeed played a crucial role in keeping costs down for the people of Ontario, and they serve as an example of the no-nonsense approach our government is taking to provide help where it is needed. This contrasts sharply with the tax-and-spend policies of the former Liberal government, aided and abetted by the NDP for three years of its mandate.

On the side of economic growth, another noteworthy tax initiative proposed by this legislation involves strengthening critical mineral exploration through an additional \$12 million per year in tax credit supports. By expanding the eligibility of the Ontario Focused Flow-Through Share Tax Credit to include critical minerals, we are helping position Ontario on the side of growth and prosperity. After all, our province is blessed with vast natural mineral resources, many of which are essential to our economic growth and the development of key industries, with great future potential and implications.

One of the many foreseeable outcomes from our support for the critical minerals sector is the strengthening of Ontario as a global leader in the electric vehicle supply chain, an industry that has seen more than \$26 billion worth of investments over the last three years thanks to our province being able to secure automotive and EV battery investments from global automakers.

Our government's fiscal and economic measures are not only designed to accommodate our growing economy; they are indeed designed also to take into account the needs of our growing population, which, by last count, is growing at over 500,000 newcomers each year. We're on track to be at 20 million residents here in the province of Ontario by the end of this decade. Any of the work that we do to grow our economy must also therefore be accompanied by strategic investments in critical infrastructure and this bill's proposed launch of the Ontario Infrastructure Bank—and one member opposite in particular, in his most recent remarks, found reason to criticize what I submit is a very important, essential and excellent initiative proposed by the minister of Minister of Finance in the fall economic statement and this bill.

The Ontario Infrastructure Bank is much needed and serves as a strong reminder to our people and our

businesses that their government is committed to continue building where it matters. With proposed initial funding for the Ontario Infrastructure Bank of \$3 billion, this arm's-length agency would play a pivotal role in financing essential infrastructure projects to support our growing population and our future economic growth. At the same time, it would showcase our commitment to building a strong Ontario together.

Now, speaking of our growing population, I'd like to draw attention to our government's continued efforts to fight the housing affordability crisis—because that's what it is—and the work that this bill proposes to support us in that mission to build 1.5 million new homes by the end of this decade. As all members of this House already know, our government has made record strides to increase our available housing supply, while also bringing costs down. Whether it's by enacting the many tranches of our housing supply action plan over the years or through the data standards for planning and development work, my ministry is clearly making efforts to streamline the pre-construction process.

Our government is working to find every possible avenue to help Ontarians in the midst of this crisis. It is a team effort. It is an effort that requires leadership and innovative approaches to getting it done. We have already made record-breaking progress over the years, and there is much more we can keep doing. That is why I was pleased to see that this bill proposes the Housing-Enabling Water Systems Fund, with an allocation of \$200 million over a three-year period. This new initiative would reflect our government's dedication to unlocking new housing opportunities while also supporting municipal water infrastructure projects. These projects are critical to the construction of new homes.

This fund will repair, rehabilitate and expand critical water systems. These are systems in our municipalities across the province, and they will also foster much-needed development and address the needs of Ontarians now and well into the future, because a government that demonstrates leadership, as our government is by this proposed legislation, thinks not in terms of election cycles, but thinks of years and decades ahead and the prosperity for our province as the economic engine of Canada, the prosperity of our province for decades to come.

Speaking of the future, we cannot ever forget how important it is to build proactively for future generations of Ontarians. That is the trust and confidence that this government was given by the people of Ontario in last year's election and the stronger mandate that this government received in making the pledges our government did to the people of Ontario.

Each and every one of us relies on strong community resources such as health care and education in order to live healthy and happy lives. I've said before, and I will say again, the key to funding public programs like health care, education, social services and everything that Ontarians expect government to be able to fund and fund well, the way to do that is through economic growth and prosperity—a strong, vibrant private sector. It is a mixed

economy that we have, but it is an economy where government doesn't create the environment but creates opportunity by measures such as those contained in this proposed legislation. It's not that government creates jobs; government creates an economic opportunity for job creation in the private sector, which in turn funds essential public services that we all depend upon.

That is precisely why our government's fall economic statement for 2023 brings new investments to the forefront for these and many other critical sectors. For example, an historic commitment of \$185 billion over 10 years underscores our government's ambitious plan to build highways, to build roads, transit, hospitals, schools, child care spaces, broadband and other critical infrastructure. Again, this type of investment creates the opportunity, the environment for economic growth that the private sector can seize upon, invest in and help to grow the prosperity that we all depend upon, and in turn, fund the public services that we all depend upon.

We cannot continue to go further into debt; we cannot continue to borrow our way to prosperity. We must unleash the economic potential of a strong, vibrant private sector. That is the best way for government to lead towards prosperity, now and in the decades to come.

In particular, in the area of health care, our government has made investments and will continue to make investments. That includes \$48 billion over 10 years to enhance infrastructure, supporting more than 50 hospital projects and adding 3,000 new beds.

I'm proud to say that these new hospital projects include the Bowmanville Hospital renovation in my riding of Durham. That is an example where community comes together, looking first to the community to help raise essential dollars to build or rebuild a hospital or renovate a hospital in the community, but also can look to the government to be part of that. Our government has made that commitment to the Bowmanville Hospital and to 49 other hospital projects across the province. That is the investment now and in the future for health care, and this government can do that because of the revenues created by the prosperity of the private sector.

At the same time, planned investments of \$6.4 billion since 2019 will result in the creation of more than 30,000 new long-term-care beds. This addresses the evolving needs of our aging population while ensuring that we retain the dignity and quality of care that families expect and deserve. This includes investments in innovation and ensuring that our seniors can remain in their own homes or in the homes of their loved ones for as long as possible, but that those long-term care beds—they are residences and they are homes as much as staying in their own home, in the home of a loved one—that those long-term-care beds are there.

1510

Again, it bears repeating that during the period of time that the previous Liberal government was supported by the NDP, only 611 new long-term-care beds were created. That is the reason why we have faced such a crisis in elder care, long-term care, today. But we have to recognize that

sad history, and the members opposite bear responsibility for handing us off that legacy.

We look to the future by investing. We learn from the mistakes of the parties opposite and instead invest and build and care for our seniors; 30,000 new long-term-care beds is part of our plan and has been part of our plan for the last four years.

On the educational front, a commitment of \$22 billion over 10 years reflects our government's dedication to building new schools, adding child care spaces and modernizing school infrastructure. These investments in health care and education are part of growing Ontario, and they're possible because of this government creating the environment for prosperity and private sector growth and job creation.

This investment in the educational sector ensures that students across our province have access to state-of-the-art facilities, fostering a conducive environment for learning and growth that will position future generations for unprecedented success in our growing global economy. This new fund will repair, rehabilitate, and expand our schools for the benefit of our precious students who are our future.

Speaker, our proposed bill, the Building a Strong Ontario Together Act, 2023, stands, I submit, as a testament to our government's unwavering commitment to building a prosperous and resilient province, with confidence, with hope and with service to the people and the people's future in mind.

We know that it is a solemn duty to be entrusted with government—the ability to plan for the future. We take that trust extremely seriously, and with the leadership of Premier Ford and our finance minister, we are making the strategic fiscal investments for a stronger, better Ontario and a bright future. Through strategic fiscal measures, comprehensive infrastructure investments and a focus on investing in health care and education in particular, we are laying the groundwork for a stronger and more vibrant Ontario, an Ontario that we can all be proud of, an Ontario that embraces the future and innovation associated with the future, optimistically and hopefully.

As we navigate the complexities of our ever-evolving landscape, I urge all members of this Legislature to vote in support of this transformative bill. I know that, together, we can build a strong Ontario while ensuring a brighter future for generations to come.

And it is why a Progressive Conservative government always proceeds with an eye to the future, with a balance between cost-cutting measures—to make sure that, for families, for individuals and for businesses, life can be more affordable. Yes, we rightly criticize the carbon tax. We warned about it when we fought it in court, all the way to the Supreme Court of Canada, and now we are seeing what happens when a government ignores affordability—what it can do to families and individuals and businesses. It can crush initiative. It can create conditions of despair. But we do what we can. Yes, we have and will call out the federal government for its failure to recognize how important affordability is, how wrong it was to impose this

carbon tax, how wrong it was to maintain it or to provide relief for only a small segment of the population for political purposes.

We will call them out, but at the same time we will hopefully and optimistically embrace positive, prosperous initiatives, positive investments in key public sector areas, such as health care and education, and key areas of ensuring affordability for individuals, for families and for businesses, particularly our small businesses, which are indeed the engine of our economy and the biggest job creators.

I thank you for the opportunity, Speaker, and I will strongly be supporting Bill 146.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly): It is time for questions.

Mrs. Jennifer (Jennie) Stevens: To the minister opposite: You said that governments have ignored affordability and that's why we are here right now. But in your fall economic statement, I don't even see the word "affordability." With Niagara's average house price rising under this government's watch from \$397,000 in 2018 to nearly \$700,000 today, the housing plan lacks affordability measures to combat this reality. Why are we not seeing substantial grants and non-profit supports to build affordable housing and address the dramatic increase in housing costs and ensure affordable housing for all residents across Ontario?

Hon. Todd J. McCarthy: Speaker, the member would know that bills such as Bill 146 contain technical legal language. For example, to address the issue of affordability—which, I'm glad to hear, the member seems to be in favour of—that's exactly what this act is about, in part. For example, when the technical language in schedule 3 relating to the Fuel Tax Act reads, in reference to clause 3(1.1)(a) of the Fuel Tax Act, it "is amended by striking out 'December 31, 2023' and substituting 'June 30, 2024'," that extension is about increasing affordability.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly): Further questions?

Mr. Logan Kanapathi: Thank you to my colleague the Minister of Public and Business Service Delivery for that wonderful presentation.

Madam Speaker, there are hundreds of thousands of people moving to Ontario. Last year alone, for a couple of years, a half a million people moved to Ontario. What does it mean? We need more infrastructure. We need more resources put into all Ontario's infrastructure. I know the minister is talking about the Ontario Infrastructure Bank, which is an excellent initiative in this bill. Could the minister elaborate on the wonderful initiatives in this bill creating the Ontario Infrastructure Bank?

Hon. Todd J. McCarthy: I thank the member for the question. The Ontario Infrastructure Bank as a new initiative proposed in this bill is essential to increasing the availability of capital to build. That's what it's about. Ontario must take a leadership role in that regard.

This initiative comes from listening. I'm fortunate that the Minister of Finance is a member from Durham region—I'm from the riding of Durham—and not only is

he a brilliant leader in the area of finance, but he listens to the people in his riding. He and his parliamentary assistants go all over Ontario for pre-budget consultations. He is with me by my side with our Durham colleagues, the members for Ajax and Whitby, as we listen to the people of Durham region. His expertise and his listening skills are what are part of this act and in particular the Ontario Infrastructure Bank proposal.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly): Further questions?

Ms. Jennifer K. French: I'm glad to add a couple of comments to the member from Durham, who spoke about the Building a Strong Ontario Act, Bill 146. Unfortunately, in this fall economic statement the word "affordability" isn't mentioned. There isn't anything in this bill to provide relief on energy bills or increase the means on ODSP. There isn't a clear commitment to increasing the supply of non-market housing.

1520

We know that there are things missing, and I don't think he would argue that not everything could fit in this bill. But because this bill was sort of the launch for this government about the infrastructure bank, and the member mentioned that the province's new infrastructure bank, which—

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly): Question?

Ms. Jennifer K. French: They've talked about how it will operate, but there's nothing in the fall economic statement—there are few details that have been provided as to how this new infrastructure bank will operate. I'm asking about that. How will it operate?

Hon. Todd J. McCarthy: Well, the Ontario Infrastructure Bank is consistent with the purpose of any bank, which is to make capital available more readily for important infrastructure investments.

To the point at the beginning of the question about affordability: Again, there's technical legal language in the act which is exactly about "affordability," even though the word isn't there; it's an extension of what is about affordability.

If you look at page 67 of the actual fall economic statement, it begins with "Keeping Your Costs Down," "Putting Money Back in Your Pocket," "a challenging time" in Ontario "amid high inflation"—and referencing, specifically, the gasoline tax cut of 5.7 cents per litre and the fuel tax by 5.3 cents per litre, "helping to lower consumer-price inflation." I could give you lots of synonyms. But this is all about affordability for the people of Ontario.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly): Further questions?

Mr. Anthony Leardi: This fall economic statement is absolutely replete with affordability measures for the people of Ontario. I think the people in Essex county are going to love it. Starting on page 67 of the book with the fall economic statement, it starts to enumerate all of the affordability measures. It goes on to page 68, with more affordability measures, and page 69, and it just keeps going with all these affordability measures, including the

gas tax cut, child care assistance, assistance to seniors. It goes on and on and on.

My question to the minister is this: Of all of these pages and pages worth of affordability measures, which one is his favourite?

Hon. Todd J. McCarthy: I thank the member for Essex for the question.

I can tell you that not only will it go over well in my riding of Durham, but it is going over so well. I have received countless communications of support. It's actually hard to pick one, because depending on who I'm speaking to on a given day—and we have the annual Santa Claus parade coming up in Bowmanville on Saturday. I'm looking forward to it for many reasons—including hearing more input from people's favourites. I really can't pick a favourite because so many people come to me with different ones. The increasing of the minimum wage, October 1, 2023; the improving Ontario Disability Support Program; the elimination of the licence sticker fees; helping seniors through the Ontario Seniors Care at Home Tax Credit—that's probably one of my favourites, because I happen to have my mother-in-law living with us, for many, many years, and my mother in the summer, and I know how many families want to be able to do that. So that probably—if I have to pick a favourite—is my favourite one on affordability because it helps keep families and seniors together.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly): Further questions?

Ms. Peggy Sattler: My question to the minister is around the provisions in this bill for student loan repayment.

The minister will be familiar with Tim Hudak, the former Conservative leader, who is now the CEO of the Ontario Real Estate Association. That association, OREA, recently issued a report identifying student debt as the biggest barrier to young people's ability to afford a new home in this province.

So I'm curious to know, why did the government not implement new measures to reduce the burden of student debt that young people are graduating with and instead make changes to the Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities Act that would eliminate the practice of notifying OSAP students that their loan is due?

Hon. Todd J. McCarthy: Well, I certainly am very sympathetic to our students. Certainly, I had to pay my way through the post-secondary education years and my children Meaghan and Brendan did as well. Making sure that tuition is affordable is the first step towards reducing student debt, and that's why I'm proud to say the Minister of Colleges and Universities has maintained the reduction in tuition for our college and university students. That's the first step towards controlling the debt and that's the first step towards helping students get a great education regardless of their means, and I'm very proud of our government's extension of that measure. It's essential for our students and it is going to continue. I'm proud that the minister confirmed that in this House just recently.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly): Unfortunately, we are out of time for questions.

Further debate?

Mr. Adil Shamji: I'll be sharing my time with the member from Don Valley West. It's always an honour to rise in the House to discuss matters of importance to the constituents of Don Valley East and, more broadly, across the entire province. Today, of course, we're discussing Bill 146 and the fall economic statement, and I have to admit that it is clear this government has been so busy covering its tracks and reversing its commitments that they have not been able to focus on the matters of real importance to Ontarians. Indeed, they've been so pre-occupied with a range of things—the greenbelt debacle, an RCMP criminal investigation, a special prosecutor, an urban boundary flip-flop, three ministers resigning—that they have not been able to take meaningful action on real issues relating to affordability.

For example, they could have instituted rent control. They could increase the Ontario Child Benefit. They could look into potential collusion around grocery prices. But no, sadly, they have failed to do any of these things. Indeed, it is so clear that the Premier is a conductor on his own gravy train on which he's yelling "all aboard" to donors, friends and people who stand to benefit from for-profit private corporations.

Now, as it relates to the fall economic statement, very clearly this government has not taken action. Rather than dealing with real issues, they proposed a \$3-billion infrastructure bank with very, very questionable prospects.

As it relates to health care, we have a number of issues. Amidst the FAO reporting a \$1.7-billion period of underspending in the last financial quarter—no action. They are leaving hundreds of millions of dollars from the federal government on the table rather than raising the wages of health care workers such as PSWs. It was actually really difficult to hear the member across speak about the government's so-called work on increasing hospitals in our province as we see unprecedented emergency department and hospital closures ever since this government took power.

In fact, on health care the number of things the government has done has been, frankly, minuscule. We saw a \$72-million investment that is targeted specifically towards private, for-profit clinics. And just yesterday, we learned the consequence of investing in this manner. We learned that a private, for-profit hospital is being paid two to four times what the public hospital is being paid to provide the same service—the same surgery, the easiest surgery with the least complex patients at the most convenient times with the least oversight, and yet they are making the most money. This is how our budget is being mismanaged.

Moving forward, we now also see a number of so-called investments on home care, supposedly \$569 million, which is, by the way, not at all a new investment into home care. It is merely a recommitment of hundreds of millions of dollars that were already supposed to be spent.

Let's not forget that this government is merely dragging its feet. There is much more that I could say around the fall economic statement's shortcomings on northern

development, on Indigenous affairs, on colleges and universities, but I'd like to surrender the rest of my time to the member from Don Valley West.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly): Further debate? I recognize the member for Don Valley West.

1530

Ms. Stephanie Bowman: Speaker, I want to take this opportunity to speak to Bill 146. A fall economic statement is a chance for the government to take stock and to think about what's going on in the province—what the economy is looking like, what the people of Ontario are experiencing—and yet we have a government that has doubled down on things like an underground parking lot to fuel the profits of a foreign spa, an Austrian spa. We have a government that has doubled down on not helping the people of Ontario who are struggling with their rent, with putting food on the table.

A new report that came out yesterday speaks about one in 10 Torontonians visiting food banks. Just think about that: On your own street in Toronto, one in 10 of your neighbours could be using food banks. It's a very troubling statistic for what has been in the past one of Canada's most wonderful provinces to live in, and we want it to stay that way.

Speaker, we know that a \$3-billion infrastructure bank is something that has been questioned. People are saying, "Look, Ontario's problem with infrastructure isn't getting it financed; the problem with Ontario's infrastructure is getting it built on time." Certainly in my riding we have the Eglinton Crosstown, which is billions over budget, and it's so far behind that the government can't actually give residents of Toronto a new date for when that line will actually be put into service. I would suggest that that's the kind of thing that would actually make a difference in the people of Ontario's lives.

We had talked about giving an increase to the Ontario Child Benefit. My colleague mentioned that. That would actually put money in the pockets of Ontarians to help feed their families as they struggle to pay rent and deal with double-digit rent increases.

We know that people are continuing to struggle with mental health. We know that we have an addiction crisis. We know that people are living on our streets and that shelter systems are full. This would have been an opportunity to provide some funding for that, to make sure that those people do have a roof over their heads, especially as the winter approaches.

Just today, we were visited—many of us—by the librarians of Ontario. We heard from them about how, certainly in the last budget consultations, they talked about the need for public funding for Ontario digital libraries. They have yet to get that funding. Just \$15 million would give Ontario libraries the start to a digital library, and that would give live, online tutoring to students from K to grade 12. That is the kind of support that Ontarians need right now. We know that our schools are suffering. We know that our teachers are feeling stressed by both the demands from COVID that students are still facing, learning challenges, and that they need those kinds of supports.

Madam Speaker, we know that we have a government that has also doubled down on privatization. As you know, in the standing orders, we are not recognized as an official party, and so we have to ask for unanimous consent to speak to ministers' statements. We asked for that last week, regarding the fall economic statement, and we were denied. And so, while I didn't have a chance then, I did have a chance in the media studio to talk about the infrastructure bank.

Basically, what that infrastructure bank will mean is that private money will be looking for returns. They will be looking for returns that are greater than the returns they get on debt. The government can go to the market today and issue debt, and investors or people in the markets can invest in Ontario. What this infrastructure bank is about is giving an even higher rate of return to investors. We have pension plans that invest in these kinds of things, and they make returns of about 11%, but those are from for-profit companies. So what this infrastructure bank is really about is privatization.

When I listened to the minister in the media studio, he was asked that question exactly: Does this mean more privatization in Ontario? He shirked the question. He didn't answer it directly. I certainly know that that is really what we will be facing in our health care system: more privatization. It could be in transportation, and it could also be in education. Those are things that certainly are worrying to the people of Ontario.

When I look at this bill, there are a couple things that are positive. We've heard about a couple things from members. Certainly the idea that there will be a tax on vaping—that is something that could discourage young people in particular from taking vaping up, and so that is something that we certainly welcome.

Related to the student debt that was talked about: I think that is quite troubling. Again, this is a time when we know that we are facing a period of potential economic slow-down in 2024, and so it seems a particularly cruel time to be basically telling students that you are going to call their debt without giving them any notice. Those kinds of things actually will hurt the people of Ontario, and I think those are the kinds of measures that show that this government really does not understand the affordability crisis people are facing.

As has been pointed out, the word "affordability" does not appear once. The government seems to be more focused on building million-dollar homes and enriching their friends in the greenbelt. They only retracted that decision when the Auditor General and the Integrity Commissioner basically told the people of Ontario what was really going on. Now we have an RCMP investigation into that. That's the kind of thing this government seems to be focused on, rather helping the people of Ontario who are, again, struggling with rent, struggling in our health care system, struggling in our education system and struggling with mental health. Those are the things we should be focused on, Madam Speaker, especially as we think about recovering from the pandemic.

The other thing I'll talk about is productivity. Productivity in the economy is really important, and one of

the things that can drive productivity is getting more people into the workforce. We all know that working parents are struggling to find daycare. While the government has opened up a new daycare, as they were proud to announce, we can't hire the people. The YMCA has talked repeatedly about how they are unable to fill the spots that they have. Of the 35,000 spots that they have, I think 19,000 are empty because they can't hire ECE workers, and that's because of the government's Bill 124, which restricts the pay to those workers.

Madam Speaker, people who want to go back to work need a place for their children, and actually paying our ECE workers a fair wage, getting those spots staffed would help people get back to work. That would help our economy. Those are things that could have been talked about in this bill instead of simply some measures around the tax act, which again—that will help some wealthy Ontarians, people who can invest, who have investable income, but we know there are many working families who are not in that situation and are struggling today.

I would ask that the government side think about what true debate is. True debate is when we can listen to one side of an argument—or you have a view of one side and you listen to another side, and you say, by listening to the other side, you learn something new and you think about a better way to do something. I would certainly like the government side to think about the motion that was mentioned this morning by my fellow member from Orléans about reducing the provincial portion of the HST on home heating. That's the kind of thing that could actually, again, put money back into the pockets of Ontarians. That's an idea that could be a positive amendment to this bill that would actually help people who are struggling to pay for housing and pay for food.

That's the kind of debate that I want to make sure we have here, where the government brings forward a bill and there's a sufficient chance to debate that bill, for that bill to go to committee, have hearings that are fulsome, where people and stakeholders can come and talk about that bill, and then we see real improvements made. That, I think, would be a real sign to getting all members of this House to vote for this bill. That is something that could happen if the government side would listen to some of the ideas that are coming from those of us on this side of the House who also want to make this province a better place for the people of Ontario.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly): It's now time for questions.

Mr. Mike Harris: I'm curious to get the member from Don Valley West's take on a balanced budget. That is something that previous Liberal governments were not able to do, and it is something that, through the fall economic statement, we're looking forward to in 2025. So I wanted to get her thoughts on whether she thinks that's important, because I know a lot of people I talk to, not only in Kitchener–Conestoga and Waterloo region but across the province, are very keen to see that happen. I would like to get her thoughts.

Ms. Stephanie Bowman: Thank you to the member for the question. It's interesting; there were balanced budgets

in at least three years in the last 15 under the previous Liberal government, so I don't think it's quite fair to say that that did not happen. There are balanced budgets under governments of all stripes.

What I will say is that balanced budgets are something—you have to look at the economy at the time. You've got to look at the situation you're facing.

1540

When you think about the recession in 2008, that was a global recession, right? Yes, it was a global recession, and at that time there was some investment required to make sure that people were able to keep food on the table and survive those challenging times. Basically, we need to look at the situation around us to decide whether or not a deficit budget, balanced budget or surplus budget is the right answer.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly): Further questions?

Mrs. Jennifer (Jennie) Stevens: Speaker, through you to either of the members: We agree that the mini-budget does not go far enough to address affordability issues. On affordable housing, however, a report stated not-for-profit development of rental houses is not being encouraged in Ontario, which sounds like it is recent, but it's actually from a 2017 AG report on Ontario social housing.

How does the Ontario Liberal Party now reflect on this period, and what lessons have been learned to better address the current housing affordability crisis here in Ontario?

Ms. Stephanie Bowman: Well, certainly building affordable housing is something I think we all agree needs to be a priority. I think that certainly in the recent debate going on amongst the Liberal leadership candidates, there have been lots of ideas put forward about positive ideas around housing, including having a fund that could actually build social housing.

So I think that is something that is certainly being discussed at length right now amongst our caucus and our leadership candidates, and I think that we've got a view in this government where we need to help them see that investing in affordable housing is actually positive. In my riding recently, I was surprised to learn about a transit-oriented community that will be built with Metrolinx, and I hope they might consider things like co-op housing there.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly): Further questions?

M^{me} Dawn Gallagher Murphy: My question is directed to the member from Don Valley East. Having heard the member speak on many occasions and knowing enough about his background, I know that he would support building a healthier and safer Ontario. For that reason, I am sure that the member is supportive of our decision to provide more access to connecting women to breast cancer screening.

With that in mind, my question to the member from Don Valley East is, would you, then, confirm in the House today that you will support and vote for this budget, because you would be supporting a move a lower eligibility

age for publicly funded mammograms from 50 to 40 years of age?

Mr. Adil Shamji: As is so typical of this government, there are lots of promises but nothing to back up the words with action. For example, there is a proposal to offer mammograms to women below 50, but there is no funding for that. You cannot perform mammograms unless there is funding for more staff, for more infrastructure, for more technical fees. So I find it audacious, preposterous, that this government can grandstand as though they're actually going to help patients, when they say the words but don't back it up with the dollars or the action to actually deliver on their promises. That is a very consistent pattern, time and time again.

Mr. Sol Mamakwa: We know that people in Ontario are feeling set back by the rising costs of rent, mortgages, groceries and everyday essentials, but it's very noticeable and evident in Kiiwetinoong. It is more extravagant, the amount you have to spend.

But what's happening as well is the addictions, the suicide crisis, the mental health crisis. I want to ask a question to the members: Do you see anything here that addresses the addiction issues, the suicide crisis, the mental health crisis? Is there anything in the budget here that supports people, that will actually save lives, not save money?

Mr. Adil Shamji: I do want to thank the member for his question. I've spent a lot of time working up north, and there have been times when I have been able to appreciate the exact affordability challenges that he speaks of, times where I've been up north and I've had to pay \$14 for a single litre of milk. This is outrageous.

But what's even more outrageous is the fact that we have an opioid crisis, an addiction crisis across our province. We have a mental health road map that has been bandied about for the last five years that needs to see massive and sustained improvements and increases, especially increases in funding, especially as it relates to delivering those services in rural and remote parts of Ontario.

So I want to reiterate: There is this road map to mental health or mental wellness, but so much more needs to be done. I look forward to working with the Associate Minister of Mental Health and Addictions to push the government to address that in greater detail.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly): Further questions?

Mr. Anthony Leardi: If memory serves me correctly—and I would certainly like to be corrected if I'm wrong—I don't believe the previous Liberal government ever delivered a budget with a clean audit, whereas, in comparison, this present government has delivered, I think, every single budget and fall economic statement with a clean audit.

Now, I know that the member from Don Valley West, who herself is an accountant, must be absolutely scandalized by the record of the previous Liberal government. My question to the member from Don Valley East is, is he equally scandalized by it?

Mr. Adil Shamji: This is amazing—the audacity of the member across to utter the word “scandalized” within the context of this government’s background of the greenbelt debacle, urban boundary flip-flop, the fact that they are under an RCMP criminal investigation. The Minister of Public and Business Service Delivery, just before in his remarks, also had the audacity to use the words “aiding and abetting”—again, just an absolutely tone-deaf use of semantics within the context of a government that seems to be embroiled in ethics scandal and Integrity Commissioner report after Auditor General report.

My friends in the government across, the members across: I would suggest, do a little bit of self-reflection and have some self-awareness before choosing your words. This is preposterous.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly): Further questions?

Ms. Peggy Sattler: My question to either of the members, from Don Valley East or West, is around the unprecedented size of the contingency budget that is included in the fall economic statement. It’s now at \$5 billion. Typically a government would put aside about a billion in contingency.

Is the member concerned about the size of the contingency, and why do they think the government is going in this direction?

Ms. Stephanie Bowman: Thank you to the member for the question. Yes, absolutely, contingency funds are something that we’ve talked a lot about. In the recent financial statements of the government, they finally booked \$2.5 billion related to the settlement of the unconstitutional Bill 124. That’s because they know that it is likely to happen and they know the amount. I believe, Madam Speaker, that there’s likely more money put in this contingency fund because they expect more things like that to happen, more things that will come out of the woodwork that they will need to pay for.

A billion dollars is absolutely sufficient for a contingency fund, especially in this time when we know that we’ve got programs that are underfunded, so—

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly): Further debate?

Ms. Chandra Pasma: It’s a pleasure to rise today on behalf of the residents of Ottawa West–Nepean to speak to Bill 146, Building a Strong Ontario Together Act.

Just for context, this is a bill that’s enacting budget measures following on the government’s fall economic statement, which came two weeks ago, right before the constituency week. That was a fall economic statement that really failed to reflect the moment that we are in here in Ontario. People in Ontario and Ottawa West–Nepean are really struggling, and we are not seeing any acknowledgement of that coming from the government.

But last night, Speaker, I was at the Cardinal’s Dinner, where the Premier spoke, here in Toronto. I almost fell off my chair, because the Premier actually did acknowledge that people were struggling here in Ontario. He acknowledged that homelessness is increasing, that we are seeing more people who are living on our streets and in

encampments, that lineups at food banks in Ontario are increasing, that people can’t pay everyday expenses or afford a home. I thought, “Wow, this is really amazing progress,” and I was waiting to hear what the Premier’s plan was to address these issues that people are struggling with in Ontario. Instead, once again, somehow he’s powerless to do anything about it. The Premier of the province is somehow powerless to do anything about these problems that fall squarely within his jurisdiction. In fact, he’s busy trying to make people believe that everything within their control is absolutely amazing and everything that people are struggling with in Ontario is the fault of another government.

1550

Now, I am the parent of a teenager. My daughter turned 13 this summer and was instantly a teenager. I don’t know how many other members here have teenagers, but this is reminding me very strongly of an experience I have repeatedly with my daughter. She likes to bake, and my husband and I have been very clear with her that the condition for using the kitchen is that you must clean up after yourself. The kitchen must be returned to the state that it was in before you started baking. And she always—

Mr. Mike Harris: Hear, hear.

Ms. Chandra Pasma: Exactly—the member from Kitchener–Conestoga must have similar conditions with his teenagers.

Every time, she agrees: “Yes, yes, the kitchen will returned to the condition that it’s in.” And 40 minutes later, I walk into the kitchen, and the sink is full of dirty dishes, there is cupcake batter along the counter, and my daughter is next door in the family room watching TV. I call her in and I say, “What happened? You promised you would clean the kitchen,” and she says, “I did,” like she is physically not capable of seeing the dirty dishes in the sink or the cupcake batter on the counter.

So I walk her over to the counter, and I say, “But look, these weren’t here before you started, and neither was this batter on the counter.” And all of a sudden, she says, “Oh, that was my little sister’s job to clean up.” That’s what we’re seeing happen from the Premier of the province here. Apparently he is literally incapable of seeing the mess created by his government’s policies. And when he can’t avoid it, then somehow it’s the federal government’s fault; it’s the fault of the previous government.

As someone I spoke to said recently, this government is a perpetual victim. Five and a half years into their term, they are still the victim of the previous government and of the federal government. At a certain point, you have to wonder: If the Premier five and a half years into his term is a perpetual victim, then maybe we should stop electing victims and start electing people who actually want to use the power that they have as Premier of the province to make life better for people in the province of Ontario.

But what we have, in this moment when people are really struggling, is a fall economic update and now a bill that doesn’t mention the words “affordability” or “affordable.” Other words that don’t appear are “cost of living,” “rent,” “food,” “price gouging,” “social assistance,” “dis-

ability” or “education.” People are struggling daily, and yet this government is so bereft of ideas, so mired in scandal and police investigations of their government that they do not seem to have anything to offer the people of Ontario. And that’s despite the fact they have the funds, they have the resources to invest in the lives of Ontarians that will actually make their lives better. They’re sitting on \$5.4 billion in a contingency fund that’s unallocated that could be going to address affordability, that could be going to address health care, that could be going to address disabilities, that could be going to address education. And instead of spending that money on things that will make the lives of people in Ontario better, they are just sitting on those funds.

The only ideas that the government seems to be able to come up with right now are ideas to make already-wealthy land speculators richer, and in that area, they’ve managed to be quite creative, because they have found quite a few ways.

So today, I want to offer the government a few ideas, remind them of the power that they actually have to get things done for people in Ottawa West–Nepean and in Ontario today. We are seeing record numbers of people using food banks in Ontario. Every single year under this government is a new record number of users. This week, we learned one in 10 people in the city of Toronto are now using a food bank. We’re waiting on the numbers in Ottawa next week, but I know that those numbers are also going to be a record because what I am seeing and hearing from food banks in Ottawa West–Nepean is that they cannot keep up with the demand and, in fact, they have had to extend their hours into the evening and on weekends to accommodate people who are working full-time and still can’t put food on the table without going to a food bank.

The food bank at the Pinecrest Terrace Community House told me that by the time people call them, they are desperate. They have tried every other solution they can think of to find food to feed their families, and yet the demand is so high that the Pinecrest Terrace Community Food Bank can’t give them an appointment for three to four weeks. People are going desperate with no food at all, waiting three to four weeks for a food bank appointment because the demand is so high.

Food banks are also providing less food because they can’t stretch it far enough, and food banks themselves are on the verge of collapse, having difficulty keeping the lights on. In my riding of Ottawa West–Nepean, the Caldwell food bank nearly had to close for six weeks this summer because they couldn’t keep the lights on and pay their employees any longer. Thankfully, the Ottawa Food Bank was able to step in with some emergency funding because of the thousands of families that would have had to go without food if the food bank closed for just six weeks. Yet, this government killed the social services relief funding which was keeping Caldwell and many other food banks across our province operating.

But the truth is that food banks don’t want to expand. They don’t want to be open for longer hours. They don’t want to be serving more clients. They want to see the

government actually tackle the reasons why so many people in the province are hungry—things, again, that are absolutely within this government’s power that they could do something about today.

The government is directly responsible for setting the income level of people on social assistance, and what are they doing? At a moment of huge increases in the cost of living, they have left people on social assistance languishing in deep poverty at rates that are well below the cost of housing, let alone other expenses. Rent for a one-bedroom apartment in Ottawa is now going for \$2,050 a month. A single person on Ontario Works gets only \$730 a month. If you even doubled it, they still wouldn’t be able to afford an apartment. A single person on ODSP is getting \$1,308 a month. That’s still \$700 below the cost of rent, and they still have to buy food, groceries and other medical necessities.

I have many constituents reaching out to me about ODSP. This is one email that I received: “My husband and I are both on ODSP and are needing to move from our home of 21 years as the landlady needs to sell.

“The amount that we get from ODSP and CPP disability isn’t meeting our needs now and on top of it is nowhere near enough to cover rent in today’s marketplace in Ottawa. Nobody wants to rent to someone on ODSP when you tell them that you are receiving assistance and definitely not to two people on ODSP. Our credit ratings are both in the high-700s and not even this helps us.

“How can we make the Ford government understand that there is no subsidized housing available anywhere? With food prices skyrocketing and heat and electricity doing the same, I just don’t know what to do anymore. The line at our local food bank is a nightmare and it is only getting worse.”

This is another constituent: “I’m writing in regard to Ontario Works and the fact that it is much too low for anyone to live on. ODSP was changed, and that was great. But Ontario Works needs to increase as well. Absolutely no one can live on \$700 to \$900 a month with rent, cellphone, food, transportation etc. Many people are becoming homeless, living in situations that are not healthy or safe. Shelters are full with waiting lists. Food banks are struggling to keep up with the needs. Ontario is increasing the amount of poverty in this province. It needs to change! Put yourself in the shoes of people that are struggling every single day. It is not fair to increase ODSP and leave everyone on Ontario Works unseen. This issue needs to be addressed, especially in our nation’s capital. Parliament Hill is well cared for while a block or two away, people are living on the streets.”

The government has within their power the capacity to increase social assistance rates today if they wanted to. They are choosing not to do that.

It’s not just people who are on social assistance who are using the food banks. In fact, they’re seeing an increase in the number of people who are working full-time. The food banks in my riding tell me they’re seeing people who haven’t been there for three or four years because they got a job and got back on their feet. They still have that job,

they haven't lost the job, but the job is no longer paying the bills anymore.

1600

Statistics Canada data that came out earlier this week show that wages for the bottom 50% of wage earners—let me say that again: 50% of wage earners—in Ontario are actually declining. In 2021, the average wage for the bottom 50% went down 3.7%; the median wage went down 4.9%.

The government wants you to believe that affordability is somehow all the fault of the federal government—in fact, the member for Kitchener–Conestoga was just saying this—but they control the minimum wage for the people of Ontario. They can increase the minimum wage for people living in Ontario and help them to afford rent and groceries and other things.

To rent an apartment in Ottawa, someone working full-time at minimum wage literally needs to pay 77% of their income on housing. The living wage in Ottawa is \$21.95 an hour. The minimum wage under this government is only \$16.55. It's absolutely shameful. People cannot get by.

In addition to increasing the minimum wage, the government could improve the quality of jobs in Ontario by cracking down on exploitative practices, including the use of permanent temps; facilitating unionization; bringing in anti-scab legislation. There's so much the government could do to address the quality of jobs and wages in Ontario.

They could also address the cost side by addressing the cost of housing, bringing in real rent control, reinstating vacancy control. I hear so many stories from constituents whose landlords are trying to force them out, knowing that they can jack up the rent on the next tenants.

The government could also create a public agency, Housing Ontario, as my colleague from London North Centre has suggested, and actually fund and build not-for-profit, deeply affordable housing in Ontario. We used to do that. Even the Bill Davis government did that. Governments of all political stripes did that. The government could move on this today and start getting back into the business of building affordable housing in Ontario.

Then, there's the price of groceries.

This is an email from a constituent about the cost of groceries:

"I am writing you this email as a constituent of yours from Nepean, and a resident of Ontario that is horrified by the rising grocery prices, and lack of social services available for ... Ontarians. Tonight, while grocery shopping at the Carling Ave. Metro ..., we were approached by a man asking for change, and then asking if we had any food. After talking to him about his situation, we asked if we could help with groceries.

"We got a cart for the man, and asked him to gather groceries he needed. He was now living in community housing, had access to a freezer and stove, and had already used the food bank for the month....

"The cost of groceries for this man came out to \$240. Once upon a time, that would have been my family's

grocery bill for December (turkey, and all the fixings for the holiday included—and I had five siblings). I want to make it clear that this man did not abuse our generosity. His purchase was groceries for a month, with smart purchases like Ensure, and Gatorade, with his most indulgent request being three bags of Lay's plain potato chips and toilet paper.

"I ask, how is the average Canadian supposed to stay fed? This was a single man, and these would have been enough groceries for my sister-in-law and brother for their two children for maybe two weeks, if they stretched it out. Went without any breakfast, avoided any 'indulgent' dairy or butter or eggs. Beyond what was required to make the four boxes of Kraft Dinner (\$10).

"While Galen Weston weeps in front of the government over how mistreated he is by average Canadians, he abuses his monopoly on groceries and pharmacies to make us pay exorbitant prices.... What are we doing to help these Canadians? What are we doing to stop Shoppers from charging \$30 for a Quo hairbrush (the only ones available by the way) or \$4 for a box of Kraft Dinner. I have a difficult time believing that there has been a 400% increase in the cost of dried noodles and cheese powder."

These are the kinds of cost increases that Canadians are dealing with at the grocery store. And yet, what did we learn today? We learned that Loblaw's third-quarter profits went up 11.7% this year compared to last year. Loblaw's raked in \$621 million in profit in a single quarter while Ontarians are watering down their milk, cutting back on meat and reusing diapers. And yet somehow, all this Premier can bring himself to do is to gift investment opportunities to Galen Weston instead of siding with desperate Ontarians, which he could do today.

One area where we are seeing a slight increase in spending, Speaker, is in health care. But, sadly, even in this area, that increase is not going to Ontarians who are in desperate need of health care: the 2.2 million people who do not have a family doctor; the people who are waiting 12 hours to see a doctor at the Queensway Carleton Hospital. Instead, what we learned this week, thanks to a freedom-of-information request—because the government, strangely, didn't want to volunteer this information—is that the government is paying three to four times as much to private, for-profit health care providers in the province of Ontario to provide the same surgeries that are being provided for much less in our public hospitals. These are public funds that are going directly into the profits of wealthy investors in Ontario instead of going to provide greater health care for people in Ontario who desperately, desperately need it. That's in addition to failing to provide appropriate support for home and community care, and continuing their appeal of Bill 124, which means that we continue to bleed health care workers every single day.

Then, of course, there's education, where spending is down under this government by 11%. This is despite the fact that our children are struggling. They are struggling because of the impact of the pandemic, where this government closed schools in Ontario for more days than any other jurisdiction in North America, and where this

government is failing to provide the resources that our children need to recover their learning, to address their mental health and to make sure that our children have a safe and healthy place to learn every single day. In fact, when you look at per-student spending in the province of Ontario, this government is spending \$1,200 less per student when you account for inflation between 2018 and 2023.

What does that mean in tangible terms for our students? It means that many of our students are in overcrowded classrooms. In Ottawa West–Nepean, in some cases the classroom is so crowded that the students can't even have desks; they have to sit at tables because it's the only way to pack all the students in. It means that our students who require special education supports aren't getting those supports that they need, that schools are desperately trying to triage who gets access to the resource teacher, who gets an educational assistant. The educational assistants themselves are running in between classrooms, holding walkie-talkies, trying to figure out which student is having the greatest emergency so that they can provide immediate care to them while other students' needs are going unaddressed.

It means that 50% of our schools do not have any kind of access to regularly scheduled mental health resources, and nine out of 10 principals in Ontario say they need more support for mental health than what they are getting from this government. It means that we have absolute chaos for school buses in Ontario, in no small part because the government somehow forgot to include non-bus forms of student transportation, even though students with special education needs and students who are in larger school boards, particularly francophone school boards with huge geographic areas—it doesn't make sense to be running a big bus, and so kids can't even get to school, which means they can't even learn.

And it means, unfortunately, that we have normalized violence for our students in schools. One teacher told me that, as she was spending her own money once again, she spent money on an evacuation kit for her students because she knows evacuations are going to happen because of the level of violence. So this is absolutely a fall economic statement from the government that fails to meet—

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly): It's now time for questions. I recognize the member for Kitchener–Conestoga.

Mr. Mike Harris: Well, thank you very much, Madam Speaker, and I just—I'm not using this as a prop. I just want to make that clear. I'm just making sure I get everything out here.

On page 68 of the fall economic statement, it says, "On October 1, 2023, the government increased the general minimum wage from \$15.50 to \$16.55 per hour"—a 6.8% increase, Madam Speaker. A worker who is working minimum wage for 40 hours a week will see an extra \$2,200—\$2,200—added to their paycheque.

For the member opposite to stand up in her place and say that a 6.8% wage increase is not a factor, I don't understand how that can be the case, because I'm pretty

sure that anyone across Ontario would be very happy to see an extra \$2,200 deposited into their bank account.

1610

Ms. Chandra Pasma: Thanks to the member from Kitchener–Conestoga for that question. Now, I wasn't here in 2018, but the member from Kitchener–Conestoga was, so you'll remember that one of the first actions of your government was actually to cancel the scheduled increase to the minimum wage, which means that minimum-wage earners in Ontario lost several thousand dollars out of their pockets over the last few years because of where the minimum wage would have been if your government had not come to power compared to what it was. So you know what? A delayed increase to the minimum wage—sure, it's better than a kick in the pants, but it does not in any way make up for the fact that this government depressed wages of minimum wage earners in Ontario over the last five years.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly): Further questions?

Mr. Terence Kernaghan: I'd like to thank the member for Ottawa West–Nepean for an excellent presentation on Bill 146. What the member has pointed out is what amounts to a clear and calculated omission of discussing rent or rent control within the fall economic statement, as well as Bill 146.

My question, though, is, how has this government ignoring the gaping loophole of vacancy decontrol, as well as the removal of rent control in 2018, exacerbated the homelessness crisis?

Ms. Chandra Pasma: Thanks to my colleague from London North Centre for that excellent question and for all of his advocacy on behalf of people in Ontario who are desperately in need of affordable housing.

One of the top issues that my office hears about is tenants who are in positions where their landlord is trying to force them out so that the landlord can increase the rent. One of the most egregious cases that we've dealt with is a safety situation where there's been high turnover because the landlord hasn't been addressing a safety situation.

What we saw was that in the course of just six months, the rent increased from \$1,400 a month for the first tenant to \$1,900 for the second tenant to \$2,600 a month for the third tenant, and that was all in the course of 2023. So landlords are absolutely using their ability to set the rent at whatever they want in between tenants to jack up rents, and they are doing whatever they can to force people out so they can do that. We need to make sure that renters have protection against that so that they're paying what the last tenant paid and people in Ontario are actually able to find affordable housing that meets their needs.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly): Further questions?

Mr. Mike Harris: I actually think Bob Rae removed rent control back in the mid-1990s, if I'm not mistaken—the one chance the NDP ever had at government.

But I do want to talk a little bit about ODSP because the member did bring that up as well. I just wanted to let her know that, since 2022, there's been an 11.5% increase in

ODSP rates, and not only that but for the first time in the history of the province it's actually tied and indexed to inflation.

So when we look at what we're doing around minimum wage, when we look at what we're doing around supporting low-income earners by removing the provincial portion of income taxes, when we look at what we're doing to support people on ODSP, when we look at what's happening in the fall economic statement, we are on the right track to helping Ontarians, we are on the right track to bringing more money back in their pockets, and I just can't understand why the member opposite wants to stand in the way of that.

Ms. Chandra Pasma: Once again, I wasn't here in 2018, but the member was, when one of the first things his government did was to cancel an increase to ODSP. Once again, people on ODSP would have gotten several thousand dollars more in their pockets over the last few years if it weren't for this government. Then, yes, you did attach ODSP rates to inflation, finally, last year, but ODSP was so low—was attached to inflation at a rate that was so low that people on ODSP are living in deep poverty. So it's not that helpful to people to have a deep poverty income that is attached to inflation, especially not when the ODSP rate doesn't even allow someone on ODSP to rent an apartment, let alone—

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly): I recognize the member for London West.

Ms. Peggy Sattler: Thank you to my colleague the member for Ottawa West–Nepean for her remarks. I want to focus on what she's talked about with regard to the education system. My colleagues and I in London had the opportunity to meet with the Thames Valley District School Board trustees and senior administration last week. One of the things they told us is that the special incidence portion of the education funding that flows to school boards has not increased in 10 years. This is funding that is used to support the highest-need kids in our classrooms. The lack of that funding has meant that school boards can't hire the EAs they need, and they can't offer the wages that EAs need, to support kids in classes.

What does the member think this budget should have done to deal with those high-needs students in our schools?

Ms. Chandra Pasma: Thank you to my colleague from London West for this great question. I think how a government treats the most vulnerable members of our society really reveals who a government is at heart. What we see repeatedly with this government is that they cannot bring themselves to actually fund the supports, the resources and the education that children with disabilities and with special needs in the province of Ontario actually need. The government is underfunding special education by millions and millions of dollars. There are many kids who are going without the supports they need: the EAs, the smaller class sizes that would actually allow them to be at school safely and learn.

What we actually need to do, what a government that actually cared about these kids would do, is fund special

education based on the cost of special education rather than constantly underfunding and forcing these kids to go without.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly): Further questions?

M^{me} Dawn Gallagher Murphy: To the member opposite: You may be aware that in the fall of 2022 the federal government had implemented a federal vaping tax, and subsequently, the federal government had invited all the provinces and territories to participate in this tax. Ontario is responding to this invitation to enable the federal government to levy an additional excise tax duty on vaping products which are intended for sale here in Ontario at the same rate as the existing federal excise duty.

My question to the member opposite is, do you agree with our economic statement and will you vote for it? Because what we're doing is we're entering into a coordinated vaping product taxation agreement.

Ms. Chandra Pasma: Thank you to the member for Newmarket–Aurora for the question. It's interesting to know that the provincial government can apparently exercise their powers when they're invited to do so by the federal government. Perhaps what we in the official opposition need to do is write to the federal government to ask them to ask the provincial government to please increase social assistance rates, address cost of living, reinstate real rent control, invest in education and actually invest in public health care so that people in Ontario are getting the very real needs that they are experiencing every day actually addressed by this government.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly): We have time for one more question. Further questions?

Mr. Anthony Leardi: At the beginning of the previous Liberal mandate, they introduced the biggest single tax increase in the history of the province of Ontario. They then racked up the hugest debt, and leaving at the end of their mandate—making Ontario the largest indebted sub-jurisdiction in the world—the highest tax rate, the worst debt.

My question to the member is this: How many years do you think it's going to take this Progressive Conservative government to undo the massive, massive damage done to the finances of Ontario by the previous Liberal government?

Ms. Chandra Pasma: At the rate this government is going, people are going to be in jail long before they ever get the chance to tackle the damage that was done by the Liberal government. But I certainly hope that they will stop hiding money in contingency funds and actually start investing in Ontarians.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly): It is now time for further debate.

Mr. Mike Schreiner: It's always an honour to rise here in the House, today to debate Bill 146, the budget measures act to implement the fall economic statement.

Speaker, we are debating this bill at a time when the people of Ontario are facing a huge affordability crisis, driven by an unprecedented housing affordability crisis. You would not know that reading the fall economic statement.

The government had an opportunity with the fall economic statement to change the channel on their \$8.3-billion greenbelt scandal, to change the channel on the fact that they've wasted the last two years not building homes that ordinary people can afford to live in in the communities they know and love, close to where they work, and instead prioritizing benefits for a handful of land speculators.

1620

Speaker, I want to tell you what I would like to see in the fall economic statement to address the housing affordability crisis coming out of what many have described as a master class plan to deliver the solutions Ontarians need to address the housing crisis that I released over two and a half years ago. There are three key points that we need to see in this fall economic statement: (1) is support to help co-ops, non-profit and supportive housing providers address the needs for deep affordability in our housing supply; (2) is we need to increase market supply by supporting municipalities to be able to build the infrastructure, to provide infrastructure for that supply and to actually legalize housing, which are in the Bills 44 and 45 I have proposed; and (3), the government could have used the fall economic statement as an opportunity to drive speculation out of the housing market so first-time homebuyers can be on a level playing field.

Why is it so important that this government actually make investments in non-profit and co-op housing—which for whatever reason they refused to do in the fall economic statement even though we're facing an unprecedented housing affordability crisis? Well, first of all, 0% of rental housing is affordable for a minimum wage worker in almost every city in the province of Ontario; 180,000 households in this province are on a wait-list to access housing.

We know the previous governments, prior to 1995, invested in non-profit, co-op and social housing. As a matter of fact, 93% of the deeply affordable homes built in the province of Ontario were built before 1995. That was the year that the upper levels of government stopped supporting that kind of housing. Why is it not in the fall economic statement?

Think of somebody on ODSP trying to survive on \$1,200 a month when rents in places like Guelph and Kitchener are now \$2,000, even higher in a place like Toronto. Even the government's own Housing Affordability Task Force—I don't know if the government has ever read their own task force report—says, "While many of the changes that will help deliver market housing will also help make it easier to deliver affordable housing, affordable housing is a societal responsibility. We cannot rely exclusively on for-profit developers nor on increases in the supply of market housing to fully solve the problem." That's the government's own task force. That's why we need a fall economic statement that's going to support co-op, non-profit and supportive housing.

Second, we have to drive speculation out of the marketplace. You know that multiple property owners now own one third of the homes in Ontario. Investors

bought 77% of the over 3,000 condo apartments built in Kitchener-Waterloo between 2016 and 2020. There are now 16,000 homes being used for short-term rentals in the city of Toronto alone. So what can we do about that? The government could have introduced regulations for short-term rentals. They could have brought in a multiple-home-speculator tax to help drive speculation out of the marketplace. They could have had a province-wide vacant homes tax, so that first-time homebuyers, young families trying to own their first home, could be on a level playing field instead of bidding against deep-pocketed, oftentimes financialized investment vehicles.

Third, we have to increase housing supply in this province by legalizing housing: legalizing multiplexes, four-storey walk-up apartments, six-to-11-storey buildings along major transportation corridors. That's exactly why I've proposed bills to do that.

Do you know what, Speaker? If you look at what the government has done, according to AMO: \$5.1 billion taken away from municipalities to build infrastructure for housing, \$227 in my own riding of Guelph, \$40 million just down the road to my neighbour in Kitchener. It is clear that Kitchener needs an MPP who's going to say yes to housing and is not going to say no to housing but also an MPP who's going to join me here and demand that the government provide the funding that municipalities need to service those houses, otherwise they're not going to be built. That's how we can increase non-market supply, increase market supply and drive speculation out of the market to address this housing affordability crisis.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly): Questions?

Ms. Jennifer K. French: I was at AMO, and a lot of folks there were talking about this government's targets for municipalities and the contingent targets that were required so that they would get the funding needed to build housing and all of that. Because Guelph has been off maligned in this place by the government, I would ask the member how it's going when it comes to meeting those targets in your neck of the woods?

Mr. Mike Schreiner: I appreciate the question from the member from Oshawa. Actually, Guelph is doing pretty good—much to contradict maybe some of what we've heard from across the aisle—but we have more to do, and partly what we need is a government that is going to replace the fiscal hole that it created for municipalities.

Over a year ago, the government said they would make municipalities whole, address the \$5.1 billion they took away from municipalities to service new home building. They have not done that yet. So municipalities like Guelph are looking at a 10% tax increase because of the hole created by the provincial government. So I'm calling on the government to make municipalities whole so they can build the infrastructure needed for homes.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly): I recognize the member for Essex.

Mr. Anthony Leardi: I'll ask the member from Guelph the same question that I put earlier. When the previous Liberal government took office, they introduced the biggest tax increase in the history of the province of

Ontario. Then, over the course of the next 15 years, they racked up the largest amount of debt in the history of the province of Ontario, leaving Ontario as the most indebted sub-sovereign jurisdiction in the world.

The biggest tax increase and the biggest amount of debt: How many years does the member from Guelph think it will take this Progressive Conservative government to undo all of the massive damage done to the province of Ontario by the previous Liberal government?

Mr. Mike Schreiner: I'm certainly not going to defend the fiscal record of the previous Liberal government. I will say that it's probably going to take this government a while because they clearly haven't utilized the tools they need in the fall economic statement, and let me give you a couple of quick examples of that.

I was the only MPP in this entire Legislature—there was one MPP in this Legislature who voted against the licence plate gimmicks, costing this province \$2.5 billion in the first year, \$1.5 billion each and every year afterwards, a policy that disproportionately benefits wealthy households. Imagine if we had that money to reduce the deficit now, to invest in health care, to invest in affordable housing, to invest in things that will address the affordability crisis people are facing—

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly): I recognize the member from London West.

Ms. Peggy Sattler: My question to the member for Guelph is around that over \$5-billion contingency fund that's been set aside in this budget.

The CCPA did an analysis looking at program spending over the last five years with the numbers adjusted for inflation. They found that real per capita spending on post-secondary education has dropped 11% since 2018 when this government was elected; in children and social services, down 12%; in education, down 11%. What does the member think about a government that allows program spending to decline to that extent and also puts aside over \$5 billion in an unallocated contingency fund?

Mr. Mike Schreiner: Any accountant will tell you that this is one of the largest and unprecedented contingency funds in Ontario history. Part of me believes the government might be doing it because they've had such an awful record in losing court cases that they need to have money to be able to deal with the losses associated with their poor record in the courts.

1630

But what this really means for the people of Ontario is somebody struggling to access a doctor or an emergency department, somebody whose school doesn't have an educational assistant so their child gets the services they need, somebody at Community Living whose housing is being closed, somebody who needs an affordable home but can't get one because they refuse to invest in co-ops. Those are the real-world implications of underfunding services in this province.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly): Further debate?

Mr. Rudy Cuzzetto: It's an honour to rise this afternoon to speak in support of Bill 146, the Building a

Strong Ontario Together Act, introduced by the Minister of Finance.

Before I begin, I want to offer my deepest condolences to the minister on the passing of his mother, Ester. As the minister said, she came to Ontario as a refugee when she was just nine years old, with her family from Budapest, Hungary, at the end of World War II. Like other Hungarian Canadians, she did so much to help build a stronger Ontario, and I was proud to introduce the Hungarian Heritage Month Act to recognize their contributions.

As the minister said, Ontario grew by almost half a million people last year, including over 60,000 refugees that came from the Ukraine. We're on track for another half a million people this year. That's more growth than any US state, including the fastest-growing states, like Florida and Texas.

But after 15 years of mismanagement and under-investment, the previous Liberal government left us with an infrastructure deficit in health, long-term care, transportation, energy, at the municipal level and in so many other critical areas, as well. Our infrastructure needs to catch up and to keep pace with the growth we expect. The Minister of Finance said that this is one of the reasons he ran for office. It is one of the reasons I ran for office, and I think it's why many of us ran for office, because we know you can't have long-term prosperity without infrastructure.

Last week, I joined the President of the Treasury Board at the Royal York for a speech from the Minister of Finance to the Canadian Club. As the minister said, we can't build a hospital, road or subway overnight. We need to have a vision of how the province will look in 10 to 20 years, and we have to focus on that. That's what the fall economic statement does.

Speaker, that's why we have the most ambitious capital plan in North America: \$185 billion over 10 years. This includes the largest hospital and long-term-care building program in Canadian history. In my community of Mississauga-Lakeshore, we're building the largest hospital in Canadian history, and we just opened the largest long-term-care home in Ontario.

After the minister's speech here two weeks ago, I joined the Premier and the Minister of Long-Term Care to celebrate a real milestone in my community: the grand opening of Wellbrook Place. Speaker, this is now the largest long-term-care home in the province—larger than the Credit Valley Hospital when it first opened 38 years ago.

From 2011 to 2018, the number of Ontarians over 75 increased by 75%, but the former Liberal government, with the support of the NDP, built only 611 new long-term-care beds across the entire province. When we were elected five years ago, there were over 4,500 people on a wait-list for long-term care in Mississauga alone. We had 20% fewer long-term-care beds than the provincial average, and some of them were badly out of date, like the four-person ward rooms at the Camilla Care Community.

But now, in just one location, on Speakman Drive in Mississauga-Lakeshore, 632 residents are moving into a modern, comfortable, safe new home which follows the

latest standards for long-term care design and safety, including single-person rooms, appropriate-sized dining rooms, outdoor spaces and enhanced HVAC systems with 100% fresh air supply. This will be part of the new campus with programs and services for seniors, including a new health services building, with special services for residents living with kidney disease and advanced dementia, as well as the first residential hospice in the city of Mississauga. Again, I want to thank Tess Romain and her team at Partners Community Health, and Karli Farrow at Trillium Health Partners for all their hard work to deliver this project on an accelerated schedule.

I also want to take a moment to thank our former Ministers of Long-Term Care Merrilee Fullerton, Rod Phillips and the government House leader. Because of their work, our government is making historic investments of \$6.4 billion to build and upgrade almost 60,000 long-term-care beds here. There are projects like Wellbrook Place that are under way right across the province of Ontario, including over 1,100 beds in Mississauga-Lakeshore alone—more than any other riding in the province of Ontario.

Under the leadership of this Premier and this Deputy Premier, the government is also investing over \$48 billion in hospital infrastructure, including a historic multi-billion-dollar investment in the complete reconstruction of the Mississauga Hospital. Last month, we hit an important milestone on this project as well, as the RFP process which began last April has now closed. Construction can now begin next year on this project, which will be the largest and most advanced hospital in the history of Canada—almost triple the size of the current hospital, with 24 storeys, three million square feet, 1,000 beds and 80% in private rooms.

Mr. Anthony Leardi: That's a lot of hospital.

Mr. Rudy Cuzzetto: Yes, it is.

Speaker, in September, I joined the Premier and the Minister of Health to announce that this will include a new 200,000-square-foot women and children's hospital, which will be the first of its kind in Canada. It will transform how health care is delivered for women and children and families in Mississauga and Etobicoke. As the Minister of Finance said, this is our vision for health care, and I want to thank him again for these investments.

Speaker, I also want to thank the minister for making a new \$200-million investment in a Housing-Enabling Water Systems Fund for the repair and expansion of core water, waste water and stormwater infrastructure. Last week, I was proud to join the minister and the Minister of Infrastructure to announce this fund at the Arthur Kennedy water treatment plant in Lakeview in Mississauga-Lakeshore. An expansion there will support the construction of 16,000 new homes in the Lakeview Village on the site of the former OPG coal plant. The new water systems fund is an important step towards our province's target of at least 1.5 million homes by 2031.

Neil Rodgers, the CEO of the Ontario Home Builders' Association said that this investment "will accelerate the construction of more housing," and his "4,000 members across the province applaud the Minister of Finance for

making this necessary investment, and we join him in calling on the federal government to match this investment to unlock even more housing choices for Ontarians."

The water systems fund will build on several other programs, including the Building Faster Fund and strong-mayor powers.

It's worth taking a moment, Speaker, to reflect on how far we've come. Just a year ago, Mayor Crombie and our Mississauga city council supported only 30% of our Housing Affordability Task Force recommendations. They opposed fourplexes, and they actually shared pictures of residential streets with giant, scary orange boxes to show what a fourplex would look like, but last month, when a council motion to allow fourplexes failed, at least there was a tie of five to five. Unfortunately, Mayor Crombie missed the vote. She was busy campaigning—

Mr. Anthony Leardi: She wasn't even there?

Mr. Rudy Cuzzetto: No, she was not.

Mr. Anthony Leardi: What a shame.

Mr. Rudy Cuzzetto: She was on a podcast, but fortunately she was able to override the council vote with the strong-mayors power that we gave her—which she did not want—in July.

I also want to thank the Premier and the Minister of Finance for their leadership in removing the HST on new purpose-built rental housing, including apartment buildings, student housing and senior residences built for long-term rentals. For a new two-bedroom rental unit valued at \$500,000, this will mean a \$40,000-tax cut from the province, and \$25,000 from the federal government.

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The Federation of Rental-housing Providers of Ontario will be here at Queen's Park next week, and I know that they are very excited about these changes.

I want to join the minister, as well, in calling on the federal government to match our \$42-million top-up to the Canada-Ontario Housing Benefit, to provide urgent help for newcomers claiming asylum. This is a federal-provincial program that should be cost-shared 50-50. As the Minister of Finance said, Ontario has done its part, and now the federal government should do their part.

Speaker, the minister's plan also includes \$71 billion for transit infrastructure, including the new 18-kilometre Hazel McCallion LRT line on Hurontario, which is still on budget and on schedule, to open next fall. Last year, I joined the President of the Treasury Board, who was then the Minister of Transportation, to see the first piece of LRT track installed in Mississauga. And just this past week, we marked another milestone, as the first LRT tracks were installed in Port Credit. They will connect to the Port Credit GO train station, with 15-minute service or better, and the new bus rapid transit line on Lakeshore. We're working towards a modern, reliable transit network right across the GTA.

We also recognize the cost of traffic gridlock. That is why this government is investing \$28 billion to expand and improve our highway network, because we know this is critical to the economic well-being of Ontario.

As the fall economic statement notes, we just hit another important milestone, as the first phase of the

QEW/Dixie interchange improvements is now complete in Mississauga–Lakeshore. And then, at the end of August, the new twin bridge over the Credit River opened to traffic on the QEW. This is part of the \$314-million QEW/Credit River improvement project.

When I spoke last year about my friend from Brampton North's motion in support of Highway 413, I mentioned that the highest court in Alberta found that our federal Parliament is not allowed to require federal oversight and approval of intra-provincial projects like Highway 413—in other words, the federal Impact Assessment Act that they were using to target Highway 413 for a potential federal EA is unconstitutional—and a month ago, the Supreme Court of Canada agreed. In a 5-2 decision, Chief Justice Wagner wrote that the federal government clearly overstepped. So, again, I want to call on the federal government to withdraw so we can complete the provincial EA for Highway 413 and build this important provincial project as soon as possible.

But as the minister said, we know that Ontario taxpayers alone can't build all the infrastructure we need. We need to attract trusted investors, like Canadian public sector pension plans, to help us build essential infrastructure. Many of these plans already make investments in infrastructure around the world. Just take one example: The Ontario Teachers' Pension Plan has over \$200 billion in investments, including water infrastructure in Australia, roads in the US and India, electricity infrastructure in Brazil and Chile—and I could go on. The Ontario Infrastructure Bank will give pension funds like this new options to put their members' investments to work right here in the province of Ontario. And as the minister said, it will follow in the steps of many other places around the world with similar banks—including our federal government, the UK government, and US states like California and Connecticut.

Finally, in the time I have left, I want to thank the minister for schedules 3 and 4 of Bill 146, which would extend our gas and fuel tax cuts until the end of June 2024. As Jay Goldberg, the Ontario director of the Canadian Taxpayers Federation, said, "This gas tax cut extension is great news for Ontario taxpayers." This "gas tax cut has saved the typical Ontario family hundreds of dollars over the past 18 months, and this will ensure that critical relief continues into 2024."

At the same time, the federal government has announced an exemption to their carbon tax for home heating. Unfortunately, Speaker, it only applies to home heating oil, which is used by 40% of homes in PEI and 32% of homes in Nova Scotia, but only 2% right here in Ontario. And I want to join the Premier—and the Premiers across the country, including the newly elected NDP Premier Kinew in Manitoba—in calling on the federal government to provide an exemption for all Canadians, including those who are heating their homes with natural gas.

As the Premier wrote in an open letter, providing relief only to Atlantic Canada is not fair and it is causing division across the country. As the Premier pointed out, the federal Liberal ministers said on CTV that Atlantic Liberal MPs

lobbied for a special exemption for home heating oil, and if other provinces want exemptions, "perhaps they need to elect more Liberals." Speaker, there are 76 Liberal MPs from Ontario, and now we're counting on them to treat Ontario fairly and cut the carbon tax on all home heating, including natural gas. As New Brunswick Premier Higgs said, no Canadian family should have to choose between heating their homes or buying Christmas gifts for their children.

Speaker, I want to close my remarks by thanking my friend Dr. David Jacobs, the president of the Ontario Association of Radiologists. As many members know, he's been a strong advocate for scanning for breast cancer in women aged 40 to 49, and we're now lowering the age to receive publicly funded mammograms to 40, beginning next year. Dr. Jacobs said the day of this announcement was "the proudest and most impactful day" of his medical career, because we know that scanning saves lives.

And that's the reason I introduced Bill 66: to encourage people to get a stethoscope check for heart valve disease. Unfortunately, Canadian women are less likely to get a stethoscope check than Canadian men.

I want to thank Dr. Jacobs again, and I want to thank the Minister of Finance and his team, including his parliamentary assistants, for all their great work on the fall economic statement and on Bill 146. I look forward to voting for this bill, and I encourage all members in this House to support this bill.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly): It's now time for questions.

Ms. Chandra Pasma: Thank you to the member for his remarks on this bill.

People in Ontario are really hurting right now. We have record numbers of Ontarians using food banks. We have people who are living on our streets and in homeless encampments because they can't find affordable places to live. We have people who are waiting 12 hours at the hospital to see a doctor, 2.2 million Ontarians who don't have a family doctor, and yet this government is sitting on a very large contingency fund of \$5.4 billion. Instead of spending that funding down during the first part of the budget year, in fact, halfway through the year, they have now increased it by adding another \$2 billion.

Can the member explain why on earth the government needs such a large contingency fund that they're not actually using, instead of investing in services and measures that would actually address the very immediate and urgent challenges that people in Ontario are feeling today?

Mr. Rudy Cuzzetto: I want to thank the member from Ottawa for that question.

As you know, our budget last year—we had a \$202-billion budget in the province of Ontario and \$81 billion went to health care alone. Now, I compared the 2017 budget that the former Minister of Finance had presented here in the House—whom I defeated in Mississauga–Lakeshore. He invested \$59.4 billion; we're at \$81 billion just in health care. And we put \$6.4 billion into long-term care, to build infrastructure, and another \$48 billion to build hospitals through the province of Ontario. That was

neglected by the previous government, which you propped up for many years here in the House.

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As I said, we have the largest budget in Ontario's history, and we're going to continue spending as we have through our mandate here in this House.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly): Further questions?

Mr. Andrew Dowie: I want to thank the member from Mississauga–Lakeshore for his comments. Actually, over the years, I've looked at Mississauga–Lakeshore particularly with envy—the growth and the success that that community has had over many, many years, attracting businesses, attracting people—something that has alluded us in Windsor–Essex for many years, but now it feels like we're on track, thanks to, certainly, the recent efforts of the government to support business growth and population development.

As you've heard reported, nearly 500,000 more people came to Ontario last year, 4,400 more businesses operate in Ontario today versus the prior year. We know that our population is growing, jobs have been created and companies are choosing Ontario. So I'd like to know from the member, could you explain what Ontario is doing to ensure that it is well positioned for the future to come?

Mr. Rudy Cuzzetto: I want to thank the member for that question. As you know, I come out of the automotive industry, and we've been able to attract \$27 billion worth of automotive investment here in the province of Ontario. When I was in the automotive industry, we were worried about plants shutting down, but our great Minister of Economic Development has been able to attract that \$27 billion, as well as having the funds from the Treasury Board with our new President of the Treasury Board always there to support the growth of this province.

But with 500,000 people coming into the province each year, we are going to have a lot of work to do, and that's what we're doing. We're building homes for these people in the province of Ontario. Not only that, we have removed the HST on affordable homes and removed development charges so we can build more homes here in the province of Ontario to help the newcomers who are coming to this province.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly): Further questions?

Ms. Peggy Sattler: My question to the member is around the proposed Ontario Infrastructure Bank. There was an interesting article from the CBC entitled, "Why Is Doug Ford's Government Creating a Bank to Finance Public Projects?" It goes on to say, "Questions swirl over Ontario's plan for luring private investment...." One of the people who was quoted in the article—a former chief economist for the province—said, "The current [financing] system seems to be working pretty well"—the problem has always been around timelines to get projects completed on schedule.

Why has the government decided to move forward with this significant change, and why have so few details been

provided about what this is going to mean for the province of Ontario?

Mr. Rudy Cuzzetto: I want to thank the member for that question, because I've been looking at the federal government: Jagmeet Singh, in 2021, did not scrap the federal infrastructure bank. He ended up supporting it and saying that he wanted to build more renewable energy and more green projects with the infrastructure bank.

As you look at other jurisdictions in the world, they have an infrastructure bank as well. As you know, the teachers' pension plan has \$200 billion which they invest around the world. Why not keep that money in the province of Ontario so we can build the infrastructure projects we need so that our economy can grow much better here?

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly): Further questions?

Mr. Amarjot Sandhu: Thank you to my friend from Mississauga–Lakeshore for such a wonderful speech.

One of the components in this fall economic statement is extending the gas tax cut that will save people money—5.3 cents at the gas pumps. By the way, I would encourage the federal government as well to step up and scrap the carbon tax on gas so that people can save money, so they can see more relief at the gas pumps. Since then, I've been receiving calls from my constituents that are so pleased to hear that we're extending the gas tax cut.

So my question to the member is, can you highlight for this House how this will assist the people of this province?

Mr. Rudy Cuzzetto: I want to thank the member from Brampton for that question. As you are aware, this is one tool that we're using to help our citizens here in the province of Ontario with the challenging times here to fight the increase of costs in the province. By reducing the gas by 11 cents a litre, that will help people. But not only that, we removed the stickers from the vehicles, as well. That's helping our young families and families across the province, so they can be able to achieve things that they want to in this province, as well as getting rid of the tolls on the 412 and 418. That has helped a lot of our families in Ontario.

We're going to keep doing things to help our families here in Ontario, so they can achieve what they have to achieve. I know that the federal NDP have supported getting rid of the tax as well, so that's nice to hear, that the federal NDP are supporting what we want to do here in the province of Ontario.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly): Questions?

Mr. Sol Mamakwa: I was listening intently to the member from Mississauga–Lakeshore—

Mr. Dave Smith: No, you were talking to me.

Mr. Sol Mamakwa: Actually, I just was kind of listening.

Laughter.

Mr. Sol Mamakwa: But I hear "funding of water treatment plants" and I hear "funding of long-term-care beds," and those are things that we need in Kiiwetinoong as well. Really, I think that it's important that you treat us as Ontarians as well. I know Kiiwetinoong only needs 76

beds, and you're talking about hundreds of beds. Why can't you just put some resources in that area? Do I have to sit over there to fund these beds?

Mr. Rudy Cuzzetto: I want to thank the member for that question. As you are aware, we are building 30,000 new beds in Ontario, across the province, as well as 28,000 rebuilt beds. This is the largest project ever in the history of Ontario: \$6.4 billion is been spent on building long-term-care beds, and not only that; even in hiring 27,000 new PSWs in the province of Ontario. We are working to build better health care for the people of Ontario across every sector of Ontario.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly): We have time for one final question.

Mr. Mike Harris: Just quickly: You touched a little bit during your time on the new long-term-care builds that are

happening in Mississauga–Lakeshore. The previous Liberal government was only able to build—what was it?—611 beds in their province in their tenure over 15 years. It's great to hear we have a new long-term-care home being opened in Mississauga–Lakeshore that actually eclipses that in just the one building. I'm hoping you can touch a little bit more on what that means to your constituents.

Mr. Rudy Cuzzetto: Well, this was long overdue for the people in Mississauga–Lakeshore. Per capita, we had the least long-term-care beds built in the province of Ontario. Now, we're going to have 1,100 beds built in my riding alone, and 632 beds are open right now in our Speakman Drive location—

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly): Thank you.
Report continues in volume B.

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Smith, Hon. / L'hon. Todd (PC)	Bay of Quinte / Baie de Quinte	Minister of Energy / Ministre de l'Énergie
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