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Mercredi
28 mai 2025

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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

Wednesday 28 May 2025

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

Mercredi 28 mai 2025

The House met at 0900.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): Good morning, everybody.

Prayers.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

2025 ONTARIO BUDGET

BUDGET DE L'ONTARIO DE 2025

Resuming the debate adjourned on May 15, 2025, on the motion that this House approves in general the budgetary policy of the government.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): Further debate?

Ms. Jessica Bell: I will be sharing my time with the member for London West and the member for Parkdale–High Park today.

We're talking about the budget motion, motion number 2. I've got to say, when I was reading through the budget, there were a lot of things that I was disappointed about. While there is some money for a slush fund, we don't even know who it will go to yet, the protect Ontario fund. When we look at the core sectors that the Ontario government is responsible for, like health care, education and housing, we're disappointed. We are also disappointed because there is an utter lack of support for measures to help people who are low income, moderate income and even middle income get by at time when it has never been more expensive to live in the province of Ontario. We've got a lot of concerns about that.

We're also concerned because things in Ontario—we have some challenges that we need to address, and people were expecting this budget to address them. We have unemployment that is rising; it's gone up to 7.6%. We have the trade war, which I'm very concerned about is looking at becoming entrenched. It's something that we're going to be grappling with for at least four years or more, and that is causing extreme economic uncertainty and worry.

We see that inequality is on the rise. We're also seeing—some statistics just came out a few days ago—that people are really struggling to make ends meet, renters as well as homeowners. There's some new data coming out showing that foreclosure rates in the province of Ontario are at their highest level since the 1990s. That's very concerning. It means that people are reaching their breaking point. Mortgages are often the last things that people are willing to forgo payment on and they're reaching that point.

So there's a lot of concerns. I think people wanted to see this budget, being \$216 billion, I think—a lot of Ontarians were hoping there would be some relief for them in this budget, and I'm not seeing it.

I want to talk a little bit about some of the sectors that are most impacted by the budget. The one that we're very concerned about is the issues around the health care system. We have a situation with our health care system where a lot of people are not getting the health care that they need. We have over 2.3 million people who do not have access to a family doctor in the province of Ontario. If you don't have access to a family doctor, it means you're going to a walk-in clinic or you're not going to a doctor at all—or in some cases, you're ending up in an emergency room to get care that should be provided by a nurse practitioner or a physician.

We've had situations in our riding where we hear about individuals who are going to the emergency room for conditions like a chronic ear infection because they've got nowhere else to go and they don't have a family doctor, so it's very concerning. We're also seeing an increasing number of instances where emergency rooms are closing on the weekends, especially in smaller towns and cities. That's very worrying. We're seeing issues with long wait times in emergency rooms, or when people are admitted, they're receiving the care in a hallway instead of a room. No one wants to be treated for appendicitis in a hallway. They just don't. It's not the way that we can provide high-quality care to people.

We're also seeing serious issues with staffing shortages. That has been alleviated somewhat because this government lost its fight to suppress health care workers' wages in the courts. We have seen an increase in health care workers' wages and we have seen the exodus of health care workers start to be reduced, which is a good thing, but we still have significant staffing shortages in our hospitals and it's impacting the quality of care that patients receive.

What we're also concerned about—you would expect that in this budget there would be some significant improvements and investments in health care, and quite frankly, we're not seeing that. We have seen talk and some modest efforts to bring in an increase in primary care provision, an increase in hospital budgets, a 4% increase in base operating costs, and we are seeing some increases in infrastructure spending so that more hospitals can be built across Ontario.

But what we're also seeing is that that increase for those measures, they fall far short of the need that we're seeing in Ontario, and it's very worrying. We receive, in Ontario,

the least amount of funding per person for health care compared to every other province, and this budget does nothing to change that.

What we're also seeing in this budget—which I'm particularly concerned about, because I've seen the rise of for-profit care when I was living in Australia, and then I also lived in the United States and I saw the impact and the decline in quality of for-profit care in the United States as well. What we're seeing here is a continued move by this Ontario government to bring in for-profit care into Ontario, and I'm very worried about that.

We're seeing \$280 million more going to for-profit clinics. Why I'm so concerned about this is that we create a two-tier system: We've got a for-profit system where people who are forced to pay and have to pay or can pay are jumping to the front of the queue, and the rest of us are left with a public health care system which is chronically underfunded and understaffed. That means that we get two different types of care.

What we're also seeing is that people are walking into for-profit clinics and they're being upsold for services that they might not necessarily need, and they're walking out with a bill when they shouldn't be walking out with a bill. This is Canada; we believe in public health care. It is the NDP that brought in public health care into Saskatchewan and then it went nation-wide. We on this side of the House will be doing everything we can to protect our public health care system.

There are some concerns about that, and quite frankly, some of the for-profit medical clinics that we're seeing in Toronto, at least, from our assessment, are breaking the law. They shouldn't be charging for medically necessary services, but they are. It's a violation of Ontario law. It's a violation of federal law. Why isn't this government enforcing its own laws? Good question, right?

The other issue that I want to talk about in my time is the issue of education. Education is a huge issue in my riding. We have over 33 public schools—elementary, middle school and high school—and increasingly, when I go from school to school, I see the same issues again and again. I see aging buildings. I see a state-of-good-repair backlog which is growing, not shrinking. I see heating that is inadequate in the winter, cooling that is inadequate in the summer. I hear about aging boilers. I hear about flooding. I hear about roofs that need to be repaired.

I recently went to Central Toronto Academy and I had students talk to me about the state of the washrooms with no doors, no locks; a field that is so poorly maintained that students don't play on it because they're scared they're going to hurt themselves when they go for a run or play basketball. It's not great. Their pool at Central Toronto Academy is already closed. When I'd raised the issue of pools being closed in the riding, they were like, "Miss, you are not up to speed, because our pool got closed years ago." I was like, "Thank you for telling me. That's very concerning."

0910

What we're seeing with the Toronto District School Board at least is that we're looking at seeing additional

cuts. We're seeing cuts to the music instructors program, delays in the roll-out of Chromebooks so that students can learn in class on a computer, cuts to outdoor education. There's talk of increasing class sizes, which could save \$7.5 million. These are awful conversations that school boards should not be having right now.

Then there's the grossly inadequate amount of funding that is available to kids who have special needs and exceptionalities, because they're, quite frankly, not receiving the care and the quality of teaching that they are entitled to, that they have a right to and that they're not getting, primarily because of staffing shortages. It's very worrying.

I want to talk a little bit about the Grants for Student Needs. It recently came out—well, it's got a new name now, but a lot of us still know it as Grants for Student Needs; essentially, funding to schools. What we've seen with this new announcement that came out, I believe, last Friday—many of us were waiting for it—was that the per-student funding since 2018 is still grossly short of what is needed, and there's been cut after cut after cut, and we've got a lot of concerns about that.

I want to read some statistics to you: Since 2018, this government has taken \$6.35 billion out of our education system. That's a cumulative total from 2018. For 2025-26 alone, funding is \$561.7 million less than in 2018 when you take into account inflation and enrolment growth. So all this talk of caring about teachers and students and schools and educational assistants—it's still a cut. And when there is a cut, it means that the quality of teaching that happens in a classroom suffers. It's that simple.

We also see that funding for critical issues that we're hearing about in our schools is woefully inadequate. For example, funding for student mental health is only 22.9 cents per student per day, when 90% of principals say they need more help to support mental health. And that's been my experience too. When I go around and I talk to principals, especially just after the restrictions were lifted and students were going back to school in-person full time, many of the principals would talk to me about the rise in mental health, the rise in bullying, the behaviour they were seeing which was not acceptable, the language that was being used. And they stressed to me that kids hadn't been socialized for the last two or three years because they had been learning at home and that it had an impact on students' behaviour and mental health, and they needed additional support. We're not seeing additional support in school boards even though kids are still recovering from COVID. Learning outcomes have not caught up.

We're also seeing an issue with special education. Nearly every school board is spending more than they're getting for a system that is not meeting students' needs or protecting their safety.

Core education funding: The funding that we received is only a quarter of the total school board deficit. So even though this government is talking a lot about these issues, we're not seeing the outcome when it comes to actual spending. We've got a lot of concerns about that.

I want to talk a little bit about housing. You would expect, given the housing crisis that we are experiencing,

that there would be a significant increase in the amount of funding available to housing, but we're not seeing that in this budget. We're actually seeing a cut of \$379 million. I don't understand, when we have a homelessness crisis—we have over 80,000 people who are homeless; we have tents and encampments in cities and towns all across Ontario—why this government is choosing to cut funding to the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing by \$379 million.

I remember when the Auditor General came out with a report in 2021. It looked at the government's plan on homelessness, and it concluded that the government has no plan to address homelessness. It's four years later, and this government still has no plan to address homelessness. I remember back when this government got elected, they said that they were going to have a commitment to end chronic homelessness. I believe it was by 2025. Here we are, 2025, and the homeless crisis has gone from bad to worse.

AMO recently came out with a report that looked at what would happen if we entered an economic downturn and how that would affect homelessness numbers in Ontario. They estimated it would go up from 80,000 to 300,000. Where is the plan to address that? Instead, we're seeing a cut.

I believe that there is going to be a rally outside Queen's Park on Thursday to draw attention to the government's tough-on-crime approach to addressing the encampment issue. We've communicated with many of the social service agencies that provide support to people living in encampments, including the city, and their overall assessment is that this tough-on-crime approach to encampments is inhumane, it's futile and it's incredibly expensive.

I also noticed, when I was reading the budget, that there seems to be a lot of talk about investing in correctional facilities; you know, more beds here and more beds here. And I wonder why we are talking about investing in correctional facilities when, in many instances, we should be talking about building supportive homes so that we're providing homes to people and we're not threatening people with six months of jail time because they happen to be too poor to find a place to rent. It doesn't make any sense at all.

I think about the issues with rent across Ontario, and I think many people were hoping for some kind of relief with rent. We've introduced many pieces of legislation to address the rising cost of rent, including the Rent Stabilization Act, which would bring in stronger rent control in all homes, not just homes that were built before 2018—or first occupied before 2018—and also to bring in strong rent controls so that there's a cap on how much the rent can be raised between tenancies.

Other provinces have this. Quebec has this. Quebec's economy is doing just fine. Their housing starts are better than ours, but they've brought in measures to protect tenants to ensure that they have a good idea on how much they're going to pay in rent next year so that they're not priced out of their home because the rent has gone up by 20% or 30%.

We hear instances of this in our riding. People will move into our riding. They'll move into a building. They'll not realize that it was built after 2018. They reach their end-of-the-year lease, and then, all of a sudden, they're getting a 20% rent increase because the landlord wants to move them out and find a tenant who is willing to pay more—or who has to pay more—so that they can generate more profits. It's very concerning.

Just taking a look at some of the recent rental prices in the province, in Toronto, the average rent for a one-bedroom that's available now is \$2,346. That is so much money. I don't know how anyone living on minimum wage could afford \$2,346. I don't know how someone earning \$60,000 a year, which is above the average income, could be affording \$2,346—or if you have a family. You're not going to be looking for a one-bedroom if you have a family, unless you're in a really difficult situation. So we've got a lot of concerns about that, and we're not seeing anything in this budget that would address that.

What I would have liked to have seen, what I think a lot of people are wanting to see is a real plan to address homelessness, a commitment to build affordable housing and supportive housing on public land and partnering with municipalities and non-profits and developers to do that so we can provide people with permanent, affordable homes. Other cities have done it. Other provinces have done it. So should we.

I would like to have seen a plan to bring in strong rent control, like rent stabilization. I would like to see greater commitment to spur up the construction of housing starts in towns and cities where people want to live, easing the zoning restrictions, making it easier to build apartments and condos on main streets, allowing fourplexes. I'm not seeing it. Are we surprised that new housing construction starts are down to 30-year lows? Not exactly. No surprise there.

0920

I want to talk a little bit about funding for municipalities. This government has talked a lot in this budget about how they're providing an additional amount of money to water infrastructure, but when you look at the big picture, overall, funding to municipalities to provide the infrastructure that we need for current residents and new development has been cut. It's partly because of Bill 23, which really gutted municipalities' ability to ensure that developers pay their fair share, and the loss in revenue has not been made up by this government. That's one of the reasons why many people have seen very significant property tax increases over the last four to five years, because municipalities have to make up that money. I'm calling that a Ford tax, because the money has to come from somewhere. It's very concerning.

When we're looking at it, the government is looking at putting another maybe—is it \$400 million?—into housing-enabling infrastructure. Compare that to the amount of money that municipalities are actually going to be spending over the next 10 years: \$250 billion. So, what, is that 1/500th of what is necessary? It's very small com-

pared to what is actually needed to maintain our roads and our day cares and our sewage systems and our electricity system—a lot of things—our parks. We’ve got a lot of concerns about that.

I want to talk a little bit about universities. Universities are seeing a \$1.2-billion cut. It’s astronomical. This is coming at a time when the number of international students that are enrolled in our colleges and universities has plummeted because of changes to our immigration laws. So colleges and universities are put in this very tough spot, where revenue from international students has dropped, and then at the same time the provincial government is cutting funding to colleges and universities by an additional \$1.2 billion and tuition has been frozen. Freezing tuition is obviously a move that I support, but what we expect is colleges and universities to be funded by the province to ensure that they can provide high-quality post-secondary education to Ontario students. That’s what we expect. Because the reality is this: Ontario universities receive the lowest per-student funding in Canada. What we’re asking for is it just to be funded to the national average.

I just gave a little summary of the key sectors in the budget that I think are significantly impacted by this government with the announcement of their budget, and I’d like to cede my time to the member for London West.

The Acting Speaker (MPP Andrea Hazell): I recognize the member from Parkdale–High Park.

MPP Alexa Gilmour: It is a privilege this morning to rise on behalf of the people of Parkdale–High Park and to speak to the Conservative government’s 2025 budget.

I want to start by sharing an analogy, a story from my childhood about a time where I was swimming. I was taking the deep end test and I was trying to get across the lane. I got about halfway across and I began to bob, up and down and up and down. On about my fourth or fifth bob, I suddenly felt these arms wrap around my tiny chest and lift me up into the air and carry me out of the pool. Speaker, I hadn’t realized that I was drowning. The lifeguard had to leap into the water to save me.

I feel like so many of the people I’m speaking to these days are bobbing up and down and up and down, trying to keep afloat. What the people needed most from this government was a lifeguard budget, but they got a band-aid budget instead. Because even before you factor in the cost of Donald Trump’s tariffs, Ontario is facing more challenges than ever. We have, of course, the ongoing living crisis and it’s affecting every aspect of people’s lives, from their ability to pay rent to putting nutritious food on the table to the freedom to choose where they’re going to live in the province and where they’re going to raise their families.

I heard a story when I was knocking on the door of a woman. She was in a room in a studio with boxes all around her. She was being forced to move out of Parkdale–High Park because the rent had jumped to \$2,000 a month for a studio apartment, and she couldn’t afford it. But she’d grown up her whole life in Parkdale–High Park, and she said, “I cannot believe I’m being forced out of my own community.” Even those who are more comfortable are

beginning to question whether they can afford the odd date night out or anniversary celebration with their family.

I was in a meeting just recently with the tenants in High Park and the association, who said that many of them, because of the lack of rent control, were making choices between food and rent, were making choices about having to move farther and farther outside of the city, get roommates and find two, three and, in one case, four jobs just to be able to afford to live.

Ontario’s housing crisis is looming large over all of this. The supply is down, the rents are up, and people can’t afford to put a roof over their heads. Across the province, we are seeing more and more Ontarians falling into homelessness, with no assistance offered but police officers to kick them from one encampment to another. With 80,000 people homeless and an expected increase of something like 12% a year, we can see the possibility of 300,000 people in Ontario homeless in the next decade.

If the measure of a society is found in how we treat those made vulnerable by systemic oppression, then certainly Bill 6 is a horrific indictment of this government, as are the funding priorities in the budget that I’m speaking to today. Because at this time of great need, of overwhelming need throughout Ontario, our public systems are failing—our public health care, public education, public transit systems that Ontarians rely on and take such pride in. We are a community that cares for one another, and yet they are crumbling after years of disinvestment from both the Liberal and the Conservative governments.

We’re also seeing—not just here in Ontario, but across Canada and North America—that families are losing their homes to flooding. Farmers are losing their crops to extreme weather conditions. More and more kids are suffering from asthma and other illnesses because of pollution. We had fires in Jasper. We had fires in LA. Canadians need a government that will fight to protect our families and our planet. We’re running out of time.

But in its 2025 budget, the government of this province did not mention climate change once. Of course, tariffs are the thing that we are all most concerned about today, and we should be—people are losing their jobs. But climate change is today and tomorrow and until the end of time. I would have liked to see—in fact, the people that I serve were demanding to see—more in this budget that protected our children’s future and our great-grandchildren’s future.

All of this is making Ontario more vulnerable—vulnerable economically, to be sure—not just to the Trump tariff wars, but also vulnerable as a society. I mean, when people are forced into survival mode, they have a tendency to turn inward to protect themselves and to protect their immediate loved ones. It makes it harder for us to look beyond ourselves, to trust one another, to work creatively together on solutions, to innovate, to build a future that works for each and every one of us. What we needed was bold, compassionate leadership; solutions rooted in love, not in competition. They needed resources that will enable them to flourish, not just scrape by.

0930

With the 2025 budget, the Conservative government could have delivered this. They could have strengthened Ontario and helped build a tariff-proof future with good schools; affordable homes; world-class public education and health care; and strong, strong, reliable public services. Instead, we got more cuts. The Ford Conservatives have produced yet another band-aid budget, when we needed a lifeguard. There's definitely a lot in here for big businesses, for big dreams like a fantasy tunnel, but struggling hospitals and struggling schools are getting short-changed.

There's nothing to help people afford groceries or pay the rent, let alone to get Ontario building—building those homes that we need to look after each other, to build a sustainable economy for that brighter future. We have major cuts to health care, education, housing—\$609 million in cuts to the Attorney General, \$266 million in cuts to children, community and social services at a time where every three days in Ontario, a child dies under Ontario's care network, at a time when people living on social assistance are living in legislated poverty. And they got cuts.

There is \$42 million less for emergency forest firefighting, at a time when climate change is increasing, and the number of forest fires are increasing, and towns, cities and municipalities are not safe from this. We learned nothing from Jasper, from Los Angeles. There's \$60 million less for natural resources and so much more.

Speaker, I wanted to hear from my own constituents in Parkdale–High Park about this budget that the government was proposing. So last week, I arranged for a town hall and I had our shadow Minister of Finance attend. There, we unpacked the budget, and so many shared with me what their hopes and their concerns about this government's 2025 budget were.

Believe it or not, not a single person asked for funding about highways or for tunnels. What my constituents did ask for, above all, was that this government invest in housing, especially in the deeply affordable, supportive housing needed to address the growing homelessness crisis. Many expressed immense disappointment in the Ford Conservatives and the way that they seem to have thrown in the towel and have decided to cut \$379 million to the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing, despite Ontario being nowhere close to meeting the government's own targets on building 1.5 million homes by 2031.

When I was at the doors, Speaker, I spoke to many residents who were struggling around this issue of housing. When I was the minister at St. Luke's, of course, I was daily working with people who were unhoused, for whom owning a home was not even on the radar; just finding a roof to sleep under for the night was.

In the conversations I had with constituents, they spoke about making difficult choices; between having to use the food bank so that they could keep their rent payments. Other young people spoke about the reality that they might live their whole lives in their parents' basements, that they might never own a home, and that they worried that even

getting a place to rent was impossible without roommates and extra jobs on the side.

My constituents in Parkdale–High Park also wanted to see serious investments in public health care and the creation of a truly world-class health care system that benefits us all, not \$6.4 million in cuts at a time of unprecedented demand. They were distressed to learn that the Conservatives are funnelling \$280 million to for-profit care clinics at a time when 2.3 million Ontarians are without family doctors and the staffing shortages are causing temporary emergency room closures more than 200 times last year. They wanted to know why there was no funding for South Bruce Grey hospitals and others that have had repeated and simultaneous closures throughout the year.

My constituents also wrote me asking that the Ontario government invest in our province's future by adequately funding our public schools. This includes our world-renowned colleges and universities, which are facing \$1.2 billion in cuts in the budget. They believe Ontario students deserve better than stagnant education funding that will lead to growing class sizes, crumbling classrooms and deep cuts to programs like music education that help them to thrive. As one of my constituents accurately and starkly put it, "Give a kid a trumpet or saxophone when they're in grade 4 or 5, and they may not pick up a gun when they reach 13 or 14." Our children need the supports.

Parents at one of the schools that I serve, Swansea public, are writing me again this year, as they wrote my predecessor, about classroom temperatures rising over 30 degrees this time of year, the lack of air conditioning, the inability to focus. Many of you will recall the famous viral video, again, of my predecessor being taken to Humber-side on Take Your MPP to School Day when it was raining inside as well as outside and there was flooding.

It's shameful that the FAO has estimated it will cost \$31.4 billion over 10 years to clear the infrastructure backlog, to maintain the schools in a state of repair, and yet this province still falls short on what's required. The Fix Our Schools campaign was started in Parkdale–High Park in 2014, and over a decade later, the problems have only gotten worse.

Special education funding also remains dangerously low in this budget. We had a town hall on Monday night for those who were concerned about the proposed TDSB deficits and budget cuts, and they expressed concerns about their children with special needs, who will not have the supports they need to stay safe and supported to receive the high-quality education that they need and deserve. One parent spoke about a child that attends using a wheelchair and is in a class of 30 children. At least one other is recognized as a high-needs child—there might be others—and the school classroom has one teacher and one ECE.

At my own school, where my children attend, the principal is regularly sitting in the administrators' desk taking in the late slips because there are staffing shortages all over the place. Another school: The principal told me that they spend an inordinate amount of time chasing children down the hallways because there are not enough

one-to-ones for the special-needs kids, and in order to keep the children safe, the principal must do the work that we need to fund ECEs and others to do.

This is not news to our government. The Ontario Autism Coalition and Community Living have both produced reports, one called *Crisis in the Classroom*.

In addition, in this budget, there were very few references to child care. The funding there is coupled with the education, and that is planned to be stagnant for the next three years. We need to commit to expanding our child care spaces.

0940

I want to just share a brief story about my trip last week. J'ai participé dans le programme pour le Réseau des Femmes d'affaires du Québec. I went to Quebec last week with francophone parliamentarians from around the world, and there we saw, in the Quebec Legislature, the most amazing thing: When they redid their renovations, they built a daycare in the Legislature that opens at 7 a.m. and it closes half an hour after the chamber rises. So if people were here until 11:30 on Monday night, the daycare was here until midnight keeping their children safe and cared for. They had a room just outside the chamber where parents—men, women, non-binary parents—could go to feed their child, to change a diaper, and there was a screen where they could watch what was happening in the Legislature as they did. There was another room for those who were 10 years old and up, who could come after school and do their homework.

Speaker, this speaks of the way that we care for families. When we lead by example in the Legislature—we know that each one of us is stronger and more able to be our full selves when the families we are in are cared for, and I would have liked to see more in this budget about caring for families.

It was certainly good to see the small increases in infrastructure spending for universities, but there were significant decreases in funding for college infrastructure. I wondered, where is the equity in that in a time where we need to get more people educated and into the workforce? I recognize and applaud the funding being put into the Skills Development Fund, PSE programs, skilled trades and scholarships for First Nations students. We would have liked to see an increase in permanent per-student funding to stabilize the sector and to increase access for financial assistance.

Speaker, the other thing that members of Parkdale–High Park spoke about was the meaningful investment in public transit that was needed and the government's need to protect green spaces to tackle climate change head on. We were glad to see that Ontario was making some investments in public transit and electric vehicle manufacturing, but we wanted to know why the budget includes no targets for reducing Ontario's carbon emissions and why it makes no mention of climate change at a time when floods and forest fires are putting us and the economy at risk.

Everywhere I look, people are struggling. We see that half of Ontario's parents have sought mental health for

their child, and they've said that they've faced challenges getting the services they need. The primary reason was long wait times. They also included things like "services don't offer what their child needs," "they don't know where to go," "they don't offer the services where I live." There are nearly 30,000 children on wait-lists for mental health, and it takes months. We would have liked to see that mental health had more support. In fact, mental health needs to be fully covered by this province because mental health is health, and a world-class health service includes fully funded mental health and pharmaceuticals and more.

Importantly, my constituents state that Ontario must raise OW and ODSP rates and end legislated poverty so that the people in our province don't have to struggle and sacrifice day-to-day just to survive. And so, we would have liked to see more in the support for those struggling at the margins.

In the end, the Conservative government had a choice with this budget to strengthen Ontario and build a future where families and workers can get ahead—a lifeguard budget—but they gave us cuts and a band-aid budget instead. But the good news is that while this government may have given up on the future of shared abundance, the people of Parkdale–High Park have not, and neither has the Ontario NDP, and I stand with them.

The Acting Speaker (MPP Andrea Hazell): I recognize the member from London West.

Ms. Peggy Sattler: It is a pleasure to rise today to participate in this debate on the 2025 Ontario budget.

This is a period of unprecedented economic uncertainty that we are facing. We are looking south of the border and seeing the most significant threat to our economy, even our sovereignty, that we have ever seen before. This budget would have been an opportunity for this government to respond to these realities in a meaningful way. Instead, what the government delivered is a band-aid budget that doesn't provide the support that workers and families are looking for, that workers and families need in this province right now.

This was a missed opportunity for this government to keep good jobs in Ontario. We are seeing thousands of jobs at risk. The Financial Accountability Officer has predicted the loss of over 60,000 Ontario jobs. Yet the budget has no clear plan to stop manufacturers and equipment from leaving the province. There was a missed opportunity in public education, in colleges and universities, in child care, at a time when we need to create a more resilient workforce, and colleges, universities, our public schools and our child care centres are the way to do that.

The budget gives us a \$1.2-billion cut to college and university funding this year, the following year and then an additional cut in 2027-28. There's no new funding for special education, school nutrition, school transportation, addressing the huge maintenance backlog in our public school buildings across this province. At a time when schools are facing deficits, classroom teachers are struggling and students are not getting the supports they need, this budget offers three years of stagnant funding.

It was a missed opportunity in housing, when we are seeing more people homeless than ever before—80,000 Ontarians in this province are now homeless. The budget would have been a chance for the government to show that they're serious about meeting the housing target that they had set out. Instead, the budget shows that housing starts are basically collapsing—down from last year—and the government is projecting to build 22% fewer homes than they did last year. We're at a pace that is less than half of what is needed if we are seriously to get to that 1.5-million-home target by 2031.

Most importantly, Speaker, it was a missed opportunity in public services and in health care. We are seeing emergency rooms closing across the province, and yet the budget brings us \$6.4 billion in cuts to health care.

There's also nothing in this budget to address the fact that Ontario's unemployment rate right now is the highest in Canada at 7.6%. That's up 1% from what the government had projected last year, and there is no support for those who are facing unemployment, and particularly young people. We just heard from StatsCan that the unemployment rate for 15- to 24-year-olds is higher than it has been in more than two decades—14% unemployment for young people.

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The cuts to our colleges and universities are worsening this pressure on young people who can't get into the labour market, who can't get the job experience that they need, because our colleges and universities, as they deal with this financial crisis, are looking at closing down, laying off staff, reducing the services that provide support for students seeking co-ops and internships. I'm hearing more and more from students who were promised a work-integrated learning placement—a co-op or an internship—and they're hearing back from their employer that, unfortunately, that's not going to happen because of the economic uncertainty that we're now in. Students need to get those real-life job experiences in order to avoid what's termed as "scarring" that comes when people try to enter the labour market without the job experience they need.

Speaker, this budget is full of missed opportunities, but it also follows on decades—or, under this government, since it was elected in 2018—of many, many poor decisions about spending public dollars. We saw a report earlier this month about the \$9.2 billion that has been spent over the past 10 years on using private agencies for the health sector. We heard about Shoppers Drug Mart billing almost \$62 million for unnecessary—in many cases—medication reviews, and yet the budget announces a further investment of \$280 million over two years for private clinics, when privatized health care is the most expensive way to deliver health care because it siphons off public dollars into shareholder pockets, and it also worsens the health care worker shortage that we are seeing in this province.

We've also just heard about the \$40 million that the government spent on self-promoting, partisan ads, which just calls into question who this government is working for. Do they care about investing in the people of this

province, or are they more interested in their own electoral prospects and their donors and supporters?

Speaker, people in this province are struggling. In my community in London, there are 140,000 Londoners who currently do not have access to a family doctor, and we heard in a study that was published just yesterday that, although there may be more family doctors who are graduating, fewer are practising in family medicine. The experts who conducted this study have said very clearly that the answer to the primary care crisis isn't just training more doctors; it is making family practice an area that new medical graduates want to go into. We know that doctors spend up to half of their working day on paperwork, and that's a huge deterrent for anyone who wants to go into family medicine.

No investment in public health care in this budget. In my community, the Middlesex-London Health Unit is the third-lowest funded of all 29 public health units in the province. They've had to lay off staff in school health nurses. They've had to cancel participation in community projects because of the layoffs. We saw 22.5 staff positions were cut. This year, they're anticipating as many as another 20 positions to be cut unless their funding crisis is addressed, and the reality is that, in London—London is the fastest-growing municipality in the province of Ontario, second fastest in Canada. We are experiencing a very significant population growth, which means that the services of the Middlesex-London Health Unit are more necessary than ever and are more over-extended than ever dealing with that large population increase.

We are seeing an increase in the need for mental health services. I just met with CHMA Thames Valley last week and the executive director told me that they were looking at a deficit of \$2.6 million because of wage harmonization that had to happen when they amalgamated agencies.

But the reality is that even with the wage harmonization, the staff who work at CMHA agencies are grossly underpaid given the services that they provide. CMHA Thames Valley has been able to clear about half of the deficit through restructuring, but they're still looking at a deficit of \$1.5 million. We know that there is a huge need for supportive housing in London and communities across the province and yet the budget provides no new dollars for operating supports, for the staff to provide the wrap-around services that people living in supportive housing need.

I talked about the fact that there are over 80,000 Ontarians experiencing homelessness. In London, it's close to 2,000 people who are on the homeless by-name list. We have 7,500 people who are on a wait-list for rent-geared-to-income housing who need deeply affordable housing because their income simply will not allow them to find affordable market housing.

It's not just renters who are experiencing the affordability pressures that we are seeing across the province; it's also homeowners. We just got a report about the number of Ontarians who are missing mortgage payments, more than at any time since they first started being tracked by Equifax in 2012. There was a 71% increase in Ontario in

the 90-day-plus mortgage delinquency rates because there is not enough missing middle housing to enable people to find affordable places to live. People are taking on huge debts in order to find affordable housing.

I want, in the last few minutes that I have, Speaker, to focus particularly on the cuts to colleges and universities that I had mentioned at the outset. I want to remind the government of the letter that they received shortly after the election, as we were preparing to return to the Legislature, a joint letter from the Ontario Chamber of Commerce that was signed by every chamber of commerce in every community across the province. It was also signed by Colleges Ontario and the Council of Ontario Universities. In the letter, they call on the government to make immediate and effective investments to avoid the difficult decisions that institutions are having to make for cancelling programs, laying off staff and reducing student services that will compromise the quality of education and limit accessibility to post-secondary education.

We know that there is expected growth in the post-secondary-age population in Ontario. HEQCO, an arm's-length agency of the government, has identified the need for 225,000 more student spaces to meet the demand from domestic students. Yet this government has yet to do anything to address the fact that high-achieving students in this province are not able to access the education that they need and deserve.

In this joint letter that was issued in March by the chamber of commerce, Colleges Ontario and the COU, the number one recommendation that they made was to increase base operating revenues. This government announced some new investments in the budget—although, overall, there's a cut of \$1.2 billion, as I said—but none of the new investments that the government announced address the fact that there is no increase to base operating revenues. And the response that the government had made to the sector a year or so ago about the need for some kind of stability in the funding formula was less than half of what the sector needed.

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Speaker, I started out by referencing what's going on with our neighbours to the south and Trump's attack on our economy. Without stabilizing and sustaining our post-secondary sector, we will not be able to build the resilient workforce that we need to respond to those threats of Trump's tariffs.

I encourage the government to listen to the chamber of commerce and listen to the council of manufacturers and exporters, who are also calling for stability in the post-secondary sector and make the investments that the sector needs.

The Acting Speaker (MPP Andrea Hazell): I now recognize the member from Don Valley West.

Ms. Stephanie Bowman: Good morning. It's an honour to rise today to lead off the debate for the third party on the budget motion.

Two weeks ago, the government tabled what they called the Plan to Protect Ontario budget. The title sounds good, but after reading the document, I can't even support

the name. It feels more like a plan to neglect Ontario because the words in the document, the rhetoric in the document, with carefully crafted headlines, political slogans and lofty promises, just don't align with the numbers in the budget document, the numbers that are in the tables, the footnotes, the fiscal projections that show us the actual actions and the actual money the government will spend and the impact of those actions and decisions on the people of Ontario are why we're all here to serve.

What we witnessed with this budget was the favourite trick of this Conservative government's political magician's playbook. With one hand, they distract Ontarians with booze, buds and the like, while with the other they make your public services disappear. Never has a government spent so much to deliver so little. And now this government has let the people of Ontario down at the moment when we need it to lift us up.

To understand what the government's budget is really about, you need to focus on the numbers, not the headlines. The numbers do not paint a pretty picture, contrary to the \$40 million that the government spent on their self-promotion ads last year. So let's dive into the cold, hard numbers because while words can distort the truth, the numbers don't lie. The numbers tell the real story of this budget.

During his speech at the Empire Club on May 12, the finance minister promised a budget that would be the most consequential in a generation, he said. It certainly needed to be, but not just because of the impact of US tariffs. He also said that Ontario is at a crossroads. I agree with him, but not just because of the impact of US tariffs.

Unfortunately, it's an understatement to say that what the finance minister delivered is underwhelming, unimaginative and insufficient. Their plan to protect Ontario is a plan to neglect it while they add billions of dollars of debt in just one year. This budget will do nothing to help those trying to buy their first home. It will do nothing to help those struggling with the high cost of affordability and groceries. It will do nothing to help those waiting more than 12 hours in the ER.

The finance minister was right when he said we're at a crossroads but, again, not just because of US tariffs. The government needed to take a different direction because the road they've taken us down is a dead end. Unfortunately, this budget provides no new direction for Ontario unless you want to take a fantasy tunnel under the 401. We're at a crossroads because the people of Ontario are living with the consequences of seven years of this Conservative government's mismanagement of the economy. With our unemployment rate at the second highest in the country, an affordability crisis and low business confidence, Ontario is falling short of the promise it once held. This budget was a chance to stand at the crossroads, take a look in the mirror and change course. Unfortunately, that didn't happen.

The voices of Ontarians were heard during pre-budget consultations at the Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs, and those stakeholders—those people who live here in the province of Ontario—painted a

picture of a province falling short of its promise. From St. Catharines to Stratford, from Ottawa to Leamington, Ontarians are saying the same thing: We're not spending public dollars in a way that produces better outcomes, especially in our health care and education systems.

In health care, the message was stark. Interdisciplinary health teams are too limited in scope to meet community needs. Mental health services are under-resourced, and emergency rooms are overwhelmed, in part because too many Ontarians can't find a family doctor—2.5 million and counting. At the same time, the province has doubled its payments to private nursing agencies to staff our public hospitals. That's an expensive approach that many see as unsustainable and misaligned with long-term goals.

In education, stakeholders like OSSTF president Karen Littlewood highlighted how "historic" spending headlines mask the real decline in our classrooms. And I hear it from residents in my riding on a regular basis. They feel the per-student funding that's fallen by \$1,500 under this government. They see and feel the larger class sizes, fewer educators and the erosion of safe, supportive learning environments.

At one school I visited during take your MPP to work week, a school talked about how they're losing a half of their one and a half special-needs teachers. Speaker, that will have an impact on those kids in that school and their futures.

Workers and businesses in this province have been struggling for several years. Now our economy is even more vulnerable because of the dramatic shift in US trade policy, but businesses are facing unprecedented uncertainty. That souring business sentiment is leading many companies to pause their investment plans as they reassess their sales outlooks in this softening economy, notably in the auto sector, which the Liberal government bailed out. Conservative members over there voted against that, but they've got an auto sector now because of the Liberal government.

They've been trying to attract investment, but guess what? Honda Canada's \$15-billion investment to scale up its EV supply chain here in Ontario is now on hold. Stellantis, while back open now, paused production for two weeks in Windsor following tariff announcements. Unemployment is increasing in other areas of the auto industry as well. According to the Bank of Canada, a growing number of workers across the province are worried about losing their jobs. Not surprisingly, the uncertainty is weighing on consumer spending decisions, and that affects us all.

These headwinds have emerged against a backdrop of already difficult economic conditions. When this government was first elected in 2018, they inherited not a bankrupt province, as the Premier likes to try to tell us. They inherited a province where Ontario had the second-lowest unemployment rate in the country, where economic growth outpaced all members of the G7.

In April 2025, under this Conservative government, unemployment jumped to 7.8% and is now the second highest in the country. Some 691,000 Ontarians are out of

work. Historically, Ontario was a leader in national job creation, so our unemployment is usually below the national average. Seeing it above the national average is very unusual. In fact, it's only happened twice in the past 50 years, during the 2008 financial crisis and then again during the pandemic.

Earlier this month, Statistics Canada—I think we can all rely on them and their data—noted that Ontario's economy slowed for a third consecutive year in 2024. Speaker, let me say that again: Under this Conservative government, Ontario's economy has slowed for three years running. Real GDP growth averaged just 1.2% for the year, the slowest pace in two decades. The province has seen its share of national GDP growth decline from 43% to 29% since this government was elected in 2018. So real GDP per capita, which is the broadest measure of economic prosperity, has been falling at a faster rate in Ontario versus the rest of Canada since 2022.

The unemployment rate in Ontario has gone up during the seven years of this government and has been above the national average because this government isn't doing enough. They are not focused on the right things, Speaker. We know that business investment drives productivity growth. It creates jobs. It boosts workers' incomes. Unfortunately, slower growth in private sector employment versus the rest of Canada since the end of the pandemic shows the Ontario government hasn't done enough, and our productivity is on par with Alabama because of it.

1010

Ontario families are seeing their after-tax income grow more slowly than the national average. In fact, Ontario's poorer performance has cut the purchasing power of households by an average of \$2,000 annually since 2018. That's why people are feeling the pinch. They are feeling the affordability crisis hit them every day, and yet this government defeated our opposition day motion to provide tax relief to families and small businesses—shameful.

The only thing the government has achieved with its debt strategy is to stabilize the debt-to-GDP ratio at a still-high level—36.9% in 2024-25—and that doesn't leave a lot of room to invest in Ontario to help Ontario businesses grow as we face this economic uncertainty.

Fewer manufacturing jobs are being created under this government, Speaker, and they know it, despite their rhetoric. The sector's share of total employment hit a new low of 10% in 2024. Only 10% of jobs in Ontario are in the manufacturing sector, significantly below the historical average of 16.5%. The manufacturing sector is shrinking under this government.

Once again, let's set the record straight on manufacturing: According to StatsCan, manufacturing jobs went up during the previous Liberal government, from 786,500 in 2013 to 803,100, for a total of 16,600 jobs—let's round up and call it 17,000. Under this Conservative government, manufacturing jobs went from 803,100 in 2018 to 809,700 in April 2025. That's 6,600 jobs—let's round that up to 7,000.

Let's just summarize that again for the members opposite; I hope they're listening. In round numbers, so there's no uncertainty on this side of the House: Liberals, 17,000 manufacturing jobs; Conservatives, 7,000.

Then there are the construction jobs. Under this Conservative government, 14,000 construction workers lost their jobs in 2024, on top of an additional 24,000 in 2023, making it the biggest two-year decline since the early-1990s recession. In 2024, Canada-US trade topped \$1 trillion, a relationship that supports 2.4 million jobs in Canada. Ontario's share of that is 1.1 million, and those jobs are certainly at risk. Those workers are feeling the uncertainty because of the dramatic shift in US trade policy. So the government did need to pay attention to that, and they had an opportunity with this budget to put forward a credible plan to protect jobs; sadly, it didn't.

Speaker, it's not a rosy picture, like the imaginary one painted by the Conservatives in their partisan ads for which they spent \$40 million of taxpayer money before an election. They won the recent election with that money; their campaign manager even said so. Now it's time for the Conservative Party to pay that money back to the taxpayers.

So, Speaker, yes, the resilience of our economy is strained, but not because of Donald Trump, like the Conservatives told people over and over during the election. The resilience of our economy is strained because of this Conservative government and their bad decisions in the last seven years, and it's time that they acknowledge that.

Because of their poor performance and the economic uncertainty we're now facing, the period ahead will be challenging for workers and businesses. The FAO noted in a recent report that GDP growth is likely to stall in 2025 and 2026 as US tariffs potentially disrupt Ontario's economy. We may see a recession in 2025, with below-trend growth after that, reducing the real level of the GDP by about \$20 billion, or 2%, between now and 2029. In Ontario's manufacturing sector, the one most exposed to US tariffs, the level of trade could be 8% lower in 2026 versus a no tariff scenario.

So those output declines do put thousands of jobs at risk. In fact, the FAO sees 119,000—

The Acting Speaker (MPP Andrea Hazell): Debate time is up. Thank you.

Debate deemed adjourned.

The Acting Speaker (MPP Andrea Hazell): It is now time for members' statements.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

L'ARCHE STRATFORD

Mr. Matthew Rae: Today, it's my pleasure to rise to talk about L'Arche Stratford; some in this place will know it very well. It will be breaking ground on its newest project on Britannia Street, an innovative and accessible new facility with eight affordable and independent living

suites, activity rooms and offices to help grow their footprint in our community. They offer a variety of programs and services and have made Stratford home to the largest supported integrated living program in the province. L'Arche provides those living with developmental disabilities with an engaged, active and fulfilling life within our community. This new location will help reduce local wait-lists for support by over 50% and provide more individuals with supportive living through L'Arche Stratford.

Speaker, I'm proud to share that our government is helping ensure this project moves forward in a small way. Because of Bill 23, More Homes Built Faster Act, we are saving L'Arche Stratford over \$32,000 in development charges. It's wonderful to see how our government is helping get more affordable and supportive housing built in our small cities and rural Ontario. Congratulations to L'Arche Stratford on reaching this milestone. I look forward to attending the grand opening later.

ANDREW LAUER

Ms. Jennifer K. French: When I was first elected in 2014, I met and hired Andrew Lauer to work in the Oshawa constituency office. Andrew is an Oshawa boy who has always had a heart for service and a head for politics. During the federal election in 1979, Andrew walked into the local NDP campaign office to volunteer and became a life-long member of the party. Andrew has been serving constituents for almost 30 years. He first worked for MPP Allan Pilkey in Oshawa during the NDP government and later for Peter Kormos in Welland. He worked for Frances Lankin in Beaches–East York, and then for MPP Michael Prue until 2014. Then, from 2014 until 2025, he's worked in Oshawa.

Andrew has worked for five MPPs, and now that he's retiring, I am quite worried he'll write a best-selling tell-all book—and Andrew can tell you stories. Many of those stories are rooted in the human moments from when he was able to make a difference in the lives of our neighbours in need. Too often, we can't solve impossible problems, but Andrew always built relationships and invested his heart and soul into helping people. He started before the era of the Internet and before emails. He has watched the work evolve but has always seen that some things have never changed: There are always good people who will need help.

Andrew is beginning his well-deserved retirement, which I hope will be filled with reading and travel and adventures. I want to thank him for being such a committed and valued member of our team and for his heart and compassion and dedication to helping the people of Oshawa and Ontario. Our team won't be the same without him.

Thank you, Andrew Lauer, for 30 years of service to community and for a lifetime of believing in a better world and working so hard to make it happen. Congratulations on your retirement.

ONTARIO SCIENCE CENTRE

Ms. Stephanie Bowman: I'm sure many members will agree with me when I say that one of the best parts of this job is welcoming students from our riding. I know it's going to be a great day here when students from Don Valley West arrive to visit at Queen's Park.

Recently, I've had visits from Junior Academy, Leaside High School, Owen Public School, Thorncliffe Park Public School, Northlea Public School and Denlow Public School. Speaker, these bright, engaged students are learning about government, and one topic that always comes up is the Ontario Science Centre. They have one question: Why did the Premier close the Ontario Science Centre? I wish I could give them an answer other than "we don't really know."

Experts have debunked his and his minister's answers: It's not cheaper to move it than renovate it, and it's not because the roof is falling. Most of the students, including those from Leaside High School recently, asked me to do one thing. They asked me to tell the Premier—they say "MPP Bowman, will you please tell the Premier to not move the Science Centre, to leave it where it is?" So, for the students in Don Valley West and across our city, that's what I'm doing again today.

GOVERNMENT INVESTMENTS

Mr. Robert Bailey: Madam Speaker, it's a pleasure to see you in the chair. Rural Ontario's economy is vast, diverse and powerful. That's why I was pleased that the 2025 budget recognized the potential of rural communities all across this province and commits to historic investments, including in my riding of Sarnia-Lambton, that will also protect Ontario. These investments include an additional \$400 million in the Municipal Housing Infrastructure Program and the Housing-Enabling Water Systems Fund. Of those two intakes for the Housing-Enabling Water Systems Fund, nearly two thirds of the projects have been in small, rural and northern communities not unlike mine.

1020

Nearly \$2 billion next year alone is committed across the province for repairs and maintenance in local schools. This includes an addition to a school in my area, Errol Village Public School, in Camlachie.

I was especially excited to see the modernization of the Rural Ontario Development Program, formerly known as the Rural Economic Development Program. We are doubling the funding, at \$10 million annually, over the next two years.

This budget reflects and respects rural Ontario. It is an encouraging response to the needs of this province and highlights our government's commitment to rural Ontario, matching the ambition of our rural economic development strategy. As we look to protect Ontario, we need to look to our small towns across the province, because when rural communities thrive, Ontario thrives.

GOVERNMENT ACCOUNTABILITY

Ms. Sandy Shaw: Doug Ford's controversial Bill 5 must be withdrawn. With this bill the government is writing a blank cheque to exempt themselves from any and all laws and regulations to do whatever they want wherever they want—no consent, no consultation, no laws.

So-called special economic zones give cabinet ministers sweeping power to override laws, including laws that protect Ontario's land and waters, even labour laws, and public safety protections.

With Bill 5, this government is displaying their staggering lack of respect for First Nations. Ontario, as the crown, has a legal responsibility to uphold the treaties. First Nations leaders have come to the Legislature and have told the government in no uncertain words that Bill 5 is a direct violation of their sovereignty and their inherent rights. There is no bill, no shortcut for the Ontario government to neglect their duty to consult. Underestimating this duty or underestimating First Nations would be a mistake.

This bill is a daring power grab that could have been ripped right out of the playbook of Donald Trump. I stand in solidarity with those who believe in accountable, responsible government, environmental protections and upholding the rights of First Nations. I urge this government to reconsider and withdraw Bill 5.

EVENTS IN MISSISSAUGA
EAST-COOKSVILLE

MPP Silvia Gualtieri: Madam Speaker, community spirit shines bright in Mississauga East-Cooksville, and I am proud to rise again to celebrate it. The 19th annual food drive, organized by the 52nd Mississauga Scouts, was a heartwarming reminder of the generosity of our youth. These young leaders collected for Food Banks Mississauga, truly showcasing what it means to give back.

I also had the pleasure of meeting Stephaney Wang, a bright and dedicated legislative page from my riding. Stephaney, we are proud of you.

We celebrated heritage and unity at the seventh annual Egyptian festival, the largest of its kind in North America, hosted by the Canadian Egyptian Heritage Association. The event brought culture, history and tradition to life.

At the International Christian Voice's memorial meeting, we honoured Martyr Shahbaz Bhatti, a courageous advocate for religious freedom and human rights. His legacy lives on.

Tonight I will be joining the volunteer appreciation evening to recognize those who uplift our community through selfless service.

Looking ahead, I am excited to attend the Italian extravaganza on June 5, and on June 9 I look forward to welcoming residents for Seniors Living Expo, where we connect seniors with caregivers, families and the tools they need to live well and age with confidence—

BASIC INCOME

MPP Lise Vaugeois: The basic income program, with locations in Lindsay, Hamilton, and my riding of Thunder Bay, began in 2017 under the Liberals as a pilot program for poverty reduction. Participants were given up to \$17,000 a year for three years in exchange for allowing themselves to become objects of the government's study, sharing intimate details about their finances, relationships, physical and mental health, housing, and so on. The goal after three years was to provide enough data to assess the effects on people and on communities of a guaranteed basic income.

The Ontario government had contractually committed to completing this project over the planned three years; however, the moment Doug Ford was elected in 2018, he pulled the plug. This caused incredible harm to participants, many of whom had reported improvements in their physical and mental health, labour market participation, food security, housing stability, financial status and social relationships.

The abrupt closure was devastating, but this story doesn't end here.

With the support of Cavalluzzo LLP lawyer Stephen Moreau, 4,000 participants are pursuing a \$2-million class action lawsuit against the government, alleging a breach of contract, negligence, and a violation of section 7 of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

The behaviour of the government was egregious, and I believe the court case will prove this. A better idea would be to save everyone time, money and further suffering, and settle this case now.

GOVERNMENT INVESTMENTS

Mr. John Jordan: Our government recently announced its 2025 Experience Ontario grants to festivals in my riding of Lanark–Frontenac–Kingston. This grant provides support for events to motivate visitors to discover Ontario, connect people and local experiences, and increase tourism spending.

Thanks to the Ministry of Tourism, Culture and Gaming, the Stewart Park Festival in Perth was one of the successful recipients. Cathy McNally, director of community services for the town of Perth, said, "When our MPP John Jordan called me to share the news we had received the Experience Ontario grant, I was elated for our Stewart Park Festival team. This group of volunteers worked tirelessly to bring three days of music to the park here in Perth each summer. This provincial funding support goes such a long way to help to continue a beloved three-decade-long tradition."

Overall, our government is investing nearly \$20 million across the province, and over 350 festivals and events will be supported this year. Events like the Spirit of the Drum Pow Wow in Smiths Falls, June 14 and 15, and Almonte Celtfest, July 4 to 6, plus the Festival of Small Halls and a number of festivals in Kingston, Ontario. Now more than ever, it's important that we come together to take part in

made-in-Ontario experiences that highlight the best of our province and support local communities.

EVENTS IN MARKHAM–UNIONVILLE

Mr. Billy Pang: I am pleased to rise in the House today to recognize the remarkable people of Markham–Unionville. Earlier this month, we celebrated Mother's Day by presenting the amazing mom award, a heartfelt way to honour the many incredible women for their love, dedication and care. Markham–Unionville is home to so many inspiring individuals, and I believe it is important that we continue to celebrate them. That's why June will be filled with special initiatives to recognize them.

We will begin with the outstanding senior volunteer award during Senior Volunteer Appreciation Week, which was officially proclaimed in Ontario through my private member's Bill 270, the Senior Volunteer Appreciation Week Act, 2021.

Next, we'll recognize father figures through the amazing dad award, a meaningful way to honour the important role they play in our lives. Men usually feel forgotten in a family—not anymore, not in my riding.

Finally, we'll wrap up the month with the shining star award, celebrating students of all ages who are achieving academic and personal milestones, with certificates and a "shining stars" festival being held in my riding.

Thank you to all the special people who make our community extraordinary and unique. I look forward to reconnecting with them in person this summer during my award presentation and community visits.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): I'd ask the House to lower the volume on the sidebar conversations, please.

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

HOUSE SITTINGS

Mr. Steve Clark: Yes, Speaker, point of order. Good morning.

I'd like to advise the House that the night sitting scheduled for this evening has been cancelled.

1030

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): I beg to inform the House—and here's the bad news. I beg to inform the House that, pursuant to standing order 9(h), the Clerk has received written notice from the government House leader indicating that a temporary change in the weekly meeting schedule of the House is required, and therefore the House shall commence at 9 a.m. on Monday, June 2, 2025, for the proceeding orders of the day.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Hon. Trevor Jones: It gives me great pleasure to welcome the Beef Farmers of Ontario today. After question

period, please attend the south lawn and enjoy fresh farm beef from Ontario beef farmers.

M^{me} Chandra Pasma: J'aimerais souhaiter la bienvenue à tous les membres de l'Association franco-ontarienne des conseils scolaires catholiques à Queen's Park aujourd'hui, y compris leur président, Robert Demers, et leur vice-présidente, Johanne Lacombe. Merci d'être venus pour nous parler de l'importance de l'éducation francophone. J'espère que vous passez toutes et tous une très bonne journée à Queen's Park.

Mr. Rob Cerjanec: I'd like to recognize Sāra Harsini, the president of the York University Undergraduate Political Science Council, and their members who are here today at Queen's Park. Welcome to your House.

M. Andrew Dowie: J'aimerais souhaiter une très cordiale bienvenue à Robert Demers, Paul Lachance et Christine Brooks avec le Conseil scolaire catholique Providence. Merci d'avoir visité notre Assemblée législative.

M^{me} France Gélinas: Moi aussi, j'aimerais souhaiter la bienvenue à Robert Demers, le président de L'association franco-ontarienne des conseils scolaires catholiques, ainsi qu'à Chahrazad Chaabane, Mirela Lonian et Stewart Kiff. Bienvenue.

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A year ago today, we were standing here, and I'd like to just acknowledge my mom, Kezia Mamakwa. Today is her birthday. She's 80 years old. Meegwetch.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): Happy birthday, Ma Mamakwa.

Hon. Nolan Quinn: I'd like to introduce my summer intern, Joshua Deslandes. Joshua's a bright student at the University of Toronto Scarborough with a passion for public service. We're pleased to have him join my ministry team. Welcome, Joshua.

Hon. Stephen Lecce: Good morning, Madam Speaker. I want to introduce some amazing friends from King–Vaughan who are with us today: my dear friend Meni and John Pitoscia, as well as Wendy and Fred. Thank you for joining us, thank you for your friendship and leadership—as well as a shout-out to Isabella, Sabrina, Ornella, Brandon, Amanda and Maia, all of whom are doing amazing work. Thank you all for your service.

Ms. Lee Fairclough: I want to acknowledge that today is Red Shirt Day, where we join thousands of Canadians in wearing red to show support for people and families living with disabilities and actions to support accessibility, inclusion and equity. I want to acknowledge everyone in Etobicoke–Lakeshore that came out to support accessibility at Mimico GO yesterday.

Hon. Graham McGregor: We have very special guests here: my parents, Duncan and Lesley McGregor. My mother,

Lesley, is here for the very first time. Welcome to Queen's Park.

Mr. Terence Kernaghan: It gives me great pleasure to welcome Feed Ontario and members of the food bank network from across Ontario. I hope your day of action goes well.

M. Stephen Blais: Je voudrais prendre un moment pour souhaiter la bienvenue à quelques amis et membres de l'Association franco-ontarienne des conseils scolaires catholiques avec nous aujourd'hui : MM. Marc Bertrand, Daniel Boudria, Jean-François Boulanger et Olivier Gagnon Maheu. Merci pour votre présence, et j'ai hâte de vous rencontrer cet après-midi.

Hon. Prabmeet Singh Sarkaria: I want to take the opportunity to introduce Corry Erkelens, who is the mother of Premier's office staffer Jenna Bendayan, and Joelle Kapon, who's also visiting us here today.

Mrs. Jennifer (Jennie) Stevens: I want to welcome two very important people to the House this morning: my constituency assistant, Caleb Ratzlaff, and Steve Walton, a constituent and local tenants' advocate. Welcome to Queen's Park. Welcome to your House.

Hon. Caroline Mulroney: I'm pleased to welcome to the Legislature today, from my riding of York-Simcoe, my friend Grant Peckford, the host of the popular Rogers television program Georgina Life.

J'aimerais aussi prendre l'occasion pour saluer les représentants de l'Association franco-ontarienne des conseils scolaires catholiques : Robert Demers, Suzanne Salituri et Mirela Lonian, et aussi la représentante du Consortium Centre Jules-Léger Melinda Chartrand. Bienvenue à Queen's Park.

Hon. Kinga Surma: I would like to welcome two of my interns: Bobby Smitiuch, who was actually with me since the very beginning, when I decided to run back in 2018, and Chiara Naccarato. They're here today.

I hope you have a wonderful day.

MPP Alexa Gilmour: Our page captain today is Emma Hurtado Dagnino, from Parkdale–High Park, and I want to welcome her and her family, Michelle, Jorge and Hermes, who are here today.

Congratulations. Parkdale–High Park is very proud of you.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): I apologize to everyone who was unable to make introductions—and my especial apology to the member from Oakville North—Burlington; you will be able to do so at 1 o'clock.

QUESTION PERIOD

GOVERNMENT ACCOUNTABILITY

Ms. Marit Stiles: This question is for the Premier. We have seen unprecedented opposition to Bill 5. And I know the Premier doesn't like to hear opposition and he doesn't like anybody opposing his ideas. Sometimes he gets a bit angry about it. He has been known to hurl a few insults.

But thousands and thousands and thousands of people have reached out with their concerns. We're hearing from mining companies. We're hearing from scientists and engineers and, of course, from First Nations. I know that the Premier is feeling the pressure now, but so far, all this government is doing is blowing smoke.

Will the government take their responsibility to First Nations seriously and withdraw Bill 5?

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): Minister of Energy and Mines.

Hon. Stephen Lecce: We brought forth a bill after campaigning to the people of Ontario on a commitment to cut down the time it takes to build responsible resource development. I think all Canadians understand the point that we are literally losing this economic war because we are the second slowest in the industrialized world. We also recognize that in order to do big things in this nation, we need to do it in partnership.

The national government, in the speech from the throne yesterday, committed to reducing their assessments from five down to two years. The new NDP of Manitoba and BC have committed to reducing their timelines too. We are all working with the same intention.

We understand the need to strengthen the bill. That's why the government has committed, working with the Minister of Indigenous Affairs, to further codify every schedule relevant in the bill—that we will meaningfully consult before using our authorities.

We will respect the Constitution. But we will get on with building our nation and standing up for Canada's economic self-reliance.

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

Ms. Marit Stiles: Well, Speaker, if the government wanted to do this right, they would consult before they introduce the law, not after.

This government has always been about show and not substance.

You're setting us back generations with this legislation. This isn't about mining. It's not about the north. It's not about the economy. It's not even about fighting Donald Trump, for goodness' sake. This is an unfettered power grab by this government and this Premier, and the people have had enough.

Back to the Premier: The only way to fix this bill is to scrap it. Nothing else is going to do that.

Will the government scrap Bill 5?

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): Response? I recognize the Minister of Indigenous Affairs.

Hon. Greg Rickford: Madam Speaker, this bill is in fact about more than just mining. It's about creating an opportunity for First Nations communities who, for too long, have lived in the kind of socio-economic conditions that are completely unacceptable—the most brittle critical infrastructure anywhere; no road access; demands from First Nations leadership to build all-season roads because they are shrinking and goods and services cannot get to those communities.

We believe if we work in full partnership with First Nations communities to build out the critical infrastructure that is the face of developing critical minerals and mining sites, we think we have a fair, responsible and reasonable way for us to have common goals and common interests, to create a brighter future for the First Nations communities in this province that need it the most.

1040

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): Supplementary?

Ms. Marit Stiles: Back to the Premier: You are not working in full partnership with First Nations. My goodness, if you got any message from this last couple of weeks, surely it's that, right? Even the mining sector knows that free, prior, informed consent isn't just a constitutional obligation; it is the key to the success of these projects.

But this bill? It just takes us backward, and all this scrambling that we've seen over the last few days from all these ministers—boy, they're going in a thousand directions, but they're actually not solving the fundamental problem here. Will the government do the right thing, the smart thing, withdraw this bill and go back to the drawing board?

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): The Minister of Energy and Mines.

Hon. Stephen Lecce: Madam Speaker, doing the right thing is ensuring that we lead the industrialized world when it comes to responsible resource development. Doing the right thing is challenging the status quo.

The opposition wants to make this everything but resource development, but they too say that they would support getting mines built faster. We have a bill before the House that respects the Constitution, strengthens compliance, but cuts down permitting timelines by 50%, and because the New Democrats and the Liberals will never get to yes on getting a resource project done—this is about the self-reliance of Canada.

If we want to win the day and build the clean energy economy the opposition members aspire to for Canada, then they will work with this government, as the federal government is doing too, to cut down timelines, to reduce the bureaucracy, to cut the permitting time by half so that we actually get on with building our clean energy economy. We cannot do that when we are the slowest in the world, and we have a plan before the House, working in partnership with all communities impacted, to deliver responsible resource development, finally, for the people of Ontario.

GOVERNMENT ACCOUNTABILITY

Ms. Marit Stiles: I'm going to go back to the Premier again. Look, you have a bill before us here that is going to tie this government and these projects up in court for years. This isn't going to help. It's not going to speed anything up. It's just going to make everything take longer.

And it's not just disrespect for First Nations, Speaker; I want to be very clear with government—and that is enough of a reason—but it's also that this bill is going to

completely derail northern development. It is about the laws that they are going to be able to suspend. You can call them “special economic zones,” but what we know you are doing is opening up the floodgates for an abuse of power by government. The government is willingly putting workers’ health and safety and lives at risk. Will you scrap the bill and go back to the drawing board?

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): I recognize the Minister of Indigenous Affairs and First Nations Economic Reconciliation.

Hon. Greg Rickford: Forgive me, Madam Speaker, if I’m struggling with that question from somebody who thinks northern Ontario is North York. Let me tell the member opposite about northern communities. The member sitting beside—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): Order.

Hon. Greg Rickford: —has stood in this place and talked about the level of desperation with First Nations youth living in those isolated communities. Nobody has mentioned here today in this debate so far that we have signed good community partnership agreements that are going to tie those communities to legacy infrastructure, to meet the demands not only of what their communities expect, since their populations are shrinking and moving to the cities, but helping those young people move back to those communities with meaningful jobs, hope and prosperity.

We believe that, done right, the \$3 billion that we announced and the money to support the consultation process will bring this to a place where we’ll be meaningful partners with First Nations and move forward in that spirit.

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

Ms. Marit Stiles: The minister can hurl all the insults he wants; it’s not going to make me back off of this one, I can tell you. I can tell you that.

I want to explain something to the minister. The government is giving themselves the power to override every law. I want to be clear about what this means, because this bill gives the government the power to override labour laws, those laws that keep those workers safe and protect fair wages.

Now, I want you to think for a moment, Speaker, about all those hard-working people in the mining sector who fought to make sure that at the end of the day they had the laws and protections that would make sure they got home safely to their families. Those laws? Out the window under this government’s law.

If the government truly respects Ontario workers, why would they override the very laws that protect them in this bill?

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): I recognize the Minister of Economic Development, Job Creation and Trade.

Hon. Victor Fedeli: Speaker, we’ve seen unprecedented levels of investment flow into the province since we took office. In the last two years, 184 international

companies have landed here, bringing \$30 billion, hiring 18,000 new people. That’s what happens when you cut red tape and lower costs across the board.

Now, we are going to build on that progress, but we have to recognize that we need to move faster. The competition for investments is going to be unlike anything we’ve ever seen. If companies have to wait 15 years to get shovels in the ground, they’re going to invest in other jurisdictions. We need to get rid of unnecessary red tape, make it easier for companies to invest, to hire and to grow. That is exactly what Bill 5 will do.

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

Ms. Marit Stiles: Well, Speaker, I’ll tell you one thing: The laws that protect workers and their rights are not red tape.

We can build a more resilient economy. We can grow this economy. We can access Ontario’s resources, and you know what? We can do it all without overriding every single law—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): Government side will come to order.

Ms. Marit Stiles: We can do that without overriding every single law and protection in this province, without suspending workers’ rights, without trampling treaty obligations, without opening the door to corruption.

What we cannot do is fight back against Trump’s trade war by adopting Trump-style tactics, but that is exactly what this Premier and his government are doing.

So I’m going to ask one more time: Will the Premier stop the Trump-like tactics and scrap Bill 5?

Hon. Victor Fedeli: Speaker, we heard yesterday in the federal government’s throne speech very clearly, from the King—he said we need to move faster to get job-creating projects approved. In his own words, the government of Canada will work with provinces to finally achieve the goal of—from the King—“one project, one review.” It doesn’t matter if it’s in Ontario, the NDPs in BC or the federal government, we all recognize the need to move faster.

The competition to land investments is going to be unlike anything we’ve seen. We’ve said that over and over here: If companies have to wait 15 years to get a permit, they’re going to bring their investment dollars elsewhere. We on this side refuse to let that happen. We will create more jobs right here in the province of Ontario through our Bill 5.

GOVERNMENT ACCOUNTABILITY

Mr. John Fraser: Bill 5 is going to go through clause-by-clause today. It’s very clear that the Premier is pretty much hell-bent on ramming Bill 5 through.

Now, we’ve heard from First Nations leaders who said to the Premier very clearly, “You need to stop. You need to talk to us. You need to consult with us.” This is what our First Nations are saying to us, irrespective of what the Premier said yesterday. It’s a big problem.

So my question to the Premier is, why is he risking breaking the little trust that his government has with First Nations and going forward with Bill 5 in its present form?

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

Hon. Greg Rickford: The term is “the First Nations,” not “our First Nations.” Proudly, they are nations that we intend to engage and consult with in a meaningful way. We understand our responsibilities with respect to the duty to consult on Bill 5.

Committee is not a place for the duty to consult. The duty to consult starts when political leadership sits down with Indigenous leaders from across the province as they’re represented by their grand chiefs etc., and then proceed into regional parts of Ontario to make sure that Bill 5 is understood as an opportunity—an opportunity to build legacy infrastructure, to advance projects that are as much in the interest of First Nations as they are to the province of Ontario.

1050

We have a rare opportunity, for all the reasons debated so far, Madam Speaker, to make meaningful partnerships with First Nations communities that can change their outcomes and look forward to the same kind of prosperity that the rest of Ontario thinks about and understands.

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

Mr. John Fraser: Speaker, I want to apologize: We don’t own First Nations. I don’t believe that, but I do believe we have a duty to consult and listen to them.

The only things that are salvageable in Bill 5 are schedules 4 and 5, and they relate to eliminating fees and the consolidation of the permitting process. The rest of it is just a recipe for disaster. Not only is it offending First Nations, it’s of great concern to the people of Dresden, who are specifically mentioned and pointed out in the bill. They are the first victims of the Premier’s special economic zones.

So the Premier’s message is clear on Bill 5: “I’m going to do whatever I want wherever I want whenever I want with whomever I want, and to heck with the rest of you. You don’t have a say.”

My question back to the Premier is, why will the Premier not do as First Nations are asking us, to put a stop to Bill 5 in its present form and go back to the drawing board?

Hon. Greg Rickford: Madam Speaker, if you look and listen to the feedback so far from First Nations leaders who’ve taken a very reasonable approach to what Bill 5 is presenting, it’s more about an opportunity—an opportunity to engage politically, an opportunity to consult on Bill 5 moving forward, which is what our obligation is once this legislation is passed, and we will do that. Under no circumstances will we compromise treaty rights or the duty to consult. In fact, it will be a sharpened focus with First Nations who’ve approached us about some of their economic interests.

Imagine, for the first time ever a government coming forward with the kind of heft in policy—\$3 billion to

support equity partnerships in major infrastructure projects, \$70 million to support capacity and engagement in the duty to consult with First Nations so that when we move beyond consultation we’re in the right place for young First Nations people to have as bright a future as my children and anybody else’s.

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

Mr. John Fraser: It’s really hard to believe that answer when the government’s response to First Nations is, “Oh, we just put two amendments into the bill,” one in the preamble—for God’s sakes, a preamble—and another one. So it doesn’t really have very much meaning. It’s just more words, which First Nations have heard a lot for a very, very long period of time.

I guess the real question is, why did the Premier not go to the people? Why did this bill not travel? Why didn’t we go to the places in the north where the Premier is going to create his special economic zones? Why didn’t we go to the people of Dresden? Why didn’t this committee take the time to do this? It’s such a big bill, it’s so important, and we’re not actually listening to the people who are most affected by it? So why did the Premier not allow this bill to be travelled?

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): The Minister of Energy and Mines.

Hon. Stephen Lecce: Madam Speaker, the member opposite is right on one thing: It can’t just be the rhetoric of public servants or politicians when it comes to commitments.

So, unlike the former Liberal government, this Premier put \$3 billion on the table to ensure equity ownership of large-scale resource projects to create jobs, ownership and opportunity for Indigenous peoples. We put \$70 million specifically on the table, increasing the Indigenous Participation Fund to navigate the duty to consult. That’s a 260% increase, a number one top ask of the leadership.

But what all Canadians want, including the federal Liberals as of yesterday’s throne speech, is an actual action plan to reduce the timelines it takes to build, because we are the slowest. It’s a legacy of the former Liberals that did nothing, that kept our resources landlocked, that didn’t get shovels in the ground.

We have a responsibility, yes, post-Trump. Let’s acknowledge the elephant in the room. It’s either we stand up or another authoritarian regime wins the day. We choose Canada and so should you.

GOVERNMENT ACCOUNTABILITY

Mr. John Fraser: Back to the Premier, Speaker: It would be easier for First Nations to believe this government if they weren’t late with their homework, with a couple of hundred words at the last minute to say they were serious about it. It’s hard to believe this government’s serious about it at all.

So, here’s what Bill 5 essentially does: It allows the Premier to draw a circle around a piece of land and say, “I’m going to do whatever I want, with whoever I want,

whenever I want.” And the rules? They don’t apply here. What the Premier wants to do is say, “There’s one set of rules for me, and there’s another set of rules for everybody else.”

So I guess my question to the Premier is, why does he think he’s above the law?

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): The Minister of Indigenous Affairs.

Hon. Greg Rickford: I’ve got to collect my thoughts here, because I’m thinking of all the Liberal MPPs that actually come from northern Ontario and understand it—oh, there aren’t any, Madam Speaker.

I think what we have to do here is understand that this is a rare opportunity, unmatched in any experience or scenario that I have been in. Even going back to my federal days, Madam Speaker, we had an opportunity to work with First Nations communities on developing the kinds of economic projects that transformed their communities across this country. As the Minister of Energy and Mines mentioned, there are other jurisdictions in Canada, notably British Columbia and Manitoba, who are looking at their policy actions and pursuing them in a way that not just builds out the opportunity for the world to serve up in critical minerals but to make sure that First Nations are full and meaningful partners, and that’s exactly what we intend to do.

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

Mr. John Fraser: Well, we all remember the last time the Premier drew a big circle, and what was that big circle around?

Mme Lucille Collard: The greenbelt.

Mr. John Fraser: The greenbelt, that’s right. And we all know what happened, right? And we had to do that because there was a crisis in housing: “We have to do it; I’ve got to break these rules because there’s a crisis.” But we all saw what happened. We didn’t get any more homes, right? But wealthy, well-connected insiders, well, they sure were rewarded.

Bill 5 is just the Premier saying, “It’s okay for me to do that.” So my question back is, why does the Premier think he’s above the law?

Hon. Greg Rickford: Let’s go back to the last time a government drew a circle around a place in Ontario. Oh, it was the Far North Act. The Far North Act, that’s it. It was a piece of legislation that put reservations—Indian reservations, as they’re referred to in the Indian Act—into parks, without consultation. It land-locked those communities that were already land-locked in the Far North. I was there working as a lawyer in that region. There was outrage, Madam Speaker, because it provided no opportunities to give voices to First Nations; it recognized no partnership opportunities.

Bill 5 and the work we’re doing with our community partnership agreements are giving First Nations a powerful economic tool to fundamentally transform the kind of prosperity that they should have, since we all have access to it. Let’s be fair, let’s be reasonable and let’s ensure that

First Nations youth, tomorrow and for the next seven generations, have an opportunity.

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

Mr. John Fraser: Speaker, I just want to make this clear to the members on the other side, especially the ministers. What Bill 5 permits to happen is the Premier, or somebody from his office, is going to come to you and say, “I want you to do this thing in this place with these people.” And then you will have a tough decision to make, and, rest assured, in that decision, you will be the person left holding the bag, because that’s how this Premier operates. I’m not making this stuff up. You have colleagues who know what it’s just like to be left holding the bag by the Premier, because that’s how he operates.

My question again is, why does the Premier believe he’s above the law?

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): Minister of Energy and Mines.

Hon. Stephen Lecce: Yesterday in the federal Liberal throne speech, the federal Liberal party announced an intention to cut their assessment timelines from five years down to two. That is actually more aggressive than the one before the House today by our government. So it begs the question: You are well outside the political mainstream if you think the status quo is working—

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

Hon. Stephen Lecce: And the members opposite of both parties posed the question, “Who stands by this bill?” Well, the Ontario Mining Association stands by the “one project, one process” vision. The head of the Canadian Manufacturers and Exporters association stands by that provision. The chair of the Greater Sudbury Chamber of Commerce stands by our plan to responsibly build resources. The head of Frontier Lithium; the head of the Toronto Region Board of Trade; the head of Generation Mining; the head of Agnico Eagle; the CEO of the Canadian Chamber of Commerce; the executive director of MineConnect; Iamgold; the Business Council of Canada—everyone wants us to get on with building a clean energy economy, and we’re doing this in partnership with First Nation communities—

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

1100

PHARMACARE

MPP Robin Lennox: My question is for the Premier.

Today there are people standing at pharmacy counters all across Ontario and wondering if they’re going to be able to afford to fill their prescriptions, trying to decide if they’re going to be able to treat their diabetes and pay their rent in the same month.

You’ve often spoken about how Ontarians will only have to pay for their health care with their OHIP card, never their credit card, but somehow that promise falls through in the short time it takes for someone to walk from

their doctor's office to the pharmacy to fill their prescription.

By expanding Ontario drug benefit eligibility to include all Ontarians, we could immediately put money back in people's pockets while taking care of their health and saving our health system dollars.

Will the Premier commit to standing with the people of Ontario and voting yes on my motion to expand the Ontario drug benefit to all Ontarians in this province?

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

Hon. Sylvia Jones: The member opposite should know that with the coverage that we have provided in the province of Ontario, we actually cover almost 60% of the population who need these services. We have five publicly funded drug programs, and of course, the largest is the Ontario Drug Benefit Program. We make sure that individuals who are in need have access to these critical drugs.

I must say, the work that the Premier has made in terms of leading the Confederation to ensure that Ontario and Canadian individuals get fast access to pharmaceuticals is some of the work that he is doing as the current leader of COF.

We'll continue to do that work. We'll make sure that those individuals who are actually in need are getting the pharmaceuticals and the treatments they deserve.

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

MPP Robin Lennox: Unlike the Minister of Health, I've never been satisfied with a success rate of 60%.

The minister should know that if we don't pay for people's essential medications at the pharmacy, we're going to be paying for it in our emergency departments and our hospitals.

One in five working Ontarians don't have any medication coverage at all. Small businesses are struggling, having to eat into their profit margins to pay for private coverage for their employees. Expanding access to prescription medication through the Ontario drug benefit would help workers and small businesses alike. Workers would know that we have their backs and that their medications will be covered no matter what.

Will the Premier commit to standing with Ontario workers and Ontario businesses by voting yes on my motion to expand access to the Ontario drug benefit for all Ontarians?

Hon. Sylvia Jones: Let's actually look at who is covered by the five publicly funded programs. Anyone aged 24 years and younger—OHIP+ is covered. Seniors aged 65 and older are covered—people receiving social assistance; people residing in homes for special care, community homes for opportunity, and long-term-care homes; people receiving professional home and community care services; and households enrolled in the Trillium drug plan.

If the member wanted to do her job, she'd actually make sure that her constituents understand the five programs that we have and work with them to apply for them.

POST-SECONDARY EDUCATION

Mr. Stephen Blais: My question is for the Premier.

Madam Speaker, Ontario should be leading North America in innovation, talent and opportunity. But under this Premier's watch, we've fallen embarrassingly behind. We are dead last in Canada for per-student university funding. While places like Quebec, California and Massachusetts are powering ahead, investing 3%, 4%, even 6% of their GDP into research and development, Ontario can't even crack 2%. We're getting lapped by global innovation leaders, and instead of investing in brainpower, the Premier is stuck in traffic with yesterday's priorities.

Why is the Premier's government steering Ontario into the slow lane when we should be in a full-speed race towards a smarter and stronger future?

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): I recognize the Minister of Colleges and Universities.

Hon. Nolan Quinn: I'll remind the member opposite: Under their government, it was the highest tuition in Canada. We will not put that on the backs of our students, Speaker.

On top of the \$5 billion we provide the sector every year, we've invested another \$2 billion in the last 15 months. We're making targeted investments into labour market needs, whether that's the \$75 million to our colleges for construction seats, the \$55 million for new teaching seats—with half of those being French teaching seats—as well as the \$10 million for First Nations scholarships.

We're focusing on what the economy needs. This summer, we'll be starting a review of the funding model, and we'll ensure that our post-secondary system is continuing to be world-class, as it always has been.

Mr. Stephen Blais: That doesn't change the fact that this province is behind Massachusetts, it's behind California, it's behind Washington in investing in research and development. The Premier talks a big game about jobs and growth, but the truth is, you can't build a strong economy when you're cutting off the brainpower at its source. Colleges and universities aren't asking for extravagances; they're asking for a little bit of oxygen. Instead, they're being told to do more with less while our competitors invest in their future. We're now seeing the cost of that: Programs are being cut, fewer seats at universities and fewer reasons for talent to stay in Ontario.

To the Premier: How can we expect to lead in innovation when his government treats education like a line item to be cut instead of a launchpad to power our future?

Hon. Nolan Quinn: Let me be very clear, Speaker: Funding for the post-secondary system is higher than it's ever been in Ontario's history. Some \$1.3 billion last year was invested into the system to stabilize it because the federal Liberals unilaterally changed the international student market, on top of the \$750 million we've now invested into STEM seats, graduating an extra 20,000 STEM graduates every year on top of the 70,000 graduates in STEM we're already providing the economy.

I've already mentioned the investments, but I'll mention it again to the member opposite: \$75 million for

construction seats, with 100 of those being planning seats for our municipalities—understanding there's a need for planning—on top of the \$55 million for 2,600 new teaching seats, as well as the \$10 million for First Nations grants for the north.

We're going to continue standing by this sector and meeting with the sector to ensure that our system will continue to be there for the students of Ontario.

TRANSPORTATION INFRASTRUCTURE

Mr. Amarjot Sandhu: My question is to the Minister of Transportation. Families in Peel region are tired of sitting in traffic. Gridlock is hurting their lives. It means missed dinners, late pickups and longer workdays. But Bonnie Crombie and the Liberals don't seem to care. She said, "I don't go to anything in Brampton. It's not my city. I don't care."

Speaker, the people of Brampton and Mississauga voted for change. They voted for Highway 413. Our government is building the roads and transit that families need. We're getting shovels in the ground, building faster and making life easier.

Can the minister please explain how our government's plan is fixing gridlock and helping Peel region grow, despite opposition from the Liberals and their out-of-touch leader?

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): I recognize the member for Brampton East.

Mr. Hardeep Singh Grewal: Thank you to the member from Brampton West. He's absolutely correct: Bonnie Crombie and the Liberals are out of touch. The people of Mississauga and Brampton voted overwhelmingly for our plan to build Highway 413. As an MPP from Brampton, I've seen first-hand how the Liberals think about Bramptonians—and don't take my word for it; take Bonnie Crombie's word for it: "I don't go to anything in Brampton. It's not my city. I don't care."

Speaker, the Liberals don't care about my community and the fact that they're stuck in gridlock. The Liberals don't care that grocery prices are going up because trucks are stuck in gridlock. The Liberals don't care that parents can't make it home in time because they're stuck in gridlock. That's why, under her leadership, the Liberals lost every single seat in Peel region, including her own.

That's why we're going to support the growth in Peel, we're going to build Highway 413 and we're going to get it done for the people of Brampton, Mississauga, Vaughan, Milton and Ontario.

1110

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): Supplementary?

Mr. Amarjot Sandhu: Thank you to the parliamentary assistant for the response. The Liberals say they're listening, but the people of Brampton know better. Under their watch, gridlock got worse and nothing got done. Why? Because as Bonnie Crombie once said, "It's not my city. I don't care." That says it all, Madam Speaker.

The Liberals may not care, but our government does. While Peel region keeps growing, the Liberals want to go to back to the same failed approach.

Interjections.

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

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): The government House leader will come to order.

I apologize. You can continue.

Mr. Amarjot Sandhu: While Peel region keeps growing, the Liberals want to go back to the same failed approach. They would rather leave Brampton stuck in traffic than build the roads people need.

Can the parliamentary assistant explain why building Highway 413 is the right choice and how our government is making sure Brampton and Peel region have the infrastructure to grow and succeed?

Mr. Hardeep Singh Grewal: Thank you again to the member from Brampton West. It takes too long to commute from Mississauga to Brampton. The Liberals studied Highway 413. They saw the need, but they sat back as the population in Peel grew. They ignored the growth. They didn't support the community, and on our major highways such as the 401 and 410, they're already at capacity. The 401 is North America's most congested highway, and the Liberals don't want to invest in these projects. With 200,000 people moving to Ontario each year, we cannot continue with the status quo. Gridlock costs our economy \$56 billion every year, and we cannot afford that. We need to make sure that we continue to build the critical infrastructure Ontario needs.

Bonnie Crombie and the Liberals are choosing to ignore the people of Peel region. That's why they couldn't even win one single seat in the entire region of Peel.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): I'm going to ask members to lower the volume on the sidebar conversations.

Question?

LABOUR DISPUTE

MPP Jamie West: My question is for the Premier. There are 4,000 workers at the WSIB who are facing record burnout and unimaginable workloads. Instead of support, the WSIB forced the first labour disruption in over 100 years.

Alyson's husband works for the WSIB, and she has a question for the Premier: "We were already struggling before this started. We both work full-time, pay our bills, taxes. We have one child. We struggle. We're going into debt putting food on the table. I am asking you to get this union and the employer back to the table."

My question is, will the Premier go elbows up to protect workers like Alyson and her husband and demand that the WSIB gets back to the table?

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): I recognize the Minister of Labour, Immigration, Training, and Skills Development.

Hon. David Piccini: Thank you for the question from the member opposite and for sharing Alyson's story.

I just do first want to start by saying that WSIB employees have done a phenomenal job—the entire organization, going from an underfunded liability to the position where they're in today, where we have the lowest lost-injury time rate in modern history. I think we can all agree that low lost injury time is a good thing in Ontario.

The parties will be back at the table tomorrow. In fact, they're at the Sheraton today, both parties. The latest wage offer was tabled by the WSIB. I'm pleased to receive and be in possession of a letter from the union that they're willing to come back to the table with a wage offer. We look forward to that. The best deals are done at the table, and I'm really happy to see that both parties are back there.

MPP Jamie West: I think that's promising news. The Premier has been going around as Captain Canada, which I think is great. He encourages Ontarians and Ontario businesses to spend their money here, but I don't know if he's aware that WSIB management has spent \$14.5 million to hire an American company called BetterUp to provide corporate coaching services; \$14 million, by the way, can provide a 4% increase for WSIB workers. They wouldn't have the stress. They wouldn't be on strike today.

While 4,000 workers are expected to do more with less, WSIB management spends millions on US contracts, they take trips, and they award themselves huge bonuses. Does the Premier think this is acceptable?

Hon. David Piccini: What we think is acceptable and what we want is a fair deal that's reached at the table. WSIB workers are valued, and they are very well compensated for the work that they do—in fact, close to 70% of whom earn over \$100,000 a year or more. So it's important that they continue to do the great work that they do.

I'm glad that both parties are back at the table and I'm glad that we have a Premier that is leading this nation, standing up for workers, encouraging investment in this country, building, bringing Premiers from across Canada together to nation-build—

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): The member from Waterloo will come to order.

Hon. David Piccini: That's what we're focused on, on this side of the House. That's going to be generational wealth and opportunity for Ontarians of all stripes.

PUBLIC TRANSIT

Mr. Jonathan Tsao: Three weeks ago, I stood in this House and I called on the Minister of Transportation to do something to help the people of Don Valley North. I asked a simple and straightforward question: Would the minister commit to actually building the Sheppard subway? Instead of answers, all I got was a laundry list of unfinished

promises that do nothing to help the people of Don Valley North.

So I'm going to give the minister another chance now. Minister, will this government commit to a timeline and dedicated funding for the Sheppard subway extension? Yes or no?

Hon. Prabmeet Singh Sarkaria: I'm going to repeat to that member that, before this House, the Minister of Finance has tabled a budget which will invest \$70 billion in investments to public transit. That includes that very line that member is talking about, the Sheppard extension. That includes the Ontario Line, the Scarborough subway extension, billions of dollars that we are investing in expanding GO Transit. Will that member stand up for his community, support this government's budget and ensure that he supports our plan—the most ambitious capital plan in the history of this country and North America on public transit. Stand up, do the right thing, support the budget and support your—

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): I recognize the member for Don Valley North.

Mr. Jonathan Tsao: Speaker, not just today but all week, we've had to listen to government members patting themselves on the back about their budget. But do you know what stood out to me? What stood out to me the most about this budget was its silence on the Sheppard subway extension. No timeline, no funding, just a vague mention of a proposal, a proposed extension, so faint that it might as well be written with invisible ink.

The people of Don Valley North are tired of proposals. This government has taken so little action but made so many proposals, you've got to wonder, what are you doing over there? Are you busy planning a wedding or are you building subways?

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): Government side will come to order.

Mr. Jonathan Tsao: Minister, when will you stop the proposing and start the building?

Hon. Prabmeet Singh Sarkaria: Let's look at the record of the Liberal opposition members: voted against, multiple times, every chance they had, the Sheppard extension proposed. Whether it be the fall economic statement or the budget document, you have one more chance to correct that. Vote with the government.

They voted against the Ontario Line, voted against the Scarborough subway extension, voted against every single one of our LRT expansions. In fact, for 15 years, the Liberals did absolutely nothing. All they did was build upside-down bridges. That is their record on infrastructure. We will take no lessons from the former Liberal government or the opposition because they do not believe in building. There has not been a single project that this government has tabled that they have supported. We will invest \$70 billion into public transit, get shovels in the ground and ensure that people have accessible public transit.

POLITIQUES ÉNERGÉTIQUES

M. Stéphane Sarrazin: Ma question s'adresse au ministre associé des industries à forte intensité énergétique. L'énergie permet à l'Ontario de continuer à croître. Cette énergie alimente nos foyers, nos usines et notre secteur technologique. Mais avec les menaces venant des États-Unis, nous devons agir rapidement pour protéger tout ce que nous avons bâti. Nous devons produire plus d'énergie ici en Ontario, plus d'approvisionnement, et ce, rapidement.

Dans l'Est ontarien, des usines comme Ivaco Rolling Mills et plusieurs autres ont besoin d'énergie fiable pour croître, garder et créer plus d'emplois. Les entreprises technologiques d'Ottawa ont besoin d'un approvisionnement stable pour continuer à innover. Les familles et les petites entreprises veulent de l'aide pour réduire leurs coûts d'électricité.

Le ministre peut-il nous dire comment notre gouvernement fait avancer les projets énergétiques dans l'Est ontarien pour créer des emplois et protéger nos entreprises?

1120

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): I'm asking members to lower the sidebar conversation volume.

I recognize the Associate Minister of Energy-Intensive Industries.

L'hon. Sam Oosterhoff: Je remercie le député de Glengarry–Prescott–Russell pour son accueil chaleureux dans sa circonscription et pour le leadership qu'il continue d'exercer en faveur de la croissance économique dans l'est de l'Ontario.

L'énergie alimente nos vies et notre prospérité. À Ivaco Rolling Mills, nous avons vu de première main comment l'acier produit en Ontario soutient des chaînes d'approvisionnement essentielles dans les secteurs de la fabrication et de la construction. Chez Nordik Windows, nous avons discuté de l'expansion de la production et de l'emploi local.

À Ottawa, la semaine dernière, j'ai également rencontré des chefs de file du secteur technologique de Kanata-Nord. C'est pourquoi, aux côtés du ministre Lecce, notre gouvernement lance le plan énergétique intégré de l'Ontario : pour planifier à long terme, éliminer les retards et fournir aux entreprises l'énergie dont elles ont besoin pour innover, se développer et créer de bons emplois ici-même, en Ontario.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): We do not mention members by their names.

Back to the member from Glengarry–Prescott–Russell.

M. Stéphane Sarrazin: Les familles et les entreprises de partout en Ontario veulent de l'énergie fiable sur laquelle elles peuvent compter. Nous voulons de l'énergie propre, fiable et abordable, de l'énergie quand nous en avons besoin.

Ailleurs, on cherche encore des solutions, mais ici en Ontario, on montre la voie. Nous construisons de nouvelles installations nucléaires. Nous sommes en tête en matière de stockage d'énergie par batteries. Nous modernisons

notre réseau pour être prêt pour la demande du futur, et nous le faisons grâce à un seul plan cohérent. En regroupant l'électricité, les carburants, l'hydrogène et plus encore, nous réduisons la bureaucratie et donnons aux employeurs les outils dont ils ont besoin pour croître.

Le ministre associé peut-il nous expliquer comment le plan énergétique intégré de l'Ontario nous aidera à être un chef de file, non seulement au Canada mais partout dans le monde, grâce à une énergie propre, fiable et abordable?

L'hon. Sam Oosterhoff: Absolument. Alors que le monde cherche de l'énergie plus abordable, plus sécuritaire, plus fiable et plus propre, l'Ontario passe à l'action. Nous réalisons la plus grande expansion nucléaire du continent. Nous construisons le plus grand parc de stockage par batteries au pays. Nous ajoutons des milliers de kilomètres de lignes de transport et modernisons notre réseau pour répondre aux besoins de demain.

Tout cela fait partie d'un seul plan, le plan énergétique intégré, dirigé par le ministre de l'Énergie et des Mines, pour assurer la fiabilité, réduire les retards, stimuler la compétitivité et soutenir les créateurs d'emplois partout dans la province. C'est ainsi que l'Ontario continuera à fournir une énergie propre, fiable et abordable pour toute la province.

EDUCATION FUNDING

Ms. Chandra Pasma: Our children deserve the best-quality education, but under this government, they are in large classes without qualified teachers, without access to mental health care, in crumbling schools that don't have enough paper, pencils or textbooks.

Since this government came to power, they have taken \$6.35 billion from our education system. This year, again, while our education system is struggling to meet our kids' needs, they are widening the funding gap instead of closing it. How bad do things have to get before the Premier will finally restore the education funding he has cut?

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

Hon. Paul Calandra: Well, I'll just say this: The cut that the member referenced is certainly news to me, and I would certainly welcome her tabling the document that shows year-over-year cuts in the education budget, because—again, Madam Speaker, if those cuts happened the way the member says, I'm certainly unaware of that. But I'd appreciate those documents that highlight that, because I know that the time that we have been here, we've increased funding.

In fact, this budget, which it seems the opposition will be voting against, includes historic funding in education—the highest level ever in the province's history. But make no mistake about it, Madam Speaker, I do understand that more continuously needs to be done to make sure that our students are prepared for the jobs of tomorrow.

That is why we have told school boards across the province of Ontario: Refocus your efforts on making sure that the money that we send goes to the classroom to give

our students, teachers and parents the confidence that they will have the best students ready for the jobs of tomorrow.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): The member for Ottawa West—Nepean.

Ms. Chandra Pasma: It's not a great sign for our education system, Speaker, when the Minister of Education is unaware of what education funding has been under his government.

But the minister keeps telling school boards they have to cut deficits while ignoring the fact that he's responsible for those deficits, and nowhere is that more true than for special education. Nearly every school board in the province is spending more on special education than what they are getting from this government, and that's for a system that is badly failing our children with disabilities. The government's funding doesn't even come close to eliminating that deficit, let alone provide the additional resources we need to protect these kids and give them the education they deserve.

Why is it always the most vulnerable kids who pay the biggest price for this government's cuts?

Hon. Paul Calandra: It is always easy for opposition members to throw out all kinds of numbers and say this and that. I challenge the member opposite: If the member has documentation that shows that this government has reduced funding for education between 2018 and now, I ask the member to prove me wrong. Table those documents. Table each budget from every single year from 2018. I encourage the member to prove me wrong, or else do not get up in this House and suggest that we have made cuts that simply have not happened.

What we do do, Madam Speaker, is we put money to our school boards. I agree with the member opposite: If school boards aren't funding the programs the way they should be, we will step in and we will make sure that they are being funded, whether it's special education, whether it's student transportation, whether it's school boards that, as opposed to fixing their schools, leave money in accounts so that schools aren't being repaired, we will step in. We will do the job. We'll put an end to politics in the classroom. We'll play politics here, but we'll fund the system and give our students the tools they need to—

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): Question.

PUBLIC TRANSIT

MPP Andrea Hazell: Madam Speaker, my question is for the Premier. Listen to this: This government cancelled a \$1.6-billion, 25-year operations and maintenance agreement between Metrolinx and ONxpress just months before it was set to begin. Now we are back to square one. Am I surprised? No, but I'm very disappointed. This has cost wasted time, wasted money—and nothing to show for it. The Premier refuses to say why the deal fell through and how much the cancellation will cost. I want to stress that, the cost factor.

Madam Speaker, will the Premier tell the millions of people impacted by this delay what prompted his reckless decision?

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

Hon. Prabmeet Singh Sarkaria: Madam Speaker, here are the facts: We improved service and increased service on GO Transit just last year by over 300 trips a week. That is a fact.

And guess what? That member stood up and voted against the funding and the measures that were needed to improve that service. In fact, every step of the way, when it comes to supporting transit, when it comes to supporting, in that member's own riding, the Scarborough subway extension, she stands up and votes against the funding, the dollars, the planning and the workers that go into supporting that project.

We will continue to run an operation that will support public transit in this province, that will improve service and continue to deliver accessible public transit for the residents of Ontario.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): Back to the member for Scarborough—Guildwood.

MPP Andrea Hazell: Madam Speaker, I'm going to throw out three projects here, just three: the Eglinton Crosstown, Finch West LRT and Ontario Line. Where is the end result of those projects? This government talks a good talk about investing in transit. Let the people get a win. We need these projects to finish.

Madam Speaker, this contract that was cancelled is a cornerstone of Ontario's GO rail electrification project, an initiative intended to modernize commuter transit, reduce emissions and serve over seven million transit users across the GTHA. So what caused this deal to fall through? We're asking again, why did the deal fall through?

In my riding of Scarborough—Guildwood, my constituents have been holding their breath, just like a lot of us all through Ontario, for the Eglinton Crosstown to open. Madam Speaker, will the Premier continue his pattern of limiting information to the public, or will he tell us how much time and money he wasted on this deal?

1130

Hon. Prabmeet Singh Sarkaria: Madam Speaker, I am going to provide a list right now of projects that the Liberals have voted against every step of the way.

Let me start with the first project: the Ontario Line—

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): The Liberals will come to order. The member for Orléans will come to order. The government side will come to order.

Hon. Prabmeet Singh Sarkaria: —the Liberals voted against that.

The Scarborough subway extension: over 100,000 boardings a day. Guess what? The Liberals voted against that.

The Yonge North subway extension—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): Stop the clock. The member for Orléans will come to order. Order.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): The government side will come to order. The member for Orléans will come to order.

The Minister of Transportation may continue. Start the clock.

Hon. Prabmeet Singh Sarkaria: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Hamilton LRT, which we just released—

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): The Minister of Education will come to order.

Hon. Prabmeet Singh Sarkaria: —the Liberals have voted against it.

The west extension of the Eglinton Crosstown, which will have 6.5 million fewer car trips a year, the Liberals have voted against.

There is not a single public transit project in this province—whether it's in Ottawa, whether it's in Toronto, Hamilton, Mississauga or Brampton—that the Liberals haven't voted against.

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): The member for Orléans will come to order.

Hon. Prabmeet Singh Sarkaria: That's why they are the opposition and the third party.

VETERANS

Mr. Andrew Dowie: My question is for the Minister of Citizenship and Multiculturalism. Veterans gave so much to protect our way of life. They fought for our freedoms, our peace and our safety, but too often, their stories are forgotten and their services taken for granted. We must do more than honour them, not just on Remembrance Day, but every day.

That's why it matters that Ontario is taking action. Our government is finding new ways to say thank you to our veterans and share their legacy with the next generation.

Speaker, can the minister please share how our government is better supporting Ontario's veterans, and how we're working to make sure their service is never forgotten?

Hon. Graham McGregor: I want to thank the member from Windsor–Tecumseh for that question and for his steadfast support of those who served our country.

Simply put, we must ensure that the legacy of our veterans continues to inspire future generations to uphold the values of freedom, peace and unity. As lawmakers in this House, we can never thank those who served our country enough, but we can sure as heck try. In this effort, our government, under the leadership of this Premier, has launched the Ontario Veterans Award for Community Service Excellence, reaffirming our commitment to recognizing the invaluable contributions of veterans.

Last week, I was joined by the Associate Minister of Women's Social and Economic Opportunity at the Lorne Scots Regimental Museum to announce the launch of the portal for applications. Now, every member of this House has an opportunity to reach out to their local Legion

branch and make sure they get their application in. The deadline is August 31.

Let's support our veterans and show them that we care for them, we cherish them, and we thank them for their service.

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

Mr. Andrew Dowie: I want to thank the minister for his response. I'm sure the members of Branches 261, 255 and 594 in my riding will be ecstatic to learn this news.

We owe so much to the men and women who served our country, but support for veterans can't end when their service does. It must continue and it must be strong. Veterans and their families face real challenges with health care, housing and making the shift into new careers.

That's why our government is stepping up with more help through the Soldiers' Aid Commission. It covers the essentials like medical equipment, rent and personal supports. We're also helping veterans retrain for new jobs in tech and the skilled trades.

Speaker, can the minister share more about how these supports are helping veterans live with dignity and thrive after service?

Hon. Graham McGregor: Thank you again to the member for the question. This new award builds on the foundation laid by the passage of the Honouring Veterans Act, 2024, and I think it bears repeating: There are many members of this House of all different political stripes. When we tabled that bill, we got unanimous support, regardless of political stripe. Whether independent, Green, Liberal, NDP or PC, every member stood up to support that bill.

We tabled it on a Monday and passed it on a Wednesday, with royal assent by Thursday. My first time putting something through, I told my colleagues, "I don't know why democracy is hard for the rest of you." When it comes to getting the right thing done, every member of this House stood up and I think that needs to be acknowledged and celebrated.

I also want to shout out to the Minister of Transportation and the Minister of Children, Community and Social Services for their initiatives in the bill: increasing the Soldiers' Aid Commission from \$2,000 to \$3,000, making it more accessible, and providing free GO train service for active service members and retired service members. It's doing the right thing.

We're doing our part, standing up for our veterans. We look forward to doing more.

SOCIAL ASSISTANCE

Mr. Terence Kernaghan: Speaker, my question is to the Premier.

If success is defined as meeting people's basic needs, this government is failing.

Across Ontario, hunger is hitting more homes than ever. In my riding of London North Centre, one in three visitors to the food bank is a child. More than a quarter of food bank visitors are working but are still struggling. In fact,

many of those visitors are working for the province, but their pay is poverty level. People on social assistance have to use food banks. People who are working have to use food banks.

I really want to know: Is this government good with keeping people in poverty?

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): I recognize the Minister of Children, Community and Social Services.

Hon. Michael Parsa: I thank my honourable colleague for the question.

Madam Speaker, in a time of unprecedented uncertainty brought on by US tariffs and trade barriers, our government, today—and before—and in the future, will be laser-focused on making life more affordable for Ontarians, which is why my honourable colleague would know, when it comes to social assistance, we have raised social assistance by 17% in just under two years. And yesterday, I announced that our government will increase social assistance—ODSP—rates again by another 2.87%, bringing it to nearly 20% in less than three years.

We're providing more than \$96 million through the Resilient Communities Fund so food banks and other community organizations can apply and provide those supports—and it goes more than that.

Across government, we are working together to make life more affordable for Ontarians—

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): I recognize the member for London North Centre for supplementary.

Mr. Terence Kernaghan: Speaker, the minister can talk all day but cannot blame Donald Trump for the fact that this government has left people languishing in poverty.

My question is back to the Premier.

Food banks and Feed Ontario have partnered with the government of Ontario in past emergencies. They served more than a million people last year, and the need is growing steeply from job losses and layoffs in the Trump trade war. Unemployment in Ontario is now worse than the rest of Canada, and this is only the beginning. Food banks are already stretched to their limit. The emergency is now.

Will this government admit there's a crisis, build social housing, bring back real rent control, and lift people on social assistance and working people above the poverty line? Yes or no?

Hon. Michael Parsa: The Minister of Transportation brought in an initiative that saved riders in this province \$1,600 a year annually; the opposition voted against it.

We made the fuel and tax cut at the pumps permanent; the opposition doesn't support it.

Every single initiative that we've put forward to reduce costs and make life affordable for Ontarians, including those rates, historic increases in social assistance—the members opposite voted against it.

So let me assure all Ontarians, including my colleague across: We on this side and the majority middle over there are laser-focused on making sure we bring in good-paying jobs, as a result of the work of the Minister of Economic Development, Job Creation and Trade, and make life more affordable for Ontarians, including the most vulnerable,

which is why we made the decision yesterday to amend regulations to the \$200 that the federal government has brought in through the—

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): Thank you.

NOTICE OF DISSATISFACTION

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

DEFERRED VOTES

PHARMACARE

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): We have a deferred vote on private members' notice of motion number 2.

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

The division bells rang from 1139 to 1144.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): A reminder to return to your seats. If you are not in your seat when we call the vote, you will not count.

MPP Lennox has moved private member's notice of motion number 2.

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

Ayes

Begum, Doly	Gélinas, France	Schreiner, Mike
Bell, Jessica	Gilmour, Alexa	Shamji, Adil
Blais, Stephen	Glover, Chris	Shaw, Sandy
Bourgouin, Guy	Hazell, Andrea	Smyth, Stephanie
Brady, Bobbi Ann	Hsu, Ted	Stevens, Jennifer
Burch, Jeff	Kernaghan, Terence	(Jennie)
Cerjanec, Rob	Lennox, Robin	Stiles, Marit
Clancy, Aislinn	Mamakwa, Sol	Tabuns, Peter
Collard, Lucille	McCrimmon, Karen	Tsao, Jonathan
Fairclough, Lee	McKenney, Catherine	Vanthof, John
Fife, Catherine	McMahon, Mary-Margaret	Vaugeois, Lise
Fraser, John	Pasma, Chandra	Watt, Tyler
French, Jennifer K.	Rakocevic, Tom	West, Jamie
Gates, Wayne	Sattler, Peggy	Wong-Tam, Kristyn

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

Nays

Allsopp, Tyler	Gualtieri, Silvia	Rae, Matthew
Anand, Deepak	Hamid, Zee	Rickford, Greg
Bailey, Robert	Hardeman, Ernie	Riddell, Brian
Bouma, Will	Holland, Kevin	Rosenberg, Bill
Breese, Ric	Jones, Sylvia	Sandhu, Amarjot
Calandra, Paul	Jones, Trevor	Sarkaria, Prabmeet Singh
Cho, Raymond Sung Joon	Jordan, John	Sarrazin, Stéphane
Cho, Stan	Kanapathi, Logan	Saunderson, Brian
Ciriello, Monica	Kerzner, Michael S.	Scott, Laurie
Clark, Steve	Khanjin, Andrea	Smith, Dave
Coe, Lorne	Leardi, Anthony	Smith, David
Cooper, Michelle	Lecce, Stephen	Smith, Graydon

Crawford, Stephen	Lumsden, Neil	Smith, Laura
Cuzzetto, Rudy	McCarthy, Todd J.	Surma, Kinga
Darouze, George	McGregor, Graham	Tangri, Nina
Denault, Billy	Mulroney, Caroline	Thanigasalam, Vijay
Dowie, Andrew	Oosterhoff, Sam	Thompson, Lisa M.
Downey, Doug	Pang, Billy	Tibollo, Michael A.
Dunlop, Jill	Parsa, Michael	Triantafilopoulos, Effie J.
Fedeli, Victor	Piccini, David	Vickers, Paul
Firin, Mohamed	Pierre, Natalie	Wai, Daisy
Flack, Rob	Pirie, George	Williams, Charmaine A.
Gallagher Murphy, Dawn	Quinn, Nolan	
Grewal, Hardeep Singh	Racinsky, Joseph	

Darouze, George	McCrimmon, Karen	Tangri, Nina
Denault, Billy	McGregor, Graham	Thanigasalam, Vijay
Dowie, Andrew	McKenney, Catherine	Thompson, Lisa M.
Downey, Doug	McMahon, Mary-Margaret	Tibollo, Michael A.
Dunlop, Jill	Mulroney, Caroline	Triantafilopoulos, Effie J.
Fairclough, Lee	Oosterhoff, Sam	Tsao, Jonathan
Fedeli, Victor	Pang, Billy	Vanthof, John
Fife, Catherine	Parsa, Michael	Vaugeois, Lise
Firin, Mohamed	Pasma, Chandra	Vickers, Paul
Flack, Rob	Piccini, David	Wai, Daisy
Fraser, John	Pierre, Natalie	Watt, Tyler
French, Jennifer K.	Pirie, George	West, Jamie
Gallagher Murphy, Dawn	Quinn, Nolan	Williams, Charmaine A.
Gates, Wayne	Racinsky, Joseph	Wong-Tam, Kristyn

The Clerk of the Assembly (Mr. Trevor Day): The ayes are 41; the nays are 70.

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

Motion negatived.

MUNICIPAL ACCOUNTABILITY ACT, 2025

LOI DE 2025 SUR LA RESPONSABILITÉ AU NIVEAU MUNICIPAL

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

Bill 9, An Act to amend the City of Toronto Act, 2006 and the Municipal Act, 2001 in relation to codes of conduct / Projet de loi 9, Loi modifiant la Loi de 2006 sur la cité de Toronto et la Loi de 2001 sur les municipalités en ce qui concerne les codes de déontologie.

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

The division bells rang from 1148 to 1149.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): On May 14, 2025, Mr. Flack moved second reading of Bill 9, An Act to amend the City of Toronto Act, 2006 and the Municipal Act, 2001 in relation to codes of conduct.

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

Ayes

Allsopp, Tyler	Gélinas, France	Rae, Matthew
Anand, Deepak	Gilmour, Alexa	Rakocevic, Tom
Bailey, Robert	Glover, Chris	Rickford, Greg
Begum, Doly	Grewal, Hardeep Singh	Riddell, Brian
Bell, Jessica	Gualtieri, Silvia	Rosenberg, Bill
Blais, Stephen	Hamid, Zee	Sandhu, Amarjot
Bouma, Will	Hardeman, Ernie	Sarkaria, Prabmeet Singh
Bourgouin, Guy	Hazell, Andrea	Sarrazin, Stéphane
Brady, Bobbi Ann	Holland, Kevin	Sattler, Peggy
Bresee, Ric	Hsu, Ted	Saunderson, Brian
Burch, Jeff	Jones, Sylvia	Schreiner, Mike
Calandra, Paul	Jones, Trevor	Scott, Laurie
Cerjanec, Rob	Jordan, John	Shamji, Adil
Cho, Raymond Sung Joon	Kanapathi, Logan	Shaw, Sandy
Cho, Stan	Kernaghan, Terence	Smith, Dave
Ciriello, Monica	Kerzner, Michael S.	Smith, David
Clancy, Aislinn	Khanjin, Andrea	Smith, Graydon
Clark, Steve	Leardi, Anthony	Smith, Laura
Coe, Lorne	Lecce, Stephen	Smyth, Stephanie
Collard, Lucille	Lennox, Robin	Stevens, Jennifer (Jennie)
Cooper, Michelle	Lumsden, Neil	Stiles, Marit
Crawford, Stephen	Mamakwa, Sol	Surma, Kinga
Cuzzetto, Rudy	McCarthy, Todd J.	Tabuns, Peter

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

The Clerk of the Assembly (Mr. Trevor Day): The ayes are 111; the nays are 0.

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

Second reading agreed to.

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

Hon. Rob Flack: Speaker, please refer the bill to the Standing Committee on Heritage, Infrastructure and Cultural Policy.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): The bill will be referred to the Standing Committee on Heritage, Infrastructure and Cultural Policy.

There being no further business, this House stands in adjournment until 1 p.m.

The House recessed from 1153 to 1300.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Mr. Robert Bailey: This introduction today is on behalf of Minister Thompson, who's unable to be here right now. I'd like to introduce our page captain today, Allie Terpstra, from the riding of Huron-Bruce, who's serving as a legislative page at Queen's Park.

I'd also like to introduce Allie's family: her mother, Eline Terpstra; her father, Herman Terpstra; her grandfather Mieke Peters; and her grandmother Wilma Meyers. Welcome to Queen's Park.

Hon. David Piccini: I appreciate the opportunity to introduce the incredible team that I get to work with each and every day at the Ministry of Labour. This is the team in our political office that have worked extensively hard at a bill I'll soon be introducing. I just want to thank them all for all of their hard work to make today possible. Welcome to Queen's Park and thank you for being here.

Mr. Matthew Rae: They're making their way in right now to the chamber, but I want to welcome Robin, George and Isla from my constituency of Perth-Wellington.

Ms. Lee Fairclough: I would like to welcome Michael Schwanzer and James Foster of the Mimico Residents' Association who have been working tirelessly to make

Mimico GO station accessible to all. Welcome to Queen's Park.

Ms. Laura Smith: It's my very great honour to welcome vice-chair of the Canadian Franchise Association, Mr. Todd Wylie; and David Druker and Sherry McNeil, all from the same organization. They're here to meet so many of us throughout the day. A warm welcome to all of them.

Mr. Tom Rakocovic: I'm proud to announce that we'll be joined by the students and educators from Nile Academy in Humber River-Black Creek. I want to welcome them when they arrive and thank you for being here at Queen's Park.

Mr. Deepak Anand: It is the first time I'm doing this. I am here to recognize somebody who has the same name as me: Deepak Anand from Vancouver, who is at Queen's Park for the first time. Welcome to Queen's Park.

INTRODUCTION OF GOVERNMENT BILLS

WORKING FOR WORKERS SEVEN ACT, 2025

LOI DE 2025 VISANT À ŒUVRER POUR LES TRAVAILLEURS, SEPT

Mr. Piccini moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 30, An Act to amend various statutes with respect to employment and labour and other matters / Projet de loi 30, Loi modifiant diverses lois relatives à l'emploi et au travail ainsi qu'à d'autres questions.

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

First reading agreed to.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): Does the minister wish to explain the bill?

Hon. David Piccini: The Working for Workers Seven Act, 2025, takes the next step to protect workers in the province of Ontario and support business. If passed, it will raise workplace standards, boost productivity and make Ontario a fundamentally more competitive province.

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

MARRIAGE AMENDMENT ACT, 2025

LOI DE 2025 MODIFIANT LA LOI SUR LE MARIAGE

Mr. Rae moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 31, An Act to amend the Marriage Act / Projet de loi 31, Loi modifiant la Loi sur le mariage.

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

First reading agreed to.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): Does the member wish to briefly explain the bill?

Mr. Matthew Rae: Sure. I want to briefly thank also the member from Peterborough for his support on this bill.

The bill amends the Marriage Act to authorize a member of the Assembly to solemnize marriages under the authority of a licence if they have given written notice to the minister. The authorization would last for a period of 12 months after the day the person ceases to be a member of the Assembly.

RESOURCE RECOVERY AND CIRCULAR ECONOMY AMENDMENT ACT (BEVERAGE CONTAINER DEPOSIT PROGRAM), 2025

LOI DE 2025 MODIFIANT LA LOI SUR LA RÉCUPÉRATION DES RESSOURCES ET L'ÉCONOMIE CIRCULAIRE (PROGRAMME DE CONSIGNES APPLICABLES AUX CONTENANTS DE BOISSONS)

Ms. McMahon moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 32, An Act to amend the Resource Recovery and Circular Economy Act, 2016 with respect to a beverage container deposit program / Projet de loi 32, Loi modifiant la Loi de 2016 sur la récupération des ressources et l'économie circulaire en ce qui concerne un programme de consignes applicables aux contenants de boissons.

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

First reading agreed to.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): Does the member wish to explain the bill?

Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon: I would love to explain the bill, thank you very much. This is my second attempt; I'm reviving this amazing bill. The bill amends the Resource Recovery and Circular Economy Act, 2016.

Currently, section 107.1 of the act authorizes regulations governing the collection of blue-box materials. The amendments expand this regulation-making power by allowing cabinet to establish and govern a beverage container deposit program and require and govern collection depots for blue box materials.

New subsection 107.1 (5.1) requires the payment and refund of a specified minimum beverage container deposit in accordance with the regulations.

New subsection 107.1 (5.2) requires grocery stores and stores operated by Brewers Retail Inc. to act as collection depots and provide beverage container deposit refunds. It is an offence for Brewers Retail Inc. and grocery store owners to fail to comply with subsection 107.1 (5.2).

Given the situation with our neighbour to the south, we want to do everything we can possibly do to divert our waste. This would help increase our recycling numbers that we need in Ontario.

PETITIONS

VISITOR PARKING FEES

Mrs. Jennifer (Jennie) Stevens: This petition has gathered thousands and thousands of signatures across St. Catharines. It's to ban paid visitors' parking at multi-unit residential apartment buildings. I actually just tabled my motion today.

With regard to parking meters, they're being installed at multi-unit rental apartment buildings across St. Catharines by corporate landlords. Visitors to these buildings, including PSW caregivers—even Shoppers Drug Mart delivering medication—are being charged hefty parking fees.

It's affecting thousands of seniors within St. Catharines, Madam Speaker. Residents of these multi-unit rental buildings reflect all demographics, including newcomers, young families, the elderly and cost-prohibited visitors. Parking charges further contribute to the affordability challenges we're seeing not only in St. Catharines, but in Guelph, Waterloo, Thorold, Welland and across Niagara.

What this petition is asking, and Lil Jones from Queenston Street in St. Catharines is asking, is that all buildings across Ontario—they're asking the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to direct the Minister of Housing to issue an order that states owners of residential multi-unit apartment complexes and buildings are banned from installing parking meters and charging visitors to park and spend time with the residents, the seniors, for their mental health and just to get their medication.

1310

I fully, fully support this petition and I am going to affix my name to it and send it down with page David.

PUBLIC TRANSIT

Ms. Lee Fairclough: I am pleased to present my first petition on behalf of the residents of Etobicoke–Lakeshore, asking for accessibility at Mimico GO station. This GO station is one of the last remaining GO stations to not meet accessibility standards that came into force under the AODA on January 1, 2025. What this means is if you arrive at that station in a wheelchair, you have no way to get down from the platform. It means if you have a walker, like what I saw yesterday, you need to be helped up the stairs by strangers. If you're travelling with a stroller and small children, it's going to be very difficult to use the station.

It is National AccessAbility Awareness Week and today is Red Shirt Day, a day to raise awareness about accessibility, inclusion and equity for the people living with disabilities. I was proud to work with our community and the Mimico Residents' Association, who worked at the Mimico GO station yesterday to gather hundreds and hundreds of signatures from residents and commuters to support this petition. The petition requests ongoing community consultation and an acceleration of the current timelines to make this station accessible.

I'm very pleased to add my signature to this petition and I will provide it to page Leif.

SOCIAL ASSISTANCE

Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon: I have a petition to raise social assistance rates. We know that we want everyone to survive and thrive in Ontario and we don't want people living below the poverty line. We want to double the OW and ODSP and support everyone: That is part of our duty as elected officials.

I will sign my name to this petition and send it with new page Noah.

CONSUMER PROTECTION

MPP Kristyn Wong-Tam: I'm proud to rise in the House to present this petition. It's entitled, "Protect Ontario Consumers: Stop the Sale of Stolen Palestinian Land in Ontario," and it's to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario, bringing our attention to the fact that real estate events are being held across Ontario to promote the sale of foreign real estate in Ontario to consumers, which furthers illegal Israeli settlements on occupied Palestinian land. It stipulates that the activities are prohibited under international law and in violation of the fourth Geneva Convention, and such events are happening behind closed doors, with no transparency about who is selling this real estate or how it's obtained, or the legal and financial risks Ontarians are being exposed to, recognizing that real estate sales are violating the spirit of the Ontario Consumer Protection Act and that it raises serious concerns under international law.

This petition calls on this House, who has a responsibility to protect Ontario consumers from misinformation and illegal activity. They call on the government to—or the Legislative Assembly, I should say, rather—to immediately take action to protect Ontario consumers:

- end the sale and expansion of illegal settlements, a recognized barrier to long-lasting peace;

- ban the promotion and marketing of illegal and stolen property; require public disclosure of individuals, companies, governments and other entities promoting and profiting from the sale of illegal and stolen property;

- issue a province-wide warning about these real estate events under the Consumer Protection Act; and

- uphold Canada's responsibilities under the international humanitarian law.

I will attach my signature to this petition and send it back with our wonderful page Sarang to the centre table.

TENANT PROTECTION

Ms. Jessica Bell: This is a petition entitled, "Rent Stabilization Now," signed by residents in my riding of University–Rosedale. It's calling for stronger rent control and rent stabilization measures, so there's a cap on how much rent can be raised between tenancies and expanding what buildings are eligible for rent control to include all

buildings and not just buildings that are built before 2018. I support this petition. I'll be affixing my signature to it and giving it to page Calvin.

ENDANGERED SPECIES

Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon: My last one today: I have a petition to maintain the Endangered Species Act, 2007, and this comes from a group called Grow Native Halton community. They're concerned about the removal of the Endangered Species Act and the replacement with the Species Conservation Act. They're also concerned about excessive decision-making power at the hands of a single minister and all other kinds of things in Bill 5.

I will happily sign this, as I'm equally concerned, and I will send it with page Aastha.

SOCIAL ASSISTANCE

MPP Kristyn Wong-Tam: Again, I rise in this chamber to present this petition. It's entitled "Petition to Raise Social Assistance Rates." It reads:

To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

Recognizing that 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—only \$733 for individuals on OW and \$1,368 for those on ODSP;

Recognizing that an open letter has already been sent to the Premier and two cabinet ministers, signed by over 230 different organizations recommending that the social assistance rates in Ontario be doubled for both Ontario Works and ODSP;

Recognizing that even a small increase to ODSP is not enough—it is still leaving citizens well below the poverty line—and that those who are receiving OW have had their rates now frozen for far too long;

Whereas the government of Canada even recognized that during the COVID pandemic that an adequate wage to subsist in this country is \$2,000;

The undersigned members of the public call on the Legislative Assembly to do everything they can to double the assistance rates for OW and ODSB as soon as possible.

Again, I will attach my signature to this petition and send it to the centre table with page Leif.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

TIME ALLOCATION

Mr. Steve Clark: I move that, pursuant to standing order 50 and notwithstanding any other standing order or special order of the House relating to Bill 24, an Act to implement Budget measures and to enact and amend various statutes, Bill 10, an Act to enact the Measures Respecting Premises with Illegal Drug Activity Act, 2025 and to amend various acts with respect to public safety and the justice system, Bill 11, an Act to enact or amend

various acts related to health care, and Bill 13, an Act respecting primary care;

That when the orders for the bills are next called, the Speaker shall put every question necessary to dispose of the second reading stage of each bill without further debate or amendment; and

That upon receiving second reading, the bills shall be ordered for third reading, which orders may be called the same day; and

That when the order for third reading of Bill 24 is called, one hour shall be allotted to debate with 18 minutes for the members of His Majesty's government, 18 minutes for the members of His Majesty's loyal opposition, 18 minutes for the members of the third party, and six minutes for the independent members as a group; and

That at the end of this time, the Speaker shall interrupt the proceedings and shall put every question necessary to dispose of the third reading stage of Bill 24 without further debate or amendment; and

That when the order for third reading of Bill 10 is called, 40 minutes shall be allotted to debate with 12 minutes for the members of His Majesty's government, 12 minutes for the members of His Majesty's loyal opposition, 12 minutes for the members of the third party and four minutes for the independent members as a group; and

That at the end of this time, the Speaker shall interrupt the proceedings and shall put every question necessary to dispose of the third reading stage of Bill 10 without further debate or amendment; and

1320

That when the order for third reading of Bill 11 is called, 40 minutes shall be allotted to debate with 12 minutes for the members of His Majesty's government, 12 minutes for the members of His Majesty's loyal opposition, 12 minutes for the members of the third party and four minutes for the independent members as a group; and

That at the end of this time, the Speaker shall interrupt the proceedings and shall put every question necessary to dispose of the third reading stage of Bill 11 without further debate or amendment; and

That when the order for third reading of Bill 13 is called, 40 minutes shall be allotted to debate with 12 minutes for the members of His Majesty's government, 12 minutes for the members of His Majesty's loyal opposition, 12 minutes for the members of the third party and four minutes for the independent members as a group; and

That at the end of this time, the Speaker shall interrupt the proceedings and shall put every question necessary to dispose of the third reading stage of Bill 13 without further debate or amendment.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): The government House leader has moved government notice of motion number 3.

I recognize the government House leader.

Mr. Steve Clark: Thank you very much, Speaker. I've been here as a member of provincial Parliament for 15 years, and I learned very quickly, just like when I was a mayor in Ontario for nine years, that the rule of procedure is very important. It's very important when you're a mem-

ber of municipal council to know the rules of procedure—to know when you're to stand, when you're to sit, when you're to vote. And it becomes very interesting, especially when a new councillor or, in our case, a new member of provincial Parliament comes, that part of our knowledge exchange between those members are the standing orders of the Legislature and how this place works.

I can tell you, just like what happened earlier on this week with a member—and I won't name the member—who thought they were asking a question when it was in fact their time to debate, things happen. I can tell you a lot of things that I did wrong when I first came here, and I learned from—and I think everybody has made their share of missteps. But the good thing about this place is that even though it's a partisan, charged place, we do help each other, and we do help new Speakers, new Deputy Speakers. This is what we do. So it was a teachable moment for that member. Some of the people who served with me 15 years ago could tell you about a lot of teachable moments that I had when I was first here.

Part of the reason why I'm government House leader and I was opposition House leader—which I will get to in a few moments—and a deputy opposition House leader is, once you learn the rules, you get tagged with the rules; you then have to interpret the rules for other people.

I decided early on when I was here, because I was a new member and I had no roles—there was a period of time when I had no critic roles and I was basically allowed to move around and speak and do whatever I was doing unfettered. Then, I started to get jobs. And one of the things I learned when I was a mayor—because I was 22, right out of university, didn't know anything about municipal council, I wanted to learn the rules—Robert's Rules of Order, all the procedural bylaws. So I became sort of a student of how you do things. I did the same thing when I was here. So I think that some of the reasons why I'm debating these is because I spent those times reading that little black book that's in people's desks, and I decided that the rules were something that I thought, since I made a few mistakes, that I would learn.

I'm probably not going to speak for the entire time, but I have a feeling—because I had been an opposition House leader, because I had been an opposition deputy House leader—that perhaps, even though I will sit down at some point, somehow my words from the past will come forward this afternoon. Even though Steve Clark won't be standing and speaking at the mike, some quotes from Steve Clark, I'm sure, will be given today to talk about.

Mr. John Vanthof: There'll be more than one.

Mr. Steve Clark: There will be more than one. I've already heard that there will be more than one here.

Anyway, to the motion: The government has decided that these four bills are very important for us. There needs to be certainty from the government's agenda. It's not uncommon, either in a provincial Legislature or the House of Commons, that after an election, the government runs on a particular mandate. The government decides that they're going to prioritize certain things, the government

is going to move forward with those legislations. That's my message.

My words from the past will say otherwise, but as the government House leader, that's the most important thing that we have here, certainty around—if you're asking me a question, whose words do I believe? Obviously, I'm much older now and I'm much more learned. So I want you to impart the knowledge that I'm going to give you today, as opposed to that younger MPP that was maybe more brash and more abrupt in some—

Interjection.

Mr. Steve Clark: Who knows?

I like where I am. I like where I'm at in my life right now. I appreciate that. I enjoy this job, I enjoy the procedures of the House, but I also feel it's important, at least for a few moments, to talk about these four bills and why they're so important for the government.

Obviously, Bill 24, An Act to implement Budget measures and to enact and amend various statutes, is our government's Plan to Protect Ontario Act. It's very important. We just finished an election. We made a decision that we were going to go to an election. The government was elected to protect Ontario, protect Ontario jobs, protect Ontario businesses.

The harmful Trump tariffs: The Premier framed very appropriately, whether he had the "Protect Ontario" ball hat, or the "Canada is not for sale" ball hat or, given it was a winter election, the toque. With my hairline, I wore the toque a lot more than the baseball hat during the winter election. It was very important because it talked about the threat, the unpredictability of Donald Trump.

Just to remind everybody in the House, in the beautiful riding of Leeds–Grenville–Thousand Islands and Rideau Lakes, literally out of the window in my constituency office in Brockville I can literally look over the St. Lawrence River to Morristown, New York. The United States is a very important partner with our country.

I remember very vividly what happened the last time Donald Trump was President of the United States: The biggest industry in Brockville, Procter and Gamble, went to West Virginia because Trump wanted to repatriate manufacturing jobs from Canada to the United States.

This is probably a little homage to Bill 5: I also remember, during the pandemic, where we decided that we weren't going to be beholden to any other jurisdiction in the world when it came to PPE. We decided that we were going to build a plant in Brockville, given some of the powers that we had during the pandemic, and we built an N95 plant in Brockville. Go talk to any nurse in Ontario. Ask them about the N95 that's built in Brockville. They'll tell you that's the gold standard.

We built that plant in seven months. Why did we do it in seven months? Because we had an all-of-government approach, very much like what Trump did with Procter and Gamble, with the special economic zone in West Virginia. While we didn't create the special economic zone, we worked as a government—all-of-government approach—to be able to build that plant.

That's the type of thing that we have to do—again, my homage to Bill 5. That's what we did during the pandemic, that's how we were able to build that plant and that's the type of measure that we need to deal with Donald Trump.

In our 2025 budget, we're delivering roughly about \$30 billion in tariff supports. As a border community, that's a very good thing. When the Premier was in Brockville and toured Canarm during the election, he talked to the president, David Beatty. There's a picture of Mr. Beatty giving the Premier a bunch of papers to read. Those papers were bills of lading for products that were made in Brockville at that Canarm plant that were going to be shipped that day to the United States. They were going to be shipped to all over the place in terms of HVAC products that were built there.

Again, it's very important that our budget reflects what we said during the election about protecting Ontario jobs, protecting Ontario workers and ensuring that the entire time that Donald Trump is President of the United States, Doug Ford and the Ontario PC government are going to be looking right across the table from him. This is what the people of Ontario voted for, and this is what we're doing to fulfill our mandate to the people of Ontario, just like every other government of every political stripe would do, just like we're doing today—same thing. We're calling on the opposition parties, as you've heard during question period today—that we hope that the other parties will support us in supporting Ontario workers against Trump's tariffs and that they vote for the 2025 Ontario budget.

1330

That ends my lecture about why the Ontario government budget—and why this time allocation motion, this apportionment of time—is so important for us, especially after the people of Ontario gave us this mandate.

Bill 10, An Act to enact the Measures Respecting Premises with Illegal Drug Activity Act, 2025 and to amend various Acts with respect to public safety and the justice system—the short name, Protect Ontario Through Safer Streets and Stronger Communities Act: Our government has made the decision. We're going to have a targeted action to protect communities from serious crime through this act. We believe as a government that we need a tough-on-crime approach to put an end to violent and repeat offenders behind bars. I'm going to do a tie-back to the Ontario budget at the very end of the explanation.

The new measures in this bill are designed to do a number of things:

- to reinforce our bail system;
- to crack down on serious and organized crime;
- to combat auto theft, which I'm sure members from across the aisle heard very distinctly during those times they were knocking on doors in the election;
- address intimate partner violence—very important;
- attack human trafficking;
- target illicit drug operations;
- enhance funding for police services;
- modernize the judicial appointments process; and
- strengthen both the justice and the correctional system.

The changes in that bill reflect our commitment as a government to the justice system that puts public safety first, supports victims and gives law enforcement the tools that they need to do their jobs effectively.

My tie-in with this Bill 10 and the budget is in my own community. The budget spoke to the need for new correctional facilities. I have the Brockville Jail in my community. It was built in 1842. It's 183 years old, and I think it's time that the government of the day invests in a new state-of-the-art facility for the people that are housed there but also the workers that work there.

I have taken, since 2010—and even before 2010, even when I worked for my predecessor—I have steered a long lineup of ministers of corrections, ministers of community safety and corrections and Solicitors General through that 183-year-old jail. Lots of different politicians, not all Conservatives, have gone through that jail—and federal Conservatives and federal Liberals, as well—to see the fact that we have a facility there, the St. Lawrence Valley Correctional and Treatment Centre, that could be expanded on property that we own, the old Brockville mental health facility, the old Brockville Psychiatric Hospital, where we have the land and we have the existing facility where we can build something that's not 183 years old and that has capability to meet the needs that we talk about in Bill 10.

So again, I'm going to be very riding-focused here for a few moments, but I support the bill. I support the budget bill that ties into Bill 10. So I think, from a government perspective, it's important for us to take some of the bills that are alike and put them forward.

And then the final two bills: I can't speak for anybody else in this place, but regardless of the campaign platform to protect Ontario and talk about Trump, I did talk about primary care because I value what Minister Jones is trying to accomplish. I very much respect Dr. Jane Philpott and her team—I've met with them. And I believe, collectively, deep down—although I might not hear it today on this motion from the opposition parties, I think generally we are in favour of the measures that the government are proposing. I have a plan in my riding. I'm working with Minister Piccini on the Regional Economic Development through Immigration program. I think there is a real opportunity, as one of the pilots for my riding, to bring more doctors, to bring more nurses, nurse practitioners and PSWs and skilled trades through this program, moving forward—up to 200.

I also think that the promise that I made to my constituents about an urgent care centre is very real. As part of the primary care expansion, we received some dollars to create a nurse practitioner-led clinic in Mallorytown that is open a couple of days a week. We've seen tremendous uptake. We know that there continue to be people who don't have a family physician. How are we different from some? We have a plan. We have a plan to create the urgent care centre. We have a plan to work with Dr. Philpott and Minister Jones, who—by the way, Minister Jones and her staff have been fantastic with my constituency staff and myself on the ground on this. I think, again, the bills that

I'll talk about now, coupled with the budget, are a very important opportunity for my riding to be able to deliver on the things I talked about during the election.

The two bills, as part of my motion, are the two health bills. Bill 11, An Act to enact or amend various Acts related to health care—the short name is the More Convenient Care Act, 2025. If the bill is ultimately passed by the Legislature, it would take the next steps in our province's plan to provide more people with the right publicly funded health care in the right place, making it easier for you to do many things in the health care field: access your records; build healthier communities; bolster the provincial health care workforce, both now and in the future—something that I think we all heard during the election. The act also contains a framework for digital access and a digital access portal addressing a public request for access that will bring our province in line with other provinces that launched similar years ago.

It also provides timely access to mandatory blood tests, which would ensure that our first responders can return to normal lives. With the tests in hand, our first responders can enjoy moments with their loved ones or return back to their normal duties at work. Bill 11 also addresses the long overdue change—the long-overdue change, almost the entire time I have been here in the Legislature—to allow qualified nurse practitioners the right to perform tests, expanding human resources to get the results back faster to those first responders. The sooner this act is passed, the sooner our government can provide the measures in it for the people of Ontario.

Finally, in this motion is Bill 13, An Act respecting primary care. The short name of the act is the Primary Care Act, 2025. Its purpose is really to establish the government's vision for primary care so that insured persons know what they should expect when they access primary care again. It's something that I addressed from my riding perspective at the start of my comments. As the minister has said many, many times in the House, we're leading the country with almost 90% of Ontarians having a family doctor or having a primary care provider. Bill 13 is how the government is going to take action to connect that last 10%. I think we can all agree that that's something that we all want to attain.

I mentioned Dr. Philpott's primary care action team. Again, I applaud her work. I want her to know how much, as an individual MPP, I want to work with her on establishing that in my own riding. I wish her well—I think we all wish her well—in connecting every person in Ontario to a primary care provider within the next four years. We need to take action through this framework that's outlined in Bill 13 as soon as possible to achieve those benchmarks that are part of our reforms.

Every one of these four bills is critically important for the government's agenda. I wanted to ensure that people knew and I was very transparent in the “why.” There are many vehicles, Speaker—and it's great to see you in the chair, Speaker—on how we can drive our government agenda. We've seen it in this session, where we've used various methods. There are a couple of bills right now that

are before committee that will eventually come back to the House. But I'm very happy that I was able to bundle four bills together. I just want to make sure that I give Mr. Vanthof ample time to quote the Steve Clark from many years ago, but he's much wiser now.

1340

The Acting Speaker (MPP Andrea Hazell): Further debate?

Mr. John Vanthof: The government House leader is getting older, like we all are, but I don't know, I think we're still waiting for the wiser to kick in.

What we're debating here is a time allocation motion. The government House leader talked about how you have to know how the place works. Well, actually, you need to step back a little bit farther and know how the system works.

So, we had an election. The government won the election, so they have the right to put their agenda through. That's pretty clear. But we have a Parliament. So, when you put your agenda, which is bills, into Parliament, it's the role of Parliament and the way it works to make sure that those bills are as good as they can be. The opposition can perhaps not change the government's agenda, but they should have the opportunity to help make the bills better.

Part of that process—the government introduces a bill like the budget, which is pretty important. It goes through second reading. This one went through six and a half hours, the government adjourned debate. It usually goes a little bit longer, but the most important part, actually, is when it goes to committee. Because then people of the public get to make comments—experts from the public, but also just lay people—because that's why Parliaments were created. So everyone has the opportunity—not just the people who are elected—to speak at the committee, to give their experiences.

Actually, what's happening now with the time allocation, specifically on four bills, is removing the right of the people to speak, and in many ways, the opposition to speak. You actually don't need a Parliament. We're actually almost going back to where you have, like, a king. That's truly scary. I'm not opposed to the monarchy as a figurehead, but we came very far in our democracies to actually have Parliaments. What the government is doing is basically making the Premier the king.

I'm going to quote the government House leader when he was in the opposition. He knew I was going to do this, and he was trying to inoculate himself from this. But you will hear in his words almost the exact thing that I am saying. It's amazing that they haven't learned, because the fact of the matter is that over the years this government—and they're good at winning elections; no one's disputing that. But they also have a very bad record of putting forward legislation that needs to be retracted and rescinded, because it's either illegal or wildly unpopular or, quite frankly, nuts.

We're facing that again, right now, with Bill 5. It's wildly unpopular. Now, to their credit, they haven't put Bill 5 in it. I just want to put it in the record: Put Bill 5 in time allocation, and you will regret the day. I want to put

on the record: You need to change your course and take Bill 5, take a committee and take it to the places where people will be impacted by Bill 5. Take it to Dresden. Take it to the Ring of Fire. Take it to those places, and then you will see. Take it to northern Ontario—lots of talk here about northern Ontario, but take it to northern Ontario.

I am going to back up, Speaker. A time-allocation motion is basically removing the role of the committee, removing the role of the public. And the government House leader has been here a little bit longer than me—not that much longer, but a little bit—but these remarks that I’m about to quote weren’t when he was a rookie. It wasn’t that he just got here and he didn’t know any better. He knew exactly what he was saying.

The question that we all have to decide—or I guess we don’t have to decide it, because the government have got more members. They’re all going to vote for this time allocation motion. But are the words that the government House leader spoke now the words that he’s directed to say by the Premier, or are these the words of what he really believes?

November 28, 2017, when he was in the opposition—and I really like this one; this one goes more back to me for Bill 5, a direct quote from the government House leader regarding time allocation: “You know what, Speaker? My party loves to hear from people. We’ve been talking to people for months. We’ve had hundreds of volunteers, thousands of ideas. And you know what? If this government”—and now he’s talking about the former Liberal government—“doesn’t want to listen to people, I’ll give them a guarantee. I’ll give them, actually”—oh, and remember this? Again, I’m breaking out of the quote. “I’ll give them, actually, the People’s Guarantee, because we will listen to them, and we will ensure that those Ontarians are being listened to. We are”—okay, I have to stop here, because this next one really needs emphasis, so be ready for the next one. In the words of your government House leader, in 2017, regarding the previous Liberal government: “We are looking at a government that is for the insiders and not the people. You know what, Speaker? That’s going to change.”

Well, I question that. Speaker, they were bad; they’re badder. Like, think this through. Further—

Interjection: There’s more?

Mr. John Vanthof: Very much more. In the esteemed words of the government House leader, when he wasn’t government House leader, when he was younger and more principled—

Interjections.

Mr. John Vanthof: Or maybe—no, I respect the government House leader. I work with him. Again, I’m going to question whether it’s the government House leader who is actually—are those the words, the directions of the corner office? Whether it’s the corner office or the sovereign, that’s why these Parliaments are created to represent people. That’s why you fought so hard to win the election: to let your people speak. I sincerely question why the government caucus is okay with this.

1350

Mr. John Fraser: Baa.

Mr. John Vanthof: Okay. I prefer to talk about cows, not sheep.

Getting back to a much better speaker than me, I’m going to, again, quote the government House leader—May 16, 2017:

“Mr. Steve Clark: Oh, my goodness, Speaker. You know, I find it—wow. That’s the way this government operates, Speaker, to move a closure motion and then for this government to not to even try to justify using this type of tactic just speaks volumes about this government.”

Now, again, they were speaking about the previous Liberal government. And they love—

Mr. Robert Bailey: They were a mess.

Mr. John Vanthof: You know what? I agree with the member from Sarnia–Lambton: The previous Liberal government was a mess. But I have heard so many times in this Legislature the current government blaming the prior government. You do realize that you are the prior government, or the prior government before that is also you. So when you’re talking about the housing crisis and you’re blaming—that’s you. You’re the prior government.

I’ve got so many quotes here I’m losing track of my quotes.

I think I like this one. I’m going to go with this one. Dateline May 16, 2017:

“Mr. Steve Clark: The Minister of Children and Youth Services can sigh all he wants, but facts do matter. Facts do matter, and deciding to choke off debate on a bill, a bill that many stakeholders are imparting information on—many stakeholders are indicating that there are some measures that they like, but there are also some measures that stakeholders have indicated to our critic that they don’t like. But the government doesn’t want to hear those negative voices. They want to bring this bill through committee without debate. They want to bring it back to the House with as little debate as possible and then move forward. I wouldn’t be surprised, Speaker—we’ve dealt with two time allocation motions today; I believe that we’ll probably be dealing with more before this government rises.”

This one is really good. Speaking of the previous, previous, previous Liberal government, which, we all agree, was in disarray at the end—

Mr. Stephen Blais: But only at the end.

Mr. John Vanthof: I came in at the end. All the time I saw it, it was in disarray.

So, speaking of the previous, previous, previous government, again, the words of the current government House leader: “It has real difficulty managing its legislative agenda. I used my comments a few days ago about this government’s lack of planning and organization when it came to one of the House leaders’ meetings that we sat in—myself and the member for Simcoe–Grey....” House leader meetings: That’s an interesting thing that hasn’t happened for a while.

You want to talk about a lack of planning of the legislative agenda, they waited six and a half weeks to

actually bring the Legislature back. You could make that argument if it was a change of government, but you were the previous government and the previous government. So you waited six and a half weeks and now it's rush, rush, rush, because you have to get this stuff through.

The rush isn't because the bills aren't critical; they are critical. But so is comment from the public. You would assume that a budget bill—and there are things in the budget bill that are good. There are things that we would question. There are things that the public would question. You would want to put that to the public. If it's such a great bill, why wouldn't you put it to the public? Do you know what would happen? That someone in the public would say, "You know what? Have you thought about that?" And I think it's human that in a government, certainly in opposition and in my private life, my private business life, you would say, "Hey, I haven't thought about that. That would improve this." That's the whole purpose of the committee of the Parliament, and the government is bypassing it willfully—willfully.

I don't understand. On the government side, with some members, I get it—people who were elected after 2018, right? But the senior members in the government who lived through time allocation from the previous Liberal government should be the ones who are saying behind closed doors, "Okay, this isn't good. Let's use the Legislature. You know, Premier, do you remember Bill 124? Do you remember the greenbelt? Let's slow things down, use the Legislature the way it should be used." But that's just not in the cards with this. I don't, I really—we really do not understand.

Now, in one of the quotes, the current government House leader, former opposition House leader, mentioned that the Liberal government, which I think the majority of us can all agree that they were a mess—there are a few things we can agree with. But he mentioned that they had passed, put forward two time allocation motions in one day. And that was probably the previous—I've got a note; I don't often use notes here. Oh, two time allocation votes in a day was probably the previous record for the travesty to democracy, probably the previous record, and that was held by the Liberals.

But this government is so efficient, including destroying the democratic process, that they put four bills, including a budget, in one time allocation motion. Talk about removing—at this point, I actually think that the Premier thinks that Parliament and committees are red tape. I think that's actually—I think the minister of red tape, whoever the minister of red tape is right now, has succeeded in convincing the Premier that the Parliament is red tape, and it isn't—it isn't.

Again, I'm going to back up. You have the right. You won the election. I get that. Do I like it? No. I'm very proud that I'm still here and that we're still, but—

Interjections.

Mr. John Vanthof: Oh man, all these hecklers are making me lose my spot. It took me a while to research this stuff. Give me a break.

The important part we have to realize is, we're here all to do the same job, to make Ontario stronger, to make sure that the pages and their families and all the people they represent have as good a life in Ontario or better than we did. We all work for them. We disagree philosophically, but with time allocation motions like this one, you're basically saying you don't agree with the parliamentary process. You're basically saying you ran to represent the people, but now that you won, as opposed to what the current government House leader said in 2017, you don't want to listen to the people. You really don't. In fact, you don't have the guts to even try, because you're not taking these bills to committee. And some of these bills, actually, we're not opposed to, so I don't think they're going to be that tough.

1400

So, when the opposition House leader of the day accused the Liberal government of not being able to organize their agenda, I am now accusing this current government of totally being unable to organize your agenda. You could have started a couple of weeks earlier, could have maybe had more discussions: "Okay, okay, so which bills do you like, or which bills can you"—we just passed a bill about integrity commissioners on second reading, right? We agreed this needs to be addressed. Let's move it forward. But they prefer—perhaps the Premier prefers, the Premier's staff prefers, whoever—they don't want to move it through Parliament. They think Parliament is a waste of time.

Although Parliament isn't always the most exciting place in the world, I've got to admit, it fills a role and it's incumbent on us all to play a part in that. That's why we got elected. We all got elected for a reason. I've learned that. I've been here long enough that each one of us got elected because there was something that we do or did that is a little bit different than everybody else, and that's why we're sitting here. It's an incredible honour to be here.

But I don't understand why, on the government side, you're now—why government members are now giving up not only their rights but the rights of the people they claim to represent to actually make deputations to committees—because they're eliminating committees. They don't need to talk to anybody else.

I can spend the next 20 minutes, or the next 17, quoting Mr. Clark. I don't think I need to any more. I think we've made our point that what the government House leader said when he was opposition House leader is completely diametrically opposed to what this motion says. So, at some point, who is responsible for this motion? Who is responsible for basically ignoring Parliament?

The budget, Bill 24, the budget motion, a pretty serious motion, I think, a pretty serious bill: There would be people who would want to talk to this bill and people who would give the government credit for some of the measures within it, right? But it's a risk they don't want to take. Unfortunately, when they take out public consultation, the risk they take is the things they missed in the public consultations are the things that come and bite them

later. But they don't just bite the government; they bite Ontarians. That's the issue.

So the other one—help me out here. Which is the bill about the justice system?

Mr. John Fraser: That's Bill 10.

Mr. John Vanthof: I'm going to ask somebody I trust. Which is the bill about the justice system?

MPP Kristyn Wong-Tam: It's Bill 10.

Mr. John Vanthof: It's Bill 10. Okay.

There would definitely be commentary about that bill if it was taken to committee, and good commentary—commentary that would, could, might, should improve the bill. The government has the agenda to put the bill forward and to get the bill passed. That's how our system works.

The idea that to exclude the public on issues that they will be very strongly impacted by—they have the power to do that with motions like this, but they don't really have the right. There's a difference between having the ability or the power and having the moral right.

Bills like this—although this is a grand building and people come to tour it, and it's an incredible honour to be able to stand here, as a farm boy from somewhere in northern Ontario—lessen the grandeur of this building. What makes this building grand is the way legislation in democracies is crafted, and the way that we deal with each other, and the way that we can laugh with each other, can fight with each other—and the reason we're two swords' lengths apart. We don't always agree with each other. But when you take that out of the equation and, basically, when all the decisions are made on that side, excluding the public—then each time you do that, this building is more and more just for show. And when our institutions are just for show, in the end, they won't actually serve the people.

We hear this in the government a lot—and sometimes I agree with the government: We are in a very dangerous time right now. Our former best friend and closest ally doesn't seem to be our best friend or closest ally anymore. Quite frankly, they don't seem to be anybody's best friend or closest ally anymore.

One of the things that makes us Canadian and makes us different is institutions like this. We have a parliamentary democracy. Part of that parliamentary democracy is taking the time to scrutinize bills, taking bills to the public in a committee system so the public can comment, then taking them back and putting it through the system to make those bills—although we can disagree with them philosophically—the best they can be. This is not the case here.

I hope that the government members actually think about this, that you're giving up your right—you're giving up your citizens' rights to talk about these bills. You've got the majority. You'll get these done. They won't be as good—they might be. That's the thing about committees: You don't know who's coming to the committee.

1410

But the one thing I can guarantee is, if you don't hold a committee, you'll never find out. You'll never find out. The government, based on this, does not want to make the bills the best they can be. They just want to push their agenda forward, which they have a right to. But they don't

want seem to want to make the bills the best they can be, because these bills could have easily gone through the process if we had started two weeks earlier.

Actually, the way it's supposed to work, the House leaders from the parties say, "Yeah, okay. This bill, we can live with." Right? "This bill, we hate. This bill, we are going to fight it to the end." That's not the way this government currently works. Each successive government makes this process worse. So the first government that introduced time allocation, unfortunately, was the NDP.

Mr. John Fraser: Shocking.

Mr. John Vanthof: It is shocking. It is shocking. Every government, instead of making it better, makes it worse. This is an example, right? Four bills, one thing—bang, bang, bang.

You're making, basically, bills like you're putting it in the microwave and making popcorn. But that impacts people. I hope that when the government members—and I have a strong feeling, based on past experience, that the government members are all going to vote for this.

Mr. John Fraser: Baa.

Mr. John Vanthof: That's not even a good sheep, John.

The best thing ever—but I hope you remember. I also hope you remember, when you're on the other side—because it's going to happen. It's going to happen. The reason that the Progressive Conservatives lasted—I believe they had a dynasty for 40 years; right? The reason that they lasted so long is because even when they had a majority, they governed like they had a minority. They actually listened to people. They did some great things. But what you're doing is you're just listening to your own people, not listening to all the people.

When it comes crashing down, you're going to come crashing down. All the rules that you are creating, you're all going to have to live with them. You should remember that, especially the ones who were just elected. Remember why you ran. Remember. I hope that you will remember that you didn't just run to get told what to do. That's what this time allocation motion is, basically. It's telling you what to do. It's telling us what to do. And you know what? It's telling the people of Ontario where to go.

The Acting Speaker (MPP Andrea Hazell): Further debate?

Mr. John Fraser: In two ways, I look forward to time allocation debates—and then, of course, I don't like them. The reason I look forward to them is, I'm going to be able to follow the member from Timiskaming and to listen to him—well, actually, listening to him is the enjoyable part, the part I look forward to; the hard part is following him because he has a certain way of saying things. But I want to say this just for the record, so it's in Hansard—that I trust the member from Timiskaming, because he is the example of what we should all be here, which is: what you see is what you get.

Mr. John Vanthof: I appreciate that, John.

Mr. John Fraser: Despite what he thinks about me. I'll say that out loud.

He makes a really good point. Our job here—all of our jobs, not just our jobs here—is to ask questions. That's how we make legislation better. That's how we make things better. That's how we learn. We listen and ask the right questions. When you set a record by taking four bills and time-allocating them—not even time-allocating them through committee and debate; just taking the committee right out, and part of that's the budget bill—that's incredible. It's not just about what we have to say.

I do believe the member for Timiskaming was right when he thinks that the Premier, or the Premier's office, believes that committees are an obstacle to be avoided. The committees aren't about us; they're about people being able to come and speak to us about the things that we're saying we're going to do. They come and they speak to us. They represent, sometimes, different stakeholder groups and it's important that we listen to them so that we make the right decisions and we don't make mistakes.

Again, back to the member for Timiskaming, when he talked about this government always having to go back and fix things because they're in such a hurry: If this government was a car, someone would have to tell them, "The 'R' is for 'reverse,' not 'race.'" This Ford goes in reverse. It's unbelievable how many times this government has had to undo the legislation that it's put forward on very serious things—like, literally turned something inside-out. I think—I don't know—we had four housing bills or three; I lost count. Maybe it's like new technology, like "housing bill 4.0" or whatever. "We got some of the bugs out. We found some more bugs and we had to blow it up."

But here we have four bills, and they're important bills and I'm going to talk a bit more about each of those bills. The member previous was correct in saying that some of this stuff, we support. It doesn't mean that by supporting it, we don't think it could be made better, and we don't put it through a process that makes it better. That's why we debate. That's why we travel bills. That's why we listen to people when they come and they say to us, "You're doing this thing."

Bill 5 is the perfect example; I'll have a bit more to say about that later. Literally, First Nations had to come into this building and say, "You are not listening to us. You're not respecting the duty to consult on this piece of legislation and what you're trying to do with it." The government's response to that, which is typical but in some ways an unreal reaction, is, "Oh, my gosh. We forgot about our duty to consult in this bill. We didn't put it in." All this work we're doing, it's like we're actually in a place where—I'm not saying the duty to consult is any more or less important in different places, but if it's important in one place in this province, it's in the north.

The response was to amend the preamble in the bill. For those who don't know what amending a preamble essentially means, it means nothing. It's symbolic. Its force in law is—to say "limited" would be very overly generous; and then to put another amendment in that involved how regulations were supposed to be written with regard to this bill.

1420

It's like, at the eleventh hour, at the last minute, and the government is making it seem like it's some sort of epiphany and they've seen the light and everything's going to be okay right now. And First Nations are going, "Whoa, just wait a second. We're partners. We're not an afterthought. The purpose of talking to us and consulting with us and dialogue is so that we can work together and get it right." What the government is saying is, "Oh yeah, no, we get that. We just fixed it," with nothing other than words, their own words—not First Nations words; their words. And if there's anything that First Nations have heard in a large quantity, it's a lot of words. What First Nations are looking for—and, actually, people across Ontario—is action. What action means is listening, dialogue, asking questions, taking the time, taking a genuine interest.

So, like this time allocation motion, this government is going full steam ahead on Bill 5, because they fixed it. "We fixed it, guys, and we did it in a couple of days"—with maybe a couple of hundred words, and I think that's probably being generous. It's moving so fast that it's risking whatever relationship there exists between First Nations and this government. It's putting that at risk. As I mentioned the day before in my question, we started to hear words that we've never—that we haven't heard, I should say, in a long time, like "Idle No More," from leaders. And those weren't threats. What they're saying is, "The thing that you're doing is going to lead to people feeling the way that they did when we saw Idle No More."

Now, if that's not a very clear message about the level of concern that First Nations have with Bill 5 and the speed with which this government is going—which is the same that they're trying to do with this time allocation motion, given the breadth of the bill. I'm not even going to get into—at least not right now—what the bill actually does, because that's another problem altogether.

All we have to do is look south of the border and see what happens when decisions that are made become more centralized, when the people helping to make decisions are sidelined, when the people who the decisions affect aren't being listened to. You see it with the President of the United States. They're not passing legislation; he's a king offering decrees.

Bill 5, although it's a piece of legislation, is essentially going to say, the king of Ontario, who we know as the Premier, is going to say to his loyal subjects—at least that's what he believes they are—"I'm drawing a circle here. And in this place, I'm going to do whatever I want with whoever I want whenever I want to do it. And the laws, they're not the same over there. They're not the same. I'm the one; I'm the arbiter of it. I'm going to make the choices"—not us; him.

People are going to say, "Don't draw a comparison with Donald Trump." I'm not going to do that. But what I'm going to say is, if you look at that action and you remove the personalities from it and just put those actions as something that's happening, it's like it's the same thing: "I am going to give a decree, and you are now a special

economic zone. And by the way, company X, you have the rights over there, and all those laws to protect endangered species, respect First Nations treaties, all those things—they don't matter. They don't exist there. I'm making the laws. I'm the king. I make the decisions."

That's how things start to go in the direction that's happened in the United States, which is the centralization of power, the personalization of power, the executive branch being the power. And what happens is that the people who ask questions, especially on the other side, they're on the outs, and nobody wants to be on the outs in their family or on their team.

I was joking with the member from Timiskaming, and I did make a sheep sound, but I've sat on the other side so I know what it's like to have the pressure to work as a team and to have the pressure of a Premier's office, the power that's centralized—and my old colleague Jim Bradley, the House leader at the time, used to call it the politburo. It was always amusing to hear him say that.

But here's what happens in governments: You get elected, you listen to the people, and then it starts—it erodes, right? And we can see that happening right now. Then you listen to your caucus, and then, after a while, you stop listening to them, because that office has got a lot of control. You stop listening to the caucus and then you're only listening to cabinet. And then, well, that starts to go down, and six people are making the decisions for all of us. It's the way that it works, and it only happens because people don't ask questions. You don't have to ask them out loud, but you need to ask those questions of the people who are making those decisions when you sit on the other side. I don't expect you to make them out loud—you play on a team—but your responsibility to the people who elected you is to ask those questions, to put those people to the test. Because it's the natural way of governments evolving when that doesn't happen. I have seen it. They have—pardon me, I just got interrupted there. I lost my train of thought. It stopped at the station, so just give me a moment.

I'm going to switch gears and go back to time allocation. I won't go through all the quotes that the member from Timiskaming made, because I don't have them, and I don't know if you want to hear any more words, but the words that we say here are important. They all get written down. I've said things that I've regretted and then tried to take them back—

Mr. Matthew Rae: No.

Mr. John Fraser: Well, stay with me, you might hear something. Just stick with me.

But I remember the government House leader saying all those things. I remember John Yakabuski slamming his hand on the desk when there was closure, and it would startle all of us, the guillotine coming down. I quite enjoyed it. I tried to do it for a little while, but then my arm hurt and I stopped doing it. I don't know how he did it. I do have to say, I miss John here because he is, again, another example of "what you see is what you get," which is, I think, the most important commodity in politics.

But I'm going to have a little bit of a quiz here. I'm going to read this quote. If anybody guesses this quote after I'm finished, you can pipe up. Here the quote comes: "That was the news article by the CBC touting the agreement between the NDP and the Liberals at the federal level. They sure talked a lot about this deal, and it seemed that the federal NDP were very proud of it. They said they 'got a lot.' I don't know what they meant when they said 'a lot' because, from what I read, it looks like they got coverage for only two things, one of which was contraception. When you think about that for a second—of all the things you could ask for under a pharmacare agreement, what they put at the top of their ask, at the top of their list, was contraception. They could have asked for all sorts of things. They could have asked for many of the things that I heard about talking tonight: medication for this, medication for that. But instead, the NDP put at the top of their list contraception. I found that interesting."

Does anybody know? Anybody want to guess? It was the PA to the Minister of Health questioning why contraception was a priority. We have to think about what we say here. I'm sure the member regrets saying this, just like I've regretted saying things too.

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When we have debates in here and we wax eloquent about time allocation and other things, those words, they all come back. There's this poem, if I can remember it, by Carl Sandburg and it goes something like this. It's called proud words: Be careful how you use proud words. Proud words "wear long boots, hard boots; they walk off...; they can't hear you calling."

We have to be careful in this chamber. I've been guilty of that. I wanted to read this quote here today because last night I would have liked to have read it out. I was a bit more exercised last night about the comments from the parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Health. I thought it was very disrespectful to a member who had brought forward their first motion in this chamber—a serious motion, a great motion, one that she should be very proud of. And he treated the debate on that motion with a total lack of respect—a total lack of respect for the member and the importance of it.

Thank you for listening to that. I'm just going to share a bit of my time with my colleagues here. I'm going to say a couple of things about not taking these bills to committee. First of all, it's wrong. Nothing is—

Interjection.

Mr. John Fraser: I have to leave some time, I should say. Yes, I'm leaving some time. I just want to go through these bills quickly because—how much time do you want?

M^{me} Lucille Collard: Three minutes.

Mr. John Fraser: Three minutes. How much time do you want?

Mr. Stephen Blais: Whatever.

Mr. John Fraser: There we go, okay. Because we want to debate this one—

The Acting Speaker (MPP Andrea Hazell): There's no sharing. We're just going to continue the rotation—

Mr. John Fraser: I know. I'm watching the clock.

The Acting Speaker (MPP Andrea Hazell): Okay.

Mr. John Fraser: I know. I can't do the full—I'm not like you. I don't have that much wind. Sorry; it just came out.

Mr. John Vanthof: I deserved that.

Mr. Matthew Rae: Do you regret saying that, John?

Mr. John Fraser: Ah, there we go. I love you. I love the member from Timiskaming.

So Bill 10: It's a bill we're going to support. All of us are going to support it. It's important. It could go to committee and we could hear from the people that it's most important to and maybe we could make it better. That's the point of this place. It's the point of democracy. How do we do the best we can? How do we make the best decisions? We only do that by listening to each other and listening to people.

Now, the more convenient health care act has to go to committee. The reason that it has to go to committee is, one of the officers of this Legislature, the Information and Privacy Commissioner, has raised very serious concerns about people's health information. She's written to the government twice. She's written to the government when they wrote regulations for a bill that came back and said, "Stop what you're doing. There's a problem here."

We know that data—personal information—is currency. That's what people trade now. It has value. How we treat that and use that as a government, we have to make sure that we don't get caught up in that data being used as currency. It's currency and it's power.

Again, I'm going to go back to the parliamentary assistant for health. I'm not picking on them today but I heard in debate that as long as your personal health data—listen to this—as long as your personal health data was anonymized, that could be used. You didn't need to worry about that. As long as it didn't have your name or your number or some identifier on it, then it was okay.

The reality is, your personal health data, whether it has your name on it or not, is your data. It belongs to you. Here's why. Number one: You can compile data and identify somebody who is anonymized just by compiling other data. We know that.

The other thing is that masses of personal health information or any data can be used by companies to make insurance packages, to make decisions about who gets coverage, whether you get insurance or not. The Information and Privacy Commissioner is telling us to pause, stop on Bill 11, and the government is not listening. We're not listening inside here. We're not listening to the officers of the Legislature who we appoint and we're not listening to the people.

I'm just going to wind up here, and I want to talk about Bill 13, which is the access to primary care act. Literally, it's a bill that has no teeth. When people talk about things that are aspirational, it essentially says in this bill, "You can't hold us to account on this." If you're not delivering these services, this bill means nothing with regard to that. It's non-binding. It's a non-binding piece of legislation about access to primary care.

Now, I can see something non-binding coming in private members' business, but if the government was serious about fixing primary care, that wouldn't be in this bill. Or we could at least go to committee and have some discussion about how we could make the bill stronger, how we could actually deliver this thing. Or at least we could get out in the open that the bill was non-binding.

I'm going to cede my time. Thank you very much, Speaker. It's been a pleasure.

The Acting Speaker (MPP Andrea Hazell): Further debate?

Mme Lucille Collard: I felt it important to rise today and speak to that motion that restricts times on the legislative process. The government House leader spoke about his role as government House leader, and I want to speak a little bit about how I see my role as House leader for my own party. I think I became the House leader of the Liberal Party a little bit as a natural fit, because I actually like rules. I like rules, I like principles and I like rules because they provide clarity and they provide predictability. I like to know what I need to prepare for, what I'm going to be talking about.

But today, there was no notification, no advance notice that we were going to debate this motion. I got a note when we came back at 1, getting ready to listen to my colleague to debate our bill, just to be told by my assistant, "The government is going to bring up that motion now," and it was just like, okay, here we go, out the door for predictability, because the government likes to take us by surprise.

The rules around the legislative process are very important, and they are there for a reason. We have a legislative process to make sure that we do due diligence when we adopt legislation that will impact a number of people in the province. So it's very important that we go through the motion, through the process: second reading; and then committee, where we can hear from stakeholders and learn about the concerns, and possibly even improve the legislation; and then back to third reading where we can actually report on what we've heard at committee and hopefully be able to make that legislation better.

We're skipping all of this and this has real impacts. For one thing, it undermines democracy, because people expect to be heard, and we have a role to play as members of the opposition, and we're being impacted by this decision to "court-circuit" the process. And it reduces the legislative oversight. Obviously, that process is there for a reason. So we can check, you know, all the boxes, cross the t's and dot the i's, but we're not doing that anymore.

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The most important thing, though, is that it erodes public trust, because we might think here that people are not paying attention, but we all report to our riding about what's happening here in the Legislature. I'll be sure to tell the people in my riding of Ottawa–Vanier, "The government decided to fast-track those bills so that they wouldn't have to hear about what you have to say."

It really sets a dangerous precedent, but I think that train has left the station. That precedent is already there, and the

concern about fast-tracking that legislation is still a thing, and it disrespects the role of the Legislature.

So it raises a question: Why are we here? Because we have the feeling that the government would be perfectly happy doing that legislation, crafting it and just not hearing from us or from anyone else about what they think about it. I think those are important considerations.

I would caution against the government to keep doing that because it has real impact, and it's not a good look on the Legislature and on the work that each and every one of us here is expected to do.

The Acting Speaker (MPP Andrea Hazell): Further debate?

Mr. Stephen Blais: Thank you for the opportunity to speak to this tonight.

I am someone who's also very fond of quoting people, Madam Speaker. I don't have any quotes of the House leader, but I do have one from the Minister of Economic Development and Job Creation, who once held the title of finance minister and was responsible for introducing budgets. In his first budget, he said, "Restoring trust, accountability, and transparency is foundational to our plans to build a fiscally sustainable government and protect the critical services we all cherish."

As it turns out, that was very prescient because this government hasn't built a fiscally sustainable Ontario, and they have not protected critical services for Ontarians. So it's not entirely shocking to understand that they haven't restored trust and accountability because, as evidenced by their move today, they are not particularly open and transparent.

The government says with their budget, which they're trying to fast-track this afternoon, that they're protecting Ontario. But unfortunately, they're doing everything they can to avoid any kind of scrutiny. They're rushing the budget through, they're skipping committee, they're cutting off debate.

That isn't particularly transparent. The Premier campaigned on being transparent and being for the people, but he doesn't actually want to hear from the people, and he doesn't want to hear from the people elected to this place.

He said he was going to be different. Well, I guess he is, Madam Speaker, because I don't know too many governments who have multi-hundred-billion-dollar budgets that they don't actually consult people on, that they don't actually hear debate on, that they don't actually hear expert testimony on. So I guess in that sense, the Premier is quite different.

The government says that time is of the essence. Well, they had time earlier this year to give four weeks up for an election and another six or seven weeks for a transition, but they don't have four days to do public hearings. They don't even have one day to do public hearings. They're giving us 40 minutes to debate the budget.

If the budget was so great, the government shouldn't really be afraid to have everyone talk about it. They shouldn't be afraid to go to committee and hear what residents of Ontario might have to think, but I think they are, because if they did go to committee and if they did

hear from residents of Ontario, I think this is what people of Ontario might say. I think people in Ontario might say that there is a health care crisis, that wait times are up, that ERs are overflowing and that despite the Premier's promise to end hallway health care, it's only gotten worse. And then they would ask what is in this budget to fix those things, and the answer, unfortunately, from the government would have to be: not a lot. The budget still doesn't properly fund public hospitals. Instead, they are funnelling money to private clinics. Madam Speaker, I think we can agree that that's not solving the crisis; that's cashing in on it, and that unfortunately is something this government likes to do.

And if we were to go to committee and we were to hear from people and we were talking about the next biggest item in the budget, which is education, I think we might hear the same story from people. School boards are still warning about cuts. I was in a meeting not 90 minutes ago about cuts to education, cuts in the classroom, cuts to special needs, cuts to the infrastructure necessary to build schools. The government is perfectly okay with kids learning in temporary classrooms and portables, instead of actually building the schools we need for a growing population.

I think if they went to committee, they might hear that from experts and they might hear that from regular Ontarians who might come to participate. They would certainly hear that from the representatives of those residents of Ontario if they gave us that chance to debate it, but of course, they're trying to limit debate on their budget. Madam Speaker, how do you build a strong, skilled workforce for the 21st-century economy when their government is starving the institutions that will train the next generation? I think they might hear that if they continued with the debate on the budget and went to committee, but I guess we'll never know the answer, because they're cutting off debate.

Another important issue that the government claims that they're working on, and I think we would hear from people about, is housing. Again, the government talks a big game about housing, but when you look at the numbers that are in the budget, you see the same pattern. The government wants to build homes—great; so do I. But they want to build homes without schools, and they want to build homes without roads and they want to build homes without transit. Madam Speaker, you can't just pour concrete and call it a community. If you build the homes without the basics, you're not fixing a crisis; you're baking in the failure. I think if they went to committee, they would hear that from people. I think they would hear that from the same home builders that contribute to their fundraisers. That's what I hear from the home builders who I talk to: They want to participate in building stronger communities. They really do. They really do, because that helps them sell better homes. It helps everyone make more money. It helps everyone live in a better community. But the government is not particularly interested in hearing about that, evidenced by the fact that they're cutting off debate.

We've heard a lot about how the Premier is afraid of Donald Trump and what Donald Trump might do to Ontario's economy. He's quite worried about it.

Mr. Steve Clark: He's Captain Canada.

Mr. Stephen Blais: He's quite worried about it. It's a sense of fear that the Premier has. You'd think if someone was so afraid of the consequences of Donald Trump, there might be things in the budget to help defend against those things. I think if we went to committee and heard from experts, we might hear that the whole rationale for the election and the content of the budget really doesn't have a lot to defend Ontario against Mr. Trump. The Premier doesn't really have anything that will assuage his fears or the fears of Ontarians in his budget.

Madam Speaker, budgets are about priorities. It's about who gets help and who gets left behind, about what kind of province we want to build and who gets a real shot at the future. I think going to committee would have given us an opportunity to hear from some of those people, the people who are being left behind, on how this government continues to keep them behind. I think the government would hear that the budget is a failure. I think that they would hear that families are hurting, that businesses, large and small, are stretched and communities are waiting for help. I think the government would hear that many people feel that they're more focused on headlines than on helping people. I think that's one of the reasons why they want to expedite things, because they're afraid of hearing those things. They are afraid of giving people a microphone to say those things. They are afraid of exposing those people to the media here at Queen's Park and giving them an opportunity to end up on television and in the newspaper. Otherwise, they would allow debate to continue.

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Finally, I think they are afraid that they would continue to hear that Liberals are still the only party proposing tax cuts. We are the only party proposing affordability relief for families. Because in their budget, they've proposed no income tax for the middle class, they haven't proposed taking HST off the essentials of heating your home in the winter and cooling it again in the summer. They have not proposed tax cuts to help small businesses, while Liberals have done all those things and more, Madam Speaker. I think if they allow debate to continue and they allow there to be committee hearings, they would hear a little bit about that.

Obviously, shutting off debate disallows the elected representatives of our province the opportunity to raise these important issues, to bring these important issues forward, and it really shuts down the opportunity for people in Ontario to be heard—which, I would think, was the whole point of having an election in the first place, because the government wanted to hear from people. But now they're quite comfortable shutting everything down and going home on summer vacation, and who knows when we'll be back.

Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I'll now give other people an opportunity to say a few words.

The Acting Speaker (MPP Andrea Hazell): Further debate?

Ms. Stephanie Bowman: It's a pleasure to rise today to talk about this motion to close debate. It's interesting, when I heard the House leader introduce his motion, and he talked about the need to move quickly, that we want to get things done and we've got less time to do that and we're forging ahead—that was kind of one of the rationales. Well, Speaker, it's kind of ironic for him to say that, given that it was this government that called an unnecessary, expensive early election. It was this government that, according to their own campaign manager, spent \$40 million of taxpayer money that really helped them in the polls and absolutely helped them win that unnecessary, expensive election. And then, when they won, they didn't come back right away; they took six and a half weeks. Six and a half weeks we waited to come back to the Legislature. That's time we could have been debating the budget. The government could have tabled their budget far before the date of April 15.

Interjection.

Ms. Stephanie Bowman: Speaking of the federal government, the federal government also had an election on April 28. They got back to work four weeks later. This government took six and a half weeks, to get us all back here to work. That was their choice. They delayed us. The federal government did it in four weeks with many more members to swear in. So this government has no one but themselves to blame for this now what they call need to rush forward and push ahead.

Certainly, my colleagues here have spoken also about the impact of lack of consultation that this creates. It's not a surprise with this government. I've been elected two and a half years, almost three now, and we've seen this on a regular basis, where they skip over committee hearings—I guess because they think it's a waste of time, a waste of their time to hear from constituents, to hear from important stakeholders, to hear from experts. We know this government doesn't have a great deal of respect for experts. They ignore their own task forces on a regular basis, whether it's the blue-ribbon panel on post-secondary education or the housing affordability task force.

Once again, really, the drive for this government to push ahead is only to close down consultation and conversation about these very important matters which we are debating, and I, for one, am not in support.

The Acting Speaker (MPP Andrea Hazell): Further debate? Further debate?

Mr. Clark has moved government notice of motion number 3, relating to allocation of time on the following bills:

—Bill 24, An Act to implement Budget measures and to enact and amend various statutes;

—Bill 10, An Act to enact the Measures Respecting Premises with Illegal Drug Activity Act, 2025 and to amend various Acts with respect to public safety and the justice system;

—Bill 11, An Act to enact or amend various Acts related to health care; and

—Bill 13, An Act respecting primary care.

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, please say “nay.”

In my opinion, the ayes have it.

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

Vote deferred.

2025 ONTARIO BUDGET

Resuming the debate adjourned on May 28, 2025, on the motion that the House approves in general the budgetary policy of the government.

The Acting Speaker (MPP Andrea Hazell): I recognize the member from Don Valley West.

Ms. Stephanie Bowman: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It's great to see you in the chair this afternoon.

It's a pleasure to rise again this afternoon to debate motion 2. I left off debate this morning talking about jobs, in particular in the manufacturing sector, so let me pick it up there.

I'll just recap for a moment. Under the Liberal government, 17,000 manufacturing jobs were created; so far, under this Conservative government: 7,000 jobs. This is the sector which is the most exposed to US trade.

The level of GDP, in fact, could be lower with US tariffs in 2026 by 8% versus a no-tariff scenario. These output declines do indeed put thousands of jobs at risk. In fact, the FAO sees 119,000 fewer jobs in 2026 versus a no-tariff scenario. By 2029, more job cuts could bring the total to 138,000 jobs lost. But this budget provides very little tangible protection for manufacturing workers.

There is the Protecting Ontario Account which, as I discussed earlier this week, only provides relief once every other option is exhausted. I'll speak more on that later. There is a \$20-million investment to mobilize new training and support workers who lose their jobs, to create employment centres in communities affected by these mass layoffs. I think we know why that hasn't gotten that much attention—it's because \$20 million is really not going to go very far.

So that takes me to spending; that's really what the government budget is about. What are they going to spend our money on? This government is spending more per capita in real dollars—\$13,118. That's more than any other government in Ontario history. Speaker, let me just repeat that: not nominal dollars; real dollars. They're spending more than any other government in Ontario history. This budget shows that the government will continue to spend more per capita than any other government in Ontario history: \$14,222 in nominal dollars. But yet, I fear they will continue to under-deliver for the people of Ontario. They will continue to help their insider friends; not Ontarians looking for relief because—let's face it—when they spend their money on the people of Ontario, they're not very good at it.

Since 2018, the debt has ballooned by about \$105 billion. They've had deficit after deficit, and yet what do we have to show for it? Crumbling infrastructure, crises in health care, homelessness, housing and more. Now, over the next three years, they're going to add \$73.6 billion on top of the \$105 billion, with no new direct supports to the people of Ontario, no tax cuts for middle-income families like they promised, no increases to ODSP and no progress on the housing file.

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So let's look again at the economic reality: the second-highest unemployment rate in the country, 7.8%, it jumped to, in April—the highest since 2013, Speaker—and it's been climbing since June 2022, long before the threat of US tariffs. Some 691,000 people are now out of work in Ontario, and the toll this is taking on them is apparent.

Our economic prosperity is also suffering. Real GDP per capita was \$59,000 at the end of 2024, but persistent declines over the last few years have reduced this measure by 1%, or roughly \$600 per person, since the Conservative government was elected in 2018.

Business investment is falling since 2021, contributing to that slower productivity growth, and it means that Ontario families really have seen their standard of living decline under this government.

Under the previous Liberal government, real GDP increased by \$4,000 per person, or 7.4%. We were a leader in the G7 in that regard.

So when people say they are feeling the pain in the affordability crisis, they really are. Their dollars are not going as far.

Ontarians aren't asking for miracles from their government, but they would like competence. They need a government that listens to experts, that plans responsibly, that invests in the things that matter—health care, education, infrastructure—to create economic growth that will benefit everyone. This budget makes very paltry attempts to fix what's broken or prepare us for what lies ahead.

The Conservative government used US tariffs as their excuse for an expensive, unnecessary early election. Speaker, we know they were planning for this election long before they called it, because they wasted over \$1 billion—\$1.4 million up to \$1.9 million—to get beer into corner stores a year early. That was the first sign that they really were going to call an early election, because they wanted to make good on that promise—no middle-income tax cut promise, but let's get beer in corner stores a year early. And now, they're trying to use US tariffs as a scapegoat for their poor economic performance. They've had seven years to strengthen Ontario's economy, and instead they've weakened it.

Back to spending, what's going on in this budget: Before the uncertainty from possible US tariffs, the fall economic statement presented a plan that would see program spending of \$213 billion in 2026-27. Then the government sent us to the polls in that early, expensive, unnecessary election and they told us it was a matter of economic urgency. The government said it would need to spend tens of billions of dollars to protect the economy

from tariffs. The Premier said that was why he needed a new mandate. But Speaker, we know that's not accurate. We opened up this budget document and we expected to see some of those tens of billions of dollars, some of those bold ideas he talked about.

But before I get into the numbers, let me just say that there are some positive things in the budget: the tax credits for families undergoing fertility treatment and trying to expand their family. I'm happy the government finally heeded the call from the agricultural sector to increase spending in the risk management program, and I'm happy that the government, at least in the words in the document, are talking about critical minerals processing, not just mining. I support a strong mining sector, in partnership with First Nations and considering the obligation to consult, but there is an opportunity, according to a number of sector experts, for Ontario to have a reindustrialization strategy. That is if this Critical Minerals Processing Fund gets off the ground—because, again, while it's talked about in the budget, the words are there, the money being spent, if you look at the tables in the mining sector—on page 186, to be exact—is only going up \$10 million next year. I don't think that's going to advance our critical minerals processing strategy very far.

So if they are serious about this—and I hope they are, for the good of our economy—I hope they put together a panel of experts to help them build a credible plan for reindustrialization. I hope they listen to them so that we take advantage of the opportunity for Ontario to innovate and be part of the value-added activities that come after the minerals are mined.

Back to those tens of billions of dollars: Where are they, Speaker? Only in the rhetoric. When we look at the entirety of new spending, we're seeing a big gap compared to what we heard on the campaign trail. Next year, in 2026-27, the numbers show that the government is only planning to spend \$3.4 billion more than they had planned to spend before US tariffs, as outlined in the fall economic statement; for 2027-28, they'll spend \$1.2 billion more. So that's only an increase of \$4.6 billion in new spending versus what they had planned to spend according to the fall economic statement. That's a lot less than the tens of billions of dollars the government said it would put back into helping workers and businesses. Again, tariffs were an excuse for that early, expensive, unnecessary election.

Those billions of dollars, \$4.6 billion in new spending—it's about a 2% increase. That is not bold. That's not transformational. That's not even enough to keep up with inflation. Prior to this budget, the government was outspending inflation. They were spending at a rate—double inflation, and now they'll be spending less than inflation, at a time when we're preparing for economic disruption.

So the promises were loud. The headlines were bold. But the numbers tell a different story. And numbers, unlike press conferences, don't spin. They tell the truth.

So these tens of billions of dollars—I thought, "Well, if they're not in the operating budget, maybe it's in the capital spending. Let me look there." So I went there, to page 19, and I compared that to the fall economic state-

ment that they put out just seven months ago. The budget presented a \$200.9-billion, 10-year capital plan—and the government members are boasting about that, \$200 billion. It's only \$9.5 billion more than they were planning to spend before the election—not even one \$10-billion increase, when the Premier referred to tens of billions of dollars. That's only \$950 million a year over the next 10 years.

Speaker, the 10-year capital plan for highways, which this government loves to talk about—it's \$29.9 billion. That is a big number. And while the government insists it's forging ahead with its wasteful Highway 413, which their own experts at the Ministry of Transportation said will only save seconds—and it will ruin some of the best and most valuable farmland in the world—the government hasn't even told the people of Ontario, whose taxpayer dollars they're spending, how much they will spend on that highway. If the fantasy tunnel under the 401 really goes ahead, there's also no transparency about how much the feasibility study or the highway will cost. But I expect it will be a lot more than the \$29.9 billion they've planned.

Speaker, when we come back to program spending, the fall economic statement projected that the government would spend \$213 billion in 2026-27—as I said, going up only \$3.4 billion, according to this budget. When we break that down by sector—let's take a moment to do that—planned increases to education spending sit at just 0.4%, a fraction of what's needed to keep up with inflation. That means that schools won't have the money to hire the staff they need. The crumbling infrastructure—the schools that our kids go to and our teachers and education workers work in will continue to have a significant backlog. Educators and students will continue to be expected to do more with less. And why? Because the Conservative government has developed what I can only describe as a compulsive habit of saying one thing and doing another. They said they would cut middle-income taxes. They said that back in 2018. They still haven't done it.

By the way, when we asked the government to support our opposition day motion to cut taxes for people and small businesses, they voted against it. When asked during the vote why they wouldn't support us, the Minister of Education could be heard shouting out from across the aisle, "Because the tax cuts weren't big enough." Well, look at this budget now—no tax cuts here. Say one thing; do another.

Let's look at the post-secondary education sector. Spending here is set to decline by 5.3%. Meanwhile, domestic post-secondary enrolments are expected to increase by hundreds of thousands in the next couple of decades. If we don't start preparing for that now, we are actually going to be slashing the number of spots available for our students, cutting into their futures by not investing in them now. We see programs being cut already, and we know that we're investing less per capita than other provinces and other states. We're falling behind. Even the Ontario Chamber of Commerce raised the alarm, saying that "with spending at historic levels, there's less room to tackle

other urgent threats to our competitiveness, such as the crisis in post-secondary education.”

1510

Let’s talk about justice, Speaker. Justice sector spending is set to drop by 4% in the next two years. This is a sector that includes the courts, legal aid, correctional services and front-line staff like police officers and probation officers. We all do agree that public safety is important; it’s a core responsibility of government. But how can communities be expected to keep up to provide what we need in terms of safety when we’ve shortchanged the very system that upholds the law?

While the government boasts about its so-called economic strategy and tariff response, the truth is hiding in plain sight: The things Ontarians actually rely on—education, justice, health, community supports—are all being cut. The government wants credit for standing up to international economic threats, but you can’t fight an external crisis by quietly gutting your own house from the inside. The cuts continue. Take the children, community and social services sector, facing a 2.4% decline. That sector supports the most vulnerable people in our province: children in care. We learned, sadly, recently, that 134 youth died in care in 2023. Individuals with disabilities, low-income families, survivors of violence: Those are the people who need our help the most, and yet they’re facing a 2.4% decline in funding.

It gets worse, Speaker. As the government moves forward with plans to further expand alcohol accessibility, Ontarians should understand the full implications of that change. On the surface, it may simply seem like a move toward convenience and consumer choice, but behind the scenes there are real financial consequences. One of the most immediate impacts will be the reduction in tax revenue from both the LCBO and the province’s beer, wine and spirits taxes. According to the government’s own projections here in the budget document, Ontario is set to lose a half billion dollars in revenue from those sources in 2025-26—one year alone, Speaker. That’s not a rounding error. That’s money that year after year helps fund vital public services, in particular health care.

Let’s be clear: We are not a party that’s standing in the way of modernization or responsible access, but we must be honest about the trade-offs. The rationale for taxes on alcohol has always been tied to its impact on our health system. Alcohol overuse contributes to increased ER visits, chronic illness, mental health challenges and long-term-care pressures. That’s why those taxes are there, not to punish consumers but to help fund the system that must bear the cost. With those critical funds drying up, Ontario’s health care system could be left footing a much larger bill without the necessary revenue to cover those costs. Just this week in the SCOFEA hearings, my colleague the MPP from Ajax asked the Minister of Economic Development, Job Creation and Trade about the LCBO, and he would not commit to keeping the LCBO as the public distributor of alcohol in the future. That’s very concerning when you look at the LCBO delivering today over \$2 billion to fund health care.

Speaker, this government also talks about eliminating waste and delivering billions in government efficiencies, but you don’t see that in the numbers. Their spending is going up. They’re not getting more efficient. In the speech from the throne, the Lieutenant Governor highlighted the government’s commitment to implementing lean methodologies. The Premier himself has mentioned it on several occasions. That’s all about streamlining operations, making things more efficient, making government more efficient. I support all of that. But it does actually cost money to do that, and there’s no mention of the word “lean” in the budget—very inconsistent with the throne speech. There’s also no money mentioned in the budget.

I would like to point out, though, that the Premier took one tiny, little step making things more efficient: He reduced his office staff from a record high of 48 people last year down to a slightly less record-breaking 47. Yes, that’s right: one less staff member—not exactly very lean.

Here’s the catch: While the head count went down, the total salary paid to staff in the Premier’s office actually increased by over \$400,000 in the same period. That’s an average raise of 10% per employee—while public sector workers across the province continue to face wage constraints and underfunded programs.

So apparently, doing more with less—being lean—only applies to front-line workers, not to the Premier’s inner circle. It’s a curious kind of belt-tightening that results in higher payroll costs. That’s a lot of staff—a lot of raises—for a Premier who famously claims to answer his own phone. If that’s their definition of lean, I’d hate to see what bloated looks like.

Once again, the numbers don’t lie. The rhetoric and the numbers—the reality—could not be further apart. While Ontarians are doing everything they can to make their dollars go further, this government is burning through billions without delivering what people actually need. We have crises in health care, in education, in homelessness, in opioid addiction.

Here are just a few examples of some of the waste that we see from this government:

- \$3 billion in \$200 pre-election cheques when they actually had a \$6-billion deficit. The Premier bragged, “Oh, I’m just returning taxpayer money to them.” Well, the taxpayer bank account was in the red;

- \$40 million on a pre-election self-promotion campaign. I’ve talked already about that today;

- \$103.5 million spent on ads in 2024, with \$63 million of it deemed as partisan by the Auditor General;

- \$1.4 billion for getting beer in the corner stores one year early. They could have waited and not spent a dime, but instead they chose to prioritize booze in corner stores over fixing crumbling bridges in Haldimand–Norfolk and other ridings;

- \$2.2 billion in taxpayer money and a 95-year lease of public land for a foreign-owned, inexperienced spa company to set up shop at one of the crown jewels of Ontario, Ontario Place—shameful;

- forgiving over a billion dollars in penalties to Highway 407 owners, again money that, where the government

is now facing deficits, could have helped offset those deficits.

Then there's the environment—barely a mention of that in the budget document.

This government ripped out charging stations. Well, now they want to put them back in. They do a lot of ripping out these days—more wasted money. It's not political spin; it's their track record.

Let's just think for a moment about what could have been done with just some of that money. We could have paid down some of the debt. That's one of the areas that this government loves to talk about. They say one thing and do another. They told us they would reduce the debt, that it was a "moral imperative," but they've added a record amount of debt, \$175 billion. I guess they've lost their moral compass.

For a group so obsessed with their fiscal image, the numbers just don't back them up. The government likes to tell the chamber how great a job it's doing on debt reduction and how bad the situation was before they were elected in 2018. Maybe the government ministers do this because they need to convince themselves they're on the right track, but let me just talk a little bit about that.

Before blaming previous governments for the province's debt problems, this government should turn the mirror on itself. They'll realize no other government in Ontario's history has borrowed more than the \$178 billion this government will add to the province's debt burden by 2028. The debt accumulated by this Conservative government is four times larger than the increase recorded under the Bob Rae years, three and a half times larger than the Harris and Eves years, only one and a half times larger than the McGuinty government, four times larger than Ontario's fiscal performance under the Wynne government. I don't know why they refer to that when they're talking about debt reduction.

Even adjusting totals for the number of years in office, debt growth under this government is still one and a half to three times larger than the amounts accumulated by any other government in the last 40 years, Speaker—they hold the record.

The government can't blame the larger accumulation of debt under its watch on the pandemic either. We know from the public accounts that during the years most affected by the pandemic, debt increased by an average of 4.3%, versus 4.6% excluding the pandemic period. Even in inflation-adjusted terms, the data shows debt growing more slowly during the pandemic years.

1520

The key to understanding that—how could that happen?—is the relatively small amount of new spending that this government did—\$18.1 billion, or about \$6 billion annually for those three years—to support the economy during the pandemic period. But you know what they did do, Speaker? They relied on the federal government. The federal government leaned in with \$155 billion in direct support and cash transfers for Ontario, and that significantly reduced the amount of provincial

government borrowing that would have otherwise been needed to get the economy through the pandemic.

And we came out of it pretty good, Speaker. Inflation filled the government coffers with tax revenues. They exceeded all their budgets, but they failed to build on that advantage and a few good years of stronger growth in revenues to do what they promised in 2018 and reduce the debt. Over the next three years, the government's plans see net debt growing more quickly than GDP, something the government also promised it would avoid. So a larger share of future government revenues will go towards financing costs—interest costs, Speaker—rather than the delivery of government programs. This government has absolutely failed to position us well to weather the economic headwinds we're now facing, and they have only themselves to blame.

Even the credit agencies have started weighing in with their reaction to the government's budget plan. On Monday, just this week, May 26, Moody's took away its positive outlook for the province's rating, citing an elevated and rising debt burden, slowing revenue growth and spending pressures from growing demand for government services—not encouraging, Speaker.

The Premier lately has been quipping a lot about the Liberal government almost bankrupting the province. And when he says that, I really have to ask myself what he's talking about, but a few things come to mind. If he's talking about the Wynne government, I'll remind him that the province—even right now, under all this money that they're spending, all the debt they've accumulated, we're still not close to bankruptcy, and it's this government that's added the most debt. We're still not close to bankruptcy, Speaker; that's clear because of the rating that we have. And, Speaker, we weren't close to bankruptcy during the Wynne years, when net debt was growing more slowly than it has been since this government was first elected.

So then I think, well, maybe he's talking about the McGuinty years. Well, that makes me think he really doesn't understand how severe the financial crisis was. It created one of the deepest recessions in Ontario's history. The government's own source revenues, not federal transfers, declined as much as 10%, the drop in tax revenues. And it would take a few years for those own-source revenues to return to pre-crisis levels.

While they talk about the credit rating, maybe the Premier is referring to the credit rating downgrades that did come after the financial crisis, Speaker. It was a severe financial crisis. At that time, S&P's credit rating on Ontario was the lowest compared with other credit agencies.

If we take a look at the worst one, Speaker: In 2015, S&P cut its rating from AA- to A+. And I'll remind the Premier that the default rate, the bankruptcy rate, associated with borrowers at that rating level is less than half a percent. So I really wish he'd stop talking about that, Speaker. It just doesn't make any sense. He's really showing his lack of knowledge and experience, and I'm surprised that he chooses to overlook that when he quips about the bankruptcy statistics. His Minister of Finance

worked at a credit rating agency. Maybe the Premier could ask him for a briefing on that.

Let me talk about the borrowing authority. The budget bill requests authorization to borrow \$27 billion under the Ontario Loan Act. That amount relates to long-term borrowing needed to finance deficits. This government is continuing to give us deficits. They're going to total \$22.2 billion between now and 2028, and they'll need money to refinance maturing debt. So adding these two components of the government's financing together, we see long-term borrowing averaging \$39 billion annually between now and 2027-28. That level of borrowing is larger now than it was under the previous Liberal government—bingo. Someone say bingo.

MPP Stephanie Smyth: Bingo.

Ms. Stephanie Bowman: Thank you—which managed an annual funding need of about \$33 billion. I'm not sure, but when they talked about the previous Liberal government, they need to check their facts.

Let's talk about the Fiscal Sustainability, Transparency and Accountability Act under this government. In her 2019 audit the Ontario Auditor General made a recommendation for the government to adopt what economists like to call a long-term fiscal anchor; that is, for the government to develop formal, evidence-based, long-term provincial debt targets and plans to meet them. The idea in setting up those targets is to identify what level of debt is sustainable and build a long-term plan around how to bring that debt down.

That seems like a reasonable ask for a government, especially one that describes debt reduction as a moral imperative and likes to tout itself as fiscally responsible. But in her 2024 audit, released just late last year, the auditor noted that the government has not yet implemented this recommendation. Speaker, they're not following their own law.

This budget also makes me wonder who will benefit from the so-called economic zones introduced. The budget's going to spend a bunch of money—not as much as they said they were going to—but we don't know where that money's going. We don't know which companies, which friends could benefit from it. There's certainly no transparency about that in the budget document.

But that bill also will strip protections from workers living and working in the special economic zones, including wage protections that they have. Some members across the aisle might call that alarmist, but the facts are clear: As written, Bill 5 would allow designated projects or trusted proponents to be exempt. How much of our money out of this budget will those people be getting? We don't know.

That's this government's playbook: Announce sweeping measures, toss out big numbers in the media and in question period, and then hope no one actually looks at the real numbers.

Let's look again at that \$200 billion in infrastructure spending. Sounds bold, sounds impressive, but when you look closely it raises serious concerns. Nearly half of it, about \$100 billion, is scheduled to be spent just in the next

three years. So three years, they say they're going to spend half, and seven years to spend the rest. That's not just ambitious; it's aggressively front-loaded and likely unreasonable. It makes you wonder if that full \$200 billion is really real, or is it just another case of inflated promises with no follow-up?

We just really don't know. Neither does anyone else reading this budget, because the document doesn't say. That's the point: The government doesn't just fail to deliver; it fails to be transparent about what it is doing and what it isn't.

Let's just talk about the irony of that here. While they brag about a highway tunnel that won't break ground for years—hopefully, it never does—meanwhile, the very sectors that would build those roads, build that tunnel—the manufacturing sector, the transportation sector, construction—they're hemorrhaging jobs by the tens of thousands.

Even if the government goes ahead with these projects, Speaker, you have to ask, will we have the workforce to build them? Certainly, they say they're going to spend a lot of money in training tradespeople, but they've done so poorly at retaining those workers. We've lost tens of thousands of those jobs. They've moved to other provinces to find work.

Let's talk about housing, one of this government's other big, big, bold promises. The government can't get it done. Home ownership feels out of reach for an entire generation. According to the budget, the projected number of housing starts for 2025 was 92,000, 50,000 short of its target. This year's budget quietly lowered that figure even further, down to just 72,000. That's not just a little off course; they've lost their ambition.

We can't solve the housing crisis with headlines. We can't fix it with slogans and lofty promises that aren't followed up by real action. Ontarians don't need more marketing; they need more homes. And if this government can't deliver even half of what they promised, then they need to admit that their plan is failing, because right now we're just getting broken promises dressed up as success.

Speaker, they really need to show their work. In a democracy you need to be accountable. You need to tell people what you've done, back up your claims. They need to be accountable not just to the people of Ontario but their inner circle, their donors. That's why we need to take a close look at the claim this government is making, that they're providing \$9 billion in relief to businesses in the face of escalating tariffs. It sounds impressive, right—\$9 billion? But that's what they want us to think. Because when you peel back the onion, the truth is very different. They're simply offering a \$9-billion temporary injection of support. The bill is still coming due in six months. It's not a lifeline; it's just a deferral. Businesses are simply being allowed to delay paying certain taxes; that's it. Every dollar of that \$9 billion is still owed. Speaker, it's, at best, temporary relief. They could have spent real money and given people a small business tax cut and helped small businesses keep their doors open.

1530

What is the government's real plan to help businesses? They also talk a big game about the Protecting Ontario Account. It's big money—\$5 billion—touted as a key tool to defend the provincial economy. But let's look at the fine print. First of all, of that \$5 billion, only \$1 billion will be available immediately, and it's not straightforward. It's not money that's readily available to businesses affected by tariffs; the criteria are very restrictive. To quote the government directly, "This fund will provide immediate liquidity relief as an emergency backstop for Ontario businesses that have exhausted available funding."

And they will be exhausted, because by the time they go through all of the channels to look at other sources of funding and prove that to the government—like, how is that even going to work? We don't even know that, Speaker. They have to jump through all the hoops, these businesses, looking for this support—looking at their private lenders, looking at their banks—and only then, when they're nearly out of options and exhausted, can they apply for a slice of this fund. That's not relief, that's red tape. That's delay disguised as assistance. That's a government trying to appear to provide action when they're really taking very little.

It's cold comfort to businesses on the brink. Business owners aren't asking for handouts; they're asking for predictability, stability, a partner in government who's actually in their corner. What they're getting instead is a government focused on optics rather than outcomes. For all the flag waving over tariffs, this budget's tariff response is mostly just talk.

Here's the more serious issue: While their response may just be talk, the cuts to services Ontarians rely on are very real. Even the Chartered Professional Accountants of Ontario—hardly a partisan group; I'm proud to say I'm a member—expressed serious doubts, saying, "Whether the government's plan will be enough to blunt the impact of tariffs on the province's economy, and its finances, only time will tell." That's a diplomatic way, in my view, of saying what many Ontarians already feel: This government is just not prepared.

There's \$100 million that the government spent on advertising to convince people that they're prepared, that we're doing great, but this budget reveals a very different trajectory. Over the next three years, annual increases in program spending will average just 0.9%, while inflation and program delivery costs are expected to rise by 2.1%—more than double. So, basically, it's a cut—it's a real cut; a 1.2% cut every year. That's a slow bleed to the services we rely on. Everyone will feel it. Families, students, teachers, patients—they'll feel they're being short-changed, because they are.

So when the dust clears and we cut through the headlines, the billboards, the ribbon cuttings and the photo ops, we realize that the spending announcements about increases barely allow us to tread water, and we're left with one key question: Why these cuts? Why is a province with as much potential as Ontario, as wealthy and resourceful as Ontario, pulling back supports on education, health care,

justice and child services? The answer is simple and disappointing: This government made choices when times were good that have hurt our finances now, as we approach tough times. They chose not to reduce the debt when revenues were high. They chose to do things like move the Ontario Science Centre to Ontario Place. They chose vote-getting cheques over long-term planning. They spent recklessly when they could have been paying down the debt.

There's an old saying about "you fix the roof when it's sunny outside, not when it's raining," but this government didn't fix the roof; in fact, they celebrated, they overspent. They went out and had a spending party. They cut a hole in the ceiling and handed out umbrellas, and now we find ourselves in a monsoon and the credit card is maxed out. Their fiscal mismanagement, their refusal to make responsible decisions in good economic times has now forced them to slam the brakes on program spending in bad times, when we need it the most. They didn't make us resilient. They've built a facade, and it's beginning to crumble.

Again, the irony here, Speaker: The same political party that claims to be the defender of fiscal discipline, the party that lectures us about debt, that warns of the dangers of deficits is now the party presiding over what will soon be half a trillion dollars in debt—half a trillion, with a T. Let's be clear, no other government in Ontario's history has spent so much to deliver so little and added more debt while doing it.

This isn't a matter of partisan debate, Speaker; it's just math. It's the math that tells us that cutting program spending while costs rise is a real cut. It's the math that tells us that declining per capita investment means declining quality of life. It's math that tells families that their children's classrooms will have more students and fewer supports.

I hear from constituents every day who are afraid—afraid that when they need government support the most, it won't be there. They see the writing on the wall. That's not how you build a strong, competitive, caring province. That's how you let it slide, slowly but surely, in the wrong direction. We can't afford to keep heading that way.

Why does the government feel the need to avoid telling us what's really going on? Why can't they just come out and say there will not be spending at the levels they promised during the election, that it was big talk and big headlines that's not going to lead to real, sustained investment? It's because they've hit a moment when they've outspent their credit card, and now they can't invest when we need it the most.

What would we have done differently? I talked before about this. Budgets can't fix every problem, but we could have made some real progress. We could have cut small business taxes to spur growth and innovation. Not doing that could have damaging consequences. It's one of the reasons we have low business confidence here in Ontario. If we had done that a year ago, that would have saved some Ontario businesses, saved some Ontario jobs.

We can also take a lesson from the federal government. Yesterday, Prime Minister Carney said it well: "We've got

to get take-home pay up for Canadians. The easiest way to do that is to cut taxes now.” That’s why the Prime Minister is doing what the Ontario Liberal caucus asked this House to do as well, what this government promised to do since 2018—a broken promise—to cut taxes on middle-income families.

Public procurement is another powerful tool the government has at its disposal to drive sustainable investment and innovation, to support growing Ontario companies. The Council of Canadian Innovators emphasized that, especially in the face of growing tariff threats, the government must use its purchasing power to buy local, helping to shield businesses from economic uncertainty and market disruption. We must harness the full potential of public procurement to invest in Ontario’s economic future and deliver better results for Ontario businesses, workers and communities.

There’s no strategy for increasing innovation here in this budget. You look to a province like Quebec, which some would argue is a reasonable province to compare Ontario to. Quebec laid out a long-term innovation strategy that will look to invest in sustainable, inclusive research. They’re diversifying the areas where their research will focus so they can have an impact on multiple sectors, not just mining.

Ontario could also be a leader in supercomputing and AI infrastructure, but it requires targeted investments, and there’s very small amounts of it in this budget. By creating an environment that attracts top global talent and supports small and medium-size enterprises’ access to high-performance computing, the province could unlock enormous returns. The industry says up to \$60 for every dollar invested. A broader technology strategy including server farms, research hubs with strong regulatory guardrails would help make Ontario a destination for global AI investment and ensure the benefits are shared across our economy.

We also could have helped people on the brink. We see it all the time. The number of homeless people in the province is at a record level under this government: over 80,000. Many of those people have been people on ODSP. We could have provided a rent bank. We know that people in Stratford at the SCOFEA hearings on pre-budget consultations talked about how people on ODSP—based on the rates they’re at, they’re falling through the cracks.

1540

Maureen Cassidy and Paul Seale from the Pillar Nonprofit Network made a powerful case for doubling ODSP rates, explaining how doing so would ease the strain on non-profit and emergency services. Karen Bolger from Community Living Essex County highlighted worsening wait-lists for housing for some of our most vulnerable, a reality echoed by Mark MacAulay of Salus Ottawa.

The evidence is clear. Failing to support those most in need not only harms individuals, it burdens every part of our system. A provincial rent bank to provide emergency support for tenants to help people facing temporary financial hardship and avoid eviction would have been a real step forward. It would have been a program that would

not only protect renters but would reduce the downstream costs associated with housing insecurity and homelessness.

We can’t afford to keep walking, keep driving down the same worn path that we’re on. We need a stronger, more resilient economy. And this government has let us down. This budget lets us down. They’re just chasing better headlines, it seems.

The government needs to own up to how we got here. They need to have courage to chart a new path. They need to deliver for workers who are facing job losses today and for families and for future generations. Because those protections that people need now as we face economic uncertainty, job losses, more people using food banks, they don’t come from empty promises. It comes from the numbers and it comes from spending money. It comes from responsible leadership, honest planning and a government that invests in its people.

Consider this quote from the government, Speaker: “We need to make bold, lasting change that makes Ontario the most competitive economy in the G7 to invest, create jobs and do business.” I would argue that this budget falls far short of that. We have business confidence at an all-time low. We have the highest unemployment rate in a decade. And the supports that this government promised during the election, the tens of billions of dollars, are really only to be seen in the words, not in the numbers.

It’s disappointing because, certainly, I know that the Minister of Finance and his team, they worked hard on this document. But the reality is that they painted themselves into a corner. They painted themselves into a corner because of deficit after deficit when the times were good. And now that times are lean, we will all suffer, and it’s a real disappointment.

The Acting Speaker (MPP Andrea Hazell): Further debate?

Mr. Anthony Leardi: We’re talking about the Ontario 2025 budget today. It’s a large document: It’s over 200 pages. I know that there are some members who will assiduously read the entire 200-plus-page document. I admit that I have not read the entire 200-page document. I always concentrate on parts that are significant to me. I think other members do the same.

The part that I am concentrating on today is going to be dealing with some important health care investments being made in the province of Ontario, most of which will be involved with primary care; in addition to that, capital projects involving hospitals; and then a few other subjects that I think are important to touch on.

So if anybody is following along in their budget book, they can take a look at page 112, and there will be a section talking about advancing Ontario’s Primary Care Action Plan. That’s the budget part of the document which deals with that particular issue and that is related to Bill 13, which is the bill that further advances that primary care action plan.

That action plan was inspired by various advice and professional actions, among them, professional advice from Dr. Jane Philpott, who is a well-known individual in

the province of Ontario and even across the entire country. With respect to primary care, Dr. Philpott had some very important recommendations to make, and then there were some guiding principles. We have taken those guiding principles not only on the recommendation of Dr. Philpott but on the recommendation of many, many other people who have had input into these types of issues. We've enshrined those guiding principles in Bill 13.

Bill 13 will talk about the guiding principles. This budget document, at page 112, talks about the financial investments that put those guiding principles into practice. So if you take a look at the budget document, it will talk about the aim of connecting more and more people in the province of Ontario to primary care. Primary care means a family doctor or a nurse practitioner. There's an action plan attached to that and the implementation period is approximately four years. That action plan has a price tag of approximately \$1.8 billion. All sorts of services are going to be attached so that more and more people can get primary care where and when they need it.

In this document, it talks about creating 305 additional primary care teams. We have the tendency now not to talk about just family doctors anymore. That might have been a way of talking about primary care in years past, but now we talk about teams, because we talk about delivering care in patient-centred teams—teams which might involve a family doctor, but they might also involve other health care professionals with specialized expertise to deliver the kind of health care you're looking for. Maybe it's treatment for a chronic illness, for example. Maybe you don't need to see a doctor on a regular basis. Maybe you need to see a family doctor one time, get the advice you need and then have the regular checkup administered by a different health professional other than a family doctor, and that health professional helps you stay on track with your health plan. That's a great idea. It's very helpful to people and that's part of what this budget does. It provides money to put together those health teams to deliver the kind of primary care you might need in your particular situation.

It also talks about expanding 80 additional primary care teams across the province of Ontario, connecting 300,000 more people to primary care this year. We've already seen what that looks like. I'm sure other members in this House already know what this looks like, but I'd like to provide a few examples of what does this look like. When we talk about connecting people to primary care, what does that look like?

Well, in the area of Milton, it looks like the primary care family health team in the Milton area—that has connected an additional 2,180 people to primary health care in the area of Milton.

In Innisfil, it looks like the Innisfil nurse practitioner-led clinic, and they've attached an additional 2,400 people to their nurse practitioner-led clinic. Now those 2,400 people are getting their primary health care through a nurse practitioner-led clinic.

In the Collingwood-Wasaga Beach area, it's the South Georgian Bay Community Health Centre. As a result of this project, this initiative from the government of Ontario,

they have managed to connect another 3,400 people to their community health centre, and now those people have access to primary care where and when they need it.

Finally, we could talk about Timmins, where the Timmins Academic Family Health Team has connected an additional 4,300 people to their family health team, and that is progress being made. That is in accordance with the vision set out in Bill 13, a vision that was kind of piloted by Dr. Jane Philpott and now put into practice through this budget 2025, with the finances necessary to put that into action.

Also in budget 2025, resources are being set aside to carry out primary care teaching clinics. These are fantastic. You have a senior health care professional training junior health care professionals, and training at least 140 more family physicians per year starting in 2025-26. We all are hearing that we need more family physicians in the province of Ontario. These primary care teaching clinics will assist us in training the family physicians that we need now and in the future, and this budgetary document provides the funding foundation to carry out that policy directive.

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Also in this budget, we have the Learn and Stay grant. The Learn and Stay grant is a grant that is provided for people training for various medical professions where they can learn and, after receiving the grant, undertake an obligation to stay.

Where do we want them to stay? We want them to stay in under-serviced communities. Typically, that means a community that's rural or a community that's perhaps in northern Ontario. An under-serviced community could be, really, anywhere in Ontario, but those are the typical examples.

With the Learn and Stay grant, you will get a grant to study—that is, to learn—and then you undertake to stay in a certain area in the province of Ontario that is under-serviced. That is another initiative of this government which is now being backed up with funds through the budget 2025.

If we turn to the budget at page 115, there are some highlights there with regard to building and expanding hospitals. I've referred to this list before, and I'll refer to it again. There are approximately 50 capital projects contemplated in the province of Ontario with regard to building hospitals and expanding hospitals.

However, I would like to talk today about the 17 capital projects that are actually currently under construction as we speak. These are actually being built right now. There are 17 of them. I'm going to list all 17 of them because I think this is a remarkable accomplishment, to have 17 hospitals actually having construction under way all at the same time. So here they are:

- in Moose Factory and Moosonee, a new replacement hospital at the Weeneebayko Area Health Authority;

- in Toronto, the new Toronto Western Hospital tower at University Health Network;

- also in Toronto, the stem cell transplant phase 2 expansion at the University Health Network;

- also in Toronto, a patient care tower at Unity Health Toronto, at St. Michael's Hospital;
- in Thunder Bay, the cardiovascular surgery program at Thunder Bay Regional Health Sciences Centre;
- in Toronto, the provincial mental health and addictions capacity brain sciences centre project at Sunnybrook Health Sciences Centre;
- also in Toronto, a dialysis centre for the Sunnybrook Health Sciences Centre;
- in Scarborough, the General site hemodialysis isolation unit for Scarborough Health Network;
- also in Scarborough, a diagnostic imaging fit-up for the Scarborough Health Network;
- also in Scarborough, the Centenary site new dialysis unit for Scarborough Health Network;
- in Picton, we have the Prince Edward County Memorial Hospital redevelopment for Quinte Health;
- in Niagara Falls, the new South Niagara hospital capital project in the Niagara Health system;
- in Toronto, phase 1 of a new patient care tower for Michael Garron Hospital;
- in Grimsby, the West Lincoln Memorial Hospital redevelopment project for Hamilton Health Sciences Corp.;
- in Toronto, the phase 1 redevelopment for Centre for Addiction and Mental Health;
- in Cambridge, the main capital redevelopment project for Cambridge Memorial Hospital; and
- in Brantford, an emergency department expansion project for the Brant Community Healthcare System.

There are 17 projects currently under way, and that is remarkable. Those are being funded in part through the budget 2025, which provides for these capital projects.

Also in the budget 2025, we have investment in what are being called the new surgical and diagnostic centres. I like to talk about these a lot because this builds capacity in the province of Ontario.

My favourite example to refer to is the fact of cataract surgery being formally performed almost exclusively in hospitals and now being moved more and more to these kinds of surgical centres.

Now, if you were in my riding, you would hear from many, many people who would say that they got a referral for cataract surgery, and within three weeks, sometimes four weeks and sometimes five weeks from their referral, they got the surgery and were done and over with, and they are so pleased with that service. I can tell you that I hear regularly from people in Essex county who tell me on a regular basis they got the referral for surgery and merely weeks later they received their surgery, and they are very, very happy with that kind of service. And that is the kind of service you can deliver when you have a new surgical centre.

This particular surgical centre that I like to brag about a lot is run by a fantastic doctor. His name is Dr. Tayfour. He has partners. One of his partners is Dr. Emara. And if you mention the names "Dr. Tayfour" or "Dr. Emara" in my area, everybody knows who you're talking about, because these are famous, famous individuals. Dr. Tayfour is a pioneer in his industry and is a world-renowned expert

in his field. I love to talk about this example because it's a shining example of how fast you can get routine cataract surgery outside of the hospital setting.

People who I talk to also recognize the fact that they don't need to go to a hospital for this kind of surgery, and they are happy to stay out of the hospital because they know that some surgeries or some services can only be delivered in a hospital. So they don't want to go to a hospital and deny somebody else the opportunity who needs it to go to a hospital. They would much prefer to stay out of the hospital, get the surgery they need at a surgical centre so that somebody else who must necessarily go to a hospital can get the service they need. It is a very, very practical way of delivering these services, and I like to talk about that a lot, and that's why I do.

On page 117 of the budget, there's a reference to building long-term-care homes. In times past, long-term care—my understanding is that that used to be rolled into the health care ministry. Now it's a stand-alone ministry on its own. That's what I've been informed. And it's understandable, and I think that's a good thing. I'd like to talk about two particular projects in the riding of Essex, one which is taking place in the town of Belle River, and a second that is taking place in the town of Amherstburg.

Now, the one that's taking place in the town of Belle River is a long-term-care home. It is approximately 160 units, and it is a brand new facility. I can tell you the people of Belle River are very, very excited about this facility. It is being built under a licence that was previously held for an 80-unit facility. That 80-unit facility was approximately 15 minutes down the road. That 80-unit facility was aging, and it needed some serious upgrades. The licence holder for that facility said, "Well, this is what we're going to do instead. Instead of trying to salvage the 80-unit facility, what we'll do is this: We'll build a brand new facility. It will be double the number of units, it will be state-of-the-art and it will have all of the modern design and conveniences that a long-term-care home can have." So they applied for and received a licence from the government of Ontario.

Now, as I said, the hospital construction projects I mentioned were actually under construction. Now, as we speak, in the town of Belle River, this project, a new 160-unit long-term-care home, is actually under construction in the town of Belle River. It is one of the prides of the community. The mayor of the municipality of Lakeshore, in which Belle River is situated, is very proud of this project.

I can tell you that the municipality was great to co-operate with in planning this project, in getting it off the ground, and they were great partners for the province of Ontario in getting this for their community. It was great partnership, great co-operation. The town council and the mayor of the municipality of Lakeshore should be proud of what they have accomplished for Belle River and for their residents.

There's another facility currently under construction—we're only talking about those which are under construction—in the town of Amherstburg. You've heard me talk

about the town of Amherstburg; that's my hometown. I'm very proud of my hometown. We have another facility under construction, a long-term-care facility. It's right at the corner of Richmond Street and Fryer Street, which used to be the location—well, it's still the location—of what we formerly called St. Bernard school. This is going to be another long-term-care home. You can see it being built today.

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The town of Amherstburg is a beautiful, wonderful town. Everybody in the town of Amherstburg is very proud of their town. The great thing about building this in the town of Amherstburg is that people want to stay close to their loved ones. To be able to land this type of facility for your town means that if you have aging relatives, aging parents, for example, who need to go into this type of care home, then they can stay close to you. They can stay close to the people who love them and can support them and be with them in their aging years.

This is another great project, the type of project which is provided for through the funds that are being provided in the 2025 Ontario budget. The budget, of course, is the financing document which carries out the various other policies, some of which are enumerated or enunciated in the budget and some of which are not.

It's really great to be able to deliver these types of things when we're talking about hospitals under construction, when we're talking about long-term-care homes under construction, but these things take a lot of planning too. I talked about 17 hospitals that are currently under construction, but these things take a lot of planning—a typical hospital might go through four stages. One stage would be the land acquisition stage. The second stage would be the design stage. The third stage would be a tendering stage. The final stage—the fourth stage—would be the construction stage.

I'll end my comments with one final project which is very important to our area, which has been funded and is currently in stage number 3. That is a new regional hospital for the greater Essex county area, which is very well needed. We do have aging facilities in our area which need to be replaced. And years ago, under the first planning stage, the team that was assembled to acquire the land did, in fact, acquire that land, and then there was the inevitable appeal to the land tribunal, which then had to settle that. Once that was settled, it proceeded to the second stage, which was a design stage. Every hospital needs a design, and that's rather complex—it's not like building a shed in your backyard. That design stage has now been completed. Now we're in stage 3, which is the issue of the tender, an extremely complex procedure, which unnecessarily probably involves a lot of lawyers going through a lot of lines and crossing T's and dotting I's, which is tedious and expensive work.

So, we look forward to those projects as well, and those will be funded in the long-term budgets in the future. I thank you, Speaker, for this opportunity to address the House this day.

The Acting Speaker (MPP Andrea Hazell): Question?

M^{me} France Gélinas: I would like to ask the member from Essex—he talked about how proud he was of the new surgical and community centre, which is the way that the Conservative government calls private, for-profit clinics; so very proud of the new private, for-profit clinics that the government is going to be funding at tunes of hundreds of millions of dollars. He was especially proud of the new cataract private for-profit clinics.

Could you explain to me why everybody who has their cataract surgery in the hospital pays nothing, and everybody who has their cataract surgery done in a private, for-profit clinic has to have a second measurement of the lens, which goes between 200 and 600 bucks; has a lens that the ophthalmologist doesn't like to use—he prefers another lens that goes between \$1,000 and \$5,000. Why are they all upsold and why do they always end up paying with their credit card?

Mr. Anthony Leardi: I don't know what clinics she's referring to because, under this program, when you get necessary treatment, all OHIP coverage that was covered 10 years ago is still covered today. There is no OHIP coverage that has been cancelled. All OHIP coverage that was covered 10 years ago is still covered today. When you hear somebody talk about privatization, you have to ask them, "Well, what coverage did we get 10 years ago that we're not getting today?" It's exactly the same coverage, but a little bit better, because 10 years ago, you could only get cancer screening, if you were a woman, if you were 50, but we've lowered that to 40. So now you're actually getting more OHIP coverage today than you got 10 years ago.

Of course, the universal health care system is still fully funded, publicly funded, and anybody who suggests the opposite has not got their facts straight.

The Acting Speaker (MPP Andrea Hazell): Question?

MPP Stephanie Smyth: Yesterday the member from Essex expressed his disgust at the federal initiatives to make contraception available to women in Ontario.

I'm wondering if you could explain, please, given your disdain for women's health initiatives—I can't help but wonder, do you oppose the budget's investments in fertility treatment?

Mr. Anthony Leardi: That's a great question from a member who obviously didn't understand the debate that took place yesterday.

You see, what took place yesterday was an opportunity where the NDP bragged—they said, "Oh, we got so much out of the deal from the Liberal government. We got a lot." I said, "What did you get?" And they said, "Contraception." Well, if you're looking for contraception, you can walk down this hallway and you can put a loonie in a machine and, for a dollar, you can get contraception. So I don't know whether that's such a great accomplishment, but there you are.

The Acting Speaker (MPP Andrea Hazell): Question?

Mrs. Jennifer (Jennie) Stevens: To the member from Essex: I've read over this budget. You proudly, proudly explained how much money you're putting into different hospitals across the province of Ontario. But do you know what we don't see for Niagara and for Port Colborne and for Fort Erie? We don't see any money being put into this budget to keep our urgent cares open. Our waiting time in Niagara, at the Niagara Health System, is well over 18 hours, in the emergency room. Can you imagine getting hit by a car and having to sit with a broken leg, a tibia and a fibula, for well over 18 hours—or a sick child, parents, grandparents, seniors?

I'm wondering, can your government commit to keeping our urgent cares open in Port Colborne and Fort Erie?

Mr. Anthony Leardi: Well, of course, everybody is very, very concerned about getting the best health care they want for their own personal area, and as close to home as possible. This member is very concerned about Port Colborne. I'm very concerned about Amherstburg. I'm sure other members are very concerned about keeping health care as close as they can possibly achieve it.

While I can't guarantee every single member is going to get every single thing they ever wanted about health care, what I can say is that we rely on networks, and these networks include, in that member's area, a greater network which has, actually, investments that are going into that network—including a new South Niagara Hospital capital project, which is in that area. Admittedly, it's not exactly where that member wants that specific service to be. But there are actually great investments going into that area—and just like my area; we have great investments as well.

The Acting Speaker (MPP Andrea Hazell): Question?

Ms. Stephanie Bowman: Thank you to the member from Essex for his debate this afternoon.

Given the talk about hospitals—and there's a lot of talk about capital spending on hospitals. There's a bunch of them named in the document. Residents in my riding of Don Valley West—many of them use Michael Garron Hospital, which is outside my riding but is very close, and my colleague here, of course, is an ER physician there. People, including my constituents, the staff there, have been talking for I think a couple of years now—certainly, since I've been elected—about the planning grant that they need to get the next phase of their hospital built. It wasn't mentioned in the document. I wonder if he can mention whether or not they will be getting that planning grant soon so that people in my riding have to wait less time at Michael Garron.

Mr. Anthony Leardi: I respect that question.

I respect that, again, every member wants to get more and more health care for their area. We're all interested in that and the more we can deliver, the happier everybody will be. We're making progress in all areas: We're making progress in the construction of hospitals, we're making progress in the construction of hospitals. We're making progress in the training of an extra 140 doctors every year. We're making progress in connecting people to primary care. We're making progress, and we're going to continue

making progress. That, of course, is set out in the 2025 budget.

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And you know what? Keep pressing for that funding and keep pressing for these projects because these projects are important to everybody, just like they're important for me and my riding. I respect the fact that they're important for that MPP and that MPP's riding. We'll keep making progress across the province of Ontario.

The Acting Speaker (MPP Andrea Hazell): Question?

Mr. Robert Bailey: [*Inaudible*] member from Essex. Maybe he could allude a little more to the other investments in his local Windsor-Essex area.

Mr. Anthony Leardi: [*Inaudible*] great in our area in addition to a long-term project, which we referred to earlier, which is now in phase 3, the new regional hospital, we have managed to secure an additional 1,200 spots for patients to sign up for primary care through a nurse practitioner-led clinic. That's the Essex County Nurse Practitioner-Led Clinic, which serves locations across the county of Essex, including Kingsville, where the latest investment was made, and now, an additional 1,200 people in and around the town of Kingsville will be able to access primary care through a nurse practitioner, a very skilled professional who is also connected with a team. So, for example, if you have a chronic illness and you need ongoing services on a regular basis, you can now get those services through your nurse practitioner in and around the town of Kingsville, someplace for you, if you're from that area, that is close to home and convenient.

The Acting Speaker (MPP Andrea Hazell): Question?

M^{me} France Gélinas: Why is it that in the budget, we see hundreds of millions of dollars going toward private, for-profit clinics, yet we have surgical suites sitting empty? There's one that never opened in the hospital in Sudbury, because the hospital in Sudbury does not have enough money to open a surgical suite that the taxpayers have already paid for, that is already fully equipped, but they don't have the money to open it. But if you open a private, for-profit surgical suite across the street, you are guaranteed to have the money.

Why is it that it's okay to finance private for-profit clinics but not our existing hospitals that taxpayers have already paid for?

Mr. Anthony Leardi: The suggestion made by the member, of course, would have to have reference to the Canada Health Act, because the Canada Health Act, as the member knows—she's a very well-informed member—prohibits charging for certain services. But as I said before: All OHIP services that existed 10 years ago and were covered are still covered today, and more. So if somebody suggests to you that somehow privatization is occurring, it's entirely inaccurate. It's not an accurate suggestion. Every single service that you could get for free 10 years ago, you can still get, plus more, today.

I stand by my comments. I know the other side—

The Acting Speaker (MPP Andrea Hazell): Further debate?

Mr. Chris Glover: It's an honour to rise today to speak about this year's budget, or the budget that the government has introduced.

I will be honest: After the election, for a brief moment, I had hope. I had hope that this tariff threat would change the course of this government, that they would realize that we need to change course—we need to protect our economy, we need to protect our society against this economic threat and sovereignty threat from the United States, and so we need to look back at all the things that have made us vulnerable to this economic attack—and that the government would start to take actions to redress the things that have made us vulnerable and to strengthen our base.

I was looking for, for example, on investments in housing, health care, education—the things that are competitive advantages for us, that give us competitive advantages. I was hoping to look for procurement that would favour Ontario businesses, that would support Ontario businesses, support particularly small businesses, because small businesses provide 2.4 million jobs in Ontario. But instead, the government has doubled on the failed policies that they've been pursuing for the last seven years. There's nothing in here to start building affordable housing.

In fact, just this week in the news, the government overrode a city motion to build 5,000 units of affordable housing. The city has industrial lands—lands that are zoned as industrial or commercial, and they do not like to have those converted to residential because we need places for people to work within the city boundaries. But when it does happen, they make the developer, the landowner, make concessions. One of the concessions that they made to the landowners in three different parcels of property owned by Canadian Tire, by the Westons and—I'm blanking on the third one; anyway, by these three companies—was that they would have to build a total of 5,000 units of affordable housing as part of the mix of the residential developments they would put on those properties.

What happened was, the government, this Conservative government, vetoed that initiative. They overrode the city, and they said to those developers, "No, you can build the residential housing to maximize your profit without having to build those 5,000 units of affordable housing." When you look at the housing crisis that we are in in Ontario, the record of this government and of the previous government is dismal. We had under the last Liberal government—they left us with 50,000 people homeless. This government increased that to 80,000 homeless and 1,400 people living in encampments. Housing is one of our biggest competitive disadvantages in this province, yet there's nothing in this budget to actually address housing.

Housing, health care, education—those are the things that I was looking for, and particularly supports for our local businesses. Oh, and the other thing: fiscal responsibility. The government should always be very careful. Whenever they're spending money, it's not their money,

it's our money. It's the people's money. It's the tax dollars that we, as Ontarians, contribute to the government in the hopes that they will invest it in the services that we need, that will strengthen our economy, strengthen our society, so that we can withstand a threat like the economic threat coming from the United States. But what we've seen is just incredible waste. This is one of the most fiscally irresponsible governments in the history of this province.

A glaring example is Ontario Place, a \$2.2-billion taxpayer subsidy to a private, for-profit Austrian corporation that lied about their credentials when they were vying for this contract with them. And the government has done backflips trying to help them to build this thing. We're giving them—right now, the government's rushing to build a half-a-billion-dollar parking garage for a company that had, in the bank, according to the Auditor General, a billion euros—or sorry; not a billion euros—

MPP Lise Vaugeois: A million.

Mr. Chris Glover: A million euros—thank you for the correction. Yes, a million euros in the bank. And yet this government signed a contract with this company that would penalize the people of Ontario: If we do not provide them with a free parking garage on a particular date, then we, as Ontario taxpayers, will give them a \$30-million penalty. Can you imagine signing a deal like—this company doesn't even have to do anything, and they can increase their wealth 30-fold from a taxpayer donation that this government signed a contract for. So fiscal responsibility: We're looking for that.

Other examples: This week—it just came out—this government spent \$40 million taxpayer dollars telling the people of Ontario what a wonderful job they had been doing on partisan ads in the run-up to this last election. You used our tax dollars to help yourselves get re-elected. And the Auditor General has asked that we bring in legislation that would—in fact, not just the Auditor General; the Conservatives, when they were in opposition and the Liberals were spending tax dollars on partisan ads, brought in a motion to ban that, to have the Auditor General oversee advertising. If they, the Auditor General—he or she—deemed it was partisan, they would stop it. But this government is not supporting now the motion that they introduced when they were in opposition.

The waste just goes on and on. There was a recent article this week: \$38 million for a private hotel to a Conservative donor in Wasaga Beach.

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And on the other side, this government is asking us to support their budget. They're wasting all this money but the fundamental services that we in Ontario depend on, that we need, that our children need, that we need when we're elderly, when we're sick—housing, health care, education—there are cuts to all of those. Let me just go through some of the housing cuts here. Let's see.

Actually, do you know what? Sorry, before I get into housing, I've lost my place. I'm going to go back because there's some other things here.

I want to talk a little bit about protecting Ontario businesses, because yesterday, the Better Way Alliance

was here. It's a small business group, and it's a progressive small business group. This is a group that prioritizes not just profit, not just doing good business, but their stewardship in the community, providing good jobs for people in the communities that they serve and protecting their communities. They were talking about how small businesses are under threat in this province because of rent, utilities and insurance increases.

One of the members of this Better Way Alliance, he said that his insurance rates had gone up from \$4,000 to \$32,000 in two years, and he had made no claims during that time. Businesses are being squeezed out by these giant insurance companies. The Canadian Federation of Independent Business reported that there are two insurance companies that control 67% of the overall business market. They've got that control, and they're able to charge whatever they want.

During the pandemic, I was the small business critic, and I would meet regularly with small businesses from across the province. During the pandemic, some business owners confided to me that they were operating without insurance because they could not get insurance. Some places, they could just simply not get it, and sometimes it was just so exorbitantly high and costly that it made their business unviable, so they took the risk. No business should ever have to take the risk of operating without insurance, because that is an incredible risk to take.

But this government will not look at solutions. They will not look at regulation of the existing insurance companies or creating a last-ditch effort or opportunity, an insurance company that's run by the government, so that people, everybody, has access to insurance and that the insurance rates here in Ontario are not a competitive disadvantage.

The other one, utilities: Our residential utility bills are somewhat regulated, but the commercial ones are not. The commercial rent, the commercial utility bills are exorbitant. They're exorbitant because, in 1995, when the former Harris Conservatives got elected, they started to break up and sell off Ontario Hydro, and then the Liberals finished it off in 2018. They sold the last tranche, the last piece of Ontario Hydro for \$9 billion.

At the time when it was a public utility, from the mid-1920s to 1995, we in Ontario were paying four cents a kilowatt hour for electricity. It was a competitive advantage. When companies were deciding, "am I going to locate in the United States or am I going to locate in Canada," one of the competitive advantages was our utility bills, the four cents a kilowatt hour. We're now paying between eight and 16 cents to a private, for-profit corporation that owns what used to be a public utility.

To keep it at that rate, to cap it at that rate, we are providing a \$6.9-billion annual tax subsidy to that private, for-profit corporation. Each year we're contributing to them almost the same amount as we sold the last piece of Ontario Hydro to them for. It's just really, really bad management. This privatization of our services, the sell-off of our public assets like Ontario Place, the giveaway of

our tax dollars, this weakens us and makes us a less competitive jurisdiction to attract business.

The Better Way Alliance, they were asking for some things. One other thing they talked about is rent control. Commercial corporations, these massive corporations, like the three that don't have to build the 5,000 units of affordable housing in Toronto, are buying up, gobbling up real estate, both commercial and residential real estate. We are seeing it in the residential sector. The Core, one real estate investment trust, is buying \$1.5 billion of housing in Ontario, and then they rent it back. And these corporations—there was a study from the University of Toronto this week, and they said that these corporations charge, on average, 44% more rent than non-corporate landlords.

The corporations are buying up massive amounts of commercial properties, they jack up the rents, and, if they happen to squeeze out the small business owner who has the lease for that property, they look at it as a loss leader because, overall, they buy up all these properties, they jack up all the rents, and if some businesses go bankrupt, even if that storefront or whatever stays empty for the period of time, it's just a loss. They can write it off as a loss. In the meantime, their overall profit margin is higher.

What's happening to small businesses because of these corporate landlords is that we are losing some of our small businesses. It has a domino effect because if you have a storefront business and three other businesses next to you are going under or closed, then that reduces your foot traffic. That means you don't have as many people walking by who want to buy stuff at your business. You no longer become as much of a shopping destination.

Some of the Better Way Alliance business owners were from the town of Bracebridge, and they say this is really hurting the tourism industry in Bracebridge because these corporate landowners have squeezed out enough businesses that it's hurting the overall tourism industry and the surviving businesses.

So the government needs to look at what businesses need, and they need some sort of regulation around corporate landlords so that they are not just buying up properties and bankrupting businesses. They need some sort of control over insurance rates, and they need regulation around utility rates because those are the three main things that the business owners were talking about driving them into bankruptcy.

Housing: I've talked a little bit about housing, and I want to spend most of the rest of the time on housing because it is the biggest competitive disadvantage right now. I'm the tech and innovation critic. Every tech business that I go to visit, they all say our biggest competitive advantage in Ontario is that talented people will come from anywhere in the world to Canada and feel comfortable because of our diversity. Our diversity is one of our biggest competitive advantages, so we can attract talent. We have an opportunity right now. Because of the chaos being created by Trump in the United States, we have an opportunity to attract a lot of tech talent to Canada.

All the tech businesses say our biggest competitive disadvantage is our housing costs because a lot of tech startups say the average starting salary is around \$60,000, and you just can't live in Toronto or the GTA for \$60,000, not when an average rent for a one bedroom is \$2,000 a month. You just can't afford it. So we need to bring down housing costs.

This government's policies on housing—and this government has introduced eight bills on housing. They came in, they were talking about how they were going to address the housing supply crisis. Remember that? If you look in Hansard, it comes up again and again: "We're going to address the housing supply crisis. We're going to give a billion-dollar taxpayer subsidy a year to developers that's going to be paid for by municipal taxpayers." They went ahead with that. They were going to pave over the greenbelt. They were going to pave over the Duffin's wetland. They made secret deals to demolish the Foundry. And the result of all of those bills, eight bills—

Ms. Sandy Shaw: Nothing—zero housing starts.

Mr. Chris Glover: Okay. Do you know what we've got in Ontario? We have the second-lowest number of housing starts of any province in the country. We have an average of 350 housing starts per 100,000. In BC, they have an NDP government, and the NDP government is building 736 housing starts per 100,000.

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Why don't you guys communicate? We'll help you. We can be the liaison. We can arrange a phone call. We can get a Zoom meeting with the BC NDP, and they can show you how to double the housing starts in the province of Ontario by following their policies. In fact, we have introduced bills and motions in this House that would help in that way. One of them was to bring back rent control because housing rents have gone up by 40% in this province. The other one is to actually build housing.

We introduced a bill here to build government housing, to build social housing, to build supportive housing, to build co-operative housing, to build non-profit housing by the government, directly by the government. It was modelled on a bill by John Robarts. John Robarts was the Conservative Premier of this province from 1960 to 1970. You know what the response from this government was when we introduced a Conservative bill to build government housing, just like they had done 50 years ago.

Ms. Sandy Shaw: I remember.

Mr. Chris Glover: Do you remember what they said?

Ms. Sandy Shaw: It's communist.

Mr. Chris Glover: They said it's a communist plot. They called John Robarts a communist. It's because this government—and I don't know what happened to the Conservative party, but somewhere along the way, they lost the plot. They will not take practical measures. Our tax dollars have to be funnelled to private, for-profit corporations, and I gave a number of examples, and they cannot do anything directly themselves.

The result is that we have an enormous housing crisis. Under this government, housing costs and rent costs have increased by 40%. We have, as I mentioned, 80,000 people

homeless. We have 1,400 people living in encampments, and it's only getting worse. The city of Toronto reports that for every affordable housing unit that's built in Toronto, we are losing 15. So we are not at the worst part of this housing crisis. We are just at the beginning of it.

This government's solution—and it's another bill that's before the House right now—is not to build housing because there's—even when you're walking here, the Conservative members, all of us, when we walk here to the Legislature, we are walking by people living in tents. That is the only housing this government has built in the last seven years. There are tent encampments everywhere.

Their solution is not to build housing so those people will have a home; their solution is to fine them \$10,000. Because the problem, as the Conservatives see it, is not that they don't have enough money, but they're sitting on this bankroll of \$10,000 that they're going to give to the government or they're going to go to jail. So they're going to criminalize the people that are victims of the housing policies that they've created.

The government's going to say, in future debates, "The NDP voted against our budget. They voted against this part of the budget and they voted against this part of the budget." We don't get to vote on individual parts of the budget. This budget does not address the housing, health care, education needs of this province that would actually make us stronger and help us withstand the tariffs—

The Acting Speaker (MPP Andrea Hazell): Question?

Ms. Laura Smith: Thank you for the member opposite for his comments. He cares about his community deeply and I think we all do in this room.

He talked about housing, which is something that is near and dear to me. I have kids. I want my children to live close to me when they eventually leave my home, and that's my goal, right? So this budget makes it clear that our government is trying to build faster and smarter and quicker for these children that we want to live near our own homes. These aren't just plans, these are priorities.

Through the expanding Building Ontario Fund, we're investing billions to accelerate infrastructure projects. There's a place, a location in my riding called the VMC. Just last fall, an injection of \$35 million was provided to municipalities for infrastructure projects. Are you in support of these infrastructures for better housing?

Mr. Chris Glover: The \$35 million is—and I don't know the details of this—but what this government did was they cut development charges for developers, so it's a billion-dollar subsidy a year to developers. Normally, development is supposed to pay for itself. So if you buy a 200-acre farm and you want to build housing on it, you have to pay for all of the services that you need—the roads, the sewers, the sidewalks, the schools—everything you need for those 200 acres, you need to contribute to that so that the existing taxpayers, their taxes don't go up. What this government said is, "We're going to make the existing taxpayers' taxes go up, and the developers will get a break," but the for-profit developers cannot build right now, are not building right now, so the government needs

to step in and actually build affordable housing, and this government refuses to do it.

The Acting Speaker (MPP Andrea Hazell): Question?

Ms. Peggy Sattler: I want to thank the member from Spadina–Fort York for his comments. London city council just got a report this week, and it showed that almost 70% of London's public housing stock is in poor or very poor condition, and at the same time, we have almost 7,500 people and families who are waiting to get access to rent-geared-to-income housing. The city noted when receiving this report that the province has played no role whatsoever in social housing since the 1990s and has downloaded the cost to municipalities, creating situations like in London, where the public housing has fallen into such disrepair.

I wonder if the member sees this budget as a missed opportunity to try to fix the problems that have happened in communities across the province because of that downloading.

Mr. Chris Glover: I thank the member for the question. There's never been a period in history when everybody could afford market housing in Ontario. Between the Second World War and 1995, we were building about 15,000 units of not-for-profit housing. The government was doing it directly. Then, in the early 1990s, the Chrétien Liberals cancelled the National Housing Strategy, so they stopped building affordable housing and not-for-profit housing, and then they introduced legislation to create real estate investment trusts, which are investment tools for corporations to buy up massive amounts of housing, and that's what they're doing. These real estate investment trusts are buying up massive amounts of housing, and they're jacking up the rents, and as I mentioned earlier, they're charging 44% more. And then the other piece that happened is that the Harris Conservatives downloaded existing Ontario housing onto municipalities, so the crisis that we are in has been 30 years in the making. It was made by government policies. It can be unmade by government policies, and that's what we need to do. We need to get back into the business of building houses.

The Acting Speaker (MPP Andrea Hazell): Question?

Mr. John Jordan: I thank the member opposite for his comments. One of the things he said earlier on in his comments was that he doesn't see anything in the budget for health care, which is surprising, because health care has been and continues to be one of our number one priorities. There have been significant improvements in health care, and health care providers will tell you that.

This government in this budget continues to expand access to primary care, and they're doing that with team-based care. That is the answer to our health care demands versus our supply. Does the member support this budget and increasing, continuing to expand health care by primary care in Ontario?

Mr. Chris Glover: I don't know where to start with that. I mean, our health care system is in a crisis. It was in a crisis when this government got elected in 2018, and it's

a far worse crisis now. There are two and a half million people without a family doctor.

My brother was in the hospital a year ago, and he spent the first 12 days in the hospital in a hallway. And he wasn't the only one. It wasn't like, "Oh, there's one patient in the hallway because there's not enough rooms." They actually number the beds, on the wall, of all the people that are in the hallway. It's not just one hospital; it's every hospital across the province. We are in an absolute crisis.

The Financial Accountability Office has said that this government is underfunding our health care system to the tune of billions of dollars, because they're not keeping up with population growth and an aging population. So we need to invest massive amounts into our health care system.

The best part of it is, it's not just that we get care. Public health care is one of our biggest competitive advantages, but this government is undermining it by the privatization of those services and wasting our tax dollars.

1640

The Acting Speaker (MPP Andrea Hazell): I recognize the member from London North Centre.

Mr. Terence Kernaghan: I'd like to thank my friend from Spadina–Fort York for his presentation this afternoon.

I also had the opportunity to meet with the Better Way Alliance yesterday. Their recommendations were quite sound and represent the voices of many small businesses who are deeply concerned with the threat of Trump's tariffs and what that means for their future. They also pointed towards the Canadian Federation of Independent Business, who have cited that there's \$2 trillion worth of wealth at stake, because over the next 10 years, the retiring baby boomer generation does not have a succession plan.

They also mentioned that there needs to be more of a strategy for employee ownership. This reminds me of NDP legislation that I was honoured to bring forward that was sponsored or endorsed by the Ontario Chamber of Commerce, as well as the London Chamber of Commerce, to create a provincial employee ownership strategy. Is that something that the government should have put within budget 2025?

Mr. Chris Glover: Absolutely. You know what? This is one of the ways—and you're right about small businesses: A lot of the owners of those small businesses are aging out and they're looking for someone to buy their business. One of the most logical places to look would be to the employees, for the employees to buy out the business and take it over.

This is what the NDP did when they were in power in the early 1990s. They saved the city of Sault Ste. Marie by arranging an employee buyout of Algoma Steel, which was on the verge of bankruptcy. Sault Ste. Marie, especially at that time, was a one-industry town; if that company had gone under, the town would not have survived. But it survived because the NDP helped facilitate an employee buyout.

We should be doing that and making legislation to facilitate employee buyouts of small businesses and other

businesses in Ontario. So I want to thank the member for—

The Acting Speaker (MPP Andrea Hazell): Question?

Mr. Amarjot Sandhu: Thank you to the member opposite for his remarks on this bill.

Madam Speaker, the member highlighted his concerns regarding housing. There's no government in the history of this province that has invested more in housing than this government. The province is investing nearly \$2 billion in housing and community-enabling-infrastructure funding through the Housing-Enabling Water Systems Fund and the Municipal Housing Infrastructure Program.

In my role as the parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Infrastructure, I had the opportunity to meet with several municipalities at the AMO conference and ROMA conference, and they were appreciative of the investments this government is making to unlock hundreds of thousands of new housing units in the province of Ontario.

He also talked about building new schools. I was at the inauguration of a new school in Brampton West, a new medical school in Brampton West, a new hospital in Brampton. Would the member acknowledge that fact and support this bill?

Mr. Chris Glover: One of the games that the Conservatives play in here is that, whenever they're challenged with something, they always say, "Well, we're investing \$100 million here and \$50 million here." Meanwhile, they cut \$1 billion out of that same bucket.

You're talking about investing \$2 billion in housing? You have the second-lowest record of housing starts of any province in the country. There are nine other provinces that you could go to for lessons on how to build housing because you are failing miserably, and the people of Ontario are suffering. It's also a huge competitive advantage, because a net 50,000 people are leaving this province every year because of how—

The Acting Speaker (MPP Andrea Hazell): I recognize the member from Ottawa–Vanier.

M^{me} Lucille Collard: It's a pleasure to rise today to speak about the budget, which unfortunately falls short in so many fundamental ways. In the limited time that I have today, I won't be able to address every weakness, but I will focus on the areas that matter most to the people I represent in Ottawa–Vanier: from Beacon Hill to Vanier, Manor Park, ByWard Market—among the few neighbourhoods that I represent.

Generally, this budget fails to meet the basic responsibilities of government while wasting record amounts of public money. As my Liberal colleagues have already pointed out, it leaves far too many people behind at a time when support is more urgently needed than ever. From where I stand, it is painfully clear that this budget starves our education system of funding and turns a blind eye to the growing homelessness crisis.

Let's begin with education because once again, we are missing a critical opportunity to invest in our children and build the world-class education system that they deserve. Ontario should be leading in this area. Instead, this budget

continues to deprive school boards of the funding they need, forcing them to make impossible decisions.

Because school boards cannot run deficits, they are cutting programs, they are reducing supports for students with special needs and scaling back on desperately needed mental health services. The consequences are severe—not only for families and children but for our overburdened health care system, which is left to absorb the fallout. According to the Ontario Secondary School Teachers' Federation, 40% of school boards are facing serious deficits. That is simply unacceptable—especially in a province as prosperous as Ontario. Our children are our future, and they should be a priority.

Speaker, school infrastructure is another critical issue. Our schools are overcrowded. Portables now line schoolyards, especially in francophone schools, where enrolment has steadily increased, but capital investments have not kept pace. When I first entered public life as a school board trustee—that was 15 years ago already—I was totally determined to fight for real solutions to eliminate these so-called temporary structures—those infamous portables—and yet they remain.

The truth is, school boards are not to blame; it is a government that has failed to adequately fund repairs, expansion and the construction of new schools. We need serious investments in school infrastructure—repairs, maintenance, expansions and new builds—because our students deserve real classrooms, because the quality of a learning environment has a direct impact on students' success.

What's worse, Speaker, is the alarming increase in classroom violence and the growing lack of safety for teachers and students alike. Overcrowded classrooms, a shortage of special education professionals and the lack of mental health supports have made it harder than ever for teachers to do their job. It's no wonder that recruitment and retention is such a challenge. The system is breaking under the weight of neglect, and the only solution is investment—something this government clearly has no interest in because their priority seems to be elsewhere.

I am also deeply disappointed by the absence of targeted investments to support the francophone workforce. My riding of Ottawa–Vanier is home to one of the largest francophone communities in Ontario, yet access to services in French—health care, legal service, social supports—all remain a serious challenge. We are fortunate to have the Montfort Hospital in my riding, which delivers exceptional care, but we should not have to rely on a single institution.

In my riding, clinics are non-existent and family health teams lack capacity, and too many residents are without access to a family doctor, like so many other places in Ontario.

The lack of investment in French-language services undermines the rights of francophones and continues to erode trust in public institutions.

Speaker, the most glaring failure of this budget is its complete inaction on homelessness—an issue that is devastating communities across Ontario, including mine.

This budget does nothing to support people living with addiction, mental illness or those forced to sleep in tents in parks. Despite having an Associate Minister of Mental Health and Addictions, this government offers no meaningful response to a crisis growing worse by the day.

Worse still, this government is doubling down on legislation that stigmatizes and criminalizes homelessness rather than addressing its root causes, and that is unconscionable. Yes, residents should not bear the burden of policy failure, but the solution is not punishment—it's support. Investing in addiction services, mental health care and supportive housing would not only improve lives but reduce long-term cost to the public, because dignity, safety, and health are not luxuries; they are basic human rights.

1650

Ottawa Community Housing has been underfunded for decades, as I turn to affordable housing. And most of the affordable housing stock dates back to an era when governments actually invested in social housing, before those efforts were gutted in the 1990s. And what's the result? Long wait-lists, units in disrepair—and people in despair—and hundreds of families stuck living in hotel rooms paid for by the city because there's nowhere else to go. This is not a solution. It's a symptom of a failed system.

Housing is a provincial responsibility, but this government continually downloads the problem onto municipalities and relies on federal dollars to bail them out. Meanwhile, cities lack the fiscal capacity to meet the scale of the crisis. If we are serious about addressing homelessness and housing insecurity, we need a coordinated strategy and real, ambitious investment in affordable housing, and the province must lead.

Madam Speaker, I hope government members are listening because budgets are not about headlines or slogans; they're about getting the basics right: funding our schools, supporting our children, building homes, protecting public services and making sure no one is left behind. This budget fails on every one of those counts, and the people of Ottawa–Vanier, and across Ontario, deserve better.

Thank you, Madam Speaker, and I'm sharing my time with the member for Nepean.

The Acting Speaker (MPP Andrea Hazell): I recognize the member from Nepean.

MPP Tyler Watt: Thank you, Madam Speaker, and thank you to my colleague from Ottawa–Vanier for that wonderful statement. It's an honour to be here today to discuss the 2025 budget.

Speaker, two weeks ago, the government presented its budget: a 232-page document full of spin, short on solutions and completely out of touch with what Ontarians are actually going through. It has been seven years—seven years—of the Premier telling us he's getting it done. But if you look through this budget, it's painfully clear who he's really looking out for, and it's not the people that I represent in Nepean. It's not health care workers, it's not students, it's not seniors and it's not working families.

This government has had chances, they've had opportunities and they have this budget now, but it continues to fail the people of Ontario.

Let's start with health care. The member across the aisle said, "Ask health care workers how our health care system is doing." Well, I, as a health care worker, am here to speak on that. As a registered nurse, I know what it means when health care is underfunded. I know what it looks like when our hospitals are stretched too thin, when nurses are overworked and when patients are stuck waiting for hours in crowded emergency rooms, if their ER is even open. This budget offers only a 2% increase in health spending. That doesn't even cover inflation. That's not investment; that is a cut in real terms. Hospitals across this province are desperate for help, yet there are no new investments in critical hospital infrastructure in my riding of Nepean—nothing for the Queensway Carleton Hospital, which serves some of the fastest-growing communities in the region.

Our health care system is not getting better; it's getting worse. The words "public health" appear far too few times for a budget written during this ongoing health care crisis.

And let's talk about primary care: 2.5 million Ontarians don't have a family doctor. That's nearly one in five. That's not just a stat. That's your neighbour. That's your child's classmate. That might be you. If you can't access care early, problems get worse and more expensive to treat. That's not just inefficient; it's dangerous and costly.

And mental health? Barely mentioned. In a time when the need for mental health services is skyrocketing, when youth are crying out for support, when ERs are seeing more and more patients in crisis, this government continues to ignore it.

This budget is full of talk about training new health care workers—and don't get me wrong; I support that. We need to train the next generation. But what about the people that are already working in the system? What about retention? What about the nurses and PSWs that are keeping them all afloat? For every 10 nurses we hire in Ontario, six are leaving. Why? Because they're underpaid, they're undervalued and they feel disrespected by this government. And what's driving that instability? Unregulated private staffing agencies are poaching workers, charging hospitals double, and creating chaos. And yet, this budget has no real solutions to fixing this problem.

We cannot solve the health care crisis without retaining the workforce we already have. Someone has to be there to train the next generation. That starts with atoning for Bill 124 and finally showing front-line workers the respect that they deserve.

Speaker, this government talks a lot about building Ontario. But you can't build a province on empty promises and frozen funding. You can't build when your priorities are spas, booze and backroom deals instead of hospitals, community care, and public health.

I want to take a moment to talk about long-term care. The way that we care for our elders says everything about who we are as a society—I think we can all agree on that—and right now, we're failing them. This budget barely

mentions long-term care, and what little it does include shows that this government still doesn't get it. Once again, the focus is on bricks and mortar; not on the quality of care, not on staffing, not on accountability, and certainly not on prevention.

Let's be clear: If we want to ease the pressure on our hospitals, we need to invest in long-term care and home care. Helping people stay healthy and independent at home is not just good for seniors and our society; it's good health policy, it's good economics and it's what people deserve. We need to be investing in care that is people-centred, not profit-driven. We need to hire more PSWs, improve wages, and take care of our health care workers so we can bring quality care and dignity back to our elder care in this province. Aging shouldn't mean being warehoused in a for-profit facility with too few staff and too little oversight; it should mean being cared for with respect, with compassion, and with the kind of support we want for our own parents and grandparents. Ontarians deserve to age with dignity. That means investing in long-term care and community home care properly. This budget doesn't do that.

Speaker, do you know how many times home care is mentioned in this budget? Just once, in a table. Meanwhile, alcohol is mentioned 132 times. Home care is one of the most effective tools we have to keep people out of the hospital, to ease ER pressure, and to let people recover in the comfort of their own homes, but this government refuses to fund it or take it seriously.

The people of Ontario deserve so much better than this.

For families who want to send their kids to college or university, the news doesn't get any better. This government is cutting funding to post-secondary education by \$1.2 billion, despite their self-proclaimed record investments. Ontario already has the lowest per-student funding in the country. Now, with this budget, we're slipping even further behind. Colleges and universities across the province are being forced to shut down programs. Speaker, 37 programs at Algonquin in Nepean, this fall, have been cut due to the underfunding. Students are paying more, getting less, and facing a future with fewer options.

The repair backlog in our schools is still over \$22 billion—and still no plan to fix it.

This isn't how we prepare the next generation. This isn't how we build a workforce. This is how we fall behind.

Speaker, I want to be fair. There are a few positive measures in this budget. There's some support for primary care. There are some grants for health care students. Those are good steps, and I applaud them. But let's not pretend that Band-Aids are enough when the patient is bleeding.

This government continues to claim that it's fiscally responsible. Well, let's look at the numbers. Ontario's debt is now projected to surpass half a trillion dollars. That's the highest in our province's history. And what do we have to show for it? A billion-dollar booze plan, a \$4.6-billion spa deal, a fantasy tunnel under Highway 401, millions of dollars spent on the government's self-congratulatory television ads, billions handed to private interests, while

Ontarians wait in pain in ERs, struggle to pay bills, and wonder if they'll be able to afford rent next month.

Let's talk about affordability. This budget does nothing to make life easier for families. The 5% increase to ODSP doesn't come close to matching the real cost of living. Rent control is still gutted—something they could easily reverse to help make people's lives more affordable for the future. And minimum wage still isn't enough for most to get by.

This budget doesn't meet the moment, and it certainly doesn't meet the needs of my constituents in Nepean.

People are tired. They're working harder than ever and still falling behind. They see a government that says it's focused on the people, but they know the truth: This is not a budget for them. This is a budget for their donors, lobbyists and insiders, not for health care workers, not for students and certainly not for everyday Ontarians.

1700

I believe in this province. I believe in our people, and I know that we deserve better. We can fix health care, we can fund education properly so every child and student has a meaningful education and we can build long-term care that respects our elders, but we need the political will to do it.

It's time that this government listens to the people on the ground, to the key stakeholders, to the people on the front lines who have been begging and pleading for us to make real change. We need a government that listens, that invests wisely and that remembers why it was elected, to serve the people—not corporations, not political donors, not insiders—the people.

To the families across Nepean and across Ontario, I hear you, I see you and I will keep fighting for you because your voice matters, your health matters, your future matters, and you deserve a government that acts like it. Thank you.

The Acting Speaker (MPP Andrea Hazell): Questions?

Ms. Laura Smith: Thank you to the member opposite. He talked about the cost of living, and I appreciate that. My constituents in Thornhill obviously—just as a mother, as a person who lives in a community, I'm always concerned about that, and we touch base on that.

One of the things that our government is doing and is going to continue to do is one of the biggest tax cuts that has ever happened, which is the gas tax cut, which is saving Ontario families a significant amount every year. We're making that gas tax permanent.

I'm just wondering if getting rid of the tolls on the 407, which is expected to save daily commuters a lot of money—\$7,200 for some commuters—and the gas tax, which are so important for the people getting across the city, is something that he would be in favour of?

MPP Tyler Watt: Thank you to the member for that question. Yes, those are going to save certain people money, people who drive cars and people who drive on the 407, but what about affordability for everyone? What about getting people affordable housing? What about bringing back rent control, which this government cancelled

the first chance they got back in 2018? What about cutting people's income? You guys promised to cut their income tax back in 2018. Seven years later, it still hasn't happened.

There are so many measures that we can take to actually be meaningful, that will save the people of Ontario money, not just these select few policies that you're implementing. It seems like making sure that people have access to health care, like they can afford to pay for their medications, like they can afford to eat healthy food or making sure that they can pay their electricity bills—the government is ignoring these things. I hear you on that, but it's not enough.

The Acting Speaker (MPP Andrea Hazell): Question?

MPP Lise Vaugeois: My question is for the member from Ottawa–Vanier. I was interested to meet with people from the Association franco-ontarienne des conseils scolaires catholiques today. First of all, I know the population is growing in French Catholic schools—379 portables, which is really unfortunate—but also that they're in a deficit position because of the funding formula for school busing.

In my region, those buses have to travel a long distance so that French-speaking students can actually get there. It may be a little bit different than Ottawa–Vanier, but I wonder if you could speak to that, particularly the transportation deficit.

M^{me} Lucille Collard: Thank you to the member for Thunder Bay–Superior North. I appreciate the question.

I also met with those people today. The really important thing is for the government to understand that French education is different than English education. The school boards cover a lot larger territories than for the English school boards. That's an important factor, so therefore transportation is very important and needs to be addressed in a different way, taking into consideration these realities. But there is much more to that because—I've mentioned it during my debate—school boards and school enrolments are growing steadily in our francophone schools, and we're not keeping up with the needs, the resources. The transportation is one, but more than that, infrastructure. We need more schools, and we need more resources just to keep the equity level.

The Acting Speaker (MPP Andrea Hazell): Question?

Mr. Amarjot Sandhu: Thank you to the member opposite. The member highlighted affordability. As my good friend the member from Thornhill was highlighting, the measures this government has taken, whether it's the gas tax cut that is being eliminated permanently, eliminating the licence plate stickers, a One Fare Program that will save commuters a lot of money, the 407 that will save commuters up to \$7,200 per year, this government has taken all the measures to make life affordable for the people of this province.

But the irony is that the Liberals and NDP, they always vote against those measures which this government brings to make life affordable for the people of this province. So,

will the member opposite support this bill and vote in favour of the bill?

The Acting Speaker (MPP Andrea Hazell): Response? I recognize the member from Nepean.

MPP Tyler Watt: Again, I hear about cars; they're saving people with cars money. That's great. That's helping them, sure. What about everyone else? When we're talking about affordability, it's not just about cars, it's not just about gas or alcohol. It's about your home. It's about your rent. It's about your bills, the food that you put on the table for your kids. This government isn't doing anything about that.

Again, in 2018, this party ran on cutting people's income tax. They've had seven years to do it. They had the opportunity just a few weeks ago to commit to it, and they didn't do it. They could cut the HST off of home heating and hydro, something that would impact pretty much everyone in this province, correct? This government hasn't done it.

So, I appreciate that you all are making life more affordable for people with cars, but you're not doing enough for the rest of this province.

The Acting Speaker (MPP Andrea Hazell): Question?

M^{me} France Gélinas: Both speakers talked about the crisis in our health care system and how this government's solution to the crisis in the health care system, in recruiting and retaining staff, in making sure that our hospitals stay open, is to fund more private, for-profit clinics.

I was wondering if the members agree that funding more private, for-profit clinics for hip and knee surgeries, for MRIs, for CT scans—is this the way we will fix the crisis in our health care system?

The Acting Speaker (MPP Andrea Hazell): Response? I recognize the member for Nepean.

MPP Tyler Watt: The answer to our health care crisis is not private; it is investing in public health care. The way that these private companies are able to staff is that they're poaching from the public health care system. There's a shortage of health care workers in this province, so we're going to use public dollars to pay private companies a premium to do surgeries, to provide care to patients rather than just making sure that that happens in the public system. We shouldn't be using public spaces, public hospitals, for private companies to then poach our nurses and health care workers and pay them a premium to do the work that we can just be doing in the public health care system.

We are lucky to have a public health care system. It needs a lot of love and support and funding right now. So, the solution is public, not private.

The Acting Speaker (MPP Andrea Hazell): Question?

Mr. John Jordan: I want to direct my question to the member from Nepean. He mentioned long-term care, and he's quite right; it's not just about bricks and mortar and building new buildings—although this government is building 58,000 new and reconditioned beds, and we can

compare that to the Liberal government's 611, which I think is saying a lot.

But as far as staffing goes and all these nurses leaving—and the member might want to check with the RNAO on that one, because their membership is way up. We've invested \$4.9 billion to hire and retain 27,000 long-term-care staff. Recently, I talked to the Christian labour association. They're really happy about that, and they note it in the long-term-care homes.

In this budget, we're continuing to grow staffing and long-term-care homes. Do you support that?

1710

MPP Tyler Watt: Of course I support the idea that we should be growing staffing and resources in our health care system, but I, as a nurse and a member of the RNAO, can tell you the reality that's going on in our hospitals, in our communities and in our health care system. The fact is that health care workers are leaving either the profession or the province altogether. They know that they will be treated with better respect elsewhere. They're tired of this government saying these types of things in the Legislature, when they work on the front lines, they work with our patients and community every single day. They know that they're short-staffed, they don't have resources and that we have a government here that's bragging about how phenomenal and world-class this health care system is.

So I fully support us getting more health care workers into the system. That's just not the reality that's going on right now. We want to make sure that we are retaining the talent and expertise that we have right now, because they're fleeing. We want to train the next generation to come, and we can't do that without the health care workers that are there right now.

The Acting Speaker (MPP Andrea Hazell): Further debate?

Ms. Laura Smith: It is my very great honour to stand here today and speak to the budget motion for our Plan to Protect Ontario Act, 2025.

Ontario is at the doorstep of a completely new era. Today, we're going through unprecedented times. We face new and very complicated obstacles that we've never faced before. The United States—our best friend, our ally, our neighbour—has overturned one of the most successful economic relationships anywhere in the world, and these tariffs critically threaten our economy at its heart.

These tariffs have also targeted some of the most critical sectors. Canadian steel and aluminum got 25% tariffs; our potash and energy, 10% levies; the automotive industry, one of the central pillars of our economy activity, 25% on Canadian content in vehicles; and lastly, a 25% tariff on everything else not covered by the CUSMA trade agreement.

Amidst economic uncertainty and through this trade war, one thing emerges so very clearly: Things are no longer business as usual. We can no longer assume the benefits of our economic partnership with our southern ally. Ontario's economy can no longer depend on a partner that has proven itself to be fundamentally unreliable.

Naturally, Madam Speaker, this trade war has hurt our businesses, our workers and our families. Ontarians are worried and they're concerned. Business owners are worried about making payroll, worrying about making ends meet. Parents worry about the well-being of their children. This is why our government is taking action—right now. This is why we're delivering on our promise to protect Ontario: so that Ontario families—the workers, the businesses—can rest assured, as we face this storm together, that our government is there for them and that, together, we can come out of this stronger.

Over the last seven years since our government was first elected, we accomplished so many things. Our province has come so far. Under the leadership of the Premier, we have been working so hard. To echo what Minister Bethlenfalvy mentioned in the budget: almost one million more jobs exist and have been created since 2018, Ontario's GDP grew to over a trillion dollars and we attracted nearly \$70 billion—that's a B, \$70 billion—in new investments in key sectors.

These accomplishments are the result of relentless and purposeful work. They are the result of our government's focus on reducing costs for businesses and creating the conditions for them to grow and thrive. But above everything else, they're the result of the hard work of millions of Ontarians across this province in the various industries and sectors that build the economic engine that Ontario is.

Unfortunately, we find ourselves now in a very tough position. All this progress we have secured for our province and our people is now at risk. That's what we're facing. The minister put it quite succinctly: Ontario is at a precipice, and we must take serious steps to make sure we don't find ourselves anywhere near the bottom.

Madam Speaker, we all know that the people of Ontario are particularly exposed to these tariffs and the widespread economic uncertainty. Across the province, 285,000 jobs depend on exporting goods to the US, which represents almost 3.5% of our total employment. On top of that, many more jobs—thousands of them—rely on US exports across domestic supply chains.

This is why our government's 2025 budget includes measures to protect the livelihoods and the paycheques of hard-working Ontarians. We are taking action to help those workers and businesses and communities weather this storm by providing urgent relief and support. What our Plan To Protect Ontario Act, 2025, does, first and foremost, is take immediate and urgent action in response to the impacts of tariffs to defend our economy, to protect our industries, to protect our businesses, to protect our workers and, in one word, a plan to protect Ontario and its future.

So there are reasons why our government at first measures took an action to support about 80,000 Ontario businesses and job creators impacted by the US tariffs, and we are providing a six-month deferral on interest and penalties on select provincial taxes. From April 1 to October 1, 2025, all businesses who pay taxes under 10 of Ontario's business-focused tax programs can defer payments for tax owed without incurring interest or penalties.

This measure provides them with up to \$9 billion in cash flow, giving them more flexibility to deal with any challenges resulting from US tariffs and put their money where it's most needed for them.

Secondly, there is a new and added \$2-billion rebate through the WSIB that is being distributed directly to safe employers so that employers can weather the storm and use their money in protecting their businesses and keeping their employees on the job. All of these families that we are talking about, they work somewhere, and we are protecting these workers so that they can stay employed.

Our government has taken significant steps to help businesses over the past years, and WSIB rates have been reduced to the lowest in half a century. These premium rate reductions will save businesses in Ontario about \$150 million annually, and we were able to do this, to give their money back to our businesses, because we have a surplus in this fund. And keeping costs down for businesses and giving money back to them are not the only tools at our disposal to help job creators optimize their resources; cutting red tape and simplifying cumbersome bureaucratic and unnecessary processes to prompt economic development are also in our agenda.

In Bill 24, A Plan To Protect Ontario, 2025, we are taking another step in that direction, in this opportunity, on the employer health tax. The government is proposing some amendments to the act that would expand how notices of assessment under the act may be sent, including electronic means, getting rid of unnecessary rules and benefiting employers, because when prudence and responsibility are exercised in fiscal and public management, as our government has done, taxpayers benefit from it.

All of these measures reflect nothing else but this government's strong commitment in fostering a robust and resilient business environment for Ontario's economy to thrive. It's about the jobs. We have to keep these people employed, and to continue to put forward measures designed to promote capital formation, enhance access to investment opportunities and maintain market integrity and investor protection.

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Bill 24, Plan to Protect Ontario Act, 2025, includes some legislative amendments to favour a nurturing business environment. Through this bill, the government is proposing several amendments to both the Commodity Futures Act and the Securities Act that would expand the enforcement of powers of our key partners in the local capital markets, the Canadian Investment Regulatory Organization and the Ontario Securities Commission. We're confident that these measures will reassure investors, not in Canada but across the globe, that Ontario is open for business and that it's the best place in the G7 to invest.

These are only the first and immediate measures taken by Ontario in response to uncertainty and global instability. To protect the province's local economy and help Ontario-based businesses forced to reconsider their US trading dependency, we are creating the new Protecting Ontario Account, a fund of up to \$5 billion designed to

provide businesses with critical support to protect jobs, transform businesses and grow strategic sectors of the economy.

The Protecting Ontario Account will work in tandem with federal government supports to make immediately available up to \$1 billion in liquidity relief. That is \$1 billion readily available for Ontario businesses and workers facing significant tariff-related business disruptions. This liquidity relief will build on top of the existing supports, and it operates as an emergency backstop for those businesses who have exhausted available funding.

Our team is committed to protecting Ontario, so when we think about our businesses and industries, it would be remiss of us if we did not specifically protect the accomplishments that we've already achieved in the auto and electric vehicle battery sector. This is a particularly interesting point that I really like to talk about because we have so many of these component creators that exist in my riding of Thornhill.

But with President Trump's tariffs taking aim at our auto industry, there is no doubt that we must stand firmly behind the industry and the tens of thousands of auto workers in Ontario. To do that, our government is extending its investment in the Ontario Automotive Modernization Program and the Ontario Vehicle Innovation Network through a total envelope of \$85 million. Ontario will be providing an additional \$73 million over the next four years to continue the Ontario Vehicle Innovation Network program.

This funding will continue to support regional technology development sites, research and development partners and incubator projects for automotive and mobility small and medium-sized enterprises. To date, this program has leveraged over \$850 million in private sector investments, and it has supported 600 Ontario small and medium-sized enterprises and helped secure more than 6,000 jobs. It's about the jobs; let's always remember this. When we talk about the economy and we talk about the families, it's about protecting those jobs.

In addition, the province will be investing another \$12 million in the next three years to continue the Ontario Automotive Modernization Program. The program is designed to support our automotive parts suppliers by helping small and medium businesses upgrade their equipment and adopt new tools and technologies. The numbers on this program are also amazing. Since its inception, this program has supported a total of 215 projects—215—creating over 1,000 jobs and retaining nearly another 16,000 jobs. They've leveraged over \$59 million in private sector investments.

We have come a very long way. So that is why, now more than ever, we must protect the progress that our manufacturing sector has seen since 2018. I've mentioned the workers so many times, the hard-working people of this great province. They're the backbone and the true motors of the Ontario success story. Nobody knows that better than us, and nobody is more aware of the worries, the concerns, the instability which they are now facing today.

To provide immediate transition support for laid-off workers at these uncertain economic times, the government is investing \$20 million to mobilize the new training and support centres. These centres provide temporary places for affected workers to receive services, including referrals to in-demand training, job search assistance, upskilling and Employment Ontario programs.

Our communities are also hurting and may face major disruptions as well. Our government is taking action to be there for them. Through the new Trade-Impacted Communities Program, we're proposing to allocate \$40 million to respond, in a tailored manner, to the unique and unprecedented needs of individual communities and local industries. This funding would be tailored and flexible. They'd be flexible grants to help communities respond to trade disruptions and pivot to procure from domestic and local suppliers.

Municipalities, economic development organizations, business accelerators and incubators, among other eligible industry associations, would also receive the funding to support large-scale strategic initiatives to help grow businesses, find new markets and investments, and diversify their supply chain.

Madam Speaker, this budget is about so much more than just the tariffs. It's about ensuring that our businesses, our workers and our communities have the tools to weather this storm. The economic downturn has been a wake-up call for Canada. Business as usual and status quo are no longer acceptable. We must now reflect and acknowledge that we are faced with a new playing field and a much larger problem. Let's keep our eye on the much larger problem. Not only has our overreliance on the United States made us so very vulnerable, we must also recognize the fact that our country must focus on growing its productivity and growth.

That's why our government created this plan to protect Ontario; to take bold action that makes Ontario the most competitive economy in Canada and the best place to do business in all of the G7. Our fiscal responsibility and responsible management of public finances has put us in a strong position against these headwinds, and we must do more.

Our plan to protect Ontario is a road map for the economy of tomorrow. It makes the necessary investments to protect Ontario for the future. It builds a stronger economy that Ontarians can count on in the face of new challenges so that future generations can enjoy what we've enjoyed, so that our GDP grows to fuel the economy of tomorrow, and so that our workers have the best opportunities that they can.

A few days ago, I was very fortunate to be able to open up the Toronto Stock Exchange with the Minister of Finance. It was with an emerging business that was growing and they were expanding their operations. It gave me such an incredible, brilliant moment of confidence. We pressed the button and the market immediately went up 130 points. Now, I'm not going to take responsibility for that upturn, but I am pretty proud of that moment because it really let me view the resilience of our community. They were

investing in Thornhill. They were investing in the environment. They were investing in workers.

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Our government was given a mandate to continue these investments, to protect Ontario and workers and businesses and communities, and we will do whatever it takes. Together, alongside our workers, our municipalities, our union leaders and our Indigenous communities, we will unleash Ontario's economic potential. We're going to continue to build the critical infrastructure we need. We will continue to keep down the cost of living. We will continue to deliver a world-class health care sector and public service sector. In short, we're protecting Ontario for today and future generations.

I want to thank the Minister of Finance for allowing me to press that button because it gave me a whole new perspective on everything that we're facing. I looked into those workers' eyes, and I could see they were so grateful to be there. They were newly employed, and they knew that we had their back.

Through you, Madam Speaker, I call on all members to vote in favour of the Plan to Protect Ontario Act, 2025.

The Acting Speaker (MPP Andrea Hazell): Question?

Mrs. Jennifer (Jennie) Stevens: I want to thank the member from Thornhill for enlightening us on some of the things that she boasts about—maybe creating jobs, bold actions.

However, in St. Catharines—my riding—and Niagara, your government seems to have forgotten us, like a forgotten child. We haven't seen any two-way, all-day GO in this budget. We haven't seen any monies for our urgent cares in Port Colborne and in Fort Erie. And we certainly haven't seen your government go to the table to get some money for our south Niagara waste water treatment plant, which is necessary for our municipalities to be able to build the housing target.

My question to you is, will your government start to recognize that Niagara is past the Burlington bridge, and we need two-way, all-day GO so that we can get to jobs in other parts of Ontario?

Ms. Laura Smith: Thank you to the member opposite.

One of the things that is happening in my riding of Thornhill is a—we have the VMC. I've talked about this area many times. And we're expanding areas and infrastructure to the Building Faster Fund. That's something that I would recommend. Yes, it's a definite enabler. It's actually going to provide waste water sewer upgrades, to the tune of \$35 million. These funds are available.

Speaker, do you know what? Our government understands that we can't continue this economy without building forward, and infrastructure is 100% essential.

So I would advise her to take advantage and tell all of her municipal partners to explore those opportunities.

The Acting Speaker (MPP Andrea Hazell): Question?

Mr. Anthony Leardi: The member spoke about some successful businesses in her riding, and I want to ask her

if she would like to elaborate on some of the successful businesses in her riding.

One of the things that this budget does is, it defers taxes and various fees and such for six months so that businesses have enough cash flow to survive what is definitely going to be a period of disruption and dislocation in the market.

So I would invite the member to tell us a little bit more about some of the successful businesses in her riding.

Ms. Laura Smith: Thank you to the member.

We've got a lot of incredible businesses in Thornhill. I talked about some of the car components that are built right in Thornhill. They're used for industry all over the world, and they're sent off.

Weathering the storm is something that we also talked about. Our government understands that Ontario's job creators are under pressure, and we're talking about bold action to help them weather the storm. That's why we've introduced a six-month-interest and penalty-free deferral on selected provincially administered taxes. That happens between April 1 to October 1, 2025. I highly recommend that he take that information back to his constituents as well and his businesses, because they can defer payments under 10 different business-focused tax programs, all without facing any interest or penalties—

The Acting Speaker (MPP Andrea Hazell): Question?

Ms. Sandy Shaw: Thank you to the member. I will agree with you on one point: that you can't have a resilient economy without infrastructure. It seems to me the government has come late to understanding that we need infrastructure, that we need to have sewers and roads. That was something that was missing for quite some time.

But I wonder if the member would appreciate that housing is essential infrastructure. And publicly funded, publicly available affordable housing is something that's completely absent from this government's agenda, and certainly from this government's budget. Under this government's watch, in seven years, they went from saying they were going to build 1.5 million homes—they haven't even delivered on a half of their watered-down targets. The housing starts in this province are cratering. This province has the lowest housing starts in Canada.

So my question to you is: Why is there nothing in this government's budget that will help us build the housing that we so desperately need in this province?

Ms. Laura Smith: Well, actually, I respectfully submit that Ontario expects their government to invest in community infrastructure that keeps our province moving and growing, and we are doing just that. Earlier I was talking about infrastructure in the Vaughan Metropolitan Centre for the waste water system. If you can't flush a toilet, you can't have homes; you can't have schools. We've put so much substantive work in that area, and I want to thank the Minister of Infrastructure for all of that work, because she identified a growing area in my riding and literally nipped it in the bud and created an environment—there's going to be 20,000 more homes in that area as a result of that infrastructure fund and that waste water management fund. So I beg to say that—

The Acting Speaker (MPP Andrea Hazell): Question?

Mr. Matthew Rae: Thank you to my colleague from Thornhill for her remarks this afternoon on a very important motion in front of this House on the budget. I was wondering if she could expand a little about some of the supports that we are providing to businesses—small businesses, in particular—to ensure that they are supported through these economically challenging times because of President Trump's tariffs, and what she has heard from her local riding on how we continue to support our small businesses, putting more monies back in their pockets, in particular.

Ms. Laura Smith: It is about protecting the small businesses, because they need the assistance as well. One of the things that I talked about earlier was the investments that we're providing—actually, there's \$1.3 billion in support to businesses over three years by proposing to temporarily enhance and expand the Ontario Made Manufacturing Investment Tax Credit, helping both qualified and Canadian-controlled private corporations and qualifying non-CCPCs to increase their competitiveness and the resilience of Ontario's manufacturing sector.

Just on a side note, we're also investing an additional \$1 billion over three years in the Skills Development Fund's capital and training streams so that those businesses can pivot and possibly provide different opportunities for their employees.

The Acting Speaker (MPP Andrea Hazell): Question?

Ms. Peggy Sattler: I want to thank the member for Thornhill for her reflections on the budget. I heard from her and as well as members on the opposite side a lot of boasting about what this government has done for skilled trades. However, this budget includes a \$1.2-billion cut to funding for colleges and universities. Every member should be aware that 80% of apprenticeship training is delivered by public colleges. When you destabilize public colleges by taking away funding, you're forcing those colleges to cut programs, to lay off staff and to harm the local economies in those communities that rely on graduates from those programs. Can the member explain why they are further cutting post-secondary education in Ontario?

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Ms. Laura Smith: I want to thank the member opposite. I want to take another moment to talk about an area north of Thornhill where we're going to be expanding a program that will allow us to create more doctors, specifically family-driven doctors in our riding. I think that everybody has the goal of having more health care workers, and we've done that through the Learn and Stay program. We're doing that with so many of the expanded college programs and university programs that are in the medical arts, that are expanding and allowing other opportunities that are essential not only today, but also to the future of our next community. I think that putting more of a position on what the necessary programs should be is something that I like to look at, especially as a mother.

The Acting Speaker (MPP Andrea Hazell): Further debate?

MPP Lise Vaugeois: I'm going to look at a number of things that particularly affect the north but also really the province as a whole. People may not realize but the wildland firefighting budget has been cut by \$42 million, and that's the second time—it was cut the year before. This is the base budget, so I should clarify that; in theory, the emergency budget is unlimited. However, this base budget—this is how you're going to hire your staff. This is what is going to pay for your training. This is what's going to support people.

At this time, believe it or not, people who are interested in joining the wildland firefighter service have to pay \$1,500 to come and go and get trained. Now, the wages for wildland firefighting are not very good. It starts at around \$25, and the highest pay is, I think, \$37 if you've been there for seven years.

Ms. Sandy Shaw: It's a very dangerous job.

MPP Lise Vaugeois: It's a very dangerous job. It's a very difficult job. I certainly have heard from the firefighters that they're continuing to have really serious difficulty in recruiting. They can't get people to come. They can't get people to stay. I thought briefly that things were getting better. I saw something about permanent jobs, but these are not full-time jobs. All they are are right-of-first-refusal jobs, and they can still be cut away, so permanent is very impermanent.

We still have not seen any restoration of full-time jobs, which is what we had prior to the Mike Harris government when those jobs disappeared. Last year, we were successful in getting presumptive cancer coverage for wildland firefighters. This was a very big step ahead. But people here may recall that we were also promised that the categorization of wildland firefighters was going to be changed, so that they had the same status as structural firefighters, even as volunteer firefighters, but they don't. They're forest rangers. It's a lower category. This was promised to us by the Minister of Labour, who then said, "Oh no, I can't do that. That has to be done by the Treasury Board." So we're still waiting to see that classification, that promise fulfilled.

There was also an interesting article that CBC ran about training community members to be kind of the first line of defence. There are pros and cons to that. Certainly, if a community could do a fire cut, a protection cut, that might be useful. But what's interesting to me was that there was a three-year period when the Canadian Armed Forces were training people from the Canadian Rangers from northern communities. They would do a modified SP100 fire training in their fall training camps, delivered at a regional fire response base in the north. The Canadian Armed Forces loved it, and some of the graduates of that program actually became wildland firefighters, but then, in the latest budget, it's not there. It's cut. So that program no longer exists, which is really too bad. We know that we're going to have a very, very difficult fire season this year. It has already resulted in tragedy in other parts of the country.

There's a section in the budget that talks about forestry. It talks very positively about the government's commitment to forestry, but there's no mention of Terrace Bay. The Terrace Bay mill closed just about a year ago, and the people of Terrace Bay are still waiting. What I have learned from people in the forestry industry is that we actually need—pulp and paper goes along with cutting and using up a lot of the—I've forgotten the word for it, but I'm going to call it scraps. It's not really scraps, but it's not the logs that are in the forest. It's very important that those materials actually get used, because otherwise it's a tinderbox.

A boreal forest reaches a certain age, and it becomes much more prone to fire. So if the wood is not being cut or there's a lot of wood being cut but it can't be delivered anywhere—it's not being used in a pulp and paper mill—then we've actually left a greater fire hazard in our region, in these northern forests. So again, I am hopeful that something is happening in the background to help Terrace Bay bring that mill back to life and bring it up to the state of the art. However, the people of Terrace Bay have heard absolutely nothing for a very long time.

Then there is community infrastructure. The town of Schreiber—and the government knows about this—has been really having a very hard time because their water treatment plant and their sewage treatment plant is so old, it keeps falling apart. They can't get parts anymore because the new parts actually have to be machined, so there's no way to get parts for that system. The brand new CAO of Schreiber, the first letter she got was from the federal government saying, "We're going to throw you in jail if you guys don't upgrade your sewage treatment system, your water treatment system." So nothing has happened.

The problem is that most of the infrastructure funding that is available is to build new housing. But you can't invest in new housing if you cannot provide the infrastructure for the people who already live in your community.

There is another fund that communities can access, and that's the Ontario Municipal Partnership Fund, but there's not that much money in it. In fact, the town of Schreiber has already used it up, for the next few years, to upgrade their electrical system that's also connected to the water treatment plant. So there's nothing; there's nowhere for them to go.

We should recognize—I think it's interesting—that in 2010, the Ontario Municipal Partnership Fund was actually \$650 million. It was cut to \$500 million. That was actually in the previous Liberal government. It's gradually creeping its way up. So we're up to \$600 million in 2026. But I can tell you that's not going to help the people in Schreiber, and that's very, very disappointing. I see that there's money for tourism. Schreiber and Terrace Bay could also have investments in tourism. But you've got to have infrastructure first. You can't just have people coming to a community that can't process its waste water.

Now, I had an interesting meeting today—I'm going to zigzag a little bit—with Feed Ontario, and we were looking at ODSP and OW rates. ODSP is 53% below the

disability-adjusted poverty line. OW is 66% below the poverty line. It is shameful. We know this is the case. So why are there—is the number as big as a million people, accessing food banks now across the province and 80,000 not able to afford a place to live? Well, if they had enough money to live on—I can tell you there are an awful lot of precarious labourers working many jobs, but not enough to keep a roof over their head. Living wages, a respectable living wage for people on ODSP, and OW needs to come up.

In addition, rent control. The first thing this government did when they came into power, apart from cancelling the basic income program, which was a breach of contract—the other thing they did was eliminate rent control. And guess what's happened? Rental costs are completely out of control. In fact, not only are rents so high, we've lost two buildings in Thunder Bay that were affordable apartments. They're now short-term rentals. They're all Airbnbs now.

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Also, this government has been asked a number of times to actually have a standardized provincial law about charging the MAT tax, the municipal accommodation tax, to Airbnbs, but it's kind of left to each municipality to sort that out. But clearly, it's a problem.

So when we're looking at why there is so much poverty—and this is poverty that has grown and grown over the seven years of this government; it's really shocking, at the same time as housing starts are way down in this province. It's kind of a puzzle to me that we've had all these bills over the last seven years to hurry up and build housing, and yet the housing isn't being built.

I looked also with interest at the health care budget, and I see that there is money for primary health care teams. What's interesting about that is that that is for creating new teams in places where people don't have access at all to primary health care. So that's a good thing. However, there's no additional money for the existing family health teams that are the centre of primary care in all of the northern communities outside of Thunder Bay. In fact, they haven't had an increase in their base funding to match inflation in over 10 years. So they are dying. They're dying because the funding is not there.

So on the one hand, we could say, "Yes, we want to support primary health care." We all agree that team-based health care is the way to go. But we actually have team-based health care in a number of our communities, but it's being underfunded and they're really, really struggling.

Another piece of that is that those family health teams cannot pay nurse practitioners the same rate as the hospitals can pay them. So no sooner do they get nurse practitioners at the family health teams, as soon as there's an opening at the hospital, of course they move because it's \$50,000 more a year. So we need to be looking really carefully at how these institutions are funded but also how these wages are established, because there needs to be equity in wages regardless of where you're working—based on your experience and your responsibility, but not on whether you're working with a family health team or

you're working in a hospital or you're working in home care.

I was very disappointed that under the seniors' section in the budget—there is some more money for active living programs. I love those programs. They're very effective. I see that in different communities I visit, people really take advantage of those programs. But that's not the only thing that seniors have to deal with. The biggest thing I hear about is home care. Why can't we get home care consistently? Because PSWs who do home care are paid very badly. They're not even paid for their travel time. I've heard of one PSW who actually has to pay for a cab to get to work to do the 15 minutes that she's going to get paid for and then pay for another cab to get to the next location. So it's no wonder that PSWs—if somebody else calls up from a different location, maybe a seniors' home or a hospital, and says, "We need you to come in," of course they come in because they're going to get paid more, and the people are left waiting at home.

Again, it's critical that we be looking at how those pay scales are structured. Home care is just as important as other kinds of care, especially for people with disabilities, for seniors who need that care, but it needs to be reliable. Why would we say, "Well, when you reach the age of whatever"—70, 80; in the case of my mom, 97—why it's okay to say, "Oh, yes, well, she's 97. She can wait all day for a PSW to come. What the heck? She's not working. She's a nobody, so who cares?" That's a pretty awful thing to do to anybody. I can tell you, it's distressing. But it also means that they're not getting the care. The care is not coming. So that is something I really think needs to be addressed.

The Northern Health Travel Grant still doesn't come close to paying the actual cost for northerners to receive health care. The government knows this. I think the mileage rate is still 41 cents a kilometre. Well, we get paid—what do we get paid? Sixty or is it 68 now? Anyway, it's a lot more than the rates that people living in northwestern Ontario are given. The other thing is that they have to wait four to six weeks to get a refund which will not actually equal the amount of money that it costs them to access health care.

There's \$280 million in the budget to create for-profit surgical centres. As the member from Nickel Belt mentioned earlier, we have hospital space that's not being used and is already paid for; the public has already paid for it. So why on earth would we be taking public money to increase profits, to even create new surgical centres that are going to be receiving profits out of public funds? It's not right. That's not what public money is for. Public money is to make sure that we are looking after one another. Profits are not part of that equation. That's not why people pay taxes. That's not what they're looking for.

I have quite a lot of things here and hardly any time. I knew that would happen, but whatever.

A lot of people are not going to be aware that this is the case: Do people realize that there has been a cut to youth funding for summer jobs? There's a wonderful organization in Thunder Bay called the Regional Multicultural

Youth Council, and it has been run by Moffat Makuto for over 30 years. They've been getting funding from YES, Youth Employment Services, for the last 30 years. Every summer, they sponsored students who wanted to learn work skills, gain work experience for references, explore career options—to work with the support of senior peer mentors and coaches and develop a work ethic to thrive in the work world. So you can imagine their shock when they were told by Youth Employment Services that the summer program is gone. It's been around for 30 years; it's gone. They certainly didn't know in advance that that was disappearing, and it's a huge disappointment and lack of opportunities for these young people.

Highways: Can I possibly talk about highways and highway funding in only three and a half minutes? Ontario

is the only part of Canada that has not four-laned the Trans-Canada Highway. As we've mentioned so many times in this Legislature, safety on those highways, particularly in northern Ontario, is a major issue. In fact, it is the issue that I hear most about. It doesn't matter where I go or what conference I attend, people will come up to me and say, "Thank you so much for making as much noise as possible about the safety of our highways because something needs to change."

People are dying. We know there's corruption at DriveTest. We know that drivers are—

The Acting Speaker (MPP Andrea Hazell): It's now time for private members' public business.

Debate deemed adjourned.

Report continues in volume B.

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Calandra, Hon. / L'hon. Paul (PC)	Markham—Stouffville	Minister of Education / Ministre de l'Éducation
Cerjanec, Rob (LIB)	Ajax	
Cho, Hon. / L'hon. Raymond Sung Joon (PC)	Scarborough North / Scarborough-Nord	Minister for Seniors and Accessibility / Ministre des Services aux aînés et de l'Accessibilité
Cho, Hon. / L'hon. Stan (PC)	Willowdale	Minister of Tourism, Culture and Gaming / Ministre du Tourisme, de la Culture et des Jeux
Ciriello, Monica (PC)	Hamilton Mountain / Hamilton-Mountain	
Clancy, Aislinn (GRN)	Kitchener Centre / Kitchener-Centre	
Clark, Steve (PC)	Leeds—Grenville—Thousand Islands and Rideau Lakes / Leeds— Grenville—Thousand Islands et Rideau Lakes	Government House Leader / Leader parlementaire du gouvernement
Coe, Lorne (PC)	Whitby	
Collard, Lucille (LIB)	Ottawa—Vanier	Third Party House Leader / Leader parlementaire de parti reconnu
Cooper, Michelle (PC)	Eglinton—Lawrence	
Crawford, Hon. / L'hon. Stephen (PC)	Oakville	Minister of Public and Business Service Delivery and Procurement / Ministre des Services au public et aux entreprises et de l'Approvisionnement
Cuzzetto, Rudy (PC)	Mississauga—Lakeshore	
Darouze, George (PC)	Carleton	
Denault, Billy (PC)	Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke	
Dixon, Jess (PC)	Kitchener South—Hespeler / Kitchener-Sud—Hespeler	
Dowie, Andrew (PC)	Windsor—Tecumseh	
Downey, Hon. / L'hon. Doug (PC)	Barrie—Springwater—Oro-Medonte	Attorney General / Procureur général
Dunlop, Hon. / L'hon. Jill (PC)	Simcoe North / Simcoe-Nord	Minister of Emergency Preparedness and Response / Ministre de la Protection civile et de l'Intervention en cas d'urgence
Fairclough, Lee (LIB)	Etobicoke—Lakeshore	

Member and Party / Député(e) et parti	Constituency / Circonscription	Other responsibilities / Autres responsabilités
Fedeli, Hon. / L'hon. Victor (PC)	Nipissing	Chair of Cabinet / Président du Conseil des ministres Minister of Economic Development, Job Creation and Trade / Ministre du Développement économique, de la Création d'emplois et du Commerce
Fife, Catherine (NDP)	Waterloo	
Firin, Mohamed (PC)	York South—Weston / York-Sud— Weston	
Flack, Hon. / L'hon. Rob (PC)	Elgin—Middlesex—London	Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing / Ministre des Affaires municipales et du Logement
Ford, Hon. / L'hon. Doug (PC)	Etobicoke North / Etobicoke-Nord	Premier / Premier ministre Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs / Ministre des Affaires intergouvernementales Leader, Progressive Conservative Party of Ontario / Chef du Parti progressiste-conservateur de l'Ontario
Fraser, John (LIB)	Ottawa South / Ottawa-Sud	Leader, Third Party / Chef du troisième parti
French, Jennifer K. (NDP)	Oshawa	First Deputy Chair of the Committee of the Whole House / Première Vice-Présidente du Comité plénier de l'Assemblée législative
Gallagher Murphy, Dawn (PC)	Newmarket—Aurora	
Gates, Wayne (NDP)	Niagara Falls	
Gélinas, France (NDP)	Nickel Belt	
Gilmour, Alexa (NDP)	Parkdale—High Park	
Glover, Chris (NDP)	Spadina—Fort York	
Gretzky, Lisa (NDP)	Windsor West / Windsor-Ouest	
Grewal, Hardeep Singh (PC)	Brampton East / Brampton-Est	
Gualtieri, Silvia (PC)	Mississauga East—Cooksville / Mississauga-Est—Cooksville	
Hamid, Hon. / L'hon. Zee (PC)	Milton	Associate Solicitor General for Auto Theft and Bail Reform / Solliciteur général associé responsable de la Lutte contre le vol d'automobiles et de la Réforme relative aux mises en liberté sous caution
Hardeman, Ernie (PC)	Oxford	
Harris, Hon. / L'hon. Mike (PC)	Kitchener—Conestoga	Minister of Natural Resources / Ministre des Richesses naturelles
Hazell, Andrea (LIB)	Scarborough—Guildwood	Third Deputy Chair of the Committee of the Whole House / Troisième Vice-Présidente du Comité plénier de l'Assemblée législative
Holland, Hon. / L'hon. Kevin (PC)	Thunder Bay—Atikokan	Associate Minister of Forestry and Forest Products / Ministre associé des Forêts et des Produits forestiers
Hsu, Ted (LIB)	Kingston and the Islands / Kingston et les Îles	
Jones, Hon. / L'hon. Sylvia (PC)	Dufferin—Caledon	Deputy Premier / Vice-première ministre Minister of Health / Ministre de la Santé
Jones, Hon. / L'hon. Trevor (PC)	Chatham-Kent—Leamington	Minister of Agriculture, Food and Agribusiness / Ministre de l'Agriculture, de l'Alimentation et de l'Agroentreprise
Jordan, John (PC)	Lanark—Frontenac—Kingston	
Kanapathi, Logan (PC)	Markham—Thornhill	
Kernaghan, Terence (NDP)	London North Centre / London- Centre-Nord	
Kerzner, Hon. / L'hon. Michael S. (PC)	York Centre / York-Centre	Solicitor General / Solliciteur général
Khanjin, Hon. / L'hon. Andrea (PC)	Barrie—Innisfil	Minister of Red Tape Reduction / Ministre de la Réduction des formalités administratives
Kusendova-Bashta, Hon. / L'hon. Natalia (PC)	Mississauga Centre / Mississauga- Centre	Minister of Long-Term Care / Ministre des Soins de longue durée
Leardi, Anthony (PC)	Essex	Deputy Government House Leader / Leader parlementaire adjoint du gouvernement
Lecce, Hon. / L'hon. Stephen (PC)	King—Vaughan	Minister of Energy and Mines / Ministre de l'Énergie et des Mines
Lennox, Robin (NDP)	Hamilton Centre / Hamilton-Centre	
Lumsden, Hon. / L'hon. Neil (PC)	Hamilton East—Stoney Creek / Hamilton-Est—Stoney Creek	Minister of Sport / Ministre du Sport
Mamakwa, Sol (NDP)	Kiiwetinoong	Deputy Leader, Official Opposition / Chef adjoint de l'opposition officielle
McCarthy, Hon. / L'hon. Todd J. (PC)	Durham	Minister of the Environment, Conservation and Parks / Ministre de l'Environnement, de la Protection de la nature et des Parcs
McCrimmon, Karen (LIB)	Kanata—Carleton	

Member and Party / Député(e) et parti	Constituency / Circonscription	Other responsibilities / Autres responsabilités
McGregor, Hon. / L'hon. Graham (PC)	Brampton North / Brampton-Nord	Minister of Citizenship and Multiculturalism / Ministre des Affaires civiques et du Multiculturalisme
McKenney, Catherine (NDP)	Ottawa Centre / Ottawa-Centre	
McMahon, Mary-Margaret (LIB)	Beaches—East York	
Mulroney, Hon. / L'hon. Caroline (PC)	York—Simcoe	President of the Treasury Board / Présidente du Conseil du Trésor
Oosterhoff, Hon. / L'hon. Sam (PC)	Niagara West / Niagara-Ouest	Minister of Francophone Affairs / Ministre des Affaires francophones Associate Minister of Energy-Intensive Industries / Ministre associé des Industries à forte consommation d'énergie
Pang, Billy (PC)	Markham—Unionville	
Parsa, Hon. / L'hon. Michael (PC)	Aurora—Oak Ridges—Richmond Hill	Minister of Children, Community and Social Services / Ministre des Services à l'enfance et des Services sociaux et communautaires
Pasma, Chandra (NDP)	Ottawa West—Nepean / Ottawa-Ouest—Nepean	Deputy House Leader / Leader parlementaire adjointe de l'opposition officielle
Piccini, Hon. / L'hon. David (PC)	Northumberland—Peterborough South / Northumberland—Peterborough-Sud	Minister of Labour, Immigration, Training and Skills Development / Ministre du Travail, de l'Immigration, de la Formation et du Développement des compétences
Pierre, Natalie (PC)	Burlington	
Pinsonneault, Steve (PC)	Lambton—Kent—Middlesex	
Pirie, Hon. / L'hon. George (PC)	Timmins	Minister of Northern Economic Development and Growth / Ministre du Développement et de la croissance économique du Nord
Quinn, Hon. / L'hon. Nolan (PC)	Stormont—Dundas—South Glengarry	Minister of Colleges, Universities, Research Excellence and Security / Ministre des Collèges et Universités, de l'Excellence en recherche et de la Sécurité
Racinsky, Joseph (PC)	Wellington—Halton Hills	
Rae, Matthew (PC)	Perth—Wellington	
Rakocevic, Tom (NDP)	Humber River—Black Creek	
Rickford, Hon. / L'hon. Greg (PC)	Kenora—Rainy River	Minister of Indigenous Affairs and First Nations Economic Reconciliation / Ministre des Affaires autochtones et de la Réconciliation économique avec les Premières Nations Minister Responsible for Ring of Fire Economic and Community Partnerships / Ministre responsable des Partenariats économiques et communautaires pour le développement du Cercle de feu
Riddell, Brian (PC)	Cambridge	
Rosenberg, Bill (PC)	Algoma—Manitoulin	
Sabawy, Sheref (PC)	Mississauga—Erin Mills	
Sandhu, Amarjot (PC)	Brampton West / Brampton-Ouest	
Sarkaria, Hon. / L'hon. Prabmeet Singh (PC)	Brampton South / Brampton-Sud	Minister of Transportation / Ministre des Transports
Sarrazin, Stéphane (PC)	Glengarry—Prescott—Russell	
Sattler, Peggy (NDP)	London West / London-Ouest	
Saunderson, Brian (PC)	Simcoe—Grey	
Schreiner, Mike (GRN)	Guelph	
Scott, Chris (PC)	Sault Ste. Marie	
Scott, Laurie (PC)	Haliburton—Kawartha Lakes—Brock	
Shamji, Adil (LIB)	Don Valley East / Don Valley-Est	
Shaw, Sandy (NDP)	Hamilton West—Ancaster—Dundas / Hamilton-Ouest—Ancaster—Dundas	
Skelly, Hon. / L'hon. Donna (PC)	Flamborough—Glanbrook	Speaker / Présidente de l'Assemblée législative
Smith, Dave (PC)	Peterborough—Kawartha	
Smith, David (PC)	Scarborough Centre / Scarborough-Centre	
Smith, Hon. / L'hon. Graydon (PC)	Parry Sound—Muskoka	Associate Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing / Ministre associé des Affaires municipales et du Logement
Smith, Laura (PC)	Thornhill	
Smyth, Stephanie (LIB)	Toronto—St. Paul's	
Stevens, Jennifer (Jennie) (NDP)	St. Catharines	
Stiles, Marit (NDP)	Davenport	Leader, Official Opposition / Chef de l'opposition officielle Leader, New Democratic Party of Ontario / Chef du Nouveau Parti démocratique de l'Ontario
Surma, Hon. / L'hon. Kinga (PC)	Etobicoke Centre / Etobicoke-Centre	Minister of Infrastructure / Ministre de l'Infrastructure
Tabuns, Peter (NDP)	Toronto—Danforth	
Tangri, Hon. / L'hon. Nina (PC)	Mississauga—Streetsville	Associate Minister of Small Business / Ministre associée des Petites Entreprises

Member and Party / Député(e) et parti	Constituency / Circonscription	Other responsibilities / Autres responsabilités
Thanigasalam, Hon. / L'hon. Vijay (PC)	Scarborough—Rouge Park	Associate Minister of Mental Health and Addictions / Ministre associé délégué à la Santé mentale et à la Lutte contre les dépendances
Thompson, Hon. / L'hon. Lisa M. (PC)	Huron—Bruce	Minister of Rural Affairs / Ministre des Affaires rurales
Tibollo, Hon. / L'hon. Michael A. (PC)	Vaughan—Woodbridge	Associate Attorney General / Procureur général associé
Triantafilopoulos, Effie J. (PC)	Oakville North—Burlington / Oakville-Nord—Burlington	Deputy Speaker / Vice-Présidente Chair of the Committee of the Whole House / Présidente du Comité plénier de l'Assemblée législative
Tsao, Jonathan (LIB)	Don Valley North / Don Valley-Nord	
Vanthof, John (NDP)	Timiskaming—Cochrane	Opposition House Leader / Leader parlementaire de l'opposition officielle
Vaugeois, Lise (NDP)	Thunder Bay—Superior North / Thunder Bay—Supérieur-Nord	
Vickers, Paul (PC)	Bruce—Grey—Owen Sound	
Wai, Daisy (PC)	Richmond Hill	
Watt, Tyler (LIB)	Nepean	
West, Jamie (NDP)	Sudbury	
Williams, Hon. / L'hon. Charmaine A. (PC)	Brampton Centre / Brampton-Centre	Associate Minister of Women's Social and Economic Opportunity / Ministre associée des Perspectives sociales et économiques pour les femmes
Wong-Tam, Kristyn (NDP)	Toronto Centre / Toronto-Centre	