

Hansard Thursday, May 15, 2025

(Ontario Budget, Supportive Housing, Post Secondary Funding, Indigenous Economic Development)

Ontario budget

Mr. Terence Kernaghan: Today is budget day, a pivotal moment for Ontario. With an ever-shifting economic threat, now, more than ever, is the time for a bold, transformative and inspirational vision. Ontario needs to invest in the nation-building infrastructure that supports people. Build affordable homes like lives depend on it, because they do.

Invest in all levels of education, as well as training, upskilling and apprenticeships in a meaningful way. Fully fund needs-based therapies for autism and all exceptionalities for young people; you will change lives and save money.

Invest in care, not profit. Stop US-style profit-mongers from snatching care dollars from our treasured public health care system.

Develop an Ontario intellectual property research, development and innovation pipeline, to stop our bright ideas being homed in the US through our inaction and lack of investment.

Pay nurses and health care workers equitably, no matter what domain of health care in which they practise. Stop shifting precious public dollars into private pockets with agency nursing.

Get people on social assistance above the poverty line by doubling ODSP and OW.

Creative industries are economic development. The arts bring us together, build communities and are a key critical investment at this time.

Support our amazing non-profits, who are stepping in where the government has failed.

Attract talent: scientists, professors, thinkers, artists and experts wishing to flee Trump's dangerous regime. Bring the brain drain north. And invest in people, not profits for the already wealthy few.

Supportive housing

M^{me} Lucille Collard: People in my riding of Ottawa–Vanier are watching closely, hoping that today's budget will finally address the homelessness crisis with real investment in affordable housing.

We know that a housing-first approach to homelessness is not only more effective, but it's actually cost efficient—more than the shelter model—especially when we factor in the savings for our health care system and our justice system.

The government knows our communities are suffering because of the consequences of homelessness, but punishing people is not a solution. Housing is a provincial responsibility, yet time and time again, this government has passed the buck, leaving municipalities and front-line organizations to clean up the mess.

Will the government announce new investments in supportive housing today, or will it once again disappoint the people and communities across Ontario?

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): I recognize the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing.

Hon. Rob Flack: Speaker, I think we've acknowledged many, many times it takes too long and it costs too much to get any type of housing built in Ontario—supportive, affordable, purpose-built rentals, market housing—period. That is why we introduced Bill 17 this week, protecting

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Ontario by building faster and smarter. If you take a look at some of the initiatives within that bill, you will see that that is exactly what we're doing.

I would also add that we continue to support our municipal partners' massive infrastructure dollars: \$2 billion, plus \$400 million more announced this week. We continue to support our municipal partners. Take a look at who's supporting this bill: AMO, all key municipal partners in Ontario and all building industry organizations.

That being said, we're going to see results. More of the same isn't working. We're getting it done by building faster and smarter.

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

M^{me} Lucille Collard: Some of the people experiencing homelessness need more than a roof. They need supportive housing and access to mental health care if they are ever going to get back on their feet.

The homelessness and opioid crises are devastating our communities. In Ottawa–Vanier, our streets are reaching a breaking point. What is needed is a serious, coordinated, all-hands-on-deck response.

So I ask again, will this budget finally invest in the outreach, treatment and supportive housing people urgently need, or will this government continue to watch from the sidelines while communities fall apart?

Hon. Rob Flack: We continue to invest in the homelessness crisis. We continue to invest for supportive housing. Let's take a look at some of these investments: \$75.5 million last fall to end encampments and support wraparound treatments for those in most need; \$700 million in homelessness prevention funding; and close to \$550 million dollars in treatment centres in this province—wraparound services. Nine have opened in April. We're going to continue to look at these investments.

This Minister of Health continues to support this initiative day in and day out and so does this government, so does this caucus. We're going to get it done for the people of Ontario.

University and college funding

Ms. Peggy Sattler: My question is to the Premier. Speaker, for years, Ontario colleges and universities have struggled with the lowest per-student funding in Canada, while this government sat back and allowed international student tuition to keep our system afloat.

Now our post-secondary institutions are sinking. In the last year, over 450 programs have been suspended, with hundreds more expected to shut down. Entire campuses have closed. Thousands of staff are being laid off.

Speaker, when will this government provide the permanent increase in base funding that our colleges and universities urgently need?

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

Hon. Nolan Quinn: Our focus has not changed, and maybe the member opposite missed the fact that we just invested \$750 million into STEM programming across our sector. That's 20,500

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new seats in the STEM sector, on top of the 70,000 graduates that we are graduating on an annual basis in the STEM programming.

Speaker, we will continue to stand with the sector and have conversations with them. On top of the \$1.3 billion that we invested last year, we've invested over \$2 billion in the last 16 months. That's on top of the \$5 billion that we invest annually into the system.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): I recognize the member for London West.

Ms. Peggy Sattler: Speaker, expanding STEM seats is not enough if our colleges and universities can't keep the doors open. And it's not just STEM grads who are needed to strengthen our economy and our province. It's health care grads, business grads, manufacturing, tourism and, yes, liberal arts. Instead, local employers can't find the grads that they need. Students are being turned away from high-demand programs because of enrolment caps, and the vital campus services that support students are being cut.

Speaker, why is this government standing by while our post-secondary sector collapses?

Hon. Nolan Quinn: Two billion dollars in investments in 14 months is not standing by at all. We know our colleges and universities are building Ontario's workforce for decades to come. That's why, instead of giving in to the opposition's request to just throw more taxpayer dollars in, prolonging a systemic issue, we're taking a comprehensive approach with the sector to strategically invest in critical areas that will benefit Ontario's economy.

The people of Ontario elected our government, Speaker, because they know it's this government that will make fiscally responsible decisions and it's this government that will maintain Ontario's reputation of having a world-class post-secondary education system.

As I just mentioned, our government strategically invested three quarters of a billion dollars into STEM programs that funded almost 21,000 new STEM seats annually to develop a talented workforce, whether that's in health care, EV, automotive or life sciences. Our government is leading the shift in higher education to prepare students for the jobs of tomorrow. We have committed to a funding model review in advance of 2027-28. As we always have, we will continue responsibly and—

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): I recognize the member for Beaches–East York.

Indigenous economic development

Ms. Laura Smith: This question is for the Minister of Indigenous Affairs and First Nations Economic Reconciliation. First Nations have a long history of leadership in this province. They know the land and the opportunities that it holds. That's why it's critical that our government continues to work with First Nations on major projects.

It means job growth and real economic power for those communities. It's about building strong partnerships, and that's why Ontario recently hosted the eighth annual First Nations Major Projects Coalition conference. It brought together leaders, investors and innovators, and it focused on creating real partnerships, building trust and removing those barriers. It was about making sure that First Nations have a tool to lead in infrastructure, mining and energy.

Can the minister please share how our government is supporting First Nations on these important projects?

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Hon. Greg Rickford: Thank you to my friend the MPP for Thornhill, the amazing PA for Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing.

Listen, Saskatoon; London, England; Toronto; Montreal—all places, destinations, where major conferences were being held, I was invited to come as a panellist or a speaker. These were investors at the London Stock Exchange, Indigenous business leaders in Saskatoon and London, and entrepreneurs in mining, innovation and petroleum electricity transmission corridors who wanted to know from this politician why Ontario government was doing so well in its partnerships with First Nations, and how they could partner as equity partners, capital partners or business partners in the exciting things that are going on here across Ontario.

Madam Speaker, these are the kinds of partnerships that are redefining the relationship between our government and First Nations—hope, opportunity and prosperity for First Nations communities.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): Question?

Ms. Laura Smith: Thank you to the Minister for his continued leadership, not only in his community but across the province of Ontario. Supporting First Nations leadership in major projects means creating jobs, building strong communities and unlocking new economic opportunities. Our government is working with First Nations like Webequie and Marten Falls to advance critical road projects, and these projects are so essential. The Northern Road Link and community access roads connect people to jobs and businesses. We're also partnering with Aroland First Nation. We're supporting skills, training, infrastructure upgrades and energy projects. This ensures that communities benefit from economic growth.

Can the Minister please share how our government is helping First Nations communities build lasting economic opportunities and strengthen their economy—

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): Back to the minister for a response.

Hon. Greg Rickford: Well, it's these economic and community partnerships that I mentioned earlier that are redefining the relationship not just between the government and First Nations communities, but among Indigenous business leaders from across the country, financiers from across the pond over there in London.

Madam Speaker, it's an incredible opportunity to be able to participate in these partnership agreements, and they're not just confined to the Ring of Fire area, the corridor to prosperity. We're building new community partnership agreements there. The mighty Berens River will have a bridge built across it led by a First Nations community. The southwest council—the First Nations in southwestern Ontario—are partnering with us on a number of key initiatives to give hope, opportunity and prosperity a real meaning for all First Nations communities from one end of this province to the next. We think that's a good thing.

Plan to Protect Ontario Act (Budget Measures), 2025

Mr. Bethlenfalvy moved first reading of the following bill :Bill 24, An Act to implement Budget measures and to enact and amend various statutes.

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