

Together, let's build Ontario ^[1]

Speech from the Throne

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EXCERPTS:

Speaker of the House,

Honourable Members, ladies

and gentlemen, people of Ontario:

Honorables députés, Ontariennes et Ontariens.

I want to start by acknowledging that we are on lands traditionally occupied by Indigenous peoples. They continue to care for this land, they continue to shape Ontario today – and I want to show my respect.

Traditionally, Toronto has been a gathering place for many Indigenous nations including the Anishinabeg, the Haudenosaunee, the Wendat and Métis peoples. I acknowledge we are meeting in the area covered by Treaty 13, also known as the Toronto Purchase, and I pay my respects to the Mississaugas of the Credit.

As the representative of Her Majesty the Queen, it is my privilege to open the first session of the 43rd Parliament by delivering the Speech from the Throne.

And I wish to congratulate the members present today, both new and returning. You have been entrusted by the people of Ontario to ably and thoughtfully represent their interests.

This is a responsibility none should take lightly. The decisions made at Queen's Park, the people's legislature, are far-reaching. They touch every person in every part of the province.

As members you will disagree, sometimes if not often passionately and with conviction. That is the nature of a healthy democracy.

However, with the province, country and world having been through so much, and as we face new and looming challenges, now is not the time for partisanship and ideology to trump the virtues of partnership and collaboration. The people of Ontario rightly expect their government to work with others in common cause and in service of delivering real solutions.

They can have confidence that their government will do just that. Because now is the time for unity.

A unity of people. A unity of purpose.

Here in Ontario, across Canada and around the world, we are witnessing a growing sense of uncertainty with no historical precedent for the unique circumstances facing the global economy.

New variants of COVID-19 are having an uneven impact on different regions of the world, with some countries implementing economically disruptive measures once again.

Inflation has hit levels not seen in almost four decades, with no broad consensus on the speed with which it will return to normal levels.

Global supply chains first disrupted by the pandemic remain stressed, further exacerbated by Russia's unprovoked war of aggression in Ukraine.

With nearly 370,000 jobs currently unfilled, Ontario is facing a generational labour shortage with the lowest rate of unemployment since 1989.

And unprecedented spending throughout the pandemic has created new fiscal challenges here in Ontario and across Canada that will require prudent economic management in the months and years to come.

It is sometimes easy to consider these challenges in the abstract, but they have real and significant consequences on the lives of hard-working people and businesses.

People are now paying more for every day goods like groceries and gas, putting increased strain on household budgets, particularly for low-income families. Long-planned vacations are being put on hold as small family pleasures like a meal out at a favourite local restaurant become just a little out of reach.

Businesses of all sizes are struggling to find the skilled women and men they need to grow, or the parts they need to take on more orders. Amidst this scarcity, the rising cost of labour and supplies may in turn increase the cost of goods being sold to consumers.

Taken together, these looming fiscal and economic challenges cannot be understated or ignored. They must be confronted head on.

And there are no easy solutions.

In response to growing inflationary pressures, the Bank of Canada has started to increase its policy interest rate. While the full impact of this response is currently unclear, Ontario, like the rest of Canada and North America, must be prepared for the possibility of a near-term economic slowdown.

Even as the province, country and world navigate a period of uncertainty, your government can be sure of the fundamentals of a strong, vibrant and successful province and economy.

Low taxes and a competitive business environment that attracts investments and creates good jobs.

A highly skilled workforce prepared for the jobs of today and tomorrow.

Roads, highways and other critical infrastructure that help get goods and services to market sooner.

Livable and safe communities with good schools and high-quality hospitals and long-term care homes, as well as convenient transit options.

Over the past four years, Ontario has come so far.

The province's automotive and manufacturing sectors are breathing new life. Shovels are in the ground on transformational transit and transportation projects. More women and men are entering rewarding careers in the skilled trades.

Now is the time to redouble these efforts.

Your government is steadfast in its commitment to a path forward focused on economic growth, not painful tax hikes or spending cuts. And to achieve this growth, the province will continue implementing its ambitious plan to build Ontario.

Together, let's build a health system that better cares for patients and keeps our province open.

While COVID-19 remains with us today, Ontario has the tools to manage the virus and live with current variants for the long term, without returning to lockdowns.

That's because Ontario has one of the highest COVID-19 vaccination rates in the world, with booster doses now available for all adults.

The recent approval of a pediatric COVID-19 vaccine by Health Canada has meant the distribution of thousands of new doses specifically developed for the youngest and bravest of Ontario's patients.

At-home antiviral medications are helping to keep thousands of people healthier and out of hospitals, particularly those most at risk of negative health outcomes.

Free rapid antigen tests continue to be provided directly to Ontarians, as well as to workplaces, schools, hospitals, long-term care and retirement homes.

Over 145,000 standalone HEPA filter units have been deployed to improve the safety of spaces like schools, child-care centres and hospitals, as well as long-term care and retirement homes.

And this fall, Ontario expects Health Canada to approve a new COVID-19 vaccine that will better target and protect against Omicron variants of the virus. When available, the province will be ready to get shots into arms as quickly as possible.

It is nothing short of remarkable how quickly the world's scientific community has and continues to develop breakthroughs that are protecting people's health and keeping them out of hospital.

These same breakthroughs are helping to provide a level of stability that will be critical as your government continues to support the health system recover and rebuild as our province and economy stay open.

After decades of underfunding, your government has made unprecedented investments in the health system to add over 3,500 new hospital beds and thousands more nurses and personal support workers to care for patients.

Your government eliminated requirements for Canadian work experience that disadvantaged internationally trained health-care professionals and continues to work with regulatory colleges to ensure more qualified newcomers to Ontario are helping to care for patients, not waiting in limbo for years on end.

Rural and remote regions have for years now struggled to attract health-care professionals. That is why Ontario introduced the new Learn and Stay grant, which pays for the full cost of tuition and supplies for high-priority health professionals like nurses in return for committing to practice in an under-served community after graduation.

Ontario is also investing \$1 billion more to expand home and community care so more people can receive the support they need at home rather than in the hospital.

And Ontario recently launched the largest expansion of medical school enrolment in over a decade to increase access to family and specialty doctors across the province.

Your government is also making the largest investment in the province's history to build and expand hospitals across Ontario. Communities like Brampton, Windsor, Ottawa and Niagara – places that have for years been advocating for health infrastructure that meets the needs of their growing regions – will soon see shovels in the ground.

And Ontario is on track to make good on its commitment to build 30,000 new long-term care beds by 2028, with 31,705 new and 28,648 upgraded beds now in development. With these new beds under construction, the province is investing nearly \$5 billion over four years to hire the more than 27,000 new staff that will be needed to provide long-term care home residents an average of four hours of direct care per day by 2025.

While these historic investments have helped to support the province's health system through the most challenging period in modern history, there's no question it, like health systems across Canada, continues to experience significant pressures, including an exhausted workforce and increasingly stressed emergency departments.

Amidst these pressures, Ontario's health system continues to provide care to those who need it. Nine out of 10 high-urgency patients are finishing their emergency visit within target times. Surgeries are happening at nearly 90 per cent of pre-pandemic levels.

More can still be done.

Your government is actively engaging with health-system partners to identify urgent, actionable solutions and will implement whatever measures are needed to help ease immediate pressures, while also ensuring the province is ready to stay open during any winter surge.

As your government addresses short-term stressors, it will continue to invest in and advance meaningful reform that in the long term builds a stronger, more resilient health system that better meets the needs of patients.

For example, Ontario Health Teams, which are integrating care and helping to take the guesswork out of navigating a complex system, will soon reach full provincial coverage as they help to increase the digital and virtual

care options available to patients. Community paramedicine programs are leveraging the considerable talents of the province's paramedics to care for people at home, rather than in hospital or long-term care. The province will continue to work with system partners to safely expand scopes of practice so that qualified professionals can do more to help their patients, alleviating pressures in other parts of the health system.

Ontario will also continue to make historic investments to implement Roadmap to Wellness, your government's plan to build a connected and comprehensive mental health and addictions system. This roadmap will reduce wait times for services, helping to avoid crisis care that requires hospitalization. Ontario is also working with Runnymede Healthcare to build the first-ever centre dedicated to treating post-traumatic stress injury for first responders, who carry a special weight for us as they protect our communities.

As the province continues to pursue these reforms, it will not be limited by conventional thinking that stifles innovation and preserves a status quo that struggles to respond to growing challenges and changing needs. Instead, guided by the best evidence and the successes of other jurisdictions, your government will take bold action that prioritizes patients and their health above all else.

It's what Ontarians deserve. It's what the women and men working on the frontlines of our health system need.

These efforts will only benefit from the federal government paying its fair share of health-care funding. Like every other province and territory from coast to coast to coast, Ontario continues to urge the federal government to increase its share of provincial-territorial health-care spending from 22 per cent to 35 per cent through the Canada Health Transfer.

Together, let's build an economy with better jobs and bigger paycheques.

Ontario is now firmly on track to become a leading electric vehicle production capital of North America.

Over the past two years, the province has secured a string of historic investments in its automotive sector worth nearly \$16 billion, including \$5 billion to build Canada's first large-scale electric vehicle battery plant. These investments are creating thousands of new direct jobs in communities like Windsor, Oshawa and Loyalist and will support hundreds of thousands of indirect jobs across Ontario.

These investments and jobs are no accident.

For the past four years, your government has been hard at work creating the conditions for a stronger economy. Ontario has reduced the cost of doing business by \$7 billion annually. At the same time, your government has kept taxes for people and businesses low, while making strategic investments to improve the province's competitive advantage.

Clean, green steel is by far the best example.

With the support of the provincial and federal governments, Algoma Steel in Sault Ste. Marie and ArcelorMittal Dofasco in Hamilton are making generational investments to transition to electric-arc furnaces, powered by clean Ontario energy. These two projects alone are the equivalent of removing nearly two million cars off the road every year.

And by helping to meet the growing global demand for low-carbon automobile production, clean steel is a critical selling feature as Team Ontario fights for every dollar of investment in the province's economy.

These efforts are only supported by Ontario's abundant supply of critical minerals, including nickel, cobalt and lithium.

Recognizing the unprecedented potential, the province has released its critical minerals strategy, a five-year blueprint to better connect mines and minerals in the north with the manufacturing might in the south, including Ontario's growing electric vehicle and battery manufacturing capacity.

The cornerstone of this strategy is found in the Ring of Fire.

Located approximately 500 kilometers northeast of Thunder Bay and covering about 5,000 square kilometers, the Ring of Fire is one of the most promising mineral development opportunities in the world and represents a transformative opportunity for multi-generational development.

A project of this size and scale requires an unyielding commitment to partnership and cooperation.

By working collaboratively with First Nations partners, the province is now in the late stages of environmental assessments and design work to build the first two sections of the road to the Ring of Fire.

And recently, chiefs from Webequie and Marten Falls First Nations submitted the terms of reference for the Northern Road Link, the third and final road necessary to complete the all-season connection to the province's highway system.

This "Corridor of Prosperity" will not only bring economic growth and opportunity to northern and First Nations communities, it will also unlock the full potential of Ontario's economy.

Your government is investing in and connecting every part of the automotive supply chain. The cars of the future will be built in Ontario from start to finish by Ontario workers, delivering better jobs and bigger paycheques to hard-working women and men.

From minerals to manufacturing, the province is building up home-grown supply chains that will ensure every region and every worker benefit in this once-in-a-generation opportunity.

In the months and years ahead, your government will continue to do what has served this province's economy so well: cut red tape, keep taxes low, foster an environment that attracts global capital and make targeted investments that strengthen Ontario's competitive advantage.

Amidst growing uncertainty, the road ahead will not always be easy.

But Ontarians can rest assured that their government is and will remain relentlessly focused on protecting the strength of the province's economy.

That is why your government's first act will be to re-table Ontario's Plan to Build, the 2022 provincial budget, which provides a clear roadmap for the years ahead as your government navigates looming economic uncertainty. Your government also recognizes the need to support those who aren't able to participate in the province's economy, particularly as inflation drives the cost of living higher. Ontario's Plan to Build will now include a five per cent increase in payments made through the Ontario Disability Support Program. In the coming months, your government intends to introduce changes that will increase ODSP rates annually, tied to inflation.

Your government will always be there to support those who need it.

Together, let's build the highways, roads and transit infrastructure needed to keep Ontario moving.

Over the coming decade, Ontario is expected to grow by more than two million people. As it does, it has never been more important to invest in building transportation infrastructure.

Doing so is in equal parts a social and economic imperative.

Clogged roads and gridlocked highways not only keep busy moms and dads from getting home to their children sooner; they trap transportation trucks from getting goods to market, costing more than \$11 billion across Ontario's economy every year.

Ontario cannot afford to hold its economy back. Now is the time to build.

Your government is investing a historic \$86.6 billion over the next 10 years to build and expand roads, highways and transit infrastructure across Ontario, including Highway 413 and the Bradford Bypass.

Highway 413 will serve Halton, Peel and York regions and will bring real relief to the most congested transportation corridor in North America. It will reduce travel times by up to 30 minutes each way during rush hour on their commute, saving drivers up to one hour per day and five hours per week.

The Bradford Bypass will serve the rapidly growing communities of Simcoe County and York Region and help alleviate traffic in the Greater Toronto Area by saving drivers up to 35 minutes per trip compared with existing routes on local roads.

Your government's investments in roads and highways are not confined to communities around Toronto.

Widening Highway 3 from two to four lanes between Essex and Leamington. Rebuilding more than 21 kilometers of Highway 101 through Timmins. And twinning the Garden City Skyway bridge along the Queen Elizabeth Way over the Welland Canal. Each of these projects,

among many others, will help to reduce gridlock and support economic growth across the province.

As part of its historic investment, your government is also building the next generation of transit infrastructure, including the largest subway expansion in Canadian history with the all-new Ontario Line subway.

The province is also investing in expanding GO train service to Bowmanville, London and Niagara and to the people of northeastern Ontario: your government will bring the Northlander train to Timmins and back home to Cochrane, restoring a key passenger rail line that will better connect the north to central and southern Ontario.

Together, let's build the workforce we need today for the jobs of tomorrow.

Amidst high rates of employment, Ontario is facing a generational labour shortage.

It is welcome news that so many businesses in the province are looking to hire. But employers' inability to find workers to fill jobs is costing Ontario's economy.

It's never been more important to get more women and men trained for rewarding careers in the skilled trades.

That is why your government is investing more than \$1 billion in a skilled trades strategy to reduce the harmful stigma around the trades, particularly for

women and young people, while expanding training opportunities to help build the most highly skilled workforce in North America. This includes expanding three-year college degrees for in-demand fields and partnering with union-led training centres to provide people with the skills they need for new and exciting job opportunities.

Your government is also breaking down barriers that prevent out-of-province workers and newcomers from finding good jobs in the trades.

Ontario has the jobs. The world has the talent.

As your government continues its extensive efforts to get more women and men into the skilled trades, it is once again calling on the federal government to urgently double the number of skilled workers that are allowed to immigrate to Ontario each year.

Your government has been clear: the current allotment falls far short of what the province's economy needs.

As your government takes action to fill immediate labour gaps, it is also taking a longer-term view of building the workforce of tomorrow.

With close to one out of every five job openings set to be in the skilled trades by 2025, your government is ensuring that students learn the skills they need for these rewarding careers.

After the past two years of pandemic disruptions, it has never been more important for students to be in classrooms learning, preparing for the jobs of the future.

Ontario's Plan to Catch Up starts with students back in classrooms, on time and with a full school experience that includes extracurriculars like sports, clubs and field trips. Nothing is more important.

It also includes new tutoring supports to help fill gaps in learning.

As a first step, your government launched a new province-wide tutoring program supported by a landmark \$175 million investment, the largest of its kind in the country. On average, nearly 50,000 students are benefitting from this program each week.

Ontario's students and their parents can always use a little extra help.

When re-introduced, the 2022 budget will now include an additional \$225 million over two years to provide direct payments to parents to help their kids catch up.

This funding, which will put money directly into parents' pockets, is on top of the more than \$26.6 billion the province is investing in public education, the most ever in Ontario's history.

These new and expanded supports will be critical as students catch up on their learning today and prepare to participate in the dynamic economy of tomorrow.

Together, let's build more homes that people can afford.

Region: Ontario ^[3]

Tags: affordable child care ^[4]

provincial funding ^[5]

Canada wide agreement ^[6]

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<https://news.ontario.ca/en/speech/1002230/together-lets-build-ontario> [3] <https://childcarecanada.org/taxonomy/term/7856> [4]

<https://childcarecanada.org/category/tags/affordable-child-care> [5] <https://childcarecanada.org/category/tags/provincial-funding> [6]

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