



2019 ONTARIO BUDGET

# PROTECTING WHAT MATTERS MOST

BUDGET SPEECH

The Honourable Victor Fedeli  
MINISTER OF FINANCE

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Toll-free English and French inquiries: 1-800-337-7222

Teletypewriter (TTY): 1-800-263-7776

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*Budget de l'Ontario 2019 : Protéger l'essentiel – Allocution*

Mister Speaker,

Today, we are presenting the first *Budget* of our government's mandate, a plan for the people, by the people and, most importantly, a plan that puts the people first.

Under the leadership of Premier Doug Ford, our government has started down a path to balance so that we can protect what matters most: our vital services such as health care and education.

We are working smarter, spending smarter and reinventing the way government serves the people. And we are taking steps to attract businesses, create jobs, and provide opportunities for our emerging engineers, nurses and tradespeople.

Our government's approach is both thoughtful and measured — and is built on a foundation of four clear priorities.

- First — We are restoring accountability and trust by introducing a credible, sustainable and fully costed plan that will return the province to fiscal balance in five years. In fact, our plan is projected to generate average savings and cost avoidance of about eight cents for every dollar spent.
- Second — We are protecting what matters most by adopting bold new ways to deliver world-class services, such as health care and education, while supporting our front-line workers.
- Third — We are putting people first by making life more affordable and convenient with a new Childcare Access and Relief from Expenses (CARE) tax credit, a plan to make auto insurance more accessible and affordable, an expanded rapid transit system, and a reduced Estate Administration Tax.
- And Fourth — We are making Ontario Open for Business and Open for Jobs by lowering business costs, and making it easier for employers to hire workers and for workers to find a job.

Our government stands firmly on the side of hard-working taxpayers. That's why the *2019 Budget* contains no new tax increases. Not one.

This *Budget* builds on the hard work that our Cabinet and Caucus have been doing since taking office. In nine short months, our government has achieved hundreds of initiatives for the benefit of individuals, families and businesses, such as:

- Cancelling the cap-and-trade carbon tax;
- Cutting corporate income taxes through the Ontario Job Creation Investment Incentive;
- Introducing our Low-income Individuals and Families Tax (LIFT) Credit;
- Building new schools in high-growth areas; and
- Adding new long-term care beds, more hospital beds and repairs and upgrades to dozens of hospitals across Ontario.

We have made tremendous progress, but there is much more to do. And to be blunt, the challenge before us is daunting.

## **THE INHERITED FINANCIAL MESS**

Nobody should underestimate the mess we inherited.

When the Independent Financial Commission of Inquiry completed its review of Ontario's books, one thing became abundantly clear: not only were the cupboards bare, but the fiscal house was on the verge of collapsing under the weight of the massive debt and deficit.

The previous government's spending was out of control. They were spending \$40 million a day more than they were taking in. Under their watch, the deficit grew to \$15 billion and the debt ballooned to more than one-third of a trillion dollars. In fact, interest on debt is the fourth largest line item in the budget after health care, education and social services.

Under the previous government, individuals, families and businesses were saddled with skyrocketing taxes, increasing fees and escalating hydro bills. Ontario's manufacturing sector was being hollowed out as more than 300,000 manufacturing jobs disappeared. The previous government — paralyzed by scandal — often seemed content to stand by and watch.

Ontario deserves better. And on June 7<sup>th</sup> last year, the people of Ontario voted for something better — Premier Doug Ford and his *Plan for the People*.

## **RESTORING FISCAL BALANCE IN A RESPONSIBLE AND SUSTAINABLE MANNER**

Restoring trust, accountability, and transparency is foundational to our plans to build a fiscally sustainable government and protect the critical services we all cherish.

Balancing the budget is a critical first step to protecting our core services.

Balancing the budget requires discipline, determination and an appetite to take a different approach to government; to modernize, digitize and make our services and programs more efficient while protecting our front-line workers.

That is the path our government has chosen. We have created a fully costed and sustainable plan that will take us to balance in five years. This is both reasonable and responsible.

We are pleased to report that in the short time we've been in office, the deficit has been reduced by \$3.3 billion to an estimated \$11.7 billion for this past fiscal year.

And our government is projecting to reduce the deficit further by more than a billion dollars in the 2019–20 fiscal year, lowering it to \$10.3 billion.

There is still a long and difficult road ahead, but our determination is absolute — we will return Ontario to a balanced budget on the schedule we are setting out today.

At the same time, we know that talk is cheap. This is why we are backing up this commitment with an iron-clad guarantee that will change the culture of government.

As part of the budget legislation, our government is proposing a new robust accountability framework called the Fiscal Sustainability, Transparency and Accountability Act. This represents the first comprehensive change to Ontario's fiscal planning legislation in 15 years.

In addition, the proposed Act would require the government to deliver the *Budget* by March 31<sup>st</sup> of each year.

And perhaps most importantly, the proposed Act would include an "Accountability Guarantee" for both the Premier and the Minister of Finance. They would each be required to pay a fine equal to 10 per cent of their Premier and Ministerial salaries for each missed reporting deadline.

We are quite literally putting our money where our mouths are.

While it's important to slay the deficit, it is equally as important to face our mounting debt burden head on.

Ontario has the largest subnational debt on the planet. Over the past decade, the previous government allowed the debt to more than double to \$347 billion, or about \$24,000 for every man, woman, and child in the province. A truly staggering number.

Interest payments on this debt are more than the entire budget of most Ontario ministries and are currently forecast to be \$13.3 billion this fiscal year. Every dollar that goes to interest is a dollar that can't go to another home-care worker, fixing another school or reducing taxes. Every single day, the people of Ontario are paying for the excesses of the past in a very real and painful way.

This grave situation needs to be addressed. We will direct any unused money from the reserve and the contingency fund, as well as any unspent dollars at the end of the year, towards debt reduction.

Our government has also put an end to the so called "March Madness." Sadly — we are not talking about basketball, but instead referring to the habit of a government year-end spending spree. This is fundamentally disrespectful to the taxpayer and — on behalf of the Premier, we are pleased to report that it's gone. It's done.

Balancing the budget will be an all-of-government effort. We are looking at every program, and every agency, board and commission to drive efficiencies, find cost savings and enable the transformation and modernization of government services. We are also reviewing our capital investments and putting them at a level that is more sustainable.

During the provincial election Premier Ford promised to find savings of four cents on every dollar. Our government has nearly doubled that and found about eight cents for every dollar spent. This is enabling the government to provide a projected \$26 billion over six years in much needed relief to individuals, families and businesses. All this while protecting front line jobs.

Leading this complex multi-year planning process is our colleague Peter Bethlenfalvy, the President of the Treasury Board. His efforts have already resulted in substantial savings and cost avoidance.

## **PROTECTING WHAT MATTERS MOST**

Members of the opposition are quick to grandstand whenever we talk about balancing the budget.

If we discontinue one program because it is well past its “best before date,” they scream from the hilltops and declare it is a “cut.”

It’s a reaction that is as predictable as it is irresponsible.

Because the basic math is irrefutable — it is only by returning to fiscal balance that we can continue to invest in the critical programs such as health care, education and other services that the people of Ontario have come to rely upon.

Balancing the budget is not just some random goal — it is both a fiscal and a moral imperative that is in the public interest. Balancing the budget is how we protect the things that matter most.

### **Child Care**

Ask any parent and they will tell you that one of the things that matters most to them is child care. The previous administration took an outdated and rigid “government knows best” approach. We disagree. Why don’t we let parents decide what child care options work best for them?

That’s why our government is proposing a new Ontario Childcare Access and Relief from Expenses tax credit, or CARE for short. The CARE tax credit would provide families with low and moderate incomes up to \$6,000 per child under the age of 7; up to \$3,750 per child between the ages of 7 and 16; and up to \$8,250 per child with a severe disability.

This new CARE tax credit would provide about 300,000 families with up to 75 per cent of their eligible expenses for child care in centres, home-based care, camps, and other settings.

The CARE tax credit would be one of the most flexible child care initiatives ever introduced in Ontario, putting parents at the centre of the decision making process: not bureaucrats and politicians.

In addition, our government will be providing up to \$1 billion over the next five years to create up to 30,000 child care spaces in schools. These centres could be operated by for-profit or not for-profit operators, and will offer children a safe learning environment and the opportunity to grow in a familiar setting.

## Health Care

Our government believes that it's time patients are put at the centre of our health care system.

For too long, previous governments have been pouring massive amounts of money into a system that is siloed, fragmented and extremely complicated to navigate. It has led to longer wait times and hallway health care.

This has to change. It starts with putting the patient first. And that means giving patients a seamless health care experience, regardless of who is treating them or where this treatment occurs, and removing the stress for their families.

In an effort to end hallway health care, our government is moving towards an integrated delivery model and establishing Ontario Health Teams. These Ontario Health Teams will organize care delivery according to the needs in their local communities, ensuring that patients come first and that precious dollars are redirected to front-line services.

Our government will reduce the bloated health care bureaucracy and tear down the administrative silos by consolidating the six existing provincial health agencies and the 14 Local Health Integration Networks into a new, single agency.

We will also be providing approximately \$17 billion in capital grants over the next decade to modernize and increase capacity at our hospitals.

To support our aging seniors, our government is well on its way to creating 15,000 new long-term care beds. We are also committed to upgrading an additional 15,000 long-term care beds to modern design standards. This initiative would represent an investment of \$1.75 billion over the next five years.

At least two-thirds of low-income seniors do not have access to dental insurance. Untreated oral health issues represent a significant burden on the health care system and contribute to hospital overcrowding. This is why our government is investing \$90 million to establish a new dental program for seniors.

The mental health and addictions system in Ontario has been challenged for too long by extensive wait times, barriers to access, inconsistent quality, a lack of standardized data, and widespread fragmentation. This is why our government is investing \$3.8 billion over 10 years to support community health and justice services, supportive housing, and acute mental health inpatient beds.

The health care system is immense in size and scope, and tremendously complicated. We are confident that, under the leadership of the Deputy Premier and Minister of Health and Long-Term Care, Christine Elliott, the health care system will continue to improve for the benefit of all individuals and families.



We also applaud the Minister of Seniors and Accessibility, Raymond Cho, for his work with some of our most vulnerable citizens.

## Education

In many ways, the future of our province is tied to the quality of our education system. This is the training ground for our next generation of leaders; our scientists and engineers, plumbers and electricians.

Unfortunately, the previous government failed our children when it came to teaching the basics.

This lack of foundational knowledge has left too many of our kids ill-prepared for the challenges of the modern world. Our math scores have declined over the past 10 years, as many students struggled to meet the minimum provincial standard.

Our approach will be different. We are getting back to basics, respecting parents, and working with teachers to ensure our kids develop the skills they need to succeed in a highly competitive job market.

Our government held the largest public consultation on education in Ontario's history. This feedback helped develop our new, comprehensive plan entitled "Education that Works for You."

Our plan includes reforms, such as:

- A new math curriculum that will focus on math fundamentals for all grades;
- A renewed focus on science, technology, and engineering, along with a new focus on the skilled trades and financial literacy; and
- A modern and age-appropriate Health and Physical Education curriculum that will keep students safe.

While we take steps to help move Ontario students to the head of the class, our opponents are quick to question our financial commitment to education.

Let me be perfectly clear, our government is planning to increase funding to the education sector by \$1 billion over the next three years — to more than \$30 billion.

We are making a substantial investment in our children, in our future.

We have taken great care to build a sustainable education plan where no teacher is being fired, despite what our opponents often claim.

Our hope and expectation is that our partners in Ontario's teachers unions will join us in this incredibly important journey.

Leading these reforms is the Minister of Education, Lisa Thompson. We believe the work she is doing will enable our students to find good career-oriented jobs in the modern global economy.

## Supporting Students and Skilled Workers

The students of today are the workforce of tomorrow. To help them succeed, our government is making a college or university education more affordable. For the first time in Ontario's history, the government is reducing student tuition, saving parents and families about \$450 million. At the same time, we are leaving even more money in students' pockets by empowering them to choose which student fees they pay.

We are also reforming the Ontario Student Assistance Program by putting it on a sustainable footing and focusing the program on those who need it most. Starting this September, our government will ensure 82 per cent of grants will go to students with a family income of less than \$50,000, up from 76 per cent under the previous government.

In order to equip more people with skills that are in demand, our government is increasing apprenticeship opportunities, and transforming employment and training services in the province.

We plan to do this by establishing a new governance framework through proposed new legislation to replace the *Ontario College of Trades and Apprenticeship Act*. Our plan would encourage employer participation in the apprenticeship system through a new financial incentive program. It would also create a new one-window digital portal for apprentices and promote the skilled trades as a pathway choice for younger students.

We applaud the Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities, Merrilee Fullerton, for helping prepare even more people for the world of work.

## Reforming Social Assistance

Ontario's employment and training programs are not sufficiently focused on helping job seekers, including social assistance recipients, find and keep jobs.

In order to improve labour market outcomes and reduce the administrative burden in the employment and training system, our government is integrating social assistance employment services into Employment Ontario.

These reforms will provide wrap-around supports to help social assistance recipients address barriers and access to employment supports.

To help people on Ontario Works find employment faster, recipients could earn up to \$300 per month without reducing their assistance. And Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP) recipients will get greater flexibility through an annual exemption of \$6,000 in earnings per year, up from \$200 per month.

We applaud the Minister of Children, Community and Social Services, Lisa MacLeod, for her passion and determination to protect and support our most vulnerable citizens.

## Safety and Security

Protecting innocent, law-abiding citizens is a top priority of our government.

One person killed by gun violence is one too many. Regrettably, the number of victims has been on the increase. To combat gun- and gang-related violence, our government is investing \$16.4 million over two years to create a provincewide community safety strategy. This will include establishing a provincial Guns and Gangs Support Unit to assist local police officers and prosecutors.

This funding is in addition to the \$25 million flowing to the City of Toronto over four years to help combat gangs and gun violence, and the \$2 million committed to supporting enforcement initiatives in the City of Ottawa.

Through our *Comprehensive Police Services Act*, we are finally treating our men and women in the police services with the respect they deserve.

We want to applaud the Attorney General, Caroline Mulroney, and the Solicitor General, Sylvia Jones, for their leadership in this area.

## Housing and Municipalities

The dream of home ownership has been out of reach for many first-time homebuyers, especially in large urban centres like Toronto. In order to break down the many barriers for prospective buyers and builders, our government is developing a Housing Supply Action Plan. This Action Plan will make it easier to develop the right mix of housing where it is needed, lower the costs of development and make it easier to develop rental housing.

And we want to ensure our municipal partners are getting the maximum value for every dollar they spend. That is why our government is providing one-time funding of \$200 million to assist 405 municipalities improve efficiency.

We applaud the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing, Steve Clark, who has developed an excellent relationship with our many valued municipal and housing partners.

## Environment

To tackle climate change and other environmental challenges, our government developed a Made-in-Ontario Environment Plan. It affirms our commitment to protect the environment without burdening households and businesses with ineffective policies, such as the federal government's job-killing carbon tax.

Instead of a punishing carbon tax, our government would establish a \$400 million emissions reduction fund to speed up the deployment of low-carbon solutions and encourage private-sector investment in clean technologies.

We congratulate the Minister of Environment, Conservation and Parks, Rod Phillips, for his determination to protect our air, water and magnificent landscape for future generations.

## **PUTTING PEOPLE FIRST**

Our government is putting people first. Everything we do, every decision we make, every dollar we spend, must meet one simple test, is this good for the people?

For too long, government has refused to embrace a customer-first service model, because it didn't have to. It was government.

But times have changed and the government has changed. We are moving the province into the 21<sup>st</sup> century. We are taking steps to improve consumer choice and convenience, and revolutionizing the way we deliver and expand services, like transportation.

## Transportation

A reliable, efficient and accessible transportation network is critical if we are to drive our economy forward and protect the environment. It allows people to get to and from work more quickly, allows them to be more productive at their jobs, and, perhaps most importantly, allows them to spend more time at home with their families.

Our current regional GO rail network is realizing only a fraction of its potential. This is why we are implementing the largest increase in GO rail service in five years. We are committed to moving towards two-way, all-day service every 15 minutes in core segments of the network. This includes additional GO rail service along the Kitchener Line during the morning and afternoon rush hours, as well as year round weekday GO rail service to Niagara Falls and St. Catharines.

We are committed to building a modern, efficient rapid transit system. By uploading the TTC's subway network to the province, we would be creating a truly integrated regional transit system. This would allow the province to get projects built better, faster and cheaper, which is good news for taxpayers and commuters.

Our government is making the single largest capital contribution to new subway builds and extensions in Ontario's history. We are committing \$11.2 billion, of a total cost of \$28.5 billion, to support four rapid transit projects in the GTA — more than doubling the initial commitment we made during the campaign.

The four projects would be the Yonge North Subway Extension, the Scarborough Subway Extension, the Eglinton Crosstown West Extension and a new subway, the Ontario Line, a more functional version of the downtown relief line.

Our government is also supporting the Ottawa Light Rail Transit Stage 2 project and the light rail transit project in Hamilton.

And to keep people moving in the North, our government will continue to review the transportation needs in this vast part of the province, including the return of passenger rail and enhanced bus services.

We are expanding our transit systems, but we are also expanding other vital transportation infrastructure. Our government is making smart investments in provincial highways, roads and bridges, with projects around Kenora, London, Pickering, Mississauga and Peterborough.

These major infrastructure projects are critical to the future growth of our province and we applaud both the Minister of Transportation, Jeff Yurek, and the Minister of Infrastructure, Monte McNaughton, for their leadership.

## Auto Insurance

When it comes to driving, it is clear that Ontario's auto insurance system is broken — and drivers deserve better. This is why our government is making transformative changes to the province's auto insurance system.

It starts with giving drivers more options when deciding which auto insurance coverage suits their needs and gives them more control over their rates. We will make it easier and faster for insurance companies to offer drivers new discounts and coverage options that were not previously available.

In addition, we will introduce a Driver Care Card, which will streamline access to care by providing important information that will make the claims process easier to navigate.

And we will adopt a “care, not cash” default clause to ensure that a driver's auto insurance coverage will pay for treatment instead of costly legal fees. It will also provide for an improved early treatment system, and a return to the default benefit limit of up to \$2 million for those who are catastrophically injured in an accident.

We extend our appreciation to MPP Doug Downey, the Parliamentary Assistant to the Minister of Finance, for his excellent work on the auto insurance file.

We also thank Milton MPP Parm Gill, whose Private Member's Bill on eliminating postal code discrimination in the insurance industry, would provide an even greater amount of fairness to drivers in Ontario.

## Alcohol Reform

The cornerstone of putting people first is consumer choice and convenience. This is why our government is taking steps to modernize the way we sell, distribute and consume alcohol in Ontario.

Consider this; there are more than 8,000 retail stores in Quebec selling beverage alcohol, but less than 3,000 retail stores in Ontario. The time for change is long overdue.

That's why our government is proceeding with a plan to expand the sale of beer and wine to corner stores, big box stores, and even more grocery stores.

In the meantime, we are moving ahead with several initiatives to enhance consumer choice and convenience. We are creating a tailgating permit for eligible sporting events; introducing legislation permitting municipalities to create alcohol consumption areas, such as parks; and extending hours of alcohol service at licensed establishments allowing them to start serving alcohol at 9 a.m.

## Gaming

Today, people throughout the province spend an estimated \$500 million a year gambling online, with the vast majority of the money going to grey-market websites. Our government intends to treat adults like adults and establish a competitive market for online legal gambling. This will increase consumer choice while protecting consumers from illegal websites.

In addition, our government will continue to press the federal government to legalize single sport wagering in Canada. This form of gambling is already in several U.S. states and it is threatening jobs right here in Ontario.

## Simpler, Better, Faster Government Services

At the same time, we are modernizing the services we provide to the people of Ontario.

To make government work better, we are moving forward with a digital-first strategy that will bring government services into the 21st century. To start, we will digitize ServiceOntario's top 10 transactions which include the issuing of driver's licences, vehicle permits and health cards. This will shift approximately 10 million in-person transactions to digital channels, with savings of up to \$33.5 million over the next five years.

Our government is also taking steps to make our internal systems more efficient.

We recently announced the creation of a central procurement system to dramatically change the way government makes purchases. By employing this bulk buying power, we will be able to save taxpayers as much as \$1 billion a year.

We also embarked on an ambitious effort to ensure all government activities reflect and reinforce a renewed brand standard, including a refreshed Trillium. This new visual identity will replace the expensive patchwork of brands that exist across government today. The centrepiece of this initiative will be a new Ontario licence plate that sends a clear message to people both at home and abroad — that Ontario is "A Place to Grow." We have been clear — we want to drive a new culture throughout Ontario and this branding will signal that change.

Leading this revolutionary change is the Minister of Government and Consumer Services, Bill Walker. We congratulate him on these excellent initiatives.

## **OPEN FOR BUSINESS, OPEN FOR JOBS**

There was a time when Ontario was the engine of Confederation. It was the envy of the country, with a robust manufacturing sector, competitive costs, and a highly skilled and educated workforce.

After a decade and a half of economic mismanagement by the previous government, our engine is sputtering. Ontario has been trailing the national average in real GDP growth for most of the past 16 years.

But the word is quickly spreading that times have changed. Ontario is once again Open for Business and Open for Jobs. Our government has moved quickly to address our fiscal challenges and to create a pro-jobs environment. This includes the passage of the *Making Ontario Open for Business Act*, which, among other things, maintained the minimum wage at \$14 per hour.

We applaud the Minister of Labour, Laurie Scott, for her leadership on this important initiative.

### **Auto Plan**

For decades, Ontario's economy has benefited from the strength of the auto sector. It supported hundreds of thousands of direct and indirect jobs in communities across the province. But clearly the sector continues to change, and it is not always for the better.

Our message to all manufacturers — and their union leaders — is clear: there is a new government in Ontario. Do not make your decisions based on the failed ideological policies of the past 15 years. Let's work together to build the kind of competitive environment that will create and keep jobs here in this province.

For our part, we have already introduced Driving Prosperity: a 10-year plan that sets out a vision for how industry, the research and education sectors, and all three levels of government can work together to strengthen the industry. Driving Prosperity is supported by three strategic pillars: competitiveness, innovation, and talent.

In addition, our government is supporting the reduction of payroll taxes, peeling away layers of red tape, and lowering hydro costs. Clearly, we are making progress and seeing results. We applaud the Minister of Economic Development, Job Creation and Trade, Todd Smith, for his leadership and vision on this critically important file.



## Fighting the Carbon Tax

While our government takes deliberate steps to make Ontario open for business and open for jobs, the federal government is taking deliberate steps to make the cost of nearly everything more expensive. On April 1<sup>st</sup>, Ottawa imposed a job-killing carbon tax on the people of Ontario and three other Canadian provinces.

Our government considers the carbon tax to be a clear and present threat to the affordability of life's basic necessities. It will also increase costs for automotive manufacturing, transportation, mining and forestry, putting thousands of jobs at risk.

The federal government insists on punishing individuals, families and businesses in Ontario despite the fact that Ontario already leads Canada in greenhouse gas reduction targets.

We are planning to fight the carbon tax head on. We are challenging this tax in court and we are proposing to introduce the Federal Carbon Tax Transparency Act, which would ensure consumers are aware of the impact of the federal carbon tax on gasoline prices at the pump. In addition, we will present a public campaign to educate people about the real cost of the carbon tax, while informing people about our Made-in-Ontario Environment Plan.

It should be clear to all of us: a carbon tax is not the only way to fight climate change.

## Supporting Northern Communities

And now for a subject near and dear to my heart. Northern Ontario. As a proud Northerner, we know that Northern Ontario has the potential to make an even greater contribution to the cultural and economic success of our province.

But many Northern communities face unique challenges to growth, including a lack of economic diversification, an aging population, outmigration and gaps in infrastructure.

In the face of these challenges, our government is determined to turn this situation around through a number of initiatives, including:

1. Consulting on a proposal to repeal the *Far North Act* and amend the *Public Lands Act* in order to proceed with critical projects like the Ring of Fire;
2. Creating a Mining Working Group to focus on reducing red tape and attracting major new investments in the mining sector;
3. Developing a Forestry Strategy to increase wood supply and create conditions for the industry to innovate, attract investment and create jobs;
4. Exploring options to share resource revenue with Indigenous partners and Northern communities;
5. Creating more opportunities for Indigenous people and addressing the skilled labour shortage across the North by creating a new Northern Ontario Internship Program, and calling on the federal government to reform the National Occupational Classification Codes; and
6. Developing a Broadband and Cellular Strategy to expand access to rural and remote areas of the province that will allow more people to participate and compete in the digital economy.

We recognize the Minister of Energy, Northern Development and Mines, Greg Rickford, and the Minister of Natural Resources and Forestry, John Yakabuski, for their leadership on these critical initiatives.

## Agriculture

Farmers feed cities. This basic truth is critical to the social and economic well-being of this province. Ontario's agriculture and agri-food sector is diverse, dynamic and a key economic driver. The sector supports more than 822,000 jobs and contributes billions to our economy.

Our government is proposing amendments to the *Farm Products Payments Act* to modernize Ontario's financial protection programs for farm businesses. In addition, we are exploring options to expand the Risk Management Program to better support farmers and producers in managing risks that are beyond their control.

We applaud the Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs, Ernie Hardeman, for his passion and leadership on this important file.

## Francophone Community Grants

Our government is taking steps to stimulate job creation within our Francophone communities.

That's why we are expanding the scope of the Francophone Community Grants Program to include a focus on economic development.

This will allow Francophone businesses, entrepreneurs and not-for-profit organizations to support initiatives that promote both economic and cultural growth.

## Tourism and Culture

Sports are far more than simply playing a game. They help people stay fit and active, learn the value of teamwork and commitment, and provide an opportunity to learn firsthand the benefits of competition.

Ontario's rules and regulations for combative sports such as mixed martial arts, boxing and kickboxing are out of date. This is why our government is planning to introduce new legislation to make it safer for professional and amateur athletes to participate in combative sports.

As well, Ontario's film and television industry generates billions of dollars in production spending and supports tens of thousands of jobs throughout the province. This industry continues to thrive with recent studio expansions such as Pinewood Toronto Studios, the CBS Television Studios in Mississauga, and the launch of the new Netflix production hub on Toronto's waterfront. Our government will continue to offer three refundable film and television tax credits. This will encourage film and television production, and computer animation and special effects.

Our government supports the interactive digital media industry through the Ontario Interactive Digital Media Tax Credit and the Interactive Digital Media Fund. We are committed to streamlining administration of the tax credit, reducing red tape and enabling companies to receive their tax credits faster.

We acknowledge the Minister of Tourism, Culture and Sport, Michael Tibollo, for his efforts to advance culture and athletic excellence throughout the province.

## **CONCLUSION**

To conclude, here are a few thoughts about being a provincial representative at Queen's Park.

As we work in this historic chamber, we are reminded of the tremendous responsibility that rests upon the shoulders of all MPPs. We come from every corner of this vast province for one reason and one reason only, to represent the people of Ontario. It is a position of privilege that is earned through the trust and confidence of the many individuals and families in our local communities.

Our constituents look to us to make thoughtful but difficult decisions that will move Ontario forward. Our government, and all of our members, we are humbled by this responsibility, and are seized with the task ahead.

We know the path will not be easy, but it is absolutely necessary to preserve our quality of life and secure a bright future for generations to come.

Today, our government is reminding the world that we are serious about fiscal sustainability, about protecting front-line services and making Ontario open for business and open for jobs.

This *Budget* marks a new beginning in this province. It is a plan that will lead us to a place where costs are lower. Where tax dollars are respected. Where the government works for the people.

The individuals, families, and business leaders of this great province deserve nothing less.

Promise made, promise kept.