



Ontario's Action Plan

Protecting People's Health and Our Economy

The Honourable Peter Bethlenfalvy
Minister of Finance and President of the Treasury Board

2021 ONTARIO BUDGET SPEECH

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

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Exposé du budget de l'Ontario 2021*

Introduction

Mr. Speaker,

On behalf of the Premier, our government, and every member of this Legislature, I want to begin with a simple “thank you.”

Thank you to the doctors, nurses, personal support workers and other frontline health workers caring for people.

Thank you to every employee and business owner keeping our economy moving and local communities running.

And thank you to the people of Ontario...

For following public health guidance.

And for every act of kindness, consideration and patience that has made this tough time a little easier.

When the story of this past year is written, it will be a story of these acts, big and small, that are remembered.

That is the story of the Ontario Spirit. And it is the story of the *2021 Budget*.

And Mr. Speaker, this is our plan to finish the job we started one year ago.

Because after a year in stormy seas, a safe harbour is finally in sight.

Hope is on the horizon.

At community centres, doctors’ offices, pharmacies and hospitals across our province, Ontario’s health care heroes are delivering vaccines that will help us get back to normal.

That is what hope looks like.

But Mr. Speaker, our difficult voyage is not over.

Land is in sight, but waters remain troubled as we are now in a race against time: vaccines versus variants.

And the government’s job — to protect you, the people of Ontario — is not yet done.

As the pandemic has continued to unfold, people have been very clear that they expect us to focus on two vital priorities:

1. First and foremost, they expect us to protect people's health.
2. And second, they expect us to protect our economy.

That is exactly what this Budget does.

Protecting People's Health

Ontario's total response to COVID-19 is now \$51 billion...

And this next phase of Ontario's Action Plan makes good on the Premier's simple promise to the people — we will do whatever it takes to keep you safe.

Premier Ford has worked day and night to protect our province. His steadfast leadership has saved lives. And his focus on our health has been unrelenting. Thank you Premier.

Mr. Speaker, *Ontario's Action Plan: Protecting People's Health and Our Economy* brings the government's total investment to protect people's health to \$16.3 billion.

Defeating COVID-19

Vaccines

It starts with vaccines.

And the scientists behind the COVID-19 vaccines achieved a scientific miracle.

A human miracle.

By developing safe, effective vaccines in record time, they have also managed to bottle hope in a tiny vial.

Millions of tiny vials in fact, that will eventually close one of the darkest chapters of our lifetime.

The question that remains is how long it will take.

That's why our top priority is getting vaccines in arms. Full stop.

At this very moment, nurses, doctors and pharmacists are vaccinating the people of Ontario...

Today, I am announcing that Ontario is making more than \$1 billion available for our provincewide vaccination plan.

The plan has three phases and activates every available health care resource.

Nothing will prevent us from getting the job done.

For instance, we are investing in a program to provide safe, accessible transportation for persons with disabilities and older adults with limited mobility to get to their vaccination appointment.

And we are dedicating an additional \$50 million to vaccination programs in Indigenous communities — in which so many are at higher risk.

Nobody will be left behind.

To execute a rollout of this size, we have pulled together health care professionals, medical experts and frontline workers across the province.

From truckers to move the vaccines.

To frontline health care workers to administer them.

To an army of volunteers to help make appointments, drive people to vaccination sites or simply encourage a loved one to receive their shots.

Everyone has a role to play.

We are mobilizing Team Ontario.

There are many challenges ahead of us. But having spoken to so many people involved in this effort, I am inspired by their determination and compassion.

They are the fuel that drives the Ontario Spirit.

I invite you to join me in applauding their effort.

Testing

Mr. Speaker, while vaccines are rolling out, continued action is needed to stop the spread.

That requires more testing.

Anyone who needs a test can get a test.

And they can count on getting their results quickly.

Well over 14 million tests have already been completed.

But let me be clear, with vaccines on the horizon and the possibility of more restrictions being lifted, we need more tests, not less.

That's how we can catch new outbreaks and identify the presence of new variants.

And it's why we are ramping up our testing program.

To make it safer to re-engage with our workplaces, schools, businesses and communities, our government is investing \$2.3 billion more for testing and contact tracing in 2021–22, bringing the total investment since the beginning of the pandemic to \$3.7 billion.

Rapid tests are a key part of our strategy...

Going forward, we will provide around 385,000 rapid tests per week in long-term care...

118,000 in retirement homes...

And 300,000 in essential workplaces, like manufacturing, warehouses, construction and food processing.

This ambitious testing strategy continues to ease anxiety, make life safer and ultimately save lives.

And it's an important part of our plan to defeat the pandemic and help get life back to normal.

Hospitals

Mr. Speaker, vaccines and testing help stop the spread.

But when someone gets sick or requires care, a hospital bed must be available.

One of our greatest fears since the beginning of COVID-19 has been running out of hospital space.

Fortunately, we have prevented it from happening.

To ensure every person who requires hospital care can access a bed, even during the worst of the pandemic, we have invested an additional \$5.1 billion since the beginning of COVID-19.

This has created more than 3,100 additional hospital beds — the equivalent of six new large community hospitals.

Like every province, Ontario faces a punishing backlog of surgeries and other procedures.

That's why our Budget makes more resources available to clear the backlog the pandemic has created.

So, we will be keeping operating rooms open late into the night because no patient should be left without the care they need.

More of that care will be delivered in new, modern, bigger and better hospitals.

Today we are accelerating our long-standing work with a more than \$30 billion plan to build, expand and improve hospitals across the province over the next 10 years.

No government has committed to invest more in Ontario hospitals.

This includes a historic and overdue investment for the Peel Region.

Today I am proud to announce we will support the hospital expansion and construction of a new wing at the William Osler Health System in Brampton.

I'd like to thank my colleagues, the member from Brampton West and Brampton South, for advocating for this project.

It is a priority for their constituents. It is a priority for patients. And it is a priority for our government.

In addition, we are working with Trillium Health Partners on a major redevelopment and hospital expansion in Mississauga...

And expanding a hospital in Etobicoke to meet patient needs in these fast-growing communities.

We are supporting the planning of a new regional hospital in Windsor-Essex.

We are doubling capacity of the London Health Sciences Stem Cell Transplant Unit.

We are building a new facility to provide care and treatment to 30,000 families with young patients in Chatham-Kent.

And we are investing in a new children's treatment centre in Ottawa as part of the Children's Hospital of Eastern Ontario...

These are investments that deliver on our commitment to build more hospital beds.

To provide critical infrastructure to match the expertise of our health care workers.

And to ensure patients receive the care they need, when and where they need it.

Fixing Long-Term Care

Protecting Loved Ones in Long-Term Care

Mr. Speaker, while COVID-19 threatens us all, it is the residents and staff in long-term care homes who have suffered the most.

The good news is this, today nearly every long-term care resident in Ontario has been fully immunized.

Cases and deaths in long-term care homes have declined.

This is positive.

But it's only a start.

To protect our loved ones in long-term care from the deadly COVID-19 virus, Ontario is investing an additional \$650 million this year to prevent the spread, increase staffing and buy more supplies, such as masks.

That brings the total additional resources provided since the beginning of the pandemic to over \$2 billion.

Ensuring Access to Long-Term Care

Mr. Speaker, what happened in long-term care homes during the pandemic exposed a tragedy, decades in the making.

We can all agree this tragedy was the result of years of neglect and underfunding in long-term care...

The inaction stops with us. It stops right here.

The previous government took nearly 10 years to build just 611 new beds across the province.

We are building 30,000.

And with this Budget, Ontario is investing an additional \$933 million, for a total of \$2.6 billion, to make good on that commitment.

We are also building four new long-term care homes on an accelerated basis.

Shovels are already in the ground.

And we are investing \$246 million to improve living conditions in existing homes, including ensuring air conditioning for residents.

This will ensure our loved ones live in comfort and with safety, dignity and respect.

Ensuring the Best Care in Canada

But it's not just about beds, Mr. Speaker.

It's also about quality of care.

Last November we committed to ensuring residents receive, on average, four hours of direct care per day. Frankly, they deserved as much a long time ago.

This is an ambitious commitment. It will make Ontario the leader in Canada.

However, there are many hurdles to making it a reality — including the need to hire tens of thousands of new staff to provide the care — something that clearly can't happen overnight.

We will clear the hurdles.

Ontario is investing \$4.9 billion over four years to increase the average direct care to four hours a day.

We will also hire more than 27,000 new positions, including personal support workers (PSWs) and nurses.

And we are not waiting to act. We are investing over \$121 million to support the accelerated training of almost 9,000 personal support workers.

We are very proud of the work personal support workers do.

They sacrifice so much, at personal risk, in difficult conditions. They are frontline heroes and too often forgotten. We will always be there for Ontario's personal support workers.

Mr. Speaker, while we improve long-term care and retirement homes, we are also making it easier for seniors to live in the homes they love, longer.

It's why we are investing \$160 million in the Community Paramedicine Program to bring care and services to the homes of seniors in 33 communities.

Communities like Orangeville and Merrickville. Waterloo and Brant. York Region and Windsor.

Caring for People

Mental Health and Addictions

To reflect the true character of the Ontario people, their government must act with compassion.

That's why better care for our seniors is such an important focus of our Budget.

And it drives our commitment to mental health and addictions treatment and care.

Because Mr. Speaker, mental health IS health. Period.

This phrase is so simple, and yet it represents a monumental shift in our society's recognition that people with mental health and addictions challenges deserve access to the treatment and care they need.

It has driven so many of our actions since taking office — including the Roadmap to Wellness, our \$3.8 billion 10-year commitment to mental health addictions funding, providing more psychology treatment to patients...

And the first Centre of Excellence for mental health in the province's history.

We have a lot of work left to do. COVID-19 has only intensified the need for action.

To help the thousands of people struggling with mental health and addictions issues, our government is making record investments....

Including an additional \$175 million in 2021–22, to provide more and better care for everyone who needs it, bringing our total investment this year to \$525 million.

And we are going to bring support directly to those who need it.

That includes four new mobile mental health clinics to serve rural and underserved communities...

A new program to embed mental health workers in police call centers, to ensure people in crisis get the right support...

And investments to help our uniformed heroes, including veterans and OPP staff.

To anybody tuning in today:

Please reach out to a family member or friend to check in, acknowledge the struggle of those dealing with mental health challenges, or ask for help if you need it.

It's okay not to be okay.

And know this: we will be there to support you.

Domestic Violence

Mr. Speaker, mental health and addictions challenges are not the only challenges that have intensified during the pandemic that may not be obvious.

One that concerns me deeply is the alarming increase in domestic violence.

Every child and every woman deserve to live in a home where they do not have to fear for their safety when they walk through the front door.

I am grateful to my colleague, the exceptional Associate Minister of Children and Women's Issues. She has brought leadership and the perspectives of so many experts to end the travesty that is violence against women and children.

Thank you.

It starts, with a statement of resolve:

Domestic abusers should face severe criminal consequences. The only place for them is behind bars.

While the federal government writes criminal laws, and the justice system enforces them — our government has a role to play in providing more support to the victims.

And this Budget does just that with new investments to expand support services.

We are investing an additional \$18.2 million over three years to protect and support First Nations, Inuit, and Métis woman and girls who can face higher rates of violence than others.

And \$18.5 million to support victims of domestic violence and human trafficking survivors find and maintain safe housing.

We remain committed to supporting victims of domestic violence, human trafficking and other violent crimes.

This is a government that will always stand up for victims.

Because every law-abiding citizen deserves to be protected.

Protecting Our Economy

Mr. Speaker, our investments not only protect people from COVID-19.

They also build a better health care system for tomorrow.

So that in Ontario, people can always receive the care that they need.

Because without healthy people, we can not have a healthy economy.

And Mr. Speaker, that brings me to the second pillar in our plan.

Overwhelmingly, the people and employers of our province have done what it takes to protect each other from COVID-19 — even when these sacrifices have impacted their livelihoods.

We recognize these sacrifices. And today, we are taking further steps to provide direct support to the families, workers and employers who have sacrificed so much.

Ontario's Action Plan: Protecting People's Health and Our Economy brings the government's total investment to protect Ontario's economy to \$23.3 billion.

Supporting Workers and Families

The Ontario COVID-19 Child Benefit

Mr. Speaker, every parent in Ontario has faced new pressures due to COVID-19.

For some, that includes financial challenges caused by the pandemic. For many, it includes new expenses to support virtual learning or child care. And for all, it includes anxiety about their child's future in a world that will look different than it does today.

While our government can't make this pressure go away, we can provide a helping hand.

To put more money in parents' pockets, we are providing a third round of payments through the Ontario COVID-19 Child Benefit.

This announcement today brings the total direct support we have provided families since March to \$1.8 billion.

The payment will be doubled to \$400 per child and \$500 for each child with special needs.

Consider what that means for a family with three young children, including one with special needs.

They will have received \$2,600 through the Ontario COVID-19 Child Benefit.

That is real and meaningful relief.

It won't solve every problem. But it helps. And it's one of the simplest, quickest and most direct ways we can make a difference.

Child Care

Mr. Speaker, few pressures parents face are more significant than the cost of child care.

Nearly every economist I speak with says making child care more affordable is one of the keys to ensuring a robust recovery from COVID-19 — not to mention a vital factor in creating the growth necessary for long-term prosperity.

I also hear it directly from parents.

Too many tell me the high cost of child care will keep them out of the workforce.

And this burden is not borne equally.

Just as the virus hits different people with different levels of severity, so too does the economic impact of the pandemic.

And it is abundantly clear women have been significantly impacted.

While employment among men is currently down by 3.3 per cent, it is down by nearly 5 per cent for women.

In large part, this is because more women have tended to work in the jobs most affected by the necessary public health restrictions.

The challenges have been exacerbated by the high cost and lack of access to child care spaces.

No one should be prevented from getting back to work because they can't afford child care.

So, we are proposing a temporary 20 per cent enhancement to the CARE tax credit for 2021.

This would increase support from about \$1,250 to \$1,500, on average per family.

In total, it would provide about \$75 million in additional relief for over 300,000 families.

This is extra money.

Back into families' pockets.

To cover expenses like child care. After school programs. Even summer camp.

We also need to ensure child care is available to parents.

That's why our government pledged to create 30,000 new child care spaces.

I am pleased to report that we are more than two-thirds of the way to meeting that pledge.

With this new capacity, enhanced CARE tax credit, and the third round of payments to parents, Ontario families will be stronger.

And strong families make a strong province.

Students

Mr. Speaker, we are also supporting students.

COVID-19 has disrupted their routines and changed how they are taught...

And young people have been among those disproportionately impacted by the economic impacts of the pandemic.

So, we are protecting students today...

But also investing in their future success for tomorrow.

We have led the country with close to \$1.7 billion to protect students and keep schools safe, including \$100 million to improve classroom ventilation.

We will also invest \$14 billion over the next 10 years to build and upgrade schools

Like the first new school in Pickering in over 20 years, which will serve 536 students and create 73 licensed child care space.

All told, we are investing \$550 million in the 2020–21 school year to support 16,000 new learning spaces across 28 schools.

Of course, ensuring remote and online learning can be delivered for students has become vitally important during the pandemic, which is why we are investing \$40 million to improve remote learning technology.

This is an important step.

But there is an important factor that is holding our students back.

Broadband

Mr. Speaker, we heard from a principal during the second wave when the public health situation meant classes had to be 100 per cent virtual.

The principal said their rural school was ready to teach online...

Except most of their students didn't have a quality, reliable internet connection.

In the province of Ontario. In the year 2021. That is simply unacceptable.

We are going to fix it with the most ambitious investment in internet connectivity in Canadian history.

To connect homes, businesses and schools to broadband, our government is super charging our investment with another \$2.8 billion, bringing the Province's total investment to nearly \$4 billion over six years.

Just as railways and highways were being built 100 years ago to physically connect this vast province...

Our government will undertake this monumental province-building project to connect people virtually.

So that no student ever falls behind because they don't have internet...

So that no entrepreneur is ever held back from starting the business of their dreams...

And so that no grandparent is ever cut off from their loved ones.

I look forward to holding a videoconference with that school principal to thank her for her advocacy for her students.

A videoconference on a reliable internet connection, delivered through this historic investment.

Ontario Jobs Training Tax Credit

Mr. Speaker, too many of our neighbours lost their jobs since this pandemic began.

Workers in some industries — including hospitality, retail and tourism — have been more affected than others.

So have women, youth and racialized people.

They lost their jobs through no fault of their own, but rather due to the COVID-19 virus that has required unprecedented restrictions on our economy to keep each other safe.

It simply is not fair. And these workers deserve our support getting back to work.

For some, that may mean exploring opportunities in a new industry.

And in many parts of the economy, employers are hiring, including in construction, manufacturing and long-term care.

But this often requires going back to school which costs money at a time when their personal finances may have already been stretched to the limit.

To help workers with their training expenses, the government is proposing a new temporary Ontario Jobs Training Tax Credit for 2021.

It would provide up to \$2,000 per recipient, for 50 per cent of eligible expenses.

This is estimated to provide \$260 million in support for about 230,000 people this year.

Consider what it means for Hope, a 27-year-old who lost her job due to the pandemic.

She decides to go back to school to start a new career. Say her tuition costs \$4,050.

Hope would receive \$2,000 from the Ontario Jobs Training Tax Credit...making retraining a more accessible option to consider.

We are building on this relief with more employment and training support — because we know it makes a difference.

I remember hearing about a worker who had been laid off from a job in manufacturing.

He had used our services to retrain.

And Mr. Speaker, he decided to become a personal support worker...

Turning a personal economic loss into an opportunity to care for people in his community.

We want to help more people like this worker.

So, we are making a \$614 million investment to provide workers with employment and training support...

\$117 million of that is specifically for people most affected, including women, youth, people with disabilities, racialized and Indigenous people.

I want to point out Hope's story is one of many where her career could be in the skilled trades.

As the Minister of Labour, Training and Skills Development never fails to point out, there are more jobs available in the skilled trades than qualified workers.

These jobs are high paying, rewarding opportunities to build a career and support a family.

They also allow you to help build your community and your province.

And with our government's plans to spend more than \$145 billion over the next 10 years on infrastructure...

Including the largest subway expansion in Canadian history...

Making GO Transit a comprehensive, all-day rapid transit network...

Bringing passenger rail service to the North...

And historic investments in highways...

There will be no shortage of opportunities to play a role in building Ontario.

To help more workers and students get into the skilled trades, our government is investing \$288 million this year in the Skilled Trades Strategy to help more people find a career they wouldn't trade.

To help more workers like Hope.

Supporting Jobs

Ontario Small Business Support Grant

Mr. Speaker, one of the most significant inequities of the pandemic has been the impact on small business owners and their employees who have faced significant restrictions.

And for our government, it has been among the heaviest burdens that we bear — although I know that burden is infinitely heavier for the small businesses affected.

That's why in January we announced the Ontario Small Business Support Grant for employers affected by the provincewide shutdown.

To date, about 100,000 eligible small businesses already have seen funds flow into their bank accounts.

Businesses in communities from Sarnia to Sault Ste. Marie. Kenora to Kitchener. Brockville to Barrie.

I have heard from some who have said this support is the difference between keeping the lights on and turning them off for good.

As we roll out vaccines, we recognize small businesses are still struggling — and will face additional expenses and more pressure as things get back to normal.

Today, we are announcing a second payment of the Ontario Small Business Support Grant — so that eligible small businesses will automatically receive a second payment in an amount equal to their first.

This will bring the estimated total support provided through this grant to \$3.4 billion.

In total, our government is providing small businesses \$6.3 billion in relief in 2021, which includes lower electricity bills, lower taxes and lower payroll costs.

Consider what this means for a small retail store in Markham.

They could receive two payments of \$20,000 through the Ontario Small Business Grant, a \$1,000 Ontario Main Street PPE Grant, and \$1,630 in property tax and energy cost rebates.

That's \$42,630 in direct support. This protects jobs now, and in the future.

Tourism, Hospitality, Culture, Sport and Recreation Industries

Mr. Speaker, people in the tourism, hospitality, culture, sports and recreation industries have been particularly hard hit by the necessary public health restrictions.

In fact, 140,000 tourism and hospitality jobs were lost between February 2020 and 2021.

Today, Ontario is investing an additional \$400 million to support these employers, bringing our total support to more than \$625 million since the pandemic began.

And it includes the new Ontario Tourism and Hospitality Small Business Support Grant...

Targeted specifically at some of the hardest hit businesses, including hotels, overnight summer camps and amusement parks...

And that will provide an estimated \$100 million in one-time payments of between \$10,000 and \$20,000 to eligible small businesses.

With these additional measures, we will ensure that Ontario remains a terrific place to discover.

Unequal Impacts

Mr. Speaker, while all of us have been affected by COVID-19, some have been affected more than others.

Our government's support is designed to ease the burden for those who have been carrying more of the load during this difficult year.

As I've said, women in particular have been disproportionately affected — and it's clear we are experiencing a "she-cession."

It's why we are taking action to support affected workers and small business owners, improve access and affordability for child care and support survivors of increased domestic violence.

As a son and grandson, a husband, and a father to two wonderful daughters, the disproportionate impact on women is deeply troubling to me on a personal level.

That's why the Associate Minister of Children and Women's Issues and I will establish a task force to advise the government on how to address the unique and disproportionate economic barriers women face.

If I may, Mr. Speaker, when we all have equal opportunity, all of us do better.

I'd like to recognize the critical leadership of strong, capable, brilliant women during this pandemic.

Like Dr. Barbara Yaffe, who has advised our government.

Like the Minister of Health, whose steady leadership we have counted on.

Like the Minister of Long-Term Care, a medical doctor, who has worked tirelessly to protect the most vulnerable.

Like the Solicitor General, who has guided our emergency response.

And like the leader of the opposition who has played such an important role holding our government to account.

All of us are better for their leadership and contributions.

We have made progress. And yet we still have so much more to do.

We must also do better for Indigenous and racialized people.

Systemic racism is a reality — including here in Ontario. It is a reality we must change.

A long overdue conversation on race is underway. But a conversation, however frank, is not enough.

It is time for action. That is why we made a \$60 million investment in the Black Youth Action Plan last fall.

It is why we are investing \$117 million in employment and training supports for those most affected by the pandemic.

And it is why we are taking another step with the Anti-Racism and Anti-Hate Grant which will support community-based anti-racism initiatives.

Hate spreads when allowed to fester. So, let us all resolve to speak out against hatred when we see it, and work together to build a more inclusive province each and every day.

And as we look beyond COVID-19, let's make it our shared goal that nobody is left behind.

Truly sustainable growth must be inclusive growth.

It must include everyone.

An Update on the Economic and Fiscal Situation

Mr. Speaker, I have outlined our action plan to beat COVID-19...to put it behind us. To get the job done.

I will conclude with an update on our province's economic and fiscal situation.

As a student of history, I cannot deliver that update without thinking of other challenging times in our past.

When Leslie Frost rose in this house to deliver his Budget in 1945, he declared that the Legislature was meeting in difficult days. That we had a difficult path ahead. That he was standing in a wartime Legislature delivering a wartime Budget.

Mr. Speaker, we thank God we're not in a world war. And yet the circumstances of today share some similarities to when Minister Frost stood in this place.

The people of Ontario are united in a battle against a common enemy. The job is not done. The enemy is not yet defeated.

As the Minister of Finance and as the President of the Treasury Board, my job is to ensure we make every resource available to win our battle against the virus.

And we have.

The Ontario government is projecting to spend \$173 billion in 2021–22. When you consider that the government spent \$148.8 billion in 2018–19, it's clear we have spared no expense to defeat COVID-19.

Of course, as it has for governments around the world, this spending has resulted in record deficits.

We project the deficit will be \$33.1 billion in 2021–22. And while this is neither sustainable nor desirable forever, I am absolutely, unequivocally convinced it is necessary to get through the pandemic and to recover stronger.

In fact, I believe the price of inaction would be much, much higher in terms of lost lives, jobs and prosperity.

Because as I said, you can't have a healthy economy without healthy people.

In this Budget, we once again outline three economic and fiscal scenarios, to be as transparent as possible about the uncertainty that remains in our global economy and the risks to our province's finances.

We will continue to be transparent with regular updates as the situation continues to evolve.

There is no doubt that our return to fiscal sustainability will take many, many years.

Some would tell us that tax hikes or cuts to public services are the only way to get there.

They are wrong.

The other path is to get Ontario growing again.

I'm convinced that along with a modern government and a federal partner who pays their fair share, economic growth is the key to our fiscal recovery.

And that growth will create jobs, provide revenues to support critical public services and ensure a sustainable fiscal position.

Since 2018, we have strengthened the foundation of our province's economy.

Later this year, our government will release our plan to strengthen the conditions for long-term economic growth.

We are already taking important steps today...

Positioning Ontario to be a leader in electric vehicle manufacturing...

Creating Invest Ontario and the \$400 million Invest Ontario Fund, making the province a top-tier destination for investment...

And proposing to double the Regional Opportunities Investment Tax Credit to encourage growth in regions that have fallen behind...

Which all build on the actions we took last November to remove barriers to growth that would have otherwise held Ontario back from a strong recovery...

By reducing high electricity rates...

Removing taxes on jobs ...

And lowering unfairly high business education property tax rates.

So, while we create the conditions, it will be the people and employers who create the actual growth.

Which brings me back to the Ontario Spirit.

When the people of this province put their minds to something, they make it happen.

So today, I am putting the world on notice: don't bet against us. Don't bet against the people of Ontario. We will succeed.

We have chosen growth, and as sure as I am standing here today, we will grow stronger than ever.

When Leslie Frost stood in this place in 1945, he said that "victory is assured if we adhere to our determination to win."

Mr. Speaker, we are going to defeat this pandemic. Because I know the people of this province. I know that they are determined to win.

Conclusion

As we face down this historic challenge, there is no place I'd rather be.

Like so many others in this province, my family's story is an immigrant story.

Both of my parents left Hungary as refugees because of World War II. It was here in Ontario that they met, married, built a life and raised a family.

And today their son has the privilege to serve as the Minister of Finance.

That is the Ontario story. That is the Ontario dream.

And we must all work to ensure that it can be the Ontario story for every person in this province. That is can be everybody's dream.

Occasionally I step back and reflect after a conversation with a constituent, on how likely it is that they have a story or dream similar to mine.

Of families from around the world that chose to settle here.

Those choices mean we get to pull from the very best of the entire world.

And if COVID-19 has taught us anything, it's that the 14.7 million people of Ontario can accomplish anything when we work towards a common goal.

Our people's hard work, ingenuity and drive for better, stronger families and communities will set us on a path that restores Ontario's place as the economic engine of the country.

The Premier calls it the Ontario Spirit.

The Ontario Spirit is hard work and sacrifice. Kindness and respect.

Doing what's right, not what's easy.

It has not been — and it won't be — a straight path to the finish line, but the Ontario Spirit will get us through COVID-19.

And when that time comes, the Ontario Spirit will unleash growth unlike anything we've seen in the province, ever before.

Hope is on the horizon. The safe harbour is not far away. And until we reach those shores, we will maintain our relentless focus on protecting people's health and our economy.

Thank you