



SPEECH FROM THE THRONE

GOVERNMENT OF ONTARIO

Protecting Ontario's Progress

Monday, October 4, 2021

ADDRESS OF

The Honourable Elizabeth Dowdeswell

Lieutenant Governor of Ontario

Speech from the Throne to Open the
2nd Session of the 42nd Parliament of Ontario



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Mr. Speaker, Honourable Members, ladies and gentlemen, people of Ontario:

Monsieur le Président, honorables députés, Ontariennes et Ontariens.

I want to start by acknowledging that we are all 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 was 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 second session of the 42nd Parliament by delivering the Speech from the Throne.

I do so as the province, country and world continue the ongoing fight against new variants of COVID-19.

Indeed, the past 18 months have been some of the most difficult in modern life.

Families separated, with many grieving the tragic loss of life. Jobs lost and businesses closed. Important life milestones put on hold.

The pandemic has and continues to challenge us in ways previously unimaginable. It has impacted every aspect of our way of life.

The pandemic has also not been equal. It is important that we acknowledge that it has significantly impacted some among us much more than others.

But through it all, our people have come together and shown the true nature of the Ontario spirit.

Strength. Determination. Compassion. Generosity. Grit.

These qualities have defined a shared sense of purpose and unity of cause against our common enemy: COVID-19.

As your government took extraordinary measures to slow the spread of this virus, Ontarians have shown remarkable resolve. You have risen to the occasion and done what is necessary to protect our communities, our hospitals and most vulnerable citizens.

Time and time again, you have been asked to sacrifice so much. But the light at the end of the tunnel has never looked brighter.

On December 14th, 2020, everything changed. On that day, the province administered its first vaccine to a personal support worker named Anita Quidangen.



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Throughout the worst of the pandemic, Anita took on extra shifts at her long-term care home, working all hours to care for her frail and elderly residents. When called to further action, she didn't hesitate to lead by example.

Like so many others on the frontlines, Anita Quidangen is a true Ontario hero.

While Anita may have been the first to get the shot, she wasn't the last. Your government has worked in unprecedented cooperation with municipal leaders, public health officials, frontline health care workers and the federal government to achieve one of the highest rates of vaccine protection in the world at incredible speed.

To the millions of Ontarians who received their COVID-19 vaccines: thank you. Every single dose is helping to protect our communities. We are now able to enjoy the things each of us have missed so dearly.

Time spent with friends and family. More businesses opening, with people going back to work. Students learning in class, and on the field playing alongside teammates.

As we enjoy the many benefits of so many people getting vaccinated, your government will never yield in its commitment to protect this hard-fought progress.

That is why Ontario has pursued the most cautious re-opening in Canada.

This approach included some of the highest vaccine thresholds for easing restrictions. It has maintained effective public health measures like indoor masking, while implementing vaccine policies to protect our most vulnerable in retirement homes, hospitals, home and community care, schools and post-secondary institutions, among others.

Most recently, your government further strengthened protections for long-term care homes by requiring all staff to be vaccinated unless they have a valid medical exemption. This is in addition to surveillance testing and inspections. Ontario was also the first province in Canada to provide third doses of vaccines to residents of long-term care.

In support of Ontario's cautious re-opening, the province also introduced a vaccine certificate.

Your government did not make the decision to require proof of vaccination easily.

The struggle to strike the appropriate balance between long-established rights and freedoms and the need to do what is necessary to protect lives has been this and other governments' most significant challenge.

But as we have seen elsewhere in Canada and North America, the COVID-19 pandemic remains an urgent public health emergency. Every tool must be brought to bear as we continue to confront the Delta-driven fourth wave. We must and will remain vigilant.



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Ontario cannot go backwards. After 18 months of fighting this pandemic, we owe our businesses stability and certainty.

Your government also recognizes that we cannot live under these exceptional measures forever. Vaccine certificates are a temporary policy that will be lifted when it is safe to do so, in consultation with the Chief Medical Officer of Health.

Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, your government has been guided by the latest science and evidence when making decisions on how to keep Ontarians healthy and safe.

And as Ontario's vaccine coverage continues to climb every day, it moves us further into a new phase of the pandemic.

In this new phase, while cases may rise as people head indoors during the colder winter months, the Chief Medical Officer of Health has been clear that this is not a cause for panic.

Instead, thanks to the protection offered by Ontario's world-leading vaccine coverage, individuals who are vaccinated are at much lower risk for more severe health outcomes, such as hospitalization.

In short, getting vaccinated protects you from the worst of COVID-19. It will save your life.

In this new phase, Ontario's top doctor and public health officials are continuously monitoring hospitalizations and intensive care units, as these indicators drive decision making.

If additional public health measures are needed, they will be localized and targeted. At the advice of the Chief Medical Officer of Health, they will seek to minimize disruptions to businesses and families.

The ultimate goal, shared by all, is avoiding future lockdowns.

In support of this goal, your government continues to make investments to build up Ontario's hospital capacity.

The pandemic has exposed the failure of successive governments, both provincial and federal, to provide adequate funding for our hospitals. The clear consequence was a health system ill-equipped to handle a crisis.

That is why your government has made unprecedented investments to add thousands of new hospital beds and ensure that qualified nurses and doctors are by a patient's side when they need care.

As a result, Ontario now has one of the highest rates of intensive care beds in Canada. Ontario is now much better positioned to respond to this and any future health crisis.



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This is in addition to historic investments to build and redevelop hospitals across the province, like the newly-constructed Cortellucci Vaughan Hospital, which initially operated as a province-wide resource to treat critically ill COVID-19 patients during the third wave of the pandemic and subsequently opened as a full-service hospital.

These historic investments will also bring a new hospital to Peel Region in Brampton, as your government addresses years of neglect by transforming Peel Memorial Centre from a day clinic into a state-of-the-art, 24-hour facility.

Your government will also continue to make progress in delivering a new hospital for the people of Windsor-Essex, who have long advocated for their voices to be heard and health needs to be met.

A chronic lack of capacity was not isolated to the province's hospitals.

This pandemic also brought into sharp relief the long-standing vulnerabilities of the province's long-term care sector. It uncovered unimaginable horrors, allowed because of decades of underfunding and neglect.

We owe Ontario's seniors so much; we owe them the opportunity to age and live with dignity. Your government will be there for them. Long-term care home residents are being neglected no more.

Your government is investing \$2.68 billion to build 30,000 new and modern long-term care home beds in a decade, as thousands more are upgraded to 21st-century design standards.

Together with partners on the frontlines, Ontario is making good progress against this ambitious goal.

In total, there are more than 20,000 new and 15,000 upgraded beds in development, representing more than 60 per cent of the province's goal.

But more beds aren't enough on their own. Ontario has for too long lagged in delivering quality care to long-term care home residents.

Between 2009 and 2019, the average total amount of care provided to residents increased by only 22 minutes from all providers. We must do more. Your government is doing more.

Ontario is investing nearly \$5 billion over four years to hire more than 27,000 long-term care staff, including nurses and personal support workers. In doing so, Ontario will provide long-term care home residents with four hours of direct care per day.

While meeting this commitment will take time, your government is urgently at work. By April 2022, Ontario will make significant progress by adding 16,200 more personal support workers to the health care system, including the province's long-term care sector.



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To fix the structural problems that have long plagued the sector, this fall your government will also introduce legislation to protect residents through better accountability, enforcement and transparency.

The days when bad actors could get away with anything less than quality care for our most vulnerable will be over.

While the province will never stop in its pursuit of fixing long-term care or building much-needed hospital beds, these efforts will only benefit from the federal government paying its fair share.

That is why Ontario has joined with every other province and territory in calling on the federal government to increase the Canada Health Transfer to 35 per cent of provincial-territorial health-care spending.

The original promise of medicare included fifty-fifty funding between the federal government and the provinces and territories for critical health services. Since then, the federal government's share has eroded, to the point where the Canada Health Transfer now only funds an average of 22 per cent of total provincial health-care costs.

This persistent gap represents billions of dollars in lost funding that Ontario could use to accelerate progress in delivering better care for our most vulnerable citizens. And addressing this gap represents an unprecedented opportunity to demonstrate to Canadians that their governments are united.

With the recent federal election having now been decided, your government will continue to work with Ottawa to advance the issues that matter most to the people of Ontario. We will work together to beat COVID-19 and put this pandemic behind us.

Our province is making progress. As a result of the hard work of every Ontarian, the province is beating back the worst of the Delta-driven fourth wave.

While we should be proud of our progress, we cannot be lulled into a false sense of security. Your government will remain vigilant in the face of the ongoing threat posed by this pandemic.

As more and more people step forward to get their vaccines, each dose brings more certainty that the days of widespread closures and lockdowns are behind us. Each dose allows us to more confidently plan for the future.

Because big challenges lay ahead.

Through no fault of their own, many Ontarians have fallen behind. Young adults, students and hospitality workers, among others, have been asked to shoulder so much of a pandemic that has demonstrated that too many workers live too precariously. At the same time, take home pay for many workers has not kept up with rising costs.



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While necessary, months of public health measures have left a heavy toll on people's mental health and wellbeing, with more Ontarians now struggling with anxiety, depression and substance abuse.

In particular, as our frontline health care heroes have cared for us, they have done so at great expense to their mental and physical wellbeing. Ontario's efforts to rebuild a health system stretched to its limits and repair the province's long-term care sector will respect the unique challenges faced by our doctors, nurses and personal support workers, as well as the countless other frontline heroes.

Significant fiscal challenges also loom on the horizon.

Throughout the pandemic, your government has never hesitated to spend what is necessary to protect lives and support families and businesses. Unprecedented levels of spending have created new fiscal challenges.

Your government remains steadfast in its commitment to an economic and fiscal recovery that is fueled by economic growth, not painful tax hikes or spending cuts.

To do so, your government will build Ontario. Build roads and highways. Build and expand transit to communities across the province. Build an economy that makes Ontario the best place in the world to do business, work and raise a family – no matter where you live in the province. This is how Ontario will create the conditions for long-term economic growth.

As your government tackles these issues that challenge the social and economic fabric of Ontario, it will do so in cooperation with municipal leaders.

Your government will also continue to engage with Indigenous communities in true partnership as we continue the work toward meaningful reconciliation. A few short days ago, Ontario and Canada observed the inaugural National Day for Truth and Reconciliation. On that day, today and every day, your government will work to strengthen its relationship with Indigenous peoples and play an active role in supporting healing and reconciliation.

There's no question, over the past 18 months the people of Ontario have been tested like never before. Through it all, during what felt like our darkest days, we've also seen the best of what our province has to offer.

Strength. Determination. Compassion. Generosity. Grit.

These are the qualities that have propelled Ontario's progress throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. This is the Ontario spirit that will drive us as we work together to build a brighter, more prosperous future.

Your government will be there to support you every step of the way.

Thank you.