

Introduction

Mr. Speaker ... I rise to present the 2017 Ontario Budget.

Four years ago, our government promised to work with Ontarians to balance the budget.

And today, Mr. Speaker, I am proud to announce ...

Thanks to the hard work of the people of Ontario ...

We did it!

By working with Ontarians...

The 2017 Budget ... is a balanced budget.

Minister's Office
7th Floor MO

Monsieur le Président, j'ai l'honneur de déposer aujourd'hui le budget de 2017, un budget équilibré.

And I want to thank my colleagues ...

And my staff and our hard-working Ontario public servants in the Ministry of Finance and the Treasury Board ...

Who have worked tirelessly to prepare these documents today ...

In particular, I would like to thank Minister Liz Sandals, Deputy Ministers Scott Thompson and Helen Angus and Assistant Deputy Minister Tim Schuurman for their dedication and efforts.

Minister's Office
7th Floor MO

And a big thank you to Ali Ghiassi, my Chief of Staff, and our entire team, who are extraordinary.

And ... above all ... I'd like to thank Premier Wynne for her steady leadership in delivering on our commitment to the people of Ontario.

Our Path to Balance

Mr. Speaker ... I want to take a moment to look back at how far we have come.

Because the road to balance has not been easy.

Minister's Office
7th Floor MO

Our government balanced three consecutive budgets before the global recession ...

I want to thank Dwight Duncan, who was the last Finance Minister to deliver a balanced budget in this house.

He is here today.

Mr. Speaker, as mentioned, we balanced three budgets...

... and then the financial markets melted-down in 2008.

After that fateful year, ... we had critical choices to make.

Minister's Office
7th Floor MO

We could do what some suggested:
cut expenses ...
cut vital programs and services that people
depended on ... to eliminate the deficit.

Or take a more principled and thoughtful
approach ...

...to make strategic investments and
stimulate economic growth.

So we chose to invest in our people.

Invest in our economy.

Invest in Ontario's recovery.

Minister's Office
7th Floor MO

So that Ontario families could get through the recession and make it out the other side without losing their homes ...

So that Ontario's kids could continue to get a great education ... and prepare for their future.

And so that our moms and dads and grandparents could see a doctor ... and get well quickly.

Minister's Office
7th Floor MO

Mr. Speaker, for our government ...
there was no question:
Ontario families mattered most.

We knew that making crucial investments
was the right thing to do for our people.

We knew that making crucial investments
was right for our economy.

We chose to invest in hospitals, schools,
roads and bridges, and public transit.

We made sure more young people
graduated from high school than ever
before ...

And we took a principled approach to
protecting workers ... and jobs in the auto
sector, from Windsor to Oshawa.

Minister's Office
7th Floor MO

We helped businesses grow by cutting corporate taxes to make them more competitive.

Those choices positioned us well when the recession ended.

And we have grown.

Mr. Speaker, nearly 700,000 net new jobs have been created since the depths of the recession.

And the majority of those are well-paying jobs ... full-time jobs ...

and private-sector jobs.

Minister's Office
7th Floor MO

Our unemployment rate is below the national average - the lowest it's been since 2007.

Our economy is growing ... and leading.

Last year, our GDP grew by 2.7 per cent.

That's almost twice the rate of growth of all of Canada.

It's better than Germany's 1.9 per cent.

It's better than the United States at 1.6 per cent.

It's better than all G7 countries.

Minister's Office
7th Floor MO

So how did we get here, Mr. Speaker?

Back in 2008 ... at the same time that we were investing in our people ...

We were also starting to chip away ... year after year ... at the deficit.

By controlling spending and finding savings.

Minister's Office
7th Floor MO

So ... in 2009 ... when we were at the depth of the recession and when Ontarians needed their government most ... the deficit was \$19 billion ...

Then in 2011 ... as the impacts of the recession persisted ... the deficit was down to \$13 billion ...

In 2014 ... as Ontario showed clear signs of recovery and thousands of new jobs were created, it was \$10 billion ...

Last fiscal year, as Ontario became an economic leader in Canada ... it was less than \$2 billion ...

And now ... I am pleased to announce that we will be balancing the budget this year.

Minister's Office
7th Floor MO

And next year...
and the year after,
it will be balanced, as well.

And the people of Ontario can count on it.

We got here because we had a plan to
grow the economy.

Year after year ... budget after budget ...

We stuck to that plan ... relentlessly ...

Keeping our people and our delicate
recovery on track ...

Until we achieved our goal.

And Mr. Speaker ... as we returned to
balance ...

Minister's Office
7th Floor MO

We also strengthened the services and programs Ontarians rely on.

We rolled out full-day kindergarten across our province ...

Better preparing 260,000 kids in their early years, and providing more support to parents.

We increased high school graduation rates to 85.5 per cent – up from 68 per cent in 2003-04.

And strengthened our colleges and universities.

Because people are our competitive advantage.

Minister's Office
7th Floor MO

We improved health care, too.

We added more nurses and doctors.

We provided free dental services to
365,000 children from low-income families.

And expanded mental health services for
50,000 young people.

And we invested in infrastructure, including
\$50 billion in new clean power and
transmission to provide greater integrity in
our energy grid.

Minister's Office
7th Floor MO

Mr. Speaker ... I ask my fellow Ontarians to consider ... if we moved our province forward in those important ways while we were recovering ...

Imagine what we can do now ... now that we're in a stronger position.

Well, Mr. Speaker ... together we have built Ontario up to compete and succeed in the global economy ...

And now we believe it's time to consider what comes next.

Because a balanced budget is never an end in itself.

Minister's Office
7th Floor MO

For Ontarians, this is just a beginning ...

a balanced budget gives us the means to shape our future and build a fairer society.

The goal for all of us ... I believe ... is a better quality of life, a more inclusive society, a more caring Ontario.

That gives us the competitive advantage — because ... more and more ... the world these days is looking inward.

Minister's Office
7th Floor MO

But by declaring ... loudly ... proudly ...
and unequivocally ...

“We are building a stronger Ontario.”

We will attract the best and brightest to live,
work and raise their families ... right here.

And build an Ontario that is just as
compassionate as it is competitive.

Mr. Speaker ... today, with the 2017
Balanced Budget, we take the next step in
building that Ontario.

Minister's Office
7th Floor MO

Staying Strong

It starts, Mr. Speaker ... with protecting the gains we have made so far.

And staying strong.

That means continuing to help our educated and talented young people find great, rewarding careers.

So, Mr. Speaker, we're launching the "Career Kick-Start Strategy"

We will help more students gain work-related experience during their studies...

...to help our students find good jobs when they graduate

Minister's Office
7th Floor MO

We will invest nearly \$190 million over three years to create 40,000 new co-op and intern opportunities.

More students will hit the ground running when they graduate.

And the result will be that all-important first bullet point on their resumé.

And to help make transitioning into the workforce easier ...

Recent grads will now not have to start repaying the provincial portion of their OSAP loan ...

Until they start making \$35,000 a year.

Minister's Office
7th Floor MO

We believe that learning is a lifelong journey, Mr. Speaker.

So, for adults looking to find their next job opportunity, or another career, we're also launching the "Ontario Lifelong Learning and Skills Plan."

This will help adults get the literacy, numeracy and digital skills they need to thrive in a changing economy.

And we will update our Second Career program ...

Which was critical for those unemployed during the recession ...

Minister's Office
7th Floor MO

And now, to better respond to ever-changing workplaces, the program must also change ...to enhance workers' skills to adapt.

And ... to make sure no one is ever left behind ... we will strengthen Ontario's income security and labour laws.

Mr. Speaker, our government is also proud to be launching a basic income pilot.

This test will provide our most vulnerable with a predictable minimum level of income.

Better supporting people ...
improving health and social outcomes.....
and reducing poverty.

Minister's Office
7th Floor MO

It will be designed to be simple and effective.

It will be designed to ensure security while promoting more opportunity in today's changing economy and job market.

Mr. Speaker, our priority is all about jobs.

Good jobs, stable jobs.

Jobs created by thriving businesses.

We will support partnerships and promote business development to create more jobs in a strong and diverse economy.

Minister's Office
7th Floor MO

We will continue to help businesses grow, by maintaining our competitive corporate tax rates...

...by modernizing regulations and by reducing red tape to lower business costs even more.

Mr. Speaker, I am proud of our business leaders and entrepreneurs, who stay at the forefront of the new economy ... like clean tech.

We will continue to tackle climate change and build a low-carbon economy that creates jobs.

We will not turn our backs on science or on future generations.

Minister's Office
7th Floor MO

Our Climate Change Action Plan and cap on emissions are already delivering results...

...and it is helping to improve our day-to-day quality of life while reducing greenhouse gas emissions.

For example, Mr. Speaker, we are investing \$200 million this year to improve the energy efficiency in our schools.

We are also making it easier for households and businesses to adopt proven, low-carbon technologies through the Green Ontario Fund.

Mr. Speaker, global competition is fierce and we cannot let up.

We will embrace and invest in new technologies.

Minister's Office
7th Floor MO

Instead of playing catch-up in a changing world, Ontario will lead that change ... and reap the benefits.

We're investing in artificial intelligence, fifth-generation wireless technology, advanced computing and quantum technologies.

And to continue to lead the way in the auto sector, we'll be investing \$80 million to create an Autonomous Vehicle Network.

This will include a new Demonstration Zone in Stratford to test this innovation.

Technology is changing every sector of our economy, Mr. Speaker ... and we are helping Ontario stay ahead of the pack.

Minister's Office
7th Floor MO

Mr. Speaker, Ontario is a strong competitor. Because we have a diverse economy that's embracing innovation.

From manufacturing to mining.

From financial services to agrifood.

As one example ...

We announced \$19 million to help our greenhouse farmers invest in new tech, so they could reduce their costs and increase their productivity.

To ensure that the old adage still applies:
"Good things grow ... in Ontario."

Minister's Office
7th Floor MO

Mr. Speaker, staying strong means building stronger communities.

And building stronger communities means connecting them, helping people and goods move faster.

And helping people get to work more quickly, and back home safely.

That's why we are increasing options for commuters, by providing faster and more frequent service on the GO lines and building more LRTs in Hamilton, Ottawa and Toronto.

And Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to announce ...

... that we will ...

... help even more people in all regions of the province take transit ...providing seniors 65 and over with a new Ontario Seniors' Public Transit Tax Credit.

What's more, we are expanding investments in the north.

Building northern highways and repairing roads and bridges in rural communities.

From Thunder Bay to Sault Ste. Marie, from Kapuskasing to North Bay.

Minister's Office
7th Floor MO

Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to announce that our multi-year plan to invest in transit, as well as in hospitals and schools, has grown to more than \$190 billion.

This is the greatest infrastructure investment in our province's history...

...creating 120,000 jobs every year.

Minister's Office
7th Floor MO

Helping Families With Living Costs

However, Mr. Speaker, we recognize that families are struggling with the increased cost of living.

While these critical investments in our power grid were important yesterday...

and while it will help make us more competitive tomorrow...

It has put too much onus and pressure on today's rate-payers today.

So we're doing more to help .

Minister's Office
7th Floor MO

We introduced our Fair Hydro Plan...

which will reduce household electricity bills by 25 per cent for each and every family.

Mr. Speaker, another great concern for young families has been rising house prices.

On the one hand...

A strong housing market reflects Ontario's strong economy.

But it is also making it difficult for many to buy their first home.

One of the strengths of Ontario has been the possibility to choose to own a home.

Minister's Office
7th Floor MO

To put down roots.

To build up equity.

The issue of housing affordability is complex ... but at its core ...

It's not fair for speculators ... with deep pockets ... to drive up the cost of a family home ...

At the expense of working families ... trying to save enough ... to realize their own dreams of a place to raise their kids ...

And call their own.

So that's why we are taking thoughtful and measured steps through our Fair Housing Plan.

Minister's Office
7th Floor MO

We'll crack down on property scalpers who are preventing people from being able to buy in new developments ...

As well, we are proposing a 15-per-cent Non-Resident Speculation Tax, or NRST, in the Greater Golden Horseshoe.

This measure is not meant to deter investment.

Many outside investors will continue to be attracted to Ontario.

Our province attracts investors from all around the world.

Ontario remains a terrific place to do business and invest.

Minister's Office
7th Floor MO

People are attracted here.

Because we have a growing economy,
stable banking and judicial systems, strong
universal health care and public education.

And we want people from around the world
to continue to invest in our province.

However, we believe that in the absence of
living here and contributing to the local
economy, speculators should pay their fair
share.

Mr. Speaker, we are proposing to also
expand rent control across the province ...

To strengthen protections for tenants.

Minister's Office
7th Floor MO

We will increase supply by reducing red tape that's slowing down building approvals.

These are just some of the measures in our comprehensive action plan to address rising costs ...

So that families can afford a home that meets their needs.

**Minister's Office
7th Floor MO**

Supporting People Who Care

Mr. Speaker ... all of us have cared for someone who needed our help.

Maybe a child ... or a parent.

Some of us are sandwiched between supporting our children and caring for our aging parents.

My wife – Zenny – has been a champion in caring for her disabled mom and dad.

My dad, too, when his health was failing.

She cares for her younger brother with spina biffida and developmental disorders.

And she manages to find time to provide love and support to our three children.

She exemplifies the sandwich generation.

Somehow she finds time to tolerate me, too.

And I admire her and all those like her who care for others.

She's in the gallery.

I see the hardships.

I understand the struggle.

Minister's Office
7th Floor MO

My point is this:
while we have excellent public health care
and strong community services ...

It is often families who step up and stand
with their loved ones in need.

And Mr. Speaker, we want to honour that
choice.

So our first step in building an even more
compassionate Ontario ... will be to provide
more supports to caregivers.

Whether you are caring for a child,
or an aging parent,
or a loved one with a mental health illness
or special needs ...

We want to help lighten the load a little.

Minister's Office
7th Floor MO

So, we are providing \$20 million in respite care to people who care for a loved one.

This funding will provide for personal support services or nursing support at home, providing caregivers with a helping hand.

We also recognize the financial strain for some, so we are proposing a new Ontario Caregiver Tax Credit.

We know caregivers can feel isolated and overwhelmed.

So, starting this fall, we'll be providing education and training to volunteer caregivers.

Minister's Office
7th Floor MO

And we are moving forward with a new organization designed to support and connect caregivers.

Because, Mr. Speaker, we stand with those who choose to care.

Caring About Our Kids' Futures

We have long known, Mr. Speaker ... that how far our kids go in life ...

Is profoundly affected by how they start.

That's why we are helping 100,000 more children get access to affordable, quality licensed child care.

Minister's Office
7th Floor MO

This year, our investments will help 24,000 more children, through new fee subsidies and licensed child care spaces in schools.

Mr. Speaker ... these new supports will reduce waitlists ...

Giving more parents more choice when it comes to balancing work and family.

Giving every child the opportunity to reach their full potential.

So, Mr. Speaker, we will continue to invest in public education.

We will introduce new class size caps on full-day kindergarten and enhance supports for students with special needs.

Minister's Office
7th Floor MO

And we are investing almost \$16 billion over 10 years to help build and renovate new schools.

We are currently building 95 new schools across the province ...in high growth communities.

And renovating 54 existing ones.

There's more ...

We are transforming OSAP ...

So that more than 210,000 college and university students will get free tuition this fall ...

Minister's Office
7th Floor MO

Ensuring that the pursuit of higher education is based on your desire to learn, not your ability to pay.

[We also want to help more students access French-language postsecondary education.]

Nous voulons aussi aider plus d'élèves à poursuivre des études postsecondaires en français.

Nous avons donc demandé à des experts de la communauté francophone de nous conseiller..

...sur la planification d'une nouvelle université de langue française.

Minister's Office
7th Floor MO

And to help more First Nation, Métis and Inuit learners access high-quality education and training, we are investing \$200 million over the next three years.

This includes dedicated funding to nine Indigenous-owned and operated Aboriginal Institutes across Ontario ... a historic investment.

It is part of our plan to develop partnerships, expand opportunities and improve the quality of life in Indigenous communities as well...

All in a spirit of collaboration and mutual respect.

Mr. Speaker, please join me in welcoming Rosie Mosquito, Chair of the Aboriginal Institutes Consortium.

Minister's Office
7th Floor MO

Mr. Speaker ... making sure all our children have what they need to succeed ...

From their earliest years ...

To graduation and into a job ... shows that Ontarians care about their children's well-being

And their success.

And by investing in that success, we are also ensuring that Ontario has what it needs to compete and win in the global economy.

Minister's Office
7th Floor MO

Investing in Health Care

Mr. Speaker ... as Ontarians ...

As Canadians ...

One of the main ways we show we care for one another is through our universal system of health.

In Ontario ... if you wind up in the hospital, you don't have to mortgage your home ... just to pay the bills.

We have you covered.

Each of us looks after... All of us.

Minister's Office
7th Floor MO

And in a world where not everyone enjoys that same caring, comfort and security — we cherish our health care system all the more.

But that doesn't mean we can't do even more.

In the lead-up to this balanced Budget, I travelled across Ontario...

To speak with people ...

To hear what matters most to them.

Everywhere I went, Ontarians told me and my colleagues too:

Invest more in our health care.

Minister's Office
7th Floor MO

Invest more in our hospitals.

A balanced budget allows us to make these new investments.

So, Mr. Speaker, to meet the needs of our patients today and in the future, we are investing an additional \$11.5 billion over three years.

This includes a \$7 billion booster shot...

To reduce wait times.

To improve access to care.

To enhance people's experience and speed up their recovery.

Minister's Office
7th Floor MO

We know that our growing and aging population is placing more demands on our health care system.

So we are increasing our capacity to treat complex illnesses, such as cancers.

And for those suffering from chronic pain, we are improving treatment by giving our health care professionals better tools and resources.

We want to ensure people get the health care they need, when and where they need it.

Our new investments will include a further \$1.3 billion over three years to reduce wait times.

Minister's Office
7th Floor MO

To get surgery faster ...

To help you see a specialist faster.

To expand home and community care.

And to help more people get vital mental health and addictions services.

We will make targeted investments in MRIs and diagnostic equipment, cataract and cardiovascular surgeries, and hip or knee replacements.

And, to make sure our towns and communities have the hospital services they need ...

Minister's Office
7th Floor MO

We will build new hospitals across Ontario to meet the wide-ranging needs of our growing communities.

Let me give you just a few examples.

We are redeveloping Hamilton Health Sciences ...

to help more people in the Greater Hamilton region get the care they need, closer to home.

We are expanding and renovating Trillium's Mississauga Hospital and its Queensway Health Centre ...

to serve the growing number of patients in Peel Region.

And we are committing to a new hospital to serve the health care needs of people along the James Bay coast.

Minister's Office
7th Floor MO

Rob MacIsaac, President and CEO of Hamilton Health Science, and Michelle DiEmanuele, President and CEO of Trillium Health Partners are here today – Thank you for your great work.

To keep wait times low and support vital services all across the province ...

... we are increasing hospital operating funding by three per cent this year — that's \$518-million more.

But Mr. Speaker, we also know that some of the best care is community care.

Minister's Office
7th Floor MO

So we are expanding community and personal support services across the province, to help meet these growing demands...

... and provide more access.

Our plan includes an additional \$85 million over three years for more home nursing, more personal support services, more physiotherapy and more respite care.

As well, to improve the care and quality of life for those living in long-term care, we are encouraging operators to redevelop more than 30,000 beds.

And for people already living in a long-term care facility, we will improve comfort and privacy by hiring more staff and eliminating four-bed wards.

Minister's Office
7th Floor MO

OHIP+: Children and Youth Pharmacare

And finally, Mr. Speaker ...

I want to talk about our children.

I have three kids.

Justin, 25, who is completing his studies....

...and two daughters, who are here...

Cristine, 27, and Jessica, 20.

They're all great kids who often give their dad plenty of humble pie.

But they make me so very proud.

Minister's Office
7th Floor MO

And as I look at all the children in the gallery today... from grade school to grad school...

I am reminded of why we are privileged to be members of this assembly.

To make a better life for our kids is one of the most important things we can do.

As parents...and as a government.

And one way we can be both a competitive and a compassionate society is to make sure that people who need medication ... get medication.

With the changing nature of the workplace, there are too many Ontarians who unfortunately do not have company benefit plans.

Meaning that getting prescriptions filled can be a challenge.

For families with children requiring medication... and...

For young people just entering the workforce...who may be working on contract.

Lack of a benefits plan is causing real hardships for some.

Mr. Speaker, we can do better than that.

We must do better than that.

And in this Budget, we will do better than that.

That is why ... I am pleased to announce ...

On behalf of our Premier ...

Starting ... January 1st, 2018 ...!

We will be expanding universal health care ...

By providing free drug coverage for everyone aged 24 and under.

We're calling it OHIP+: Children and Youth Pharmacare.

Minister's Office
7th Floor MO

Mr. Speaker, let me be clear:
our children will soon receive free
medication...

...for over 4 thousand 400 listed medicines.

It will provide for comprehensive coverage
for ... everyday needs and ... critical, life-
saving treatments.

Youth pharmacare will completely cover the
cost of all medicines funded through the
Ontario Drug Benefit Program ... regardless
of family income.

There will be no deductible,
there will be no co-payment.

Ontario's program will be the first of its kind
in Canada.

Minister's Office
7th Floor MO

Mr. Speaker, this historic investment in the health of our children ...

along with all the other investments we are making ... shows...

What Ontario can do when we are strong ...

When we are determined ...

When we balance competition and compassion ...

And when we balance our budgets...

It's for them!

[Point at the kids!]

Minister's Office
7th Floor MO

Conclusion

Mr. Speaker ... this year Ontario will be celebrating 150 years as a province ...

Along with our great nation of Canada.

From the Ambassador Bridge to Embassy Row ...

From Bay Street to Hudson Bay.

And everywhere in between ...

It is a time to look back on what we have achieved ... together.

We have so much to be proud of.

Minister's Office
7th Floor MO

A society built on tolerance, respect,
diversity and inclusion.

But while we look to the past with pride ...

Today ... is also a day ... to look forward to
the future with confidence.

This Balanced Budget writes a new chapter
for the people of Ontario.

This Balanced Budget sets a new course
for our province.

This Balanced Budget is the dividend every
Ontarian has earned.

For supporting each other during the
recession.

Minister's Office
7th Floor MO

For remaining true to our values.

Mr. Speaker ... let it always be said that in Ontario ...

We are as compassionate ... as we are competitive ...

As fair ... as we are prosperous.

And that balance ... one that is at the heart of our civil society ... is just as important as the fiscal balance we have announced today.

Together ... we will provide more
opportunity and jobs for people.

Together...we will create greater security
for our seniors.

Together ... we will create a brighter future
for our children.

Together ... we will create a stronger,
healthier Ontario.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Minister's Office
7th Floor MO