

Introduction

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

Four years ago, our government promised 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!

The *2017 Ontario Budget* ... is a balanced budget.

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 ...

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.

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

Before financial markets melted down in 2008.

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

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.

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.

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 what our economy needed.

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

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

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

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.

Our unemployment rate is below the national average and 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.

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.

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.

And next year and the year after, we're projecting it to be balanced, too.

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 ...

We also strengthened the vital 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 introduced free tuition for eligible postsecondary students ...

To ensure that everyone achieves their potential, regardless of their family's income.

Because people are our competitive advantage.

We improved health care, too.

We added nurses and doctors to Ontario's health care system.

Provided free dental services to more than 365,000 children from low-income families.

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

We stimulated job growth ...

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

Mr. Speaker ... I ask my fellow Ontarians to consider ... if we moved our province forward in all 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 up Ontario 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.

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.

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.

Staying Strong

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

And staying strong.

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

So, Mr. Speaker, to help students find great jobs when they graduate, we're launching the "Career Kick-Start Strategy."

We will work with our colleges and universities, employers and other partners to help more students gain work-related experience during their studies.

We will invest nearly \$190 million over three years to help create 40,000 new work-related learning opportunities.

More high school and postsecondary students, as well as recent grads, will hit the ground running when they graduate.

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

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

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

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

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

So, for adults looking to find their next learning opportunity, land a better job or move into their next career, we're 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.

We will also recalibrate our Second Career program ...

Which was a critical program for unemployed workers during the recession ...

And now, to better respond to the ever-changing economy and changing workplaces, the program must also change ...

To enhance workers' skills to adapt or to find their next job.

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

Mr. Speaker, we are also proud to launch a basic income pilot.

To see if providing people with a basic income could be a simpler and more effective way to ensure security and opportunity in a changing job market ...

Support people living on low incomes ...

And reduce poverty.

Our priority is all about jobs, created by thriving businesses.

To continue strengthening businesses, we will maintain our competitive corporate income tax rates, and continue to modernize regulations and reduce business costs.

Mr. Speaker, I am proud to say that we will also stay at the forefront of the global shift to a new economy ...

We will continue to tackle climate change in a way that produces a cleaner environment, builds a low-carbon economy and creates jobs.

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

Our Climate Change Action Plan and cap on emissions are already delivering results — and 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 of 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, we will also embrace and invest in transformative technologies, so that instead of playing catch-up in a changing world, Ontario leads that change and reaps the benefits in jobs and economic growth.

Fields like 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 the Autonomous Vehicle Innovation Network.

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

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

In March, we announced \$19 million to help our greenhouse farming sector invest in innovative technologies, to help reduce production costs and increase productivity.

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

Mr. Speaker, we will also continue to help people and goods move faster.

We are increasing options for commuters, by providing faster and more frequent service on the GO rail network and building light rail transit in Hamilton, Ottawa and Toronto.

And Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to announce that we are proposing to help more people use these systems in all regions of the province by providing seniors 65 and over with a new Ontario Seniors' Public Transit Tax Credit.

What's more, we're expanding northern highways and repairing roads and bridges in rural communities.

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

That's why I am pleased to announce that our multi-year plan to invest in infrastructure, such as roads and public transportation, 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.

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

So we're doing more to help with everyday costs.

Under our Fair Hydro Plan, we are proposing to reduce household electricity bills by an average of 25 per cent for each and every family in Ontario.

Of great concern to many has been rising house prices in the province.

Mr. Speaker ... one of the strengths of the Ontario economy has been the possibility for most people to afford their own home, should they choose.

A strong housing market reflects Ontario's strong economy.

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

To put down roots.

Build up equity for their futures.

The issue of housing affordability is complex ... but at its core there is a simple principle:

It's not fair for some 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.

As part of this plan, 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 are already taking advantage of favourable exchange rates.

Ontario remains a terrific place to do business and invest.

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.

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 Ontario's rising housing costs ...

...so that families can access housing that meets their needs.

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.

While we have excellent public health care and strong community health 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.

So, we are providing \$20 million in respite care to people who volunteer to care for a loved one — such as seniors, people living with dementia and other home care patients.

This funding will provide for personal support services or nursing support at home, allowing caregivers scheduled breaks from performing their critical work.

We also recognize the financial strain that caregivers can feel, 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.

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.

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.

We also believe that every child should have the opportunity to reach their full potential.

So, Mr. Speaker, we will continue to invest in our world-renowned public education system.

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

And we are investing almost \$16 billion over 10 years to help build new schools in high-growth areas and improve the conditions of existing schools.

We are currently building 95 new schools across the province ...

And renovating 54 existing ones.

There's more ...

We are transforming OSAP by repurposing existing credits and supports ...

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

Ensuring that pursuing postsecondary education is based on your desire to learn, not your ability to pay.

To help more students access French-language postsecondary education, we have asked experts in our francophone community to provide advice on planning for a new French-language university.

And to help more First Nation, Métis and Inuit learners access high-quality postsecondary 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 ... an historic investment.

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

From their earliest years ...

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

And in 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.

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 care.

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.

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:

Invest more in our health care.

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 another \$7 billion over three years.

To reduce wait times.

To improve access to care.

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

A growing and aging population is also placing more demands on our health care system.

So we are increasing our capacity to treat complex 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.

To get surgery faster ...

To help you see a specialist faster.

To expand home and community care services.

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 ...

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 Hamilton and the surrounding region get the care they need, closer to home.

We are expanding and renovating both Trillium's Mississauga Hospital and Queensway Health Centre ... to serve more 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.

And to keep wait times low and support vital services across the province, we are increasing hospital operating funding by three per cent this year — a \$518 million booster shot.

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

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

And to support faster and more equitable access across the province.

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.

OHIP+: Children and Youth Pharmacare

And finally, Mr. Speaker ...

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

The changing nature of the workplace means that many Ontarians today do not have workplace benefits plans.

Meaning getting prescriptions filled can be a challenge.

For families with children requiring medication.

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

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 this January ...

We will be expanding universal health care ...

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

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

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

Youth pharmacare will completely cover the cost of all medicines funded through the Ontario Drug 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.

Mr. Speaker, this historic investment in the health of our children ... and all the other investments we are making ... show what Ontario can do when we are strong ...

When we are determined ...

When we balance competition and compassion ...

And when we balance our budgets.

Conclusion

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

Within 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.

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.

Building on our balanced approach ...

We will invest in those things that set us apart. Making further investments in our education system.

So that our schools remain places where our children want to go to learn ... and can realize their full potential.

We will invest in free college and university tuition for eligible students — so that acceptance is based on a person's desire to learn, not their ability to pay.

We will make further investments in our health care system ...

To ensure our hospitals are clean, modern and equipped with the latest technologies ...

To help us see a doctor or nurse quickly, and help more of us care for a family member.

Because of our balanced *Budget*, we will provide medicine to anyone 24 and under, at no cost.

We will invest in our infrastructure ...

So our new roads, highways and public transportation get people to work more quickly, and home at night safely to their families.

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

We will develop partnerships, expand opportunities and improve the quality of life in Indigenous communities as well...

In a spirit of collaboration and mutual respect.

This new *Budget* will help more families buy a home.

And provide relief on our household electricity bills.

This balanced *Budget* is the dividend every Ontarian has earned.

For supporting each other during the recession.

For remaining true to our principles.

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 create a brighter future for our children.

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

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.