

Draft Post-Budget Premier's Op-Ed

This week's balanced budget isn't about me, or the Minister of Finance, or any politician.

The budget we have tabled in the legislature is entirely about you. It's about your family, your hopes and your dreams. It's about the things that keep you up at night worrying. This budget is about making the choices that help you navigate the turbulence of a changing economy with greater security and more opportunity. And it's about setting your province on a course toward long-term success.

The people of Ontario are being tested in new and unique ways. Technology. Trump. The soaring cost of housing. The rise in part-time work and decline of workplace benefits. People are worried. Anxious about the future.

In uncertain and changing times like these, government has a responsibility to respond — to step up — and protect your wages and well-being by being bold, active and inventive.

It is why our budget includes the biggest expansion of Medicare in Ontario in a generation. OHIP+ will give free prescription drug coverage to every child and youth 24 and under, starting in January 2018. No co-pay. No deductibles. No strings attached.

OHIP+ is the first program of its kind in Canada and a major leap towards universal drug coverage for everyone. We're doing it because many jobs no longer provide this kind of necessary coverage to families. With a balanced budget, we're able to fill that gap and give families back that security that's been lost.

We worked hard to stick to our balanced budget timeline so that our government would have the freedom and flexibility to respond to these kinds of new challenges with actions that make our province fairer.

With everything happening in the world right now, this is not the time to simply describe or reassert our values. We need to defend them and boldly act on them.

So the budget also invests significantly in new hospitals and front line staff, to lower wait times and improve every aspect of our health care system.

The budget is helping an additional 24,000 kids under the age of four get child care this year, a big step towards the 100,000 new spaces we're going to create within five years.

It invests in education — all the way through the system, from JK to free university and college tuition and a new program that will help students and recent grads get that all important first on-the-job experience.

It includes our Fair Hydro Plan and the actions we're taking to make finding or renting a home more affordable.

And our budget takes our historic infrastructure investments in roads, transit, hospitals and schools to stratospheric levels — \$190 billion over 13 years.

By every measure, our economy is outperforming the competition. We grew at twice the rate of the Canadian economy last year. We beat Germany, the U.S. and created more jobs than all other provinces combined.

But it's one thing to be doing better than others. It's an entirely different thing to say everything is great, because for many that isn't true. That's why this budget is so important. With the deficit gone, this is the moment for government to stand up and play an active role in building a fair society — a place as competitive as it is compassionate and as fair as it is prosperous.

So, what does a balanced Budget mean for you? It means that greater sense of security that comes with knowing your kids will get the health care they need, or that you'll be able to afford next year's university tuition, or that your aging parents are getting the best care. It means that the world around us may be uncertain, but Ontario's future is not. We're building this province up, just like we said we would.