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Full name

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The COVID-19 pandemic has exposed multiple social systems in our province and our country that have been neglected by all levels of government. The priorities that I would like to see the next budget focus on are the following:

(1) Pandemic relief. The pandemic has destroyed many people's livelihoods, and government support has been slim, particularly in recent months. This, despite the return to partial lockdown caused by the omicron variant. Strong and permanent measures to support Ontarians in purchasing and renting property, increased access to public housing, and increased financial aid to small businesses and individuals are essential to get us through this.

(2) Updating the health system. The health system in Ontario was in crisis before the pandemic. The province needs a long-term plan for drastically increasing the number of physicians, surgeons, general practitioners, and nurses working in all regions of the province. The province also needs to create a permanent task force to plan for the next major health crisis. It is also time for OHIP to cover dental, optical, pharmaceutical, and mental health services, all of which are recognized as essential to living a healthy life.

(3) Greening the economy. As we have known for over half a century, fossil fuels and greenhouse gas emitting industrial processes must be phased out quickly if our planet is going to be inhabitable by the end of the 21st century. Rapid and radical action is needed. In order to minimize disruption and pain during this transition, the government should invest heavily in reskilling workers in dirty industries, so they can move into roles in the new green economy that must replace their current employers.

(4) Restoring education. Universities and public schools are underfunded. There are more talented teachers and researchers than there are available jobs in the province. And there are too many students in our classrooms for effective learning—especially in the context of a pandemic. Tuition at universities is no longer worth it to many students if it means being saddled with debt for many years afterward. By reinvesting in education, the government will see dividends in short order as new graduates invent new technologies and found innovative businesses.

(5) Upgrading transportation. The public transportation network in Ontario is a laughingstock—which is all the more outrageous given that so many people rely on it to get to work and school every single day. Toronto still has, functionally, only two rapid transit lines. Intercity rail is slow and inconsistent. This is not what a world-class jurisdiction looks like. And is not what we need to make life more affordable and the planet liveable in the future. High-speed intercity rail, subways and elevated or separated light rail, separated bike lanes, and a phase down of automobile-focused infrastructure are essential.

This is a long list with many expensive projects. But such is to be expected after decades of neglect: one

does not buy a 50-year-old house that has never received systemic repair and expect that a reflooring is all that will be necessary to make the building liveable. A responsible government must find ways to serve its people, rather than withdraw from its duties.