

Revamped budget reveals more spending

By Mark PavilonsEditor

The reintroduction of the 2022 provincial budget, along with some changes, received mixed reaction last week. The Province re-introduced the Plan to Build Act (Budget Measures), 2022. "I am pleased to re-introduce the Plan to Build Act (Budget Measures), 2022 bill (today) so our government can continue delivering Ontario's Plan to Build, supporting better jobs for workers while building more highways, housing and hospitals right across the province," said Peter Bethlenfalvy, Minister of Finance. "With costs rising, our plan also includes measures to help families, including new direct payments to parents to help their kids catch up and increasing Ontario Disability Support Program payments." "To help fill gaps in learning for students after two years of pandemic disruptions, the government is also investing \$225 million for direct payments to parents," said Stephen Lecce, MPP for King-Vaughan and Minister of Education. "This is in addition to the previously announced \$175 million tutoring support program, the largest of its kind in Ontario's history." "To help those who qualify for disability support, the government is delivering on its commitment to increase the rates for income support by five per cent beginning in September 2022, for families and persons under the Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP). Beginning in September, the government will increase both the ODSP rate and the Assistance for Children with Severe Disabilities Program maximum monthly amount by five per cent. Future ODSP rates will also be adjusted to inflation. To help fill gaps in learning for students after two years of pandemic disruptions, the government is also investing \$225 million for direct payments to parents. This is in addition to the previously announced \$175 million tutoring support program, the largest of its kind in Ontario's history. The government will have more details later in the year on how families can access this new support. "No government in Ontario history has invested more in public education, tutoring supports, and student mental health than our government," said Lecce. "We are going further by providing direct financial support to parents, in addition to the expanded tutoring supports for students, all focused on ensuring kids get back to class with the full school experience." "The additional investment in tutoring supports and increased ODSP rate will be funded from existing contingencies contained in the government's fiscal plan as presented in the 2022 Budget. Building on the Province's record of transparency and accountability, the government also released the 2022-23 First Quarter Finances today, which provides updated information about the evolution of Ontario's economic and fiscal outlook since the 2022 Budget for the 2022-23 fiscal year. Due to higher-than-projected taxation revenues, the government is projecting a deficit of \$18.8 billion in 2022-23, an improvement of \$1.1 billion from the outlook presented in the 2022 Budget. "We have a prudent and flexible plan which builds on our record of responsible fiscal management, while making the investments that will reduce commute times, support front-line health care and help create good jobs," said Minister Bethlenfalvy. "In a time of economic uncertainty, our government is supporting Ontario workers and families by putting more money back into their pockets." "The Province's 2022-23 First Quarter Finances is projecting a deficit of \$18.8 billion, an improvement of \$1.1 billion since the outlook published in the 2022 Budget, primarily due to higher projected taxation revenues. Ontario's real gross domestic product (GDP) continued to grow in a challenging global environment, rising 1.1 per cent in the first calendar quarter of 2022 and exceeding the pre-pandemic level in the fourth quarter of 2019 by 1.3 per cent. Growth in the first quarter was widespread, with gains in household spending, business investment and exports. The government released the 2022 Budget: Ontario's Plan to Build and first introduced the Plan to Build Act (Budget Measures), 2022 on April 28. The Elementary Teachers' Federation of Ontario (ETFO) is disappointed that the budget today does not include any new investments in public education. In addition, by choosing to redirect funding away from publicly funded schools, the Ford government has chosen a path toward privatization over funding that creates lower class sizes and delivers in-school support for students with special education needs. "By dismissing educators' input and reintroducing the same education budget they presented in the spring, the Ford government has missed a clear opportunity to provide students and educators with the school-based supports and resources they need to ensure a just post-pandemic recovery," said ETFO President Karen Brown. "This school year won't be an easy one for educators. They will be relied upon to address pandemic learning gaps without the support they need to do so. Making up for lost time and providing students with more one-on-one support requires more funding at the school and board levels, not less." Ontario Nurses' Association (ONA) President Cathryn Hoy, RN, added the government's Throne Speech and re-released provincial budget utterly fail to take urgent action to protect access to healthcare for Ontarians, or to include meaningful solutions to restore our health-care system and its devastated health workforce. "Right across this province, we are seeing the results of this government's failures

regarding access to healthcare and what the shortage of nurses and health-care professionals means for our communities: Emergency Departments reducing hours or closing altogether, a long list of ICUs and other hospital units cutting back or closing service, and Ontarians struggling to get the care they need and deserve,” Hoy said. “The Throne Speech and this government pretend the crisis is a short-term issue, and says that the actions needed to address the health-care crisis have not yet been determined. The crisis is anything but temporary, and the government must wake up to that fact and listen to the solutions we have been telling them exist.” The Premier continues to ignore the majority of measures ONA has called for to address the health staffing crisis. ONA is once again calling on this government to come to the table and work with us for the sake of every resident of this province. Ontarians need the government to show the same level of urgency as nurses and health-care professionals did throughout the pandemic and continue to show.” Hoy said funding to build new Ontario hospitals will be wasted without also addressing the need to attract and retain the nurses and health-care professionals needed to staff new beds.” This government’s wage suppression legislation, Bill 124, has sent nurses and health-care professionals out the door,” Hoy noted. “Repealing Bill 124 is the first step to giving our nurses and health-care professionals hope and showing them that they are valued. Repeal of this bill will keep more nurses where we need them most – caring for Ontarians. Instead, this government will spend taxpayer money fighting our Charter Challenge against the bill.”