

Resignation of member for Scarborough Southwest

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): I beg to inform the House that a vacancy has occurred in the membership of the House by reason of the resignation of Doly Begum as the member for the electoral district of Scarborough Southwest, effective February 3, 2026. Accordingly, I have issued my warrant to the Chief Electoral Officer for the issue of a writ for a by-election.

Youth employment

MPP Lisa Gretzky: Youth unemployment in Windsor has reached alarming levels, leaving many young people struggling to find stable work and build a future. Known for its strong manufacturing base, the city has faced economic shifts that disproportionately impact youth, especially those entering the workforce for the first time.

This situation will get worse due to cuts to OSAP by the Premier and his government. For many years, OSAP has been a critical support system enabling students from lower- and middle-income families to access post-secondary education. Cuts to funding grants and stricter eligibility requirements are forcing many young people to either take on unsustainable debt or abandon their education goals altogether. This creates significant barriers for many.

The combined effect of high unemployment and reduced educational support will make it even harder for youth in Windsor and across Ontario. Without access to education or meaningful employment, youth in Windsor are left with fewer pathways to success, increasing the risk of long-term financial instability and social inequality. If these challenges aren't addressed, the city risks losing an entire generation of talent and potential.

Investing in youth employment opportunities and restoring accessible education funding is essential to ensuring that young people can contribute to and benefit from a more equitable and prosperous future, which creates economic stability that we all benefit from.

I'll continue to join students in Windsor and across Ontario in the fight for better, fairer OSAP, as well as more meaningful job opportunities that set up students and recent grads for success.

Paul Dubé

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): We have with us in the Speaker's gallery today Ombudsman Paul Dubé. He is accompanied by Barbara Finlay, Deputy Ombudsman, and Houda Bennani, his executive assistant. Please join me in warmly welcoming our guests to the Legislature.

I would also like to acknowledge that next Tuesday marks the end of Mr. Dubé's 10-year service as Ombudsman of Ontario. He served as the province's seventh Ombudsman, first appointed in 2016 and reappointed in 2021. As Ontario's Ombudsman, Mr. Dubé oversaw the office through expansion and change. He also supported several initiatives in the best interest of the public.

Mr. Dubé, on behalf of the Legislative Assembly, thank you for your service and best wishes for a happy and healthy retirement.

Student assistance

Ms. Marit Stiles: Speaker, the member opposite knows perfectly well that cabinet confidentiality is already protected in existing laws. Nobody is buying that.

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(OSAP, Students with Special Needs)

To the Premier—I'm going to go back to him, because I'm going to ask a question on behalf of every young person in this province. It has never been harder to be a young person in Ontario than it is today. Youth unemployment is at an all-time high. The cost of rent and groceries and gas is through the roof. Higher education already feels out of touch for almost every young person today, and their families. But this Premier decided, over his extended break, to make it even more difficult.

Why is the Premier turning his back on the next generation?

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): I recognize the Minister of Colleges and Universities.

Hon. Nolan Quinn: I'd like to address some of the NDP-Liberal narrative that the government is getting rid of OSAP.

The Leader of the Opposition just stated the lack of funding for OSAP—OSAP is not going away. We've made that very, very clear. The changes we're making to OSAP are to ensure it is sustainable so that this program can be around for the next generation of students behind these students. They'll continue to get the support they need when accessing higher education. If our government had not acted, like myself and the Premier have clearly articulated, we would have decimated OSAP, putting student access at risk and a massive burden on the taxpayer.

Let me remind you, Speaker, under the Liberal McGuinty-Wynne government, the grant-to-loan ratio was actually only 15% grants until 2017. That's less grants than we just currently introduced. When the grants were flipped to 85%—

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): Order.

Hon. Nolan Quinn: —the Auditor General made it very clear that it is unsustainable. You know the Auditor General clearly articulated your changes to OSAP—

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): I would ask the members in opposition and members of the third party to come to order.

Back to the leader of His Majesty's loyal opposition.

Ms. Marit Stiles: Speaker, the government has decimated OSAP—decimated it. Nobody is buying that line of argument. You are saddling Ontario's young people with a lifetime of debt.

I want to be very clear. I have met nurses over the last few months who are going to have to withdraw from their programs or face debt until they're in their forties. Students who rely on OSAP are going to have to pay \$3,500 more per year, and that is on top of what the federal government—the federal Liberals—are already adding: \$1,200 per year to student loans. Look at those numbers. Look at those numbers.

A lot of students are deciding that they're going to have to give up on university or college—and we're talking PSWs and ECEs and teachers and health care workers. They are turning down their offers because they cannot afford it. That's what we've been hearing. I know you're hearing it too.

I gave this government a chance to do the right thing this morning. But I'll ask the Premier again. Will you do the right thing and reverse your OSAP cuts?

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Hon. Nolan Quinn: I know it has been a while since the Leader of the Opposition was a member of the Rae government. Under the Rae government, tuition went up 50%, three times the rate of inflation. That was under your watch.

Hon. Nolan Quinn: That was under your watch. It was.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): Order.

Hon. Nolan Quinn: And under the Liberals, it went up 83%. Tuition went up 83%—again, triple the rate of inflation.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): Order.

Hon. Nolan Quinn: If you were in power right now, tuition would be over \$14,000 a year—if you were in power—because history speaks for itself.

Speaker, our new grant-to-loan ratio is right in line with other provinces, including the NDP friends in Manitoba and BC. When the Leader of the Opposition was in front of the media in February, she said, “We’d like to get to the place where other provinces are at.” Great news: We did exactly that. We’re in line with the rest of the other provinces.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): Final supplementary?

Ms. Marit Stiles: Speaker, so there you go, right? That is this government’s message to young people, to families out there. And I’ve got to tell you, that’s devastating. The thousands and thousands of young people we have heard from over the last few months have been very clear that they cannot afford this government, and clearly, based on what that minister said, they are on their own.

People out there are working harder than they’ve ever worked before, just to make ends meet, and you are shutting down the future of the next generation.

Why is this Premier punishing young people instead of investing in their future? I hope he has the guts to stand up and answer the question.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): Order.

Minister of Colleges and Universities.

Hon. Nolan Quinn: I’ll remind the Leader of the Opposition that it was our government that cut and froze tuition for the last eight years, when high inflation—

Hon. Nolan Quinn: We have saved the average university student \$1,800 a year on tuition and \$450 a year for the average college student. But the sector has changed significantly since the federal government has made many unilateral changes.

Speaker, we are there for the students, whether it’s through the Ontario Learn and Stay Grant that has had almost 13,000 health human resource students go through our system with free tuition, free books covered by our government, as well as the First Nations mining scholarship that has the first cohort of students enrolled this January—\$10 million.

Higher education is an investment students make in themselves, in their community and in their future, and our government will always be there to support that investment in a sustainable and responsible way for hard-working taxpayers.

Student assistance

Mr. John Fraser: The Premier is talking so much, we need to get him a Truth Social account.

Do you want to know what else is up? The provincial debt. It's closing in on half a trillion dollars. As the Premier would say, "Hey, folks, that's historic." It is.

Do you want to know what other debt is up? The debt of young people—and their families—who are trying to get a degree, a diploma or a trade. And that's because that guy over there decided that he was going to break OSAP. He's making life harder for them. He's piling on those families. Life is already hard. Why is he piling on?

After eight long years, does the Premier really think he can hide from his record of making life harder for Ontario families?

Hon. Doug Ford: Speaker, that's why we have elections. And we kicked their asses three times in a row, okay?

Hon. Doug Ford: I apologize.

We kicked their butts three times in a row, and we're going to kick their butts four times—

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): Please withdraw.

Hon. Doug Ford: I retract that.

Anyway, let's talk about OSAP. When we came into office, we knocked off 10% tuition—they increased tuition by 83%. We kept that tuition down for eight years. Now they're getting their tuition reduction—by 8%.

All they do is want to tax people to death, put their hands in their pockets. That's what they believe in—tax and spend.

We believe in putting money in the people's pockets until they have more money to go out there, maybe go for dinner, maybe put a little addition on, buy their kids clothes.

Not under the Liberal and NDP governments—they gouged them to death. Highest taxes ever in the history of Ontario from—

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): Back to the leader of the third party.

Mr. John Fraser: Speaker, they can't do that, and the Premier is making them go into debt just to give their kids opportunity.

After eight long years, what are Ontarians left with? What does the Premier say to that mom or dad in Sault Ste. Marie who just lost their job at Algoma, when their son or daughter says, "Mom, Dad, I want to go to school. I want to get a trade"? Just exactly what do they say?

The Premier is making life harder. I know he can't see it. It's harder for people in Windsor. It's harder for people in Amherstburg. It's harder for people in Brampton. It's harder for people all across Ontario—name any city.

So why is the Premier making life even harder for young families? Is the Premier actually proud of his record of making life harder for Ontario families?

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The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): I recognize the Minister of Finance.

Hon. Peter Bethlenfalvy: In the 15 years that the member opposite was in government, do you know what they did? They taxed everything, and they built nothing. That's why they are over there now.

This government is building everything in this province. We are building hospitals. We're building schools. We're building energy and nuclear. We're building highways. We're building transit. We're building long-term care.

Do you want me to keep going?

Hon. Peter Bethlenfalvy: Yes, yes, of course.

We're building houses. We're getting everything built across this province. And do you know what that does, Madam Speaker? That puts people to work. What a concept. We put the great people of Ontario to work. That's what a government does.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): I recognize the leader of the third party.

Mr. John Fraser: There are a whole bunch of people on the front lawn today, and that's because the Premier and the minister have made their lives harder. They've made their schools not safe places to learn or to work—not just OSAP, not just post-secondary. Class sizes are too big. They went up. Right, Premier? Special education has been starved; more kids are not getting their needs met. Up—and a mental health crisis that this Premier has just skated right by in schools. They're on the front lawn today. You've made life harder for them.

Are you proud that you've made life harder for all those people and those kids on the front lawn today?

Hon. Doug Ford: This is a person who was in charge of long-term care—in 15 years, built 600 beds. Our great minister is up to 30,000 long-term-care homes—30,000 long-term-care homes.

This was the member who voted against closing 600 schools. We're building \$23 billion of new schools, under our great Minister of Education. That's what we're doing.

You put us in debt—a record debt that we've never seen before. You drove up the deficit.

You dismantled jobs. We're creating jobs. We're creating opportunities. Folks, there's a million more people working today than there were when you were in office. You chased 300,000 jobs out of this province.

Special-needs students

MPP Alexa Gilmour: Today in the gallery is Chris Simao. He should be here with his son Max. But Max is not here, because Max died when he was excluded from school.

There are 100,000 other kids in Ontario experiencing school exclusions, and the number one reason is that there is not enough support to keep them safe in our schools. Families and experts have been sounding the alarm for eight years now, and they are out on our front lawn again today.

Can the Premier please tell Chris, his wife, Emily, and their other kids what he will do to ensure that no other family in Ontario experiences a tragedy like this?

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): I recognize the Minister of Education.

Hon. Paul Calandra: Well, let me just say this: Obviously, our hearts go out to the parents who are in the gallery today. This is obviously something that is heartbreaking, and I think all of the Legislature has nothing but the greatest amount of sympathy for what these parents have gone through. I'm sure that they don't care to hear the money that is being spent in the system or the supports that are being spent in the system. I think all they care about, really, is the fact that they lost a loved one and that they expect better and that things change as a result of that—and we'll make sure that it does.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): I recognize the member for Ottawa West–Nepean.

Ms. Chandra Pasma: Every single day, there are thousands of children like Max around the province—children who should be in school, who have every right to be in school, but aren't, because the supports are not there for them.

This government has cut more than \$6 billion from our schools—more than 5,000 educators gone since 2018. That is an utterly shameful record.

I'm going to ask the Premier one more time. Can he please tell Max's parents directly, what is he going to do now to ensure that there are no more tragedies and that every child in Ontario is able to go to school?

Hon. Paul Calandra: Madam Speaker, my answer is not going to change. The reality is that I have nothing but the greatest amount of sympathy for what these parents are going through and what they have endured.

The people of the province of Ontario expect the best from their education system. I expect the best from our education system, as do all members of the caucus on this side.

That is why we've taken aggressive actions to make sure that our education system is responsive to students, parents and teachers. We will continue on that mission because it is absolutely critically important that our school system does just that—that it meets the needs of parents, it meets the needs of students. and it meets the needs of teachers who just simply want the best for the kids they are educating.

We're going to make sure that we continue on this mission of revamping and reenergizing our school system so that it is the absolute best not only in Canada but in the world.

A \$43-billion investment should have better results—I absolutely agree with that—and we'll make sure it does.

Special-needs students

Mr. Jonathan Tsao: My question is to the Minister of Children, Community and Social Services.

Through the government's own actions, it has made one thing abundantly clear, and that's that supporting children with special needs and autism is clearly not its priority. Instead, this government has chosen to pursue a political agenda in schools, while tens of thousands of children with autism are waiting for core clinical services.

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Through you, Speaker: Is the minister willing to be the lone voice in the Conservative benches to stand with children with autism and the protesters on the front lawn right now, or will he continue to sit quietly and do nothing?

Hon. Michael Parsa: I thank the honourable member for the question.

I don't know what he means by "sit quietly." There hasn't been a louder caucus in the history of this province than this Premier and this caucus, standing up for the parents and students in this province. And that's what it takes, when you listen to families, right?

When we formed government—a total of 8,000 families across the province were receiving supports and services, under the previous Liberal government. It was this Premier, it was this caucus, that said, "That's not enough." That came as a result of listening to families, of working with service providers and doubling the investment of the Ontario Autism Program, from \$300 million to \$600 million. We weren't done. We said we weren't done. There's more to do, which is why, in last year's budget, thanks to the Premier, thanks to the Minister of Finance, thanks to the President of the Treasury Board—an increase of an additional \$175 million, bringing our total to \$779 million. What has it done, as a result of 8,000 in total across the province receiving supports and services, to now nearly 45,000 families—

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): Supplementary?

Mr. Jonathan Tsao: Speaker, the minister mentioned listening. Well, if he listened closely to the voices outside on the front lawn of the Legislature right now, he would hear the truth.

What we're seeing now is not an accident; this is a political choice. The Conservatives made promises to families of children with autism, and they broke them. Instead of delivering services, it has left over 67,000—listen to that number: 67,000—children on a wait-list while families are forced to fend for themselves. This is a choice. They had eight years. This government is choosing not to act.

So, through you, Speaker: Will the minister admit that this crisis is the result of this government's broken promises and commit finally—yes or no—to clearing the wait-list?

Hon. Michael Parsa: Again, I thank the honourable colleague for the question.

When it comes to listening, he talks about 15 years they were in power—15 years. They never listened to families. That's why there were only 8,000 families. They were only receiving support through one stream—one.

Today, families, upon registering with and being on the service registry, can access programs, supports and services immediately—accessing programs like urgent response, caregiver-mediated programs, entry to school, foundational family services and an expanded core service, which now includes occupational therapy, speech-language pathology, mental health supports that never existed before and, of course, IBI. That's what it takes when you listen to the community—that's what it takes to families.

The member knows I talk to five to 10 to 15 families every single day, because that's what the Premier's standard is—it's serving the people as best as we can, and that requires us working with service providers and listening to parents, because they know what's best for their families.