

Student assistance

Ms. Sandy Shaw: I rise today to speak directly to young people in this province, because we know it has never been harder to be a young person than it is today. Higher education already feels out of reach for you. It's impossible to find a decent-paying job; that's because youth unemployment is at an all-time high. You struggle to find a decent, affordable place to rent. Grocery prices, as we know, are through the roof. You are right to be shocked and angered that the Premier chose to make things even more difficult for you by decimating OSAP.

I've heard from you, I've heard from parents and I've even heard from your grandparents that this government's decision to cut OSAP is devastating. I've heard from students at McMaster and Mohawk and even high school students who must make the impossible choice between graduating with a huge debt or, unfortunately, not going to school at all. I've also heard young people say that protecting OSAP is about ensuring that every student has the opportunity to succeed, regardless of their background or financial situation. But this government's cruel message to you is: You are on your own.

This afternoon, the government will table their budget, and because they're already half a trillion dollars in debt—make no mistake, this government is spending big on luxury spas, fantasy highway tunnels, so we can only hope this afternoon that they will do the right thing and cancel these cuts to OSAP. You must understand that when you invest in young people, you are investing in the future of Ontario.

Government accountability

Ms. Peggy Sattler: London West constituents are deeply concerned about this government's plan to rewrite freedom-of-information laws. While Londoners struggle with rising unemployment, grocery bills that get bigger every month and a health care system in crisis, it seems that this government's biggest priority is changing the rules to hide the truth.

Let's be clear, Speaker: The government's FOI changes have nothing to do with protecting people's personal information. There are already legislative protections for that. This is about hiding government business by blocking access to records held by the Premier, cabinet ministers and political staff. It is about keeping the Premier's personal cellphone records secret, even after he was ordered by the courts to release them.

Without freedom of information, Ontarians and the RCMP would never have known about the greenbelt scandal. The proposed FOI changes will weaken this kind of transparency and accountability for generations to come while giving the government more unchecked power.

Speaker, FOI laws exist so citizens can understand how government decisions are made, who influenced the decisions and whether the public interest is being served. An honest government does not hide from the people. It does not disparage the Information and Privacy Commissioner when serious concerns are raised. Ontarians deserve a government that plays by the rules, not one that rewrites them to avoid scrutiny.

Special education

MPP Lise Vaugeois: Over 21,000 children living with disabilities are not in school today because the supports they need are not there, and this leaves parents no choice but to stay home.

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Trustees are the door parents knock on when they need advocacy, but trustees are being replaced by unaccountable, politically appointed supervisors, with nothing to recommend them except their loyalty to the minister's narrow, authoritarian ideology. This minister is so afraid of accountability, he has actually forbidden the livestreaming of special education advisory meetings.

Make no mistake: The very existence of special education is being threatened. How could it not be when schools are dealing with enormous class sizes, the direct effect of \$6.3 billion in cuts to public education?

As this minister hastens us towards educational totalitarianism, where his thoughts are the only thoughts allowed and no one else dare raise a critical concern, we must remember that the game of this government has always been to kill the public in order to enrich the private.

The well-being of children with disabilities is not even a blip on this agenda. If the minister were capable of admitting cause and effect, he would get out of the way, restore funding to public education, respect the work of trustees and allow educators to educate.

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Mr. Chris Glover: Shakira is a student with a disability, and she wants to attend college, but this government's ODSP rates are so low—\$600 a month for housing—that they left 35,000 Ontarians with disabilities homeless. Now this government is cutting OSAP.

She wants to fulfill her potential and contribute to Ontario, but she sees people with disabilities becoming homeless, and some are even taking medical assistance in dying. So her question is, why is this government cutting OSAP and leaving ODSP rates so low that people with disabilities cannot attend college, but instead are becoming homeless and some are even taking MAID?

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

Hon. Nolan Quinn: For the 50th time this week: We are not cutting OSAP. I don't know how I can make that any clearer. OSAP funds will continue to be available.

Yes, we have changed the grant-to-loan ratio to ensure it is sustainable, because the Auditor General made it very, very clear in 2017 that a desperate Liberal government was trying to hang on to power and they changed the grant-to-loan ratio. It was clearly articulated by the Auditor General. Me and the Premier have been very clear since day one: This is to ensure the sustainability of the OSAP program.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): Back to the member for Spadina–Fort York.

Mr. Chris Glover: What used to be 85% grants is going to be 25% grants. It means that a lot of low- and middle-income students are going to be priced out of the opportunity to attend college or university.

T is a first-year York University student, and she's one of four children of a sole-support mother. She and every other undergraduate student who relies on OSAP is facing an average \$3,400 additional debt because of the OSAP changes that this government is making. She's wondering why this government is making our college and university system an opportunity only for the wealthy and they're pricing out low- and middle-income students.

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Hon. Nolan Quinn: The opposition needs to stop fearmongering parents and students and they need to clarify that there is a significant amount of supports available to our students, whether it's bursaries or grants through the universities that amount to \$1.8 billion every single year or our colleges that have their own bursaries and grants as well in the hundreds of millions of dollars. We have a Student Access Guarantee, which is a tuition set-aside. We're going to enhance that Student Access Guarantee to ensure that our low- and medium-income students will always have the supports available to them.

I wish the member opposite would actually clarify that when students are coming to him concerned, because they're only given half of the facts.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): The member for Spadina–Fort York.

Mr. Chris Glover: You know what I'll clarify? I have been to walkouts, high school students walking out of class in Oshawa and in Keswick and other cities across this province because they know that what this government is doing is going to hurt their opportunities for the future. They know that you are downloading tens of thousands of dollars of debt onto low- and middle-income students and they are disgusted with your actions, and your pompous replies are not helping.

Kaia is a single parent with two children who is completing her degree. At her daughter's school, four teachers have been cut in one year. Educators are overwhelmed, classrooms are underfunded and recently, at every level, education—elementary, secondary, college, university—is being cut.

She's asking: Why is this government so out of touch with the reality of what's happening in the schools, and why are you undermining our education systems in Ontario?

Hon. Nolan Quinn: I was jumping out of my chair there when he called me pompous. I think that member needs to look in the mirror. I'll take that as a grain of salt. That part is unbelievably out of touch with the needs of the people of Ontario.

Speaker, when we cut and froze tuition in 2018—we are saving the average of \$1,800 per university student since then and \$450 per college student. But I wish, I hope, that that member, when he's meeting with the students, will clarify his own leader's comments that we would like to get to a place where other provinces are at. We did get to a place where other provinces are at. We're exactly in the middle of the pack when it comes to the grant-to-loan ratios. Your own leader stated that in the media. Hopefully you've clarified that, but you know what? I won't give them that much credit, Speaker. They don't clarify anything with the students. They are fearmongering and rage-baiting students right now.

Education issues

Mr. John Fraser: My question is for the Minister of Education.

Those of us who were at the teachers' breakfast yesterday are still talking about the minister's speech. We were all shocked. The remarks that he made to the people who represent 160,000 teachers—the people who help and support our kids learn every day in this province. The one thing that really stood out is the minister said 95% of teachers are good and the rest are bad. That shocks me.

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So I guess the question I have for the minister is: Just exactly where did he pull that number out of, and if he can't tell us that here, will he apologize to teachers?

Hon. Paul Calandra: Actually, Madam Speaker, I was listening to this narrative yesterday about how tough this speech was and how it would really be hurtful to me and my government. So I thought to myself, "Let me go to the website of the Leader of the Opposition, because his whole party was there and they were videotaping the speech, so certainly they were using copies of the videotaped speech to take me down." But I couldn't find it. He didn't post the speech.

So then I thought, "Okay, let me go to ETFO, who said it was a very tough speech. Let me go to the ETFO website." Could I find my speech? No. So then I went to the OSSTF. Could I find my speech there, videotaped? They were all videotaping. Did I find it? No.

I challenge the member opposite—yesterday, I gave him the opportunity to read my letter in the House. He refused to do it. I have brought 15 copies so that the members opposite can actually post it on their websites. I challenge the member opposite: Post my speech on your website. Post my letter on your website and let teachers and parents decide.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): Leader of the third party.

Mr. John Fraser: I think the minister has a highly inflated sense of self-importance. I wasn't videotaping his speech and we weren't.

Speaker, after eight years, this government is tired and out of touch and they've made a mess in our schools. Class sizes are too big. Special education has been starved and there's a mental health crisis my colleague just described that's not being addressed. Now the Minister of Education is saying he wants to fire thousands and thousands of teachers, and we don't have enough already.

That's not the point, though. The minister is trying to distract from the things that are wrong in our schools after eight years of a tired, out-of-touch, out-of-gas, out-of-ideas government. And he's treating education, our kids' schools, like his personal political playground.

So, Minister, I know what you said. You need to apologize. Will you do it?

Hon. Paul Calandra: I don't know who this was that was videotaping it, but I thought it was you.

But I will say this, Madam Speaker: If the speech was that bad, if it would harm me and my government, you would think the member opposite would want to post it. Post it. I asked the member opposite—I challenge him. I challenge the 15 members of his caucus. I challenge the 100 teachers who were there yesterday—

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): Order. The leader of the third party will come to order.

Hon. Paul Calandra: —I challenge ETFO. I challenge OECTA. If you thought the speech was so bad—all of you were videotaping it—put the speech online and let teachers make that decision. Let parents make that decision. Let students make that decision.

But I tell you what: He's a paper tiger. He has no guts and he'll never, ever do it.

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

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M^{me} Lucille Collard: Yesterday, teachers' unions were at Queen's Park, and the Minister of Education knows, because he did show up at the breakfast, after all. He didn't meet with them, however, because if he did, he would've heard about their concerns and about their perspective on the effect his policies are having on classrooms and on educators across the province.

I take it personally that the minister didn't even mention the IFO in his initial response, and I want to point out that francophone education has unique realities that require particular attention. And yet, since his appointment, the minister has not yet met with the Association des enseignantes et enseignants franco-ontariens, and that's despite repeated requests. They are wanting to meet.

So I ask the minister: Will you extend them the basic courtesy of a meeting, and take the time to hear directly from francophone educators about the challenges they face and the support that they are expecting from you?

Hon. Paul Calandra: Of course; they meet with me and my officials on a biweekly basis.

But here's what I said, colleagues. Let me quote from my speech. This was actually from a reporter who was there and videotaped it, as well: "I will not apologize for trying to create a system that is squarely focused on student achievement ... by providing teachers the resources they need to succeed,' Calandra said at a breakfast....

"I ask you to come with me, join with me in building the system. Don't be a stumbling block on the path. We will get this done...."

"He added that while 95% of—"

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): I apologize to the minister.

Order. Order. I don't think anybody wants to be warned today. I'm assuming that that is the direction we are heading, but I don't—

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): I will warn people, so if you want to be here later this afternoon, behave.

I apologize. Back to the Minister of Education.

Hon. Paul Calandra: "He added that while 95% of teachers are 'hard-working people,' 5% or less are 'focused on something other than our students.'"

Madam Speaker, I ask the member opposite: Which part of that does he not agree with? And post it online. If you have so much courage of your convictions, I dare you: Put the letter online—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): Question?

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Ms. Jennifer K. French: This Premier's attack on OSAP has awakened a giant. In 12 years, I have never before seen high school students organize themselves into province-wide, cross-community walkouts. Students know that education is a right, and what this Premier and minister are doing is so wrong.

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I listened to high school kids who have picked post-secondary programs for their future that now they don't think they can pursue. I've met with student leadership at Oshawa's post-secondary institutions trying to deal with panicked students whose goals are unravelling in real time, because they can't afford to continue their studies. I've heard from hundreds of parents and students through my OSAP impact survey, and hosted a town hall where the people were overcome with emotion as they shared how impossible it is to build a future in Ford's Ontario.

The minister responsible for this mess stood here this week and said he went to college because "Going to university would have put debt on my career." So, Minister, if student debt wasn't good for you, then why is debt what you want for today's young people?

Hon. Nolan Quinn: You know, I don't expect the opposition to ever listen to anything I'm saying, but when I was graduating high school, I took a careful look at my goals and how I could best plan my higher education to achieve those goals.

I knew I wanted to own a small business, as I mentioned earlier this week, in my community, so I weighed my options. I got into all the universities I wanted, I got into the colleges I wanted, but I understood that if I wanted to be a small business owner, college was the best path for me, so I made the sacrifice and stayed at home with my parents, because I understood that was more financially sustainable for me to be able to open a small business.

Our students need to do the same. They need to look at their future and make a fiscally responsible decision that will enable them to achieve their goals. Post-secondary education is an investment that students make into themselves and their future, and our government is proud to support that investment.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): I recognize the member for Windsor West.

MPP Lisa Gretzky: Back to the Premier: Windsor's youth unemployment has reached alarming levels, among the highest in Ontario, leaving many young people struggling to find stable work and build a future in our community. Yet this Conservative government is making cuts to OSAP at a time when students are already facing rising costs and limited opportunities.

Students and parents have been very clear: OSAP cuts will force many into a lifetime of debt. Students from lower- and middle-income families will face even more barriers to receiving post-secondary education, further reducing their prospects of securing employment. Windsor students and families are already struggling simply to get by. My question is, will the Premier explain to my constituents why he is so hell-bent on making their lives even harder?

Hon. Nolan Quinn: There are no cuts to OSAP, Speaker. I don't know how I can say that any other way. The funds will be there for OSAP. Yes, we did change the grant-to-loan ratio because the previous grant-to-loan ratio was unsustainable. I've said it 10 times in the House this week. The Auditor General clearly articulated that grant-to-loan ratio was not sustainable both for Ontario and the taxpayers we serve. Ultimately—

Hon. Nolan Quinn: —the full facts, Speaker. OSAP will continue to be there. We are 25% grants, right in line with both governments in Manitoba and BC—both NDP governments. Did you tell that to the students you spoke to? I know she didn't, Speaker. Unfortunately, they're just giving them half the information and they're trying to get them even more upset, because you know what? They're not doing well in the polls. I don't know if they've checked. Their leader's not even here.

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But ultimately—I withdraw—the funds are available for our students and we're ensuring that OSAP will continue to be sustainable moving forward for the next—

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): Leader of the third party.

Plan to Protect Ontario Act (Budget Measures), 2026

Mr. Bethlenfalvy moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 97, An Act to implement Budget measures, to enact, amend or repeal various statutes and to revoke various regulations.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry?
Carried.

First reading agreed to.