

Marit Stiles

LEADER OF THE OFFICIAL OPPOSITION
CHEF DE L'OPPOSITION OFFICIELLE
MPP/DÉPUTÉE DAVENPORT

Address to Provincial Building and Construction Trades Council of Ontario October 12, 2023

CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

I'm Marit Stiles, Leader of the Official Opposition NDP. I'd like to take a moment to thank my colleague, MPP Lisa Gretzky, who's doing a tremendous job here as the MPP for Windsor West. She's been working hard to deliver solutions on issues that are really affecting the people of Windsor and right across the province – whether it's the housing crisis, the high cost of groceries, or long lines at the ER. I'm so proud to have her on our team!

Now -- many of you in this room may not know me yet.

I was so honoured to be elected as the Leader of the Ontario NDP earlier this year. And in my new role I've been visiting communities all across this province to understand people's needs.

I'm also proud to be the MPP for Davenport in Toronto – I was first elected in 2018. My heart is in my community of Davenport – and for those who might be unfamiliar, our community is so lucky to have a strong tradition of builders, tradespeople – including more than 5,000 LiUNA members!

Before becoming Leader, I was pleased to serve as our party's Education Critic. A portfolio and issue that close to my heart, as I was a School Board trustee for many years, and also because I'm a mother to two daughters.

I'm also a Union woman, and I believe in the strength and power of workers.

I believe in what can be achieved when people come together.

Because that's what unions are – workers banding together. I spent a number of years on the bargaining table for ACTRA, getting workers better, stronger deals. So I've been on the frontlines of negotiations and winning more for the hardworking people of Ontario.

Though I've only been in my current role as the Leader of the Official Opposition NDP for just a year, the landscape in Ontario has shifted dramatically since I first started.

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I've made it a priority to go around the province to meet Ontarians from different walks of life, backgrounds, in different jobs, Ontarians who are single and have families. And I've noticed a single thread or story following everyone.

People are really finding it hard to stretch their paycheck to the end of the month. They're frustrated, worried.

And I'm sure you've been feeling it too – how the cost of rent, mortgages, general cost of living has dramatically shot up over the past few months.

My NDP colleagues and I have been thinking a lot about how to bring people some relief, and deliver innovative solutions to issues of housing, health care, transit.

It's been an interesting time to be the opposition in Ontario. Because while we would like to put our heads down to forward policies on building more homes, strengthen our health care system, provide solutions to a raging opioids crisis, we've been forced to contend a government that is all too preoccupied with helping a select few of their close friends flip real estate to make millions, and help them get ahead – at the expense of everyone else.

This government has been so focused on helping their insiders that there are days when I wonder if they can think about anything else.

And I will admit that I find it frustrating – I find it frustrating because the needs are great; the problems significant; but most importantly, some of the solutions are in reach. We just need the political will to get there.

I think this is most apparent with Ontario's housing crisis.

We need at least 1.5 million homes in the next decade.

Everywhere I've travelled to in the province, urban, rural, cities, towns - people have told me – they're afraid of getting evicted. Of defaulting on their mortgages. They're afraid that homelessness might be around the corner for them. The dream of homeownership is slipping away for so many.

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It's been frustrating to watch this government chase the Greenbelt for almost a full year, despite opposition from ALL sides, including their own Housing Affordability Task Force and municipalities, in the name of housing. The task force said there's plenty of land available to build.

But the government kept going after the Greenbelt and they wasted precious time, energy and tax dollars. We're not one single step closer to getting shovels in the ground to get Ontarians the homes they need. The homes your members build.

We knew from the very beginning that the Greenbelt was never about building homes.

It was about greedy land speculation and real estate games. It was about the needless and expensive expansion of sprawl onto critical farmlands to enrich their friends.

It was about rigging the system so their insiders could make eight billion dollars - without getting a single home built for hardworking people across Ontario. That's why we requested investigations from the Auditor General and Integrity Commissioner that eventually stopped the deal in its tracks. We now hope that the RCMP investigation leads to more transparency for Ontarians.

And you know what, since the whole Greenbelt scandal began – according to the government's own numbers – housing starts are trending down, not up. Which we all know impacts your members too.

Building homes isn't just about adding lands. It's about getting people – like your members here -- building.

It's really that simple.

In Ontario, we're also seeing a troubling pattern of forced urban boundary expansions. Where the government is providing preferential treatment to their friends - handing out MZOs to benefit them. They're creating a two-tiered system and that's just not fair.

I think it's unfair that an influential lobbyist close to the Premier – who we have come to know as Mr. X from the Integrity Commissioner's report on the Greenbelt – has been allowed to turn out MZOs. Mr. X himself has said that most of the developers he knows make their money from zoning changes and speculation, and not from building.

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This is not what this province needs. Not only is this bad policy, but we need developers that make their money by actually getting to work building homes and infrastructure, not from sitting back and engaging in land speculation that doesn't see a single new home built.

New Democrats know that in order to build the cities and communities of the future, we need to build all different kinds of homes. Homes to house Ontarians at all stages of their lives. We need to build purpose-built apartments, a range of condos, missing middle homes.

A range of homes in neighbourhoods people want to live in. Close to jobs. Schools. Community amenities.

Expanding up, not out, smart density along transit corridors.

We need to end exclusionary zoning – which by the way was one of the 55 recommendations made by the government's very own housing task force – to get a mix of homes built in communities that are already up and running.

And we also need to get provincial and federal governments back to investing in the public, non-profit and co-op sectors; because the private market can't do it alone.

Housing is a human right. And that means the public sector must play a stronger role in financing and working with developers, builders, trades – to expand public, co-op, non-profit and supportive housing options that our province so desperately needs.

We need homes that are affordable in this province so that the younger generation can move out of their parents' basement; so that newcomers can start a life here without working themselves into the ground, so people with disabilities can live independently in accessible units, so that low-income seniors can age comfortably in their own homes.

And we need to be clear on one thing. If all the government does is encourage rampant and unchecked land speculation, without actually building homes ... the crisis will only worsen and with it, Ontario's economy.

Let me tell you one thing, the NDP's housing plan is going to keep you very, very busy for years. Ontario right now has the biggest housing supply gap and the Official Opposition has the policies, solutions, and political will to go to close that gap.

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And we have the political will to stand with workers. To show up on picket lines in solidarity. To **finally bring in anti-scab legislation** to protect workers' rights and make sure that you have power on your side.

Your Official Opposition NDP – we've tabled this legislation – to ban scab labour – more than a dozen times. And every time, this government says no. Because they don't have the political will to truly make a meaningful difference in the lives of workers.

To me, that's not good enough – you have to talk the talk and walk the walk, and we're just going to keep fighting for it until we win that for the workers of Ontario.

And we're not going to stop there, because...

New Democrats believe in building strong and caring communities people can afford to live in, with services that are working and can be accessed when you need it.

Services and quality public infrastructure that you all help build – public infrastructure that builds those strong and caring communities.

Infrastructure to address the backlog in school construction... in highway and bridge construction... in hospital infrastructure... and in the infrastructure that we'll need when we address our housing crisis. Sewer systems, power, roads, and more, that we will need to support the new homes that we are going to work together, hand in hand, to build.

This is the infrastructure and these are the services that build strong and caring communities.

And that includes health care.

Ontario used to have a health care system that attracted people from other provinces and around the world. A health care system that encouraged businesses to set up shop right here in Ontario, creating jobs and building our economy.

But sadly right now the state of our health care is not where it should be. Years and years of withholding critical funding and devastating under-investment have led us to a point where ERs are overflowing, or worse - shutting down. Right here in Windsor, the Windsor Regional Hospital's Met campus emergency department has the longest patient wait times in Ontario.

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Can you imagine how scary it must be for a parent to turn up to an ER with their sick child, only to be turned away by a closed sign. How vulnerable seniors must feel knowing that they won't get access to care in case of need?

Lack of affordable housing, a broken health care system ... this is not going to inspire confidence in Ontarians.

This is creating an environment of worry and fear.

Right now, during one of the toughest financial moments in generations, we need to build confidence in Ontarians. That's why we have a goal for stronger, bigger investments in hospitals. Where's that money going to come from? Right now the government is sitting on billions of dollars in contingency funds for a rainy day.

Well that rainy day is here already, and we would like to see that money going to places that need support.

My government will also be committed to investing in mental health and addressing the addictions crisis raging across the province right now. We don't talk about it enough, but it's an epidemic silently staring at us in the face.

Your Official Opposition has a vision and plan to build long-term infrastructure, including hospitals, long-term care homes, transit, roads right across Ontario. Our plan will create jobs and provide stability at a time people need it most. And that means continuing to have more opportunities to get into the trades, and making a living from your trade.

We also need to recognize that the world we are living in is changing.

We've all heard about the wildfires raging across the province. All the forest fire crews who put themselves in the line of fire, literally, and the lives lost.

The Ontario we live in now is changing and that's a truth we must face. And we must act accordingly. Investing in green technology and infrastructure to safeguard us from the floods, fires and climate disasters that are already affecting us.

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We see it as an opportunity to get Ontario ahead, lead the charge in showing Canada and the world what building a green economy looks like. We can get ahead of the crisis and show other provinces how to create jobs in the renewable sector, how we can build and retrofit homes, buildings, and infrastructure in ways that are in line with our climate and economic goals as a province. We'll need skilled workers – workers like you - to do it.

I'm proud of what we're doing as the Official Opposition. I'm proud of the strong team we have, a diverse group of people who are tradespeople, who have worked in steel and pulp and paper mills, as millwrights, electricians, in mines, and in residential building construction. They're union workers. They are a team who understand the importance of safe working conditions.

I would like to thank you, really thank you for all the hard work that you do in building Ontario. It is because of your hard work that we get to call this province our home, that we get to put a roof over our head and call it home. That we get to access services at hospitals. It's because of the roads you lay down that people get to experience Ontario all the way from Toronto Windsor. Your hard work keeps Ontario alive and thriving.

Thank you for having me here today, and New Democrats look forward building a strong partnership with you.

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