

MPP KEVIN HOLLAND: Ontario 2024 Budget Building Better Thunder Bay - Atikokan

[Thunder Bay] – Kevin Holland, Member of Provincial Parliament for Thunder Bay – Atikokan issued the following statement on local and regional investments highlighted in the Ontario 2024 budget.

“I am thrilled to talk about the exciting projects impacting constituents in Northern Ontario announced in Ontario’s 2024 budget. Our government continues to deliver on its *Plan to Build* by investing in priority building projects, keeping costs down for families and businesses, getting more homes built faster, and working hard to make life more affordable for families across Ontario.

Forest Biomass – The government continues to invest in the use of forest biomass for energy generation, including \$997.5 thousand dollars to the Atikokan mill to increase their usage of forest biomass. Thunder Bay Pulp and Paper also received Forest Biomass Program funding of \$5 million to modernize the mill’s electrical system. The government will extend the Forest Biomass Program funding at an annual level of \$20 million. Forestry is an important economic driver for Thunder Bay and region.

Health Care – The province is making significant investments in all aspects of health care in Ontario such as investing \$60 million over 3 years to maintain mental health and addictions services, clinical supports, community mental health and well-being initiatives and opioid programming. Additional investments are being made in the Youth Wellness Hub network to increase the number of Hubs in Ontario to 32. Youth Wellness Hubs help young people access mental health services. Health care investments will also include \$50 billion over 10 years for health infrastructure, \$546 million over 3 years for expanded primary health care teams, \$128 million over 3 years for an additional 2,000 registered nurses and 1000 registered practical nursing spaces at public colleges and universities, and expanding the Ontario Learn and Stay grants by \$30 million to ensure that underserved communities will have access to health care. The Northern Health Travel Grant will also receive an increased investment of \$45 million over three years, for those that must travel for health care unavailable in their home communities. Thunder Bay Regional Health Sciences Centre will receive support for the renovation of existing spaces to deliver high-quality cardiovascular surgery services.

Roads – In Northern Ontario the government is advancing the building of all-season roads to the Ring of Fire to bring prosperity to northern communities and unlock the potential of critical minerals to service Ontario’s electric vehicle battery supply chains. Plans are also being made to widen Highway 11/17 between Thunder Bay and Nipigon.

Energy – The government is increasing the Northern Energy Advantage Program funding by \$86 million over 3 years to assist large industrial employers to better manage electricity costs which will help create and maintain good sustainable jobs. The Wataynikeyap power transmission line will connect 16 remote First Nations communities to Ontario’s clean electricity grid to transition them away from diesel

electrical generation. The Waasigan transmission line, currently under development, will also support community, industrial and mining growth in the Northwest.

Housing – In order to help municipalities to meet their housing targets, the government will provide \$1 billion in the new Municipal Housing Infrastructure Program and \$825 million for the Housing-enabling Water Systems fund. This funding will strengthen and support the \$1.2 billion Building Faster Fund to help municipalities build new homes.

Recreation – The government is introducing a new \$200 million Community Sport and Recreation Infrastructure fund to support new and upgraded sport and recreation facilities. This will help Ontario communities grow and contribute to the health and well-being of children, families and seniors.

Miscellaneous – The government is continuing to freeze driver's licence and photo card fees, eliminating licence plate renewal fees and indexing the Guaranteed Annual Income System (GAINS). The government also froze the beer basic tax indexation, and the LCBO mark-up rates for 2 years. \$11 million will be spent to bring improved internet access to rural and First Nations communities across Northern Ontario and \$15 million will enhance the Critical Minerals Innovation Fund over the next 3 years."

"These are only a few of the highlights of the *2024 Budget: Building a Better Ontario* that is supporting economic growth here in Thunder Bay - Atikokan and across Ontario. More details will be announced in the weeks ahead. Our government is committed to creating stronger communities for the future, improving Ontario's productivity growth, and building prosperity for generations to come."

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