

# Marit Stiles

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LEADER OF THE OFFICIAL OPPOSITION  
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MPP/DÉPUTÉE DAVENPORT

## ADDRESS TO ASSOCIATION OF MUNICIPALITIES ONTARIO AUGUST 21, 2023

CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

Good afternoon!

Thank you to AMO, and your Board of Directors, for the kind invitation to speak here today...

...and I have enjoyed meeting so many of you already today, and more to come.

I am so excited to be here. We are at such a crossroads in Ontario, and the conversations *here* will do so much to determine which way this province goes.

I'm Marit Stiles, the new Leader of the Official Opposition NDP.

Many of you probably know this about me by now, but I'm not originally from Ontario.

I was born and brought up in Newfoundland.

Most of that time I lived in an outport, on a small family farm. With goats and chickens... and a great big Newfoundland dog of course.

In and out of St. John's for school.

Both my parents worked full time, from the time I was born... so pretty much from the time I was about 7, 8 years old, after school I was kind of on my own. And that meant that I spent a big part of my childhood at our local public library.

For me, it wasn't just about going to read the books... though I will tell you I think I literally read almost every book in the children's library by the time I was 11...

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It was about the librarian... asking me how I was doing. It was about meeting friends there. Neighbours. It was about community.

(Overdue books story)

I was a part of some small communities, but strong and caring ones. Communities which were hard hit when the fishery went belly up.

Families that relied on community programs and the goodness of neighbours to make ends meet.

And while that seems like a world away from the Toronto riding I now represent – the needs aren't really all that different.

The importance of municipal services isn't really all that different..

I was thinking the other day that I've been working in government or public policy for almost 30 years now....

...as a former school trustee

...working on health policy, cultural policy, justice... international trade

...I myself have been that working mom who relied on community after school programs, daycare, transit

...and as someone who chose this province to settle in, because you could raise a family on a working class salary, count on good schools, good services, good healthcare....

As someone who has travelled – so thankfully – from every corner of Ontario, and experienced its beauty and its people....

I can say without any hesitation; there is no harder working level of government than our municipalities.

...no level of government is closer to the needs of our people than you.

Because not only are you putting in bricks and mortar...

...or laying down grass and installing swings at playgrounds...

...libraries, parks, community centres – these are places where people come together...

...you all in this room – mayors and reeves, councillors, staff, our municipal employees – you all build communities...

...places where children grow up, learn, build memories, thrive.

Where kids like me could count on that librarian knowing what I needed, when I needed it. (And coming after me for those overdue fines!)

But.... and, I am so sad to say this –

Right now, in Ontario, things are *far* from normal. The Ontario we have now is not the Ontario I moved to.

When I was preparing for today, I was thinking that communities work when democracy works.

Central to serving those kids, those communities, is what all of us in this room who are elected swear to when we take our oaths:

To act with integrity. To serve ethically. To serve the people.

...and I didn't want to get too political in today's speech – but we need to address the elephant in the room after everything that has come to light in the past 10 days

Right now – in this province – Ontarians are witnessing a government that has thrown out integrity, accountability and transparency.

What we have is a government and a Premier that is obsessed with making a few already very wealthy friends, even richer.

And as much as the premier wants us to ignore it and spin the Greenbelt grab as a story about housing...

We know that luxury sprawl... has *nothing* to do with housing...

...and it will *do* absolutely nothing to solve the very real housing crisis in Ontario!

Experts – all of you – told him that there is enough land available outside of the Greenbelt to develop the 1.5 million homes we need.

Instead of treating you as partners on the table, instead of recognizing the experience and expertise that exists among all of you, your staff – and harnessing it...

...Mr. Ford sidelined you and slapped you with Bill 23.

*Then* they said they'd make up for the revenues lost.

But you know what the Premier said when NDP MPP Jeff Burch – our Municipal Affairs Critic – who's here's today – stood up in the Legislature and asked what his government is doing to make municipalities whole...?

“Municipalities love spending money.” Mr. Ford said.

“We don't have an income problem at the city halls across the province; we have a spending problem. That's the issue.” he said.

This morning, Mr. Ford announced the Building Faster Fund, and while any investment in Ontario's municipalities is most welcome...

...this temporary program does not come close to replacing the one billion dollars a year in revenue that municipalities are losing – *permanently* – under Bill 23...

...revenue that municipalities need to actually *build housing*.

So... it's more than a little backwards to effectively punish municipalities for *not* building housing when they don't have the funding or the provincial partner they need to do so.

And the housing issue is increasingly a financial one, isn't it...? Instead, we need the province and the federal government to step up with *real* solutions to kickstart building the housing we need and help people afford them.

I've said it before and I'll say it again:

It is a huge problem when we have a government that acts unilaterally, rather than listening to and working with the expert voices that exist in this room...

Because if he listened... he would NOT be bulldozing the Greenbelt!

The people in this room know that.

Ontarians know that.

Ontario's Greenbelt is an environmental gold mine for this province – thousands of acres of farmland that provides our food...

...a carbon sink, flood mitigator...

...a place for Ontarians to hike, children to experience nature...

...that is what the Greenbelt is for the people of this province.

And we are not going to let them destroy it.

There's one thing the Premier and I can agree on.

The need for 1.5 million homes over the next decade is very real.

But we need to build homes in the right way, and in the right *places*, so that people can afford to actually live there.

Just a few days ago, the Smart Prosperity Institute released a report which I know many of you participated in... and it narrowed in on the importance of building non-market homes.

And while absolutely the private sector has to partner with us to build housing...

The private market alone *cannot* and *will not* be able to provide the mix of homes – the missing middle homes and multiplex apartments – which we need to meet people at different stages in their lives.

Renters need affordable housing...

...young people have different housing needs than growing families, and our ageing parents and grandparents.

The housing crisis didn't creep up overnight. It's been 30 years since the federal or provincial government got out of the business of building housing.

And the solutions to the housing crisis aren't easy but they ARE clear –

- Real rent control
- Building *truly* affordable housing – I'm talking about non-profit housing, public housing, co-op housing, supportive housing.
- Tackling greedy land speculators who play unethical real estate games... that force costs up and up and up and get in the way of the homes we need built.
- Inclusionary zoning: building homes people can *actually afford*, in neighbourhoods they *actually want to live in*...with access to transit, libraries, community centres... and jobs.

Everyone in this room knows these are the solutions.

So why do we have a government that is ignoring municipalities – the closest form of government to people across this province?

What you need and deserve is a government that will work with you to build housing, and to fund services.

That will provide the stable, predictable, and adequate funding you need...

...that is a good partner. Open to new ideas, new revenue tools even.

Not one that cuts the funding that you rely on to run our cities...

...to recruit and retain the talented staff, the workers, that keep things moving.

Mr. Ford has overlooked the very real and hard work that you and your staff put into planning, burning the midnight oil to get plans across the line.

All of it was ignored for the interests of a select few.

The solutions I mentioned a second ago? They're all measures your Official Opposition proposed in the last six months – all measures this government voted against.

But we in Ontario NDP know very well the housing crisis cannot be solved in silos. All of us at the federal, provincial, and municipal levels need to work together.

And this jurisdictional ping-pong – frankly – needs to end.

As the new Leader of the Official Opposition NDP, I have a different vision for this province.

I want to do things differently.

For starters, I want to restore the communication channel between municipalities and the province...

...restore respect, transparency and accountability.

I want to listen to the different voices around the table, the experts – you all.

I want to build a collaborative relationship with municipalities where the communication channel is always open...

...so that as our communities evolve, as people's needs change, as the climate crisis becomes all the more real, we can have proper dialogue and act accordingly.

Together, I know we can build strong and caring communities –

You've heard me say this a few times now.

Strong and caring.

Communities where emergency rooms are always open...

...where nurses and health care workers are given livable wages and treated with respect...

...where children can walk safely to school...

...where couples can grow their families in secure and affordable homes...

...where people have urgent access to the mental health and addiction supports they need...

...where the unhoused and refugees aren't pushed to the curb.

Communities with good jobs, better wages, more opportunities...

...public health care, public schools, public services to be proud of. That are there when people need it.

I know you and I are working towards the same goals, and mission.

We want better things for this province, for Ontarians.

And I'm confident we're on the right track. I have a strong team of MPPs who have been hard at work, in Queen's Park and in their communities.

Some of them are with us here today. I'd like to invite your Official Opposition NDP MPPs here today to stand up:

- Guy Bourgouin, Mushkegowuk—James Bay
- Jeff Burch, Niagara Centre
- Catherine Fife, Waterloo
- Jennifer French, Oshawa
- Wayne Gates, Niagara Falls
- Chris Glover, Spadina—Fort York
- Terence Kernaghan, London North Centre
- Sol Mamakwa, Kiiwetinoong
- Chandra Pasma, Ottawa West—Nepean
- Peggy Sattler, London West
- Monique Taylor, Hamilton Mountain
- John Vanthof, Timiskaming—Cochrane
- Lise Vaugeois, Thunder Bay—Superior North

These are just a few of the 29-member strong Official Opposition who are out there, talking to people, listening to them; hearing their struggles and what they need.

Working ***with you***, not against you.

We're doing things differently, thinking outside the box, researching, talking to stakeholders, looking at the way other countries do things.

There's not one of us here who doesn't want an Ontario that is happy and thriving.

We can work together to reach this vision, now, and for the future.

Because Ontario wouldn't be where it is today without the work that our municipalities do each and every day.

Thank you for that work, and all that you do.

Thank you for keeping Ontario moving and running.

I look forward to meeting and chatting with you all.

Thank you!

Merci!

Meegwetch!