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Tuesday 14 May 2013

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Mardi 14 mai 2013

Speaker
Honourable Dave Levac

Clerk
Deborah Deller

Président
L'honorable Dave Levac

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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

Tuesday 14 May 2013

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

Mardi 14 mai 2013

The House met at 0900.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Good morning. Please join me in prayer.

Prayers.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

PROSPEROUS AND FAIR ONTARIO ACT (BUDGET MEASURES), 2013

LOI DE 2013 POUR UN ONTARIO PROSPÈRE ET ÉQUITABLE (MESURES BUDGÉTAIRES)

Resuming the debate adjourned on May 13, 2013, on the motion for second reading of the following bill:

Bill 65, An Act to implement Budget measures and to enact and amend various Acts / *Projet de loi 65, Loi visant à mettre en œuvre les mesures budgétaires et à édicter et à modifier diverses lois.*

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Further debate?

Mr. Mike Colle: It's my pleasure to speak to the budget today, although I do it with a heavy heart. As you know, an incredible thing happened last night in Boston. Being a Leafs fan for so many years, back to the days of Johnny Bower, I can never recall such a sad, sad night. But anyway, Leafs fans are loyal and we'll carry on.

Interjection: They made it to game seven.

Mr. Mike Colle: Yes. Anyway, it's not easy.

Interjection.

Mr. Mike Colle: I know it's funny to people outside of Toronto, but Leafs fans have suffered long and the young lads played well last night.

I'm here to speak to the budget, and I just want to go through a number of things. First of all, the one thing I am happy that is in the budget is the \$35 billion over three years for infrastructure. That means that men and women across the province will work on building bridges, roads, sewers, public transit. They'll build hospitals and schools. That is critically important, because I think we don't spend enough time recognizing the importance of construction and the people who work in construction, whether they be small renovators or whether they be big construction companies.

One of the backbones of Ontario's economy is people who work in building. In this province, we're blessed with so many talented people who are wonderful at building our incredible tall buildings, building our sewers, building our roads. They are very expert, and we're

blessed to have them. This investment by the provincial government ensures that people work and ensures that we have good roads, schools and hospitals, which is critically important.

My own riding of Eglinton–Lawrence—right next door, in the riding of York South–Weston, on the border, we're building a new hospital, Humber River Regional Hospital. It's going to be the first digital hospital in North America. It's well under construction, and a lot of men and women are working there. It's not only the construction trades; all kinds of talented people are working on all the design aspects of this project. I visited the hospital site, and it's an amazing work in progress.

Also, along Eglinton we've finally started work on building the underground Eglinton crosstown transitway. Again, the work is under way. The tunnel boring machine is about to do its boring at Keele Street. We've waited for that since 1995, when unfortunately, the subway that was already three years under construction was stopped and filled in. We waited, because we need that transit in the middle of the city, and we're back at it. The only trouble now is the cost of that, compared to what it would have been. We would have gone to the airport for about \$800 million; now we're looking at about \$5 billion. Anyway, the fact is they are building it again. It's going to be urban renewal—jobs. People are already building new homes and apartments. Good things are happening as a result of the transit.

Also, I'd like to mention the youth investment. We have young people who want to work, want an opportunity, and we're investing in a youth job fund—about \$300 million in young people. That is critical, because these people want a chance and want to contribute. This investment in young people is also a very important investment.

A lot of our seniors are very anxious to get more home care. In this budget, there's going to be home care for 46,000 more Ontarians. As I mentioned, building hospitals is critically important; bricks and mortar are important. But as we transform our health care system, we have to provide more services at home. That's where people stay healthier, and that's where they want to be. They don't want to go to a hospital. The investment in keeping people healthy at home is critically important and something that really helps deliver quality home health care. That is a critical investment.

I also want to make sure that we look, in this budget, at auto insurance. There's a serious section in the budget on trying to deal with our auto insurance challenges, and there's a commitment to reduce rates by 15%. Many of

us here are certainly familiar with some of the challenges in auto insurance. The main thing about auto insurance is that it is mandatory in Ontario, so you have to have it. This investment in ensuring that auto insurance is available at a reasonable price is critically important, because so many of us depend on cars. This is a critical issue that we've tackled.

Just to mention, one of the things about auto insurance that we've got to keep in mind is that it's not just about reducing rates. We have to make sure people have protection when they are in accidents—that they can get their car fixed and get the medical support they need—and also eliminate the gaming that is going on.

There are too many people—not too many people, but a certain aggressive minority of people who are gaming the system, anything from staged accidents—in committee we've heard so many examples. It was just shocking, the testimony we heard before general government. They said that this kind of gaming has essentially been going on in auto insurance in Ontario for 40 years. It's systemic, and it's costing not just the insurance companies—everybody says, “You can game the system and the insurance company pays.” No, we all pay. These gamers, these fraud artists, are taking advantage of a system, on a daily basis, that's meant to protect people and costing all of us higher premiums.

That's why this anti-fraud task force is critically important. We can't let this small minority abuse the system and make everybody else pay. It's a good system, but the fraud artists are too prevalent. Sadly enough, they're abusing the system for their own advantage and their own profit at the expense of everybody else. So I'm glad to see that the government has made a commitment to take upon itself the implementation of the anti-fraud task force, which is critically important.

0910

I just want to mention that another thing that doesn't get much attention in the budget is the uploading that has been taking place. That means that in past years, there were costs that were driven down onto the backs of the property taxpayers. Those were the costs of maintaining highways and maintaining services at the municipal level. But over the last 10 years, billions of dollars have been brought onto the provincial tax roll and off the municipal tax roll, meaning that property taxes in Ontario have stabilized, because those costs—in many cases they're social soft costs—have been uploaded by the billions of dollars onto property taxes.

That is of great benefit to the municipalities, but it's really of benefit to homeowners. Whether you rent or whether you own a home or you have a mortgage, keeping property taxes under control is critical. So over the last number of years we have systematically brought these costs back to the provincial government—of great benefit to every municipality, large or small, from Kenora to Cornwall. That uploading is critical.

I know that in Toronto itself, we've uploaded billions of dollars off the city of Toronto's property taxes back onto the provincial tax, which is of great benefit to

Toronto, so they can do what they have to do for their citizens.

I just want to mention briefly—oh, God, it's overtime. Anyway, it's a budget that helps working people. It helps stabilize our economy and it helps build for the future. That's what this is critically important for: building for the future, so we have a good workforce and a competitive and a caring society.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Mr. John O'Toole: The member from Eglinton—Lawrence did say one thing about the discussion about municipal property taxes, and I just want to make this statement: Yes, they are uploading stuff, but they're also uploading the OMPF, the Ontario Municipal Partnership Fund, so the municipalities have no net gain on it.

Hon. Brad Duguid: That's not true. That's blatantly false.

Interjections.

Mr. John O'Toole: It's absolutely true. They are clawing back the OMPF funding, and—

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): I'm going to ask the Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities to withdraw that unparliamentary remark.

Hon. Brad Duguid: I withdraw.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): The member for Durham.

Mr. John O'Toole: Yes, I think I've made my point. I touched a sore point, so I'll leave it at that.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Ms. Catherine Fife: It's a pleasure to stand up and speak to this important bill. As the debate plays itself out—and it should be coming to a close fairly soon—I think it has been very clear that we as the third party have been able to hold the government to account on several key issues, namely home care, auto insurance, youth employment. Certainly, the conversation around closing those corporate tax loopholes and generating revenue to pay for the plans that are contained within the budget—certainly we need to get some clarity on that issue as well.

I think there is a good case for the financial accountability office which our leader, Andrea Horwath, has put forward. From an accountability perspective, that's what the people of this province actually expect, because we also have to acknowledge that there is a serious trust issue with this government.

The people of the province and the people of my riding have been very clear in communicating to me about the priorities that are expressed in this budget. We've seen promises, we've seen plans, we've seen strategies, but we need accountability. I think that what we have tried to do on this side of the House, notwithstanding what the PCs have tried to do—which is nothing—is try to hold the government to account, to ensure that the Ombudsman actually also has oversight over the health care sector so that we don't have another Ornge, so that

we don't have another eHealth, so that the chemotherapy drugs scandal, which has just recently played itself out, doesn't happen again.

These are two accountability measures: the financial accountability office and the Ombudsman. These are long-standing asks that the people of this province actually deserve. If we put this into play, we will have an opportunity to rebuild trust back in this Legislature. I think that's a long time coming and I think that it's possible.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Mr. Bas Balkissoon: I'm pleased to provide a few comments to the input my colleague from Eglinton–Lawrence has given on the government's budget for 2013. My good friend has mentioned that in the budget there are initiatives to provide more opportunities for youths to access employment and training. I can tell you, from the riding that I represent, that would make a significant difference to the young people in my riding who need these opportunities.

Also, I think every member of this Legislature has heard over the years that people who are recuperating from some form of surgery or illness in their homes require additional home care, and this budget clearly provides that opportunity. There are people out there who are actually waiting for the implementation of this particular initiative by the government.

But I think one of the bigger ones that is in the budget, and we should all be supporting it, is the auto insurance initiative. Many of you will remember in 2004, the government of the day actually took a huge initiative to reduce insurance by 10%. In 2010, the government again initiated some changes in the whole auto insurance industry. As a result of those changes we are starting to see some activity out there that is causing the insurance rates to go down. So in 2013, we're taking that next step, and it is in this budget to move there.

I'm going to tell you, one of the steps that I hope we can get in place quickly is the auto fraud. The area that I live in and the area that I represent is paying high rates because of significant fraud. I need those initiatives to be in place quickly so we can benefit from them.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Mr. Todd Smith: We are debating budget Bill 65 here this morning, a bill that actually spends \$3.6 billion more than the revenue we take in.

The member opposite just talked about auto insurance initiatives. We do sit on committee together. I think he knows, after hearing all the testimony that we heard regarding the auto insurance industry, that what they have in the budget is going to be very, very difficult to achieve. So if they believe that they're going to be able to get auto insurance customers a 15% break on their auto insurance premiums—there's a lot of smoke and mirrors contained in this budget, as well.

He also addressed youth unemployment, which is at 16.5% in Ontario. It's an unbelievable number, and this

budget doesn't go nearly far enough to address that situation with our young people under the age of 25.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): That concludes the time for questions and comments, so we now return to the member for Eglinton–Lawrence.

Mr. Mike Colle: I want to thank the members from Durham, London–Fanshawe, Scarborough–Rouge River and Prince Edward–Hastings for their comments.

I think that what people in our ridings want is government to help when they need it. They don't ask very often. If they get sick, they want good health care. If young people are out of work, they want government to give them a bit of a hand. They want good, safe streets. They want a good place to live and grow up for their kids.

I know in this Legislature we spend so much time being critical—and that's the job of the opposition, and even some of us in government, to be critical, but we forget that this is an amazing province with so many incredible, hard-working people. Despite the high Canadian dollar, despite the price of oil, despite the recession, the people of Ontario have really stood up and overcome all this adversity because the people of Ontario are not afraid to work. They're not afraid to invest. They're not afraid to innovate. They're not afraid to take on challenges. They've done amazingly well. When everybody said, "Well, Ontario isn't going to make it"—we heard about all the talking heads on television saying, "Oh, Ontario this and Ontario"—hey, Ontario has shown that we can do it.

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We've got incredible people. We've got incredible resources. Our agricultural resources, our natural resources and our human resources are second to none. That's what I hope this budget can reinforce: joining with those incredible people of Ontario, giving them the opportunity to continue to defy all the negative pundits that keep putting us down. You can't put us down, because we are strong, and we will overcome. We've shown that over and over again, and we'll show them again that Ontario is strong and going to get stronger.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Further debate?

Ms. Cindy Forster: It is my pleasure to rise today to speak to Bill 65 on behalf of the NDP caucus but, more importantly, on behalf of the residents, the taxpayers, in my Welland riding.

When I was first elected, in 2011, that election resulted in a minority government. The expectation of the people across this province was that we have a minority government, we have three parties, and they purposely did that so that these parties would have to work together on behalf of them. The message was clear then, and it's still clear, that those people who elected us want results. They're sick of the cynical political games, and they want to see action and results from this government.

Andrea Horwath, our leader, has been committed to getting results for Ontarians. We've been out over the last few months speaking to Ontarians across this province. We're now here in a budget situation, and we have

had an opportunity to actually put forward some proposals that will achieve some results for the people who live in this province. We're ready and willing to add our ideas to that budget.

I think we owe the people of this province, in this minority government, to get some action and to get something results. Unfortunately, the people on my far right, the leader of the official opposition and the Conservative Party, don't feel the same way as we do about getting results for the people in this province. They have refused to listen to Ontarians, they've refused to put aside some political games, and they vowed to vote against the budget before even reading it. I don't think that is a responsible way to represent your constituents and the people in this province.

Ms. Catherine Fife: I agree. Absolutely.

Ms. Cindy Forster: Right? We also were kind of tied up in prorogation, because the Liberals actually chose to prorogue this government last fall while we had already introduced and debated—I don't know—110 or 120 bills. That was all for political gain, to elect a new leader and to see if they could get some improvement in the polling results.

They scrapped a lot of bills, and today we are here debating those bills again so that they can use them as announcements, as if they were actually new bills, in the event that there is an upcoming election.

In fact, they even co-opted some of our bills as their own. Our tanning bill and our sprinkler bill are now Liberal bills.

Interjections.

Ms. Catherine Fife: But we're getting results. It doesn't matter. It's getting it done.

Ms. Cindy Forster: Yes. Anyway, it is a shame. Dalton McGuinty actually could have preserved all these bills, and we could have been much farther along. We probably could have been at Bill 250 by now.

But anyway, it's our job, it's our responsibility, to take our job seriously, to understand who we're here to represent, and that it's the lives of our constituents that we're talking about here.

The Liberals have introduced a new budget. We have put forward a lot of good ideas. We asked for a youth jobs plan, a Youth Jobs Strategy. There's some money going to that. It will address some of the youth employment issues in this province and, hopefully, kids will be able to move out of their parents' basements and actually get on with their lives.

We also asked the government to remove the barriers, the clawbacks, for people on ODSP and OW, and that actually was in the budget. Now, that is one small step of a much larger strategy that needs to be implemented and developed to move people out of poverty. You know, \$200 a month is not a whole lot of money. I don't know about you, but my family can spend that at the grocery store in one week. So we're not talking about giving people a whole lot of money here.

We asked for an increase in home care and a guarantee that nobody would wait more than five days to actually

get home care once they qualified. Unfortunately, the government isn't prepared to make that guarantee. I don't know why that is, because certainly they've done those kinds of things with wait times, where they've given hospitals additional dollars if they were able to meet the wait times around hip replacements, knee replacements and cataract surgeries. Surely they should be able to give a guarantee to people desperately waiting for home care—a list, I think, of about 6,100 or 6,200.

I can tell you that home care today, as it sits, is not the most satisfactory system. I can give you an example in my own riding, where my neighbour actually called for some physio. She was very fragile. She wasn't able to get from her walker to a chair or from her walker to the bed without help. She got one physio assessment, and then she got a list of exercises to complete by herself. Then she got one assessment two weeks later to say, "Oh, you're doing well." I don't actually call that home care; I don't call it a service. She would have been better off not to have it at all.

Ms. Catherine Fife: It's the bare minimum.

Ms. Cindy Forster: Yes, it's the bare minimum.

In order to make sure we were able to fund some of these initiatives, we also came forward with proposals to do things, as we did in the last budget, to cap public sector CEO salaries. We believe that would have generated about \$0.7 billion. We also asked for the loophole to be closed on HST input tax credits. That is actually a loophole that will see big corporations, which can well afford to take their clients to a Blue Jays game or out for an expensive dinner at a steak house—

Ms. Catherine Fife: No more Leafs.

Ms. Cindy Forster: Yes, no more Leafs games, unfortunately.

The average taxpayer doesn't get to write off those expenses. They're the ones paying the freight here. The big corporations are already getting a quite satisfactory tax rate, unlike the taxpayers of this province. So we said, "Close those loopholes, and you'll save \$1.3 billion." To date, the only thing the government has done is send a letter, on May 1, months after we first proposed it.

So I'm actually—time goes very quickly when you're up here. We also proposed a number of other things, but I'm going to concentrate now on the last two things we addressed last week.

The financial accountability office: The reason that is important is because we have asked for a balanced and accountable budget process. We've been talking about this for several months. We've been talking about scandals at gas plants, where millions, which could be leading to billions, of dollars have been wasted. We talked last year, and we're still talking, about the Ornge air ambulance fiasco, where millions and potentially billions of dollars have also been wasted. Prior to that, it was eHealth, and I'm sure there are many more to come. What we're saying is that if we had a financial accountability office, we could in fact be dealing with these things at the front end instead of at the back end. That, in itself, would save taxpayers millions and millions of dollars.

We're also asking for Ombudsman oversight, which is not a stretch. I mean, a \$48-billion, \$49-billion health care budget; it's, I don't know, 40%, 50% of the budget—maybe even more—60%.

Mr. Rosario Marchese: Hospitals are about \$24 billion or \$25 billion.

Ms. Cindy Forster: Right. It's a lot of money. We can't understand why the government wouldn't want to have Ombudsman oversight. We are the only province in Canada that doesn't have it. In fact, there is Ombudsman oversight of the LHINs. So it's not a stretch to actually expand that to hospitals, home care, clinics—there are so many different clinics now. There are the family health teams, there are the CHCs and then there are all these other things the government funds, like the private eye clinics—it goes on and on. We need to be clear that there is some oversight.

0930

Hundreds of patients complain every year. We know that because they complain to the College of Nurses, for example, about their care. They may complain about their care providers or they may complain to some other college that represents professionals in the health care system, but they also complain directly to the Ombudsman. So, certainly, it's our position that we need to have that financial accountability office to save the taxpayers a lot of money, and we need to have Ombudsman oversight so that patients in this province have a venue to go to to get their issues addressed.

Thanks for the opportunity to speak to this. I look forward to further debate.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Hon. Tracy MacCharles: I'm happy to rise again to speak about the Ontario path to balance the 2013 budget.

I want to respond to a couple of comments that the member from Welland made. She made a comment about the Liberal government co-opting some of their private members' bills. I do think it's important to set the record straight. I mean, if we want to talk about who brought forward what, there are many examples that the Liberals brought forward that I think she is alluding to and suggesting were co-opted. We can talk about the sprinklers in seniors' homes bill that was brought forward by the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing some time ago. And the tanning bed one; that was originally brought forward by a former member from the government side. But the important thing is that most Ontarians are not that focused on who brought forward what bill. Locally, it's important who brings it forward; it resonates in certain communities, of course. But when we get in the Legislature, at the end of the day it's about bringing forward the best ideas that will serve Ontarians as a whole. I think that's the spirit that people expect us to work with, and the intent: to do what's best, take the good ideas of all the bills that are before us and call them forward and get them to committee so we can refine them and work on them and make them better for the benefit of

Ontarians, and be less focused on who brought forward what.

The member also talked about financial accountability. When we look at the budget, there's certainly a number of very strong measures around fiscal responsibility and an accountable government. There's quite a list. I won't have time in my two-minute response to cover them all, but there are many things related to managing program spending, to continuing with recommendations from Drummond, managing compensation costs, slowing the growth rate of health care while still delivering core services—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Thank you very much. Questions and comments?

Mr. John O'Toole: I listened carefully and attentively to the member from Welland and I think she was directly on course when she was talking about the state of where we are. She mentioned, I think quite informatively, about the gas plant scandal; she mentioned about the Ornge scandal; she mentioned about the eHealth scandal. And she kind of wound up by talking about the Liberals plagiarizing bills. In that respect, I think they're right.

But I ask them one question, rhetorically: How can you possibly be supporting this government on this bill? This is the question. In your response I expect you to explain, why are you supporting the Liberals who you think so poorly of?

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Mr. Rosario Marchese: I congratulate the member from Welland. She covered a lot of ground.

I appreciate the Tories responding to the member from Welland in the way that they do. I know that the leader of the Conservative Party is in a hurry to either be the Premier or to skedaddle away from here. I understand the urgency of that Conservative imperative.

Mr. John O'Toole: Point of order.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Point of order, the member for Durham?

Mr. John O'Toole: I'd ask the member to direct his comments to the budget bill, Bill 65.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): The member for Trinity-Spadina has the floor.

Mr. Rosario Marchese: It was a wonderful interruption, of course.

So I really do appreciate what the Conservatives are all up to. They are all in a hurry to get out of here; I understand that. But we have a job to do and we're doing it as best we can. One of the deficits we have in this place, in this Legislature—and in the federal government—is a deficit of accountability. The point is, how do we make ourselves accountable to the citizens of Ontario?

We propose a couple of things: One is a financial accountability office similar to—à la Page at the federal level that held the Tories to account each and every day while he was there, God bless. He did one heck of a job. We're looking to do the same here in Ontario because I think we need it. Secondly, we're calling for Ombuds-

man oversight over our hospitals and long-term-care facilities. We believe we need that accountability. Now, the Minister of the Environment says we've got the auditor. No, they're two different functions. One does audit for money and the other one hears appeals from people and says, "Here's the problem I've got." Then he researches that, investigates and makes recommendations to make government better. That's what we want.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Hon. Mario Sergio: I thank you, Speaker. Just a couple of comments. I appreciate the remarks by the member from Welland on the presentation today.

I just want to spend my two minutes on three or four particular aspects that are within the budget. One is, of course, the 15% which our colleagues on the other side, the NDP, have brought forward, I have to say, very vigorously. I think at some point in time I know that we all wanted to do something very, very major, so I think this is important to see that it's in the budget.

The other thing is home care and the changes that we are making. The hard-working Minister of Health here is making changes to the health care system. It's about time that we do bring some changes, and they are very major and positive changes as well.

The other one is jobs for youth. I think we have heard this morning here how frustrating it is to see our young people still unemployed, if you will. We have a good percentage that is looking for work, and \$295 million is to create some 30,000 jobs for youth. I think this must be taken into consideration.

The other thing that I really want to speak on, because we hear so much about infrastructure, Metrolinx and transportation—now is the time. It is within the budget: \$35 billion over two years; we are looking at 100,000 jobs a year. This is not only for Metrolinx Toronto; we are helping some 97 municipalities throughout Ontario with respect to remodernizing infrastructure within those municipalities. I think we have to take that into consideration. I thank you.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): The member from Welland has two minutes to respond.

Ms. Cindy Forster: I'd like to thank the Minister of Consumer Affairs, the member from Durham, the member from Trinity-Spadina and the minister for seniors.

It's interesting—actually, the member from Trinity-Spadina raised it—that our friends here to the right aren't debating this bill, because certainly in the last session they were ringing bells, delaying debates, and now they're wanting to speed this debate along, I guess so they can get on with summer or something, I don't know—

Ms. Catherine Fife: Cottage time.

Ms. Cindy Forster:—cottage time, whatever that is. But you know what? Our proposals are about accountability. This government has not been accountable in many ways—millions and millions of dollars wasted over the last couple of years. So this is really just about making the government accountable. It's about making the

government keep their promises. I can remember there being advertisements back in 2011 about the 100 or so broken promises of the Liberal government in the 2007-11 period. So accountability, I think, needs to be part of this budget.

The Ombudsman piece—once again, this is a huge budget—a large part of this government spending. I see no reason why the government would not want accountability. People want to make sure that every one of those valued tax dollars is spent in a way that provides excellent services for the people who live in this province.

Mr. Rosario Marchese: They must be afraid.

Ms. Cindy Forster: You know, that may be the case, but in fact there's no reason not to have Ombudsman oversight. As I said, it's already at the LHIN level. The LHINs are the people in the 14 regions who are out there passing budgets in each one of those regions. If they have oversight, why shouldn't the rest of the health care system?

0940

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Further debate?

Hon. Brad Duguid: I want to begin by speaking out to Leafs Nation across the province, who I know are in a bit of despair today. I suggest, be not despaired. Our boys did us very, very proud last night and they did us very proud in this playoff battle with the Bruins. When you think about it, this is the youngest team in professional hockey today. What great experience they had over the course of seven games. They got to overtime in that seventh game. Yes, they didn't get the overtime goal to go on, but our boys did us proud. Leafs Nation ought to be proud of each and every one of those players. I'll tell you, I certainly am as well.

On to the budget, Mr. Speaker. I want to begin by presenting seven reasons—there are many others—why I think we ought to be supporting the budget. I'll go through them quickly and then I'll try, in the time I have, to go into a little more detail on each and every one of them. I probably won't get to them all.

The first is, let's face it, we ought to be supporting this budget to avoid what I would consider to be an unnecessary election that I don't think any Ontarian really wants. Number two, if you believe in fiscal responsibility, you ought to be supporting this budget. Number three, if you believe in creating jobs and opportunities for our young people, you ought to be supporting this budget. If you believe in a strong economy, you ought to be supporting this budget. If you believe in affordable auto insurance rates, you ought to be supporting this budget. If you believe in the importance of caring for seniors in their homes, then you ought to be supporting this budget. If you're concerned about the vulnerable, then you ought to be supporting this budget. The point I'm making is, whether you swing a little to the left or a little to the right, you ought to be supporting this budget, because this is a budget that is supported by the majority of Ontarians.

Let me begin with the fiscal responsibility piece. We're the only government now in all of Canada that for four consecutive years has met our budget targets. We're well on target to meet our deficit reduction targets and have the deficit slayed by 2017-18—a reasonable, doable but an aggressive target to meet. I'm confident our track record demonstrates that we'll be able to get there.

If you believe, as I said, in creating jobs and opportunities for young people, then our Youth Jobs Strategy does just that. It's a \$295-million, almost \$300-million investment in our young people. The centrepiece of that strategy is a Youth Employment Fund—about \$195 million of that investment goes there. What that strategy does is it works in partnership with the private sector to create job opportunities for our young people. The fact is, our young people need that foot in the door to get that job experience that they need. It's the old adage: You can't get a job without experience, but you can't get experience without a job. A lot of our young people are facing that dilemma.

This program is very important to our young people, and it's very important that we get this budget passed, because we want to have that program up and running, if possible—a very aggressive timeline—by the fall. We can do it, Mr. Speaker, but we're going to have to get that budget passed by the spring in order to allow us to be able to meet that timetable and start helping our young people get that first crack at a job by the fall.

The second piece of that Youth Jobs Strategy that I find very exciting is the Youth Entrepreneurship Fund. I think that's incredibly exciting, because we need to build a culture of entrepreneurship in this province. It's something that some would say isn't naturally a part of Ontario or Canadian culture, but it's something that needs to be built in. It's not just for our young people to go out and start up businesses. That's important; that's terrific. That helps create jobs, rather than just going out and getting a job yourself, but it's also to build that entrepreneurial mindset.

Companies around the world are looking for workforces that have people who have that entrepreneurial mindset to be able to do that. This program will provide mentorship, which is critically important; seed-stage capital, which is also important; and it will provide opportunities to provide outreach in high schools, which will help breed that culture of entrepreneurial thinking that I think that next-generation workforce is going to need to be globally competitive.

The other piece of the strategy that also excites me is the Youth Innovation Fund. Mr. Speaker, there is no greater success story in Ontario than in many of our campus accelerator centres that are located right across the province. There's the U of T accelerator centre that's near here; there's also the DMZ, the digital media zone that Ryerson set up. When you go down to Silicon Valley, what they're telling us down there is that Ontario is now producing the best entrepreneurs in the world, and many of them are bubbling up through these centres. VeloCity in Waterloo is another great example of that.

It's something we can be proud of and something we can build on, and that's why I'm so excited about the Youth Innovation Fund.

The fourth piece of the strategy is the business connectivity and training fund. That's important because it brings everyone together to tackle the issue of training.

So I think the centrepiece of this budget, and one of the reasons why all parties ought to be supporting it, is the \$300-million investment that we're making in job opportunities for our young people. It's critically important in building that economy of the future.

Mr. Speaker, if you believe in a strong economy—and I say this to people who might be on the centre to right area of the political spectrum across the province—the single most important ask of the Jobs and Prosperity Council, which represented our business community very, very well, was to move forward with the extension of the capital cost allowance for manufacturing. That was their single greatest ask. That's in this budget. That's a \$295-million savings to our manufacturing sector for investing in processing machinery and equipment over three years—very significant in trying to tackle the productivity gap between Ontario's business community and the US. That's another reason to support the budget.

One of the major asks of small business and the CFIB was to provide them with a greater exemption with regard to the employer health tax levy and relief for small business. We're moving that exemption rate from \$400,000 to \$450,000 for payroll. That's going to benefit thousands of small businesses. I think it's 60,000 small businesses that are going to benefit significantly from that. That's going to help create jobs across our economy.

I'm also really pleased with the \$45-million grant for the music industry. That makes good business sense, because when music is made here, the residuals of those artists flow into our economy instead of somewhere else. That's not just when Canadians make music here; that's when anybody makes music here. That grant is a good investment because, ultimately, if there's a good business case, that will pay for itself. It's good for our music industry, which is terrific, but it's also really good for our economy.

Mr. Speaker, the \$35-billion investment in infrastructure: I think there's something like 100,000 jobs that are attached to that, at least. These are tough fiscal times. The fact that this government continues to invest in our roads, bridges, transit, hospitals and schools across this province is really important, because that's helping to ensure that we continue to build a strong economy.

I also mentioned auto insurance rates. If you believe in more affordable auto insurance rates, then you ought to be supporting this budget, because this budget will lead to a 15% reduction in auto insurance rates. When you look at the track record of this government with auto insurance rates—this is something that's good to get on the record—and you compare it with the nine years before, from 1995 to 2003, inflation was at around 18%, and auto insurance rates shot up 45% in that time. If you look at the time we've been in office, from 2003 to 2012, in-

flation was about the same, around 18.1%. Auto insurance rates went up 11.4% during that time, less than the cost of inflation. That tells me we've been managing this file reasonably well. But in recent years, we've seen a very high increase in fraud and things like that that is jacking up auto insurance rates, so we need to take action once again. This will be the third time that we've intervened and taken action, and I'm very confident that we'll be able to meet our objective of 15% auto insurance rates.

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In the 30 seconds or less I have left, I didn't get to touch on the investments we're making in home care—a \$700-million investment. That's going to touch the lives of 46,000 Ontarians to help them stay in their homes longer and to stay there safer. That's important to our families—also the investments we're making for the vulnerable: the increases in social assistance and the adjustments we're making to that.

There's something in this budget for all Ontarians. It's a balanced budget that leads us to fiscal balance. It's good for the economy. It's good for the vulnerable. All members of the Legislature ought to be supporting it.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Mr. John O'Toole: The member from Scarborough Centre, the Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities, started off by outlining the seven reasons to support it. I call it the "seven deadly sins." Basically, obesity would be one of them.

The seven issues that I like to focus on—they've doubled the debt from \$139 billion to \$273 billion. Beware. They've doubled the deficit, really. In longer terms, when they started, it was \$5 billion; it's now going to be \$11 billion. So they've doubled pretty well everything but have delivered nothing. In fact, if you really look at the scandals that we've had to deal with in Ontario: the gas plant, the billions wasted there; Ornge, the billions wasted there; eHealth—those are the seven things people should keep in mind.

I can't think for a moment why the NDP is still going to support them. They're in bed together on this, and I can't wait for the member from Trinity-Spadina.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Mr. Rosario Marchese: I know that the Tories are eager to get out of here. I am afraid that some of them are saying they want an election so they could get rid of their leader. I don't know. I'm worried about that, but I could be wrong. I want to be wrong, of course.

I have a question to the Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities, because he talked about the payroll tax. The NDP made a proposal, as you know, that we keep the payroll tax exemption at \$400,000 for small businesses and that we eliminate that payroll exemption for those corporations that earn \$5 million and up, which you have done. God bless.

You did one thing, but then you did something else, and that is, you raised the exemption from \$400,000 for

small businesses to \$450,000, thus making the whole package revenue-neutral. My question to you is: Did you not think that that tax exemption of \$400,000 for small businesses was enough, and why increase it to \$450,000, taking away from governments the ability to have a few dollars extra? God knows you need the revenue, because your deficit—it's not that small; it's quite huge. So I'm asking you why you wouldn't take the opportunity to raise a little revenue, because the exemption for small businesses of \$400,000 seemed and seems reasonable, but you opted to increase it as a way of losing potential revenue that you desperately need.

The exemption helps small business people. I understand that. But did you need to increase it and thus get rid of all the potential revenue that you so desperately need? Perhaps you might answer that question.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Further comments?

Mr. Bas Balkissoon: I'm pleased to join in on the debate and make a few comments about my colleague the Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities and some of the comments from the member from Durham and the member from Trinity-Spadina.

It's kind of interesting sitting here, but I remember being a city councillor when the then government of the day filled in the Eglinton subway that all of us in Toronto wanted. We don't seem to want to remember that and remember the costs that occurred then by my friends on the other side.

I remember, in early 2000, the blackouts in Toronto, when my fridge went down for four days and everything in it I had to throw in the garbage. That was as a result of my friends across the other way would not deal with the power shortage that Ontario had at the time.

Interjections.

Mr. Bas Balkissoon: Now you're hearing the noise on the other side because the truth is coming home to roost.

Madam Speaker, I'm part of a government that resolved that power shortage by building 17 power plants in the short period that we've been in office. Yes, there have been two of them that have caused a problem, and we accept that. But nobody's perfect. You're not perfect; we're not. But we built 15 power plants in Ontario that are up and running and working, and we should be very proud of that.

My colleague talked about the grants to the music industry. That would be something that the industry needs and would create new jobs. That's what my friends across the way want; they want us to create new jobs.

My friend from the NDP says we just increased the employer health tax credit for small business. We did that so it will create opportunities for new jobs. It will create—

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Thank you. The member for Prince Edward-Hastings.

Mr. Todd Smith: It's a pleasure to join the debate again here this morning on the budget bill, Bill 65.

I would agree with the member from Scarborough Centre, the minister, on his comments regarding the Toronto Maple Leafs last night. Although it was a tough, tough loss—my friend here from Northumberland is a Boston Bruins fan, in front of me, so don't mind me if I smack him in the back of the head. But a tough loss for the Leafs last night and all of Leafs Nation.

As far as his comments on young entrepreneurs, he is right: We are producing some great young minds here in Ontario. Unfortunately, those great young minds, as he alluded to, are being sought after by Silicon Valley and places far away from Ontario because they can't find work here in this province: 16.5% of young people under the age of 25 can't get a job in Ontario. I know lots of people, and they tell me that all the time in Prince Edward-Hastings—parents whose kids have graduated from university and college who just can't find a place in the workplace. This budget really does nothing for them.

My friend across the way is blaming the Conservatives for the blackout in 2003. There was a little event in Ohio that actually precipitated anything that may have occurred here.

We will not be supporting the budget, and I can't believe the Liberal farm team and, to my left, the NDP will be supporting the budget. I look forward to a vote on this bill in the very near future.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): The minister has two minutes to respond.

Hon. Brad Duguid: I want to thank the member for Durham, the member for Trinity-Spadina, the member for Scarborough-Rouge River and the member for Prince Edward-Hastings for their comments.

I wouldn't hold too much against the member for Northumberland-Quinte West for supporting the Bruins. They are my second favourite team; the Leafs are my favourite, growing up in Toronto, of course. But anybody my age would have grown up in the Bobby Orr era, so you've got to forgive Bruins fans for being Bruins fans because that was the be-all and end-all back then, and we're all about the same age.

I do want to comment that he actually made my case, I think, for me when he talked about the fact—

Hon. Tracy MacCharles: He did?

Hon. Brad Duguid: Yes. Youth unemployment is at 16.5%, and that's very high. That's why it's so important that he ought to be supporting this budget, because the Youth Jobs Strategy will provide 30,000 jobs for our young people, something very, very important. Now is the time that our young people need those job opportunities. The budget provides that. So I think maybe he ought to reconsider his lack of support for the budget.

I thank the member for Scarborough-Rouge River for his comments. They're chippy and spot-on, as usual.

The member for Trinity-Spadina is no longer with us right now, but I thank him for his comments. I do think, though, that helping small business helps our economy in many, many different ways. It creates jobs. They are the backbone of our economy. So providing our small business owners a break through the employer health tax levy

is something that, I think, we ought to be doing and something I would have thought the NDP would be very, very supportive of. Traditionally, they would have been.

Madam Speaker, in the 20 seconds or less, I want to say that if you're a young person in this province, you ought to be supporting this budget for the opportunities it presents. If you're a senior in this province, you ought to be supporting the budget because it helps you stay in your home. If you're a driver in this province, you'll want to be supporting it because it helps keep your insurance rates affordable. There are a lot of reasons to support the budget, not a lot of reasons not to. So I'll be supporting it, and I urge my colleagues opposite to do as well.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Further debate?

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Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: I'm pleased to join the debate today. It's always important for us to voice the concerns of our constituents. When we go back to our ridings, those are the people who bring substance to the job that we have and that we were elected to do. When we listen to the people of Ontario and the people of our ridings, they're giving us a message. The message they gave us in the last election, in October 2012, is that this is a minority government.

We've elected a minority government, and it's a democratic process. Their voices were heard, and New Democrats have respected that decision of the people of Ontario. That's why we're here. We're here debating the budget because it is a democratic process. Each one of my constituents in London-Fanshawe and every person in Ontario needs to have a voice in this budget. By not participating in debate, you're really doing a disservice to the people you represent. They sent you here for their voice. They can't speak in the Legislature, so they elected you. They elected each and every one of us to stand up for them and to give feedback to this budget.

Also, New Democrats went one step further. We also put up a website and a phone number, because if I can't get to people in London-Fanshawe on the weekend when I'm there to do the work of the constituency, then I want to hear from them 24/7. We have certainly made sure we're respectfully listening to the people of Ontario and we want to hear what they have to say before we make up our minds. We can't just say, "No, before the budget is even released, we're not voting on it. Sorry, we're not going to participate in a democratic process. We're not going to debate."

Unfortunately, that's what the Conservatives have done. They have stepped out of this vote—well, sorry, they've made it clear that they're not voting, before even actually taking the time to consider what the people of Ontario have been telling them. Maybe they're only talking to one particular constituent, but you have to broaden your conversations. It's not just about the people you represent. It's about all the constituents in London-Fanshawe. When someone calls my office, regardless of who they voted for, we are there to serve them. We are there to make sure their needs are met, and we do the best

we can. That's what our office is there for, and that's what I'm here for.

I've heard many, many people talk to us, call the office and phone line, and write to us, and they're saying, "We elected a minority government, so we want to see you get results." There are some good things in this budget, and that's because we participated in this budget, as we should. This is not an NDP budget; it's a Liberal budget, but the ideas that we've put forward, this government put in the budget. Yes, I'm glad that those things are there, but it doesn't mean that it's a *carte blanche*—"I'm going to vote for the budget" or "I'm not going to vote for the budget." It means we take considerate time to look at a document before we make decisions.

When I hear some of the comments from one particular member, they seem so unpredictable. They seem to be off-the-cuff, and that's not how a debate should be. A debate should be considerate, with factual knowledge and logical arguments back and forth before you make your mind up. I hope that some of the Conservatives will take the time to rethink just making a decision on a knee-jerk reaction because they don't think it's a process that should be considered consciously, in a democratic way of doing things before you decide. You can't do that. You have to have discussions on all things before you say no. You just can't say no without having some forethought into something before you do that.

We know that Ontarians feel they've been taken for granted. We know that they've lost a lot of faith in this government, and they've told us. I've heard in my riding, "I don't want an election, Teresa, but I want to make sure that this government delivers, so go out there and hold them accountable." We have that piece that we asked for, the financial accountability officer. That makes sense. That's something that people understand.

This government has failed in many ways. They have failed in eHealth; that's billions of dollars spent unwisely, wasted, when we have a health care system that has, of course, world-class facilities, nurses and doctors. Everyone who works in those institutions, I value what they do and they certainly do a wonderful job, but our job as a government is to make sure the tax dollars, the people's precious health care dollars, are spent on those services.

So we asked also for the Ombudsman. The Ombudsman said back in 2012—and this is the part where I talk about maybe some facts, some logic when we're debating this budget. In 2012, the Ombudsman said the following: "I'm often asked—especially now that budgets are so tight—how much it would cost to extend the Ontario Ombudsman's mandate to include hospitals. The naysayers—and we'll use the Conservatives as an example"—excuse me; the Ombudsman didn't say they're going to use the Conservatives as an example. I'll correct that record just right now. So this is the quote from the Ombudsman—

Interjection: It would have been funny if he had.

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: Yes, I certainly wouldn't want to put a shadow of a doubt on that.

"The naysayers envision a huge, expensive new layer of bureaucracy. But there's no reason it can't be cost-neutral. Indeed, that was the experience in Quebec—resources were simply reallocated from the health ministry.

"And it's worth noting that my office is already extremely cost-effective. In the past fiscal year, we handled about 18,000 complaints on a budget of ... \$11 million."

So here is the expert, the Ombudsman, André Marin, who is trusted by the people of Ontario and, I think, also trusted by the members of this Legislature. From what I have seen from André Marin in the short time that I've been here, I think that man has a lot of integrity, character and expertise. I believe he could be the Ombudsman to oversee the hospitals, the health care sector and the long-term care. We are the only province in Canada that doesn't have an Ombudsman. We need the Ombudsman.

I get quite emotional about the underdosing of chemotherapy drugs in London, Windsor and Peterborough. That is a tragic situation. I know the minister is trying to do her best to put in some oversight and she's got some new regulations in. But the fact remains that if the outsourcing of those drugs was done five years ago, which it was, that would have been maybe a recourse that could have happened, where the Ombudsman could have looked at that process and said, "You've outsourced the drugs. Now here are the checks and balances that you should have in place by changing that system." And maybe we wouldn't have this tragic situation today.

I had a press conference on Friday in my office with one of the victims of the underdosing—a very wonderful man, very gracious to come and tell his story: Barry Vickery. Mr. Vickery has an optimistic attitude, because you have to have that kind of attitude and not be self-defeating until you know what the reality is that you're going to be dealing with, especially with your health. He was very passionate about what he talked about, and his experience. But he agrees that a third party is needed—an impartial third party. When something goes wrong in the health care system, we need to investigate and people need to have confidence in that investigation. It can't be a partisan, tainted process where people don't feel that they've got the answers.

So I think that's also what we're talking about here when we talk about the budget. We don't want a knee-jerk reaction saying, you know, "Let's vote it down," or "I support it"; we want accountability. When we talk about the two pieces that we introduced currently, they make a lot of sense. They're very reasonable and they're very practical. When you have money that has been spent unwisely—people are tired of that.

Therefore, we are saying there are ways to bring trust back to this government. There are ways to bring trust back to government in general. That's by making sure any government is held accountable with an accountability financial officer. Be it the Liberals, be it the Conservatives or be it New Democrats, we are responsible to the people of Ontario. We are accountable to the people of Ontario, whether it be a majority or a minority, and we

should make sure their precious tax dollars are spent on the services they expect—

Ms. Catherine Fife: And they deserve.

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: —and they deserve—well deserve. Because we all know how hard it is to go out there every day and make sure that there's food on the table and that you have a roof over your head and then, when you need health care, it's there to rely on and the money you've contributed to the health care system is being used to look after yourself and your family and your community.

Speaker, I just want to put that out there, that I really feel passionately about the Ombudsman and this government, I hope, really understands that that should be in their proposals. Thank you.

Second reading debate deemed adjourned.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Thank you very much. It being close to 10:15, this House stands recessed until 10:30.

The House recessed from 1010 to 1030.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Mr. Bill Walker: It's my pleasure to introduce Margaret Howard. She is the grandmother of page Brigid Howard-Waddingham. She's from the great city of Owen Sound in the wonderful riding of Bruce-Grey-Owen Sound.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: I'd just like to congratulate the Toronto Maple Leafs for making game seven, but I also want to congratulate the Ottawa Senators, Canada's only hockey team—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I might have thought somebody might have learned that we want to maybe do it as a point of order after introductions, but we'll see what happens.

The Minister of Rural Affairs.

Hon. Jeff Leal: It's a pleasure for me to introduce some summer interns who'll be working in the Ministry of Rural Affairs this summer, in the members' east gallery: Matthew Scoon, Gabrielle Schachter, Parker McKay and Zahin Chowdhury. They will be serving Kawartha Dairy ice cream tomorrow during Peterborough Day from 11 a.m. to 2:30 p.m. in the afternoon in rooms 228 and 230. I want to put them to work early.

Mr. Tim Hudak: I want to welcome some special guests from the riding of Niagara West—Glanbrook—they are the proud parents, grandmother and brother of Benjamin Comley, who is our page captain here today.

Benjamin is an impressive young man—a grade 8 student from Bellmoore Elementary School. He returned to school after a very serious injury and still was at the top of his class. He is an MVP and most dedicated player in hockey and, despite his young age, also very hard at work in supporting local charities. So I'm pleased to introduce his very proud parents, Michelle and Greg Comley, brother Jacob and grandmother Linda Moore joining us here today.

Mr. Rod Jackson: I'd like to introduce two residents from my constituency in Barrie: Sylvia and Terry Stutz, who are joining us, visiting the Legislature today and joining me for lunch.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): On behalf of the member from Eglinton—Lawrence for page Brigid Howard-Waddingham, grandmother Margaret Howard is here visiting her granddaughter.

For the member from Mississauga—Brampton South, on behalf of page Brendan Adamo, mother Rita, father Stephen, sister Robyn—a twin, I think—grandmother Collen and grandfather Louis are here. Congratulations and thank you for joining us here at Queen's Park.

Point of order from the member from Newmarket—Aurora.

Mr. Frank Klees: Mr. Speaker, I would ask all members of this Legislature—even those whose loyalties are misplaced—and all Ontarians to help me congratulate the Toronto Maple Leafs on an outstanding season, even though our hope will have to be deferred until next year.

I'll say this: Now that the Leafs are no longer in the game the only Ontario team left is Ottawa, and let's lead again in the province of Ontario in hockey with the Ottawa Senators.

Applause.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I will note that the members from the Ottawa region all stood up and applauded. It is now time—

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: With the exception of Yaka-buski.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Somebody turn her mike off.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Oh, it is off.

It is now time for question period.

ORAL QUESTIONS

POWER PLANTS

Mr. Tim Hudak: My question is to the Deputy Premier. Deputy Premier, at the justice committee today, we saw one of your Liberal members conducting himself in a way that clearly is putting the interests of the Liberal Party ahead of the interests of taxpayers in the province of Ontario.

I'm worried that there has been direction from the Premier, or the Premier's office, to try to turn a committee—instead of trying to get answers for taxpayers on why you cancelled gas plants, the costs, and why you engaged in an orchestrated cover-up—to try to turn that into a circus instead of actually getting answers for the committee.

So let me ask the Deputy Premier: In light of this approach that Liberals are taking to create chaos instead of getting answers for taxpayers, will you support our call for a full judicial inquiry into the gas plants scandal?

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Be seated, please. Stop the clock. Be seated, please. Thank you.

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Thank you to the Leader of the Opposition for the question, and I am delighted to know that he actually appeared at committee this morning. That is fantastic and a big and important step.

I am, however, terribly disappointed to learn that he had no answers to any of the questions that were asked. He appeared, and we applaud him for appearing, but unfortunately, the answers were simply lacking in any substance, in stark contrast to the Premier, Speaker, who appeared before the committee. She answered questions; she's committed to being open. Nobody wants to get the answers to these questions more than our Premier, and her actions are demonstrating that.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Tim Hudak: Back to the Deputy Premier: I will say, and I'll give credit where credit is due, that the former energy minister, Ms. Cansfield, the member from Etobicoke Centre, did conduct herself and ask responsible questions that were productive, and we commend her for that. But there's certainly a different tone from your members, so I wanted to see who was making the call. Was the member for Vaughan acting on his own, or was it Etobicoke Centre?

Clearly, then, when the Deputy Premier gives that kind of answer—your approach on this gas plant committee, obviously, then, is to create as much chaos as possible instead of trying to get responsible answers for taxpayers, who are stuck with the bill. I find that highly regrettable. I expected better from Kathleen Wynne, but she has chosen her course.

Again, in light of this orchestrated attempt by the Liberals—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Just quickly, I'm going to remind the leader to use the title or the riding, please.

Mr. Tim Hudak: Thank you, Speaker. I apologize.

I expected better from Premier Wynne. So let me ask you, in your capacity as Deputy Premier—given that your early efforts show no interest in actually getting answers for taxpayers on the costs of the cancellation of the gas plants, I'll ask you again: Why not then support a judicial inquiry which can compel truthful testimony and get answers for taxpayers?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: I think it's important that we review the actions that the Premier has taken since she became Premier of this province. She is taking full responsibility for improving the planning of these large energy projects. This new approach will include strong public consultation. It will include formal municipal input. It will include better decision-making. This report will come back to us by August 1. I think that's a very important piece of what we need to do to fix the problems that got us to where we are today.

In addition, she has written to the Auditor General and asked him to review Oakville. He has agreed to do that. She immediately called the House back and struck com-

mittees, expanded the scope of the committee, offered documents from across government.

I am extremely proud of what our Premier has done, and I only wish the Leader of the Opposition—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you. Final supplementary.

Mr. Tim Hudak: I'll respond to the Deputy Premier: With respect, the Premier has failed to apologize. She has not given direct or straight answers on some pretty basic questions about what she knew and when, and clearly was there at the cabinet table, at Dalton McGuinty's right hand, when they chose to cover up this information.

Again to the Deputy Premier: I think the motive of the Liberals was revealed today by the actions of your members at committee, which is more so to obscure facts, to throw mud, instead of getting answers for taxpayers at the end of the day. Let me ask an important question. If you're rejecting—

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Minister of the Environment, come to order.

1040

Mr. Tim Hudak: I guess, what's wrong with this? What is wrong with having a judicial inquiry, just like we saw with Justice Gomery, which can compel truthful testimony and get answers? Will it take the threat of jail doors closing behind members from the Liberals to actually compel truthful testimony and get answers for taxpayers?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Government House leader.

Hon. John Milloy: Let's talk for a second about this call for a so-called judicial inquiry. I'd like to quote an expert in the field—actually, a noted expert in public policy. He had this to say: "The cost of a public inquiry is excessive; we don't believe that that's necessary. We're paid as individuals to represent our constituents and to hold the government. And that's where we expect this, this hearing to take place."

That was the member from Cambridge who said that. So, basically, we have a Leader of the Opposition who stood there in that field on YouTube and said that if he was Premier, it'd be "done, done, done." He is standing today to ask for a judicial inquiry, which his members opposed, into a decision that he supported.

POWER PLANTS

Mr. Tim Hudak: Back to the Deputy Premier, and I do hope that you'll take the time, Deputy Premier, to answer my questions instead of engaging in the types of games your House leader tends to.

We've been very clear for months now that we believe in a full judicial inquiry, just like we saw with Justice Gomery with the sponsorship scandal involving the Liberals in Quebec at the federal level. We think a judicial inquiry is preferable, and at least my colleagues in the NDP have put an option on the table on a public inquiry. We think a judicial inquiry, though, will empower a judge to actually compel testimony with the threat,

quite frankly, that if you do break the law by perjury, if it's found you have buried or intentionally destroyed documents—these are very serious accusations. That's why we support a judicial inquiry.

Let me you ask you, if you truly want to get answers for taxpayers, why do you oppose a judicial inquiry to actually get the truth once and for all?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Government House leader.

Hon. John Milloy: The Leader of the Opposition has the gall to talk about games. I watched his appearance in front of the justice committee this morning. Mr. Speaker, 28 times direct questions were put to the Leader of the Opposition, simple questions like what was his costing? Who did he consult when he made the decision to call for the cancellation of the plants? Even to acknowledge his opposition to the plants—28 times he would not answer a single question. I have not seen skating like that since I saw those old clips of Barbara Ann Scott on TV. It was incredible to watch the evasiveness of the Leader of the Opposition. The fact that he will not hold the PC Party even to a minimal standard the way he's holding the government—he should be apologizing and offering answers to those very straightforward questions.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Tim Hudak: Obviously, we can see what the Liberals are trying to do here. They're trying to create chaos; they're trying to avoid answering. They're trying to obscure the essential issues as much as possible. I think that's very clear now.

I just want to say that I find it regrettable that Premier Wynne is engaging in this. I thought she was going to be different. I thought she was going to take it down a different path, but she's engaged in the same old Liberal games of obfuscation, dithering and stonewalling. That's why a government I lead will bring in a full judicial inquiry to get answers on behalf of taxpayers once and for all.

Let me ask this in a different way, then. I think that a government so prepared to play these types of games, so prepared to bury the truth and so prepared to put Liberal interests ahead of taxpayers—clearly you've lost the moral authority to govern. Will you call our confidence motion to the floor of the assembly to vote up or down whether we support this government or want to see it change?

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Be seated, please. Government House leader?

Hon. John Milloy: Mr. Speaker, obfuscation, dithering, stonewalling—I think they are great descriptions of what we saw today from the Leader of the Opposition. He would not even acknowledge this pamphlet here that was passed out to thousands of Ontarians that said the following: "The only party that will stop the Sherway power plant is the Ontario PC Party. On October 6, vote Ontario PC."

Mr. Speaker, we have Twitter, we have press releases, we have newspaper clippings and we have a YouTube video showing the Leader of the Opposition clearly op-

posed to the Mississauga plant and his promise to cancel it if he was Premier, yet he refused to acknowledge it today. There was so much obfuscation I half expected him to come up with the evil-twin-brother defence.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member will withdraw.

Hon. John Milloy: Withdraw.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Final supplementary.

Mr. Tim Hudak: Let me try the Deputy Premier one last time, Speaker. Deputy Premier, this power plant scandal is extremely serious and Ontarians would expect you to take it seriously, as opposed to the clownish approach of the House leader, which has tended to turn this whole thing into a circus.

We all know that the Liberals are willing to throw money at any kind of situation to try to save Liberal seats. That's clearly evident with Mississauga and Oakville. Now you're trying to throw money to buy the support of the NDP for a budget—in short, an NDP budget written by the Liberals to support Liberal seats. I don't think that's in the interests of taxpayers. I don't think that's in the interests of the 600,000 men and women who have no job to go to this morning. I think, clearly, if we want to restore hope to this great province of Ontario, if we want to get this province back on track, to bring good jobs to Ontario, to respect every taxpayer dollar, to make sure that we live within our means and end these scandals, it's time to change the government, it's time to change the leadership and to put Ontario on the right track and make Ontario lead again.

Call our motion. Allow the vote. Don't you agree?

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Be seated, please. In the thrust and parry of the House, I may have missed an opportunity to ask a member to withdraw. Under the circumstances, I do my best to try to hear all of the different—and I do read my thesaurus as often as I can, to make any references that you're unparliamentary. I also leave it to members themselves: If they find themselves in a situation where they can withdraw, they can withdraw themselves. Having said that, I'll do my best to stay on top of things.

Hon. John Milloy: The Leader of the Opposition just doesn't get it, Mr. Speaker. This is about the standards that they are holding the government to. We have a committee of the Legislature which is looking into the decision to cancel the gas plants in Mississauga and Oakville. The simple fact of the matter was that every single party of this Legislature supported the cancellation of that plant. The Leader of the Opposition aggressively campaigned in the last election to do that. He cannot appear in front of the justice committee this morning and deny that fact. It is a matter of public record. If he wants to talk about obfuscation, Mr. Speaker, he should be looking in the mirror, because his appearance in front of the committee this morning was outrageous. Twenty-eight times he was asked direct questions on very, very simple matters, even to acknowledge the fact that he opposed the

plant. Instead, he decided to go for obfuscation and disrespecting the committee and its members—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Stop the clock.

By continuing to make that reference—I'm going to call everyone to order on that issue. So just tone it down.

ONTARIO BUDGET

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Before I put my question, I'd like to take an opportunity on behalf of Ontarians and members of the Legislature to let the family of Tim Bosma know that we are grieving with them. We found out today that his remains were found by the police. His wife, Sharlene, and his daughter, and his mother, Mary, I'm sure, and all their friends and family are grieving very much today. I think it's important that we say that we're grieving along with them.

Speaker, my question is to the Deputy Premier. While the Premier has been campaigning and electioneering around the province, New Democrats have been actually listening to Ontarians about their thoughts on the budget. They're saying that the government has to do better if they expect Ontarians to trust them. Is the government going to listen to Ontarians and bring some accountability, some transparency and some fairness to their budget?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: I too want to express sincere condolences to the Bosma family. This is news that we have just received, and I think all of us have hearts that are breaking as a result of that news. We are together on that sentiment.

Speaker, as we move to the budget and who's-saying-what about the budget, it might be helpful if we look at what some Ontarians are saying about the budget. Sid Ryan—I think the member opposite will know who Sid Ryan is. He is, of course, a big supporter, a former NDP candidate, and what Sid Ryan says is: "There are good things in this budget that I think we can work with in labour, that I think the NDP can work with."

1050

Fred Hahn, the president of CUPE—again, someone more well-known perhaps to the members opposite than to our side—says, "I don't think the people of Ontario"—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you. Supplementary?

Ms. Andrea Horwath: In the last 12 months, Ontarians have seen scandals grow at Ornge; they've learned that not one, but two Premiers have hidden the true costs of moving the gas plants; and they learned that over 1,000 people were given the wrong cancer medication. Does this government really believe that it is doing enough when it comes to accountability and oversight?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Let's talk about what some other Ontarians are saying about the budget. Smokey Thomas, the president of OPSEU, says, "I don't see it as an election budget."

Gail Nyberg, the executive director of the Daily Bread Food Bank, says, "Key initiatives in this budget will help more people afford to pay the rent and put food on the

table, whether they are families with children or single people who are making the move from social assistance to employment. We encourage all parties to support the budget and the positive changes that will help low-income Ontarians facing poverty and hunger."

Sarah Blackstock, who is with the 25 in 5 Network for Poverty Reduction, says, "We think this budget is an opportunity to continue reducing poverty in Ontario. We are really eager to see the opposition parties work with the government to ensure that we continue making progress."

Many Ontarians are weighing in, and they're pretty positive about this budget.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Final supplementary.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: After the budget was introduced, New Democrats asked Ontarians what they thought, but, at the same time, the Liberals started printing election pamphlets and campaigning. New Democrats are interested in delivering real results for people, while the Liberals seem to be more interested in their own political power.

Will the government listen to people and bring accountability and transparency to their budget?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Let's listen to what the Canadian Auto Workers and Communications Energy and Paperworkers Union has to say: "The 2013-14 Ontario budget represents an important shift in emphasis by the provincial government and will make a positive difference in the lives of many Ontarians."

David Coles, the national president of the Communications Energy and Paperworkers Union says, "This [budget] is proof that minority government can work to the advantage of working people."

Ken Lewenza, the national president of the Canadian Auto Workers, says, "These [budget] investments in our social and economic fabric are both badly needed, and appreciated."

The people of Ontario have spoken. They have spoken loud and clear. This is exactly the right budget for these times, and I look forward to the third party supporting it.

TRANSPORTATION

Ms. Andrea Horwath: My next question is to the Minister of Finance. Is the Minister of Finance still committed to a poorly thought-out network of tolled carpool lanes that will cost Ontarians more than \$300 million to build before they even generate a nickel?

Hon. Charles Sousa: Well, I find it odd that the third party—or, for that matter, any of the opposition members—would feel that it's inappropriate to invest in our infrastructure, in our public transit, in the construction of roads and bridges, enabling our gridlock to ease so that we can be more competitive in the long term.

Constructing more HOV lanes is about facilitating people to get to and from home more quickly, more safely. It's also about enabling our businesses and transports to get around the city and to get around Ontario more

effectively. An hour in gridlock is an hour lost to their competitiveness. We have to invest more for the benefit of all Ontarians.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Ms. Andrea Horwath: I find it surprising that this government is about to embark on a new Lexus lane boondoggle in the province of Ontario.

While the Premier has been sending campaign staff to transit stations, New Democrats have actually been listening to Ontarians about what they think about transit. They think that transit and transportation infrastructure should be funded fairly and transparently.

Will the finance minister commit to cancelling his poorly-thought-out and outrageously expensive tolled carpool lanes?

Hon. Charles Sousa: I'm going to allow the Minister of Transportation to speak in a moment, but I think it's essential that we all appreciate and understand that we need to continue to invest to be competitive in the long term. This is not about making election-cycle decisions; this is not about playing partisan politics; it's about playing for the people of Ontario.

As for constructing more HOV lanes, for the member opposite to suggest that that is somehow inappropriate—it works in other jurisdictions around North America. It eases gridlock and it enables things to move more quickly, more safely and more effectively. Don't be short-sighted about this, don't play politics with this and don't spin it. This is about moving people quickly and more safely, and we all have to be together on this issue.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Final supplementary.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: The government plans to spend \$300 million to toll carpooling lanes, but whether it's gas plants, eHealth or the Presto fare card system, which has ballooned to almost three times its initial cost, this government cannot seem to manage Ontario's money. Will the finance minister put his plan for a \$300-million network of tolled carpool lanes on hold?

Hon. Charles Sousa: Minister of Transportation.

Hon. Glen R. Murray: I'm not sure where the leader of the third party gets her information. First of all, we are not tolling HOV lanes. There is an expansion of HOV lanes. The system of HOT lanes does not diminish by one car the access to the entire system, including the HOT lanes, for people who have more than one vehicle.

The member of the third party said that there's no plan. The Big Move has been around since 2008. KPMG put out a detailed study that explained in detail how HOT lanes work. I am confused, given that there is a plan and a detailed explanation, how someone with a party that really tops the charts for luxury car ownership can make those kinds of statements.

AIR AMBULANCE SERVICE

Mr. Frank Klees: My question is to the Minister of Health. The stench from Ornge just continues to get more offensive. Last week at the public accounts hearing, we

heard that the director of the forensic investigation team at Ornge confirmed that millions of public dollars were siphoned from health care into the Mazza scheme.

At the same hearing, we heard that the director that the minister and her deputies put in charge of a new oversight program of Ornge and his newly appointed staff have no experience in either air or ambulance services—none, and yet they're responsible now for overseeing a multi-million dollar organization that has serious financial and organizational challenges.

I want to know from the minister: Who will she hold accountable for this last experience of incompetency—the deputy minister, or will she accept responsibility herself?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: I have to say that it saddens me to see the member from Newmarket–Aurora continuing to hammer on the very hard-working people who are making our air ambulance system work.

He raises the issue about experience at the air ambulance oversight branch in the ministry, so let me tell you, Speaker: There is plenty of expertise in land and air ambulance operations at my ministry's emergency health services branch. Let me just discuss some of the people, the staff, who are experienced in land and ambulance operations. They include the senior manager of operations, along with three senior field managers and the manager of investigation services; the senior manager of corporate planning and regulatory compliance; the senior manager of performance and quality management; the senior manager of finance and corporate support; the manager of inspections, certifications and regulatory compliance; policy and operational assessment; and financial planning and reporting monitoring.

The member opposite does not know what he's talking about.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

1100

Mr. Frank Klees: Well, thank you, Minister. I have a response, Speaker, but I'll hold it back.

The fact of the matter is that the one program this minister put in place to oversee Ornge—that director has no experience in air ambulance. He admitted that at the committee hearings. Not one of the six people he hired to help him in oversight responsibility has any experience in either air or land ambulance. That is who we expect would have some experience.

The minister knows full well that she and her deputy, Patricia Li, and her deputy minister, Mr. Saäd Rafi, have yet one more time made a huge mistake in terms of their responsibility of oversight.

I now want to know this: Does she know anything about this document that sets out the requirement for \$22 million more in expenditure every year to cover off the debt that she allowed to incur? Is that \$22 million included in the budget, or will she allow a cutback in more health care services at Ornge to pay—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you. Minister of Health and Long-Term Care.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Stop the clock. Be seated, please.

Minister.

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Speaker, the air ambulance program oversight branch, on the other hand, has substantial expertise and experience in ensuring that transfer payment agencies are transparent, accountable and get value for money when spending taxpayer dollars. That's their job.

Richard Jackson, whom the member has mentioned, is the director of the EHSB and AAPOB and has extensive experience in oversight of transfer payment agencies, including community colleges, private career colleges, the Ontario Student Assistance Program, Toronto's children's aid societies, children's mental health agencies, developmental services agencies and women's shelters. Speaker, this is an expert in oversight—fiscal responsibility.

I think this is exactly the kind of expertise that the member opposite would like to see looking over Ornge air ambulance services. It's what he has been calling for, and it's what we've delivered.

POWER PLANTS

Mr. Peter Tabuns: The question is to the Acting Premier. For months, Ontarians have been learning how interference by the Premier's office ratcheted up the cost of the gas plants. The Premier's principal secretary agreed to "preserve the value of TransCanada's project." It's unaccountable; it doesn't respect Ontarians.

Will the Acting Premier admit what everyone else knows, that the interference of Liberal political staff drove up the cost of the gas plant cancellation to more than half a billion dollars?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Government House leader.

Hon. John Milloy: This is a matter that has been discussed in great detail at committee. We've heard from a number of different witnesses, including Jamison Steeve, formerly of the Premier's office, who testified that, "My discussions with TransCanada were exploratory in nature...."

Sean Mullin, another Premier's office employee, said, "We were not authorized to ... and we did not engage in" any negotiation.

Representatives from TCE themselves—the gentleman Chris Breen said that "they were—certainly not negotiating in the sense of fine-detail dollars and cents."

This is something that the committee has looked at and I think has been dealt with by the witnesses who have appeared before the committee.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Peter Tabuns: Back to the Acting Premier: The promises made by the Premier's office made it impossible for the Ontario Power Authority to negotiate a good deal for ratepayers. When the OPA made an offer to TransCanada to cancel the plant in Oakville, TransCanada turned them down. They said, "The Premier's office has given us a sweeter deal."

Ontarians deserve accountability. They expect that their money will be spent wisely, not wasted on Liberal seats. Will the Acting Premier admit that the interference of senior political staff drove up costs so that Ontarians have to pay more?

Hon. John Milloy: Again, I think we have to go back to first principles. There were 19 gas plants that were sited in this province, and the government clearly acknowledges that in two of those cases we made an error. We went forward to the people of both Mississauga and Oakville—indeed, the people of Ontario—and said that we would cancel those decisions. That would have costs associated with it.

I remind the honourable member that his leader and his party, and indeed even himself, in public comments said the exact same thing. I would remind him that the Leader of the Opposition, despite the fact that he refused to answer 28 direct questions to him this morning, aggressively said that he would cancel the project.

There were to be costs associated with the cancellation of the project. We knew that. The leader of the New Democratic Party knew that. The leader of the PC Party knew that. Everyone knew that. We listened to the people in those communities and acted accordingly. As to the detailed questions he's asking today, they have all been dealt with in front of the committee.

EQUAL OPPORTUNITY

Mr. Grant Crack: My question is to the minister responsible for women's issues. We all know that women play a very important role in the province and in this country. Approximately half of Canada's workforce is female. In 2011, female graduates from Ontario's colleges and universities made up nearly 60% of the total. I'm a proud member of this government led by Ontario's first female Premier, and our cabinet and caucus include a large number of women.

Unfortunately, these successes do not translate into the private sector. Women are still critically under-represented in private sector leadership positions, in both management roles and on boards of directors. Several recent reports suggest that the pace at which women in the private sector are reaching senior positions is slowing down, not speeding up.

Mr. Speaker, through you to the minister, what is our government doing to promote gender diversity in the private sector?

Hon. Laurel C. Broten: Thank you to the member for Glengarry–Prescott–Russell for this important question. We need to tackle this issue as a province because having women in leadership roles drives innovation, improves corporate social responsibility and paves the way to a greater number of women in senior executive roles. In fact, research tells us that companies with high representation of women in senior management positions and on the board outperform those with fewer women on key metrics in financial success.

I'm proud that our government is doing our part by taking strong action to promote the benefits of gender diversity and equal representation in the private sector and on corporate boards and in senior management. In fact, page 291 of the 2013 Ontario budget reaffirms the government's commitment to delivering programs that promote women's equality and addresses the lack of gender diversity on boards and in senior management of major businesses, non-profits and other organizations. We will enlist the Ontario Securities Commission to help us determine the best way to proceed on this disclosure issue.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Grant Crack: Thank you, Minister, for that very comprehensive answer. The initiatives that the minister discussed are extremely important in helping ensure that Ontario's hard-working women are fairly represented in private sector leadership positions.

While women are still under-represented on corporate boards and in management positions, it has been shown that women can find great success in small businesses as well. Small businesses are the source of more jobs in Ontario than any other sector, and female-owned small businesses are one of the fastest-growing segments of the economy.

Mr. Speaker, through you to the minister, what is this government doing to provide women with the opportunities and the resources to become successful small business owners or operators?

Hon. Laurel C. Broten: There is no doubt that small businesses are the backbone of this province's economy. Small businesses, particularly those run by women, play an integral part in driving innovation, creating jobs and growing the economy of Ontario.

Ontario's 2013 budget makes smart investments that will strengthen the economy and takes action to eliminate the deficit by 2017-18. It recognizes the importance of small business and entrepreneurship. The budget is a testament to that through measures such as the Commercialization and Innovation Voucher program, the establishment of the venture capital fund in partnership with the private sector and more support for women entrepreneurs.

We see women being able to get their businesses off the ground through the help of our small business enterprise centres and the new microlending initiative that will help low-income women build and grow their small businesses. These initiatives are good for women and they're good for the province of Ontario.

POWER PLANTS

Mr. Victor Fedeli: Good morning. My question is for the Deputy Premier. Three months have passed since they promised to be "open and transparent" regarding the gas plant scandal, yet the Liberals continue to go to extraordinary efforts to keep the facts from the public.

We've learned that the email accounts of three of the former Premier's former staffers, including his chief of

staff, no longer exist and can't be recovered; this, despite a legal requirement to keep those records for five years before going to Ontario archives. Vital documents that could have helped the justice committee get to the answers are conveniently missing. This warped version of "open and transparent" is not the kind of Ontario we want.

My question is, will you support our motion for a non-confidence vote on your scandal-plagued government?

1110

Hon. Deborah Matthews: To the government House leader.

Hon. John Milloy: Mr. Speaker, he has the gall to stand today and talk about transparency after the performance of his leader in front of the committee. Twenty-eight times he was asked direct questions—not complicated questions; not even trick questions. We asked him to simply acknowledge the fact that he starred in a YouTube video, saying that if he was Premier of the province, this gas plant would be "done, done, done." We asked him the simple question as to what was going to be his costing, what experts he had asked, and who in his party had reached out to do the proper analysis. He put on his ice skates and avoided every single question.

We got no transparency from him. If the Leader of the Opposition will not tell us, will the honourable member in his supplementary tell us whether he will encourage the Conservative candidates in those ridings to come forward? We've been asking them; we've been begging them; we've been pleading with them. We want some answers.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Victor Fedeli: We bring out sworn testimony and he brings out dance routines. We're getting tired of that.

Let's move on from the destruction of documents to the withholding of the real costs of this Liberal scandal and when you knew them. Michael Lyle of the Ontario Power Authority was asked at the justice committee last week when the Liberal government knew the Mississauga cancellation was much more than you publicly stated. His response was, "They would have been aware that there were costs that had been paid more than the \$190 million," and that was back in July 2012. Yet you and your cabinet colleagues clung to that figure for nine months until the Auditor General told us what you already knew.

This is failed leadership at its worst, and it's time for a test of confidence. Will you support our motion tomorrow to allow a non-confidence vote in this Legislature?

Hon. John Milloy: I would remind the honourable member that in the testimony of the Premier several weeks ago—she appeared when asked, unlike the Leader of the Opposition. But in the testimony of the Premier several weeks ago, I believe there were four or five different numbers that came forward from the OPA.

I think that all of us in this House realize the reasonable thing to do is to have the Auditor General, an officer of this Legislature, finish his report on the Oakville situation. That report was undertaken at the personal

request of the Premier upon receiving office. Let us let the Auditor General do his work. I think the one thing we've found through testimony of various experts at the committee is that this is a very complicated and technical matter. I think we should leave it with this fine officer of the Legislature, the Auditor General.

TRANSPORTATION

Mr. Rosario Marchese: My question is to the Minister of Transportation. Yesterday the minister appeared to take a step back on high-occupancy tolls. While the budget speech said that the government would commit to moving quickly to implement tolls, the minister now says that the government is not rushing into anything. Has the minister now realized that putting high-occupancy tolls on hundreds of kilometres of Ontario's highways is an expensive and risky scheme that Metrolinx agrees is not a significant revenue source for transit?

Hon. Glen R. Murray: Mr. Speaker, no, we are not taking a step back, and no, we are not rushing into anything. We are going forward steadily down the path we committed to in the budget. I'm sorry that people in that party are feeling hoisted on their own petard with their confusing positions on transit that we're getting into this word detail.

Let me read the budget very carefully so it's not lost on anyone: "The province is committing to convert select high-occupancy vehicle ... lanes in the GTHA into high-occupancy toll (HOV/HOT) lanes, in which carpooling drivers would"—and I want to emphasize—"continue to drive for free, but other drivers would be able to choose to drive in these lanes for a toll. Toll-free options would exist on all highways that have HOV/HOT lanes. This model has been successfully implemented in several places, including in Florida, Texas and California."

That has been published for quite a while now. I don't think it's complicated English. I'm sure the member opposite understands it.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Rosario Marchese: I appreciate the simplicity of the message.

The Minister of Transportation and the Minister of Finance appear to be awfully optimistic about the revenue potential of high-occupancy toll lanes. But in February, we learned that the new HOT lanes in Washington, DC, lost over \$11 million in just their first six weeks of operation. The Washington, DC, HOT lanes are only 14 miles long. Meanwhile, the province has committed to building up to 450 kilometres worth of HOT lanes.

Will the government stop wasting time with risky tolling schemes and instead focus on the real job of building new transportation options for Ontarians?

Hon. Glen R. Murray: Would the third party stop futzing around and decide whether they're going to support what is the largest investment in infrastructure and transportation in the history of this province? We have more projects out there, like the Eglinton Crosstown,

which is, quite frankly, the largest—just on its own—transit project in the history of Ontario.

We introduced HOV lanes in 2005. They've been a tremendous success. There were naysayers at the time. We are prudently looking at the experiences. The member opposite's view is somewhat limited. California has had these for three years. They did not make money in the first year. By the second year, they were successful. By the third year, they were a roaring success. Their valuation was released just two weeks ago.

So, yes, we are prudently looking at all the evidence, the experiences of other places, and we will make sure Ontarians get solutions to their congestion challenges.

YOUTH EMPLOYMENT

Ms. Dipika Damerla: Last night, I held a town hall in my riding of Mississauga East-Cooksville, where we discussed the budget. Some of the things we talked about, as you can imagine, were auto insurance, increased investments in home care, our infrastructure plans and our deficit-control plans, but one area that generated a lot of interest, a lot of questions, was our youth employment strategy. Would the Minister of Economic Development and Trade please tell us what plans we have in our budget to increase well-paying jobs for our young?

Hon. Eric Hoskins: Thank you to the member from Mississauga East-Cooksville for her question and her hard work on this issue.

Our budget proposes a comprehensive Youth Jobs Strategy of \$295 million over two years. This strategy actually incorporates many of the good suggestions that came from the NDP but goes substantially further on additional measures to help youth get jobs.

Our Youth Jobs Strategy is designed to create employment opportunities for about 30,000 youth across the province and to promote entrepreneurship and innovation in Ontario. Our government's already begun consulting on the strategy. In fact, last Friday I had the opportunity, together with the Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities, to consult with about 30 individuals from business, union representatives, academics, obviously many youth themselves and not-for-profit organizations to talk about how we might refine the strategy so it's most impactful.

I encourage both opposition parties to work with us to pass the budget so we can move forward with this important initiative.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Ms. Dipika Damerla: Thank you, Minister, for your great response.

I just want to give a shout-out to all the people in my riding who came out for the town hall despite the Leafs game. It was a great town hall. I just wanted to say that.

I do want to say that we are all about building our community. As great as it is to have a good employment strategy for our youth, we want to make sure that we can employ our youth in the communities they live. So I'd like to ask the minister what our plans are for our rural

youth to make sure that they have equal opportunities for good well-paying jobs.

Hon. Eric Hoskins: To the Minister of Rural Affairs.

Hon. Jeff Leal: I want to commend the member from Mississauga East–Cooksville for her wonderful leadership in her community.

Our 2013 budget delivers for rural Ontario. The \$295-million youth strategy will benefit young people across Ontario, and will strengthen rural communities.

In addition to this investment, our government has been helping to connect students with jobs in rural Ontario communities through our Rural Summer Jobs Service. Since 2007, this program has connected 18,000 students with jobs and helped over 7,000 rural employers. The Rural Summer Jobs Service is part of our government's Ontario summer jobs strategy. It's another way we're helping to promote innovation and entrepreneurship amongst our people.

Mr. Speaker, I was in Havelock, Ontario, last Saturday, meeting with my good friend Elmer Buchanan. They're excited in Havelock about the summer jobs for rural youth.

1120

POWER PLANTS

Mr. John Yakabuski: My question is for the Deputy Premier. It's clear from your answers here in this House and the actions of your Liberal members of the justice committee that you have no interest in seeing the committee get to the bottom of the Oakville and Mississauga gas plant scandals.

The public deserves accountability. They deserve to know how your government wasted \$600 million. The Ontario PC Party has moved a want of confidence motion. If you'll agree to support our opposition day motion tomorrow, we can settle once and for all who stands for the people of Ontario and who stands to support the Liberal Party and its scandals.

Acting Premier, will you do the right and proper thing? Will you support our opposition day motion and bring our want of confidence motion to the floor of this Legislature?

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Be seated, please. Be seated, please.

Acting Premier?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: To the government House leader.

Hon. John Milloy: The line of questioning that was pursued this morning, the answers that I've given in the House—there's nothing frivolous here. The simple fact of the matter is that there is a concern about the cancellation of these gas plants. The point that we're trying to make is that every party of the House—particularly the opposition party aggressively campaigned that if the Leader of the Opposition became Premier, he would do the exact same thing: He would cancel the plant.

I believe those are relevant facts that the committee needs to know, so we invited the Leader of the Opposition this morning in front of the committee. We didn't ask him tough or technical questions; we simply asked him to acknowledge the fact that not only did he appear in a video and hold a press conference and his candidates put out tweets, and asked him about his costing and about the due diligence that he did. Twenty-eight times he refused to answer those direct questions.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you. Supplementary?

Mr. John Yakabuski: The Liberal Party has no—it's track record is one of obfuscating and scandals, billions—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Withdraw, please.

Mr. John Yakabuski: Withdraw. Maybe the House leader could withdraw the 30 times he said it.

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Sit down, please. The member from Prince Edward–Hastings will come to order. The member from Prince Edward–Hastings is warned.

The member from Pembroke will simply withdraw with no comment.

Mr. John Yakabuski: Withdraw.

Your Liberal track record is a laundry list of billions of dollars wasted on scandal after scandal. Whenever you're caught red-handed, you conveniently say, "We're going to set up this committee or that committee," and "This will never happen again."

The problem isn't just accountability; it's the arrogance of that government over there. There's one thing that the people of Ontario can be sure of: If you think you can get away with it, you'll do it again.

So I'm asking you, given your record, once again, will you do the right thing? Tomorrow there's an opposition day motion that will bring a want-of-confidence motion to the floor of this House. Let the people decide—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Stop the clock. Be seated, please. Be seated, please.

Government House leader.

Hon. John Milloy: Mr. Speaker, you want to talk about caught red-handed? This was the party that went out and paid for robocalls throughout thousands of homes, saying the only way to stop the gas plant was to elect a PC government. This was a party that went out and held press conferences, that dropped leaflets that said, "The only party that will"—and "will" is underlined—"stop the Sherway power plant is the Ontario PC Party. On October 6, vote Ontario PC."

The minimum we wanted was for the Leader of the Opposition to at least acknowledge that position, a very public position, and 28 times he evaded that question in a series of simple questions about his due diligence and his analysis.

There's a double-standard going on here, and I think it's time that the Progressive Conservative Party stood up

and acknowledged the very simple fact that they opposed the principal—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you. New question.

CANCER TREATMENT

Mr. Taras Natyshak: My question is to the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care. More than a month after we learned about the errors in chemotherapy dosing, patients are still left with the most basic questions of what went wrong. We've seen a lot of finger-pointing and it's only getting worse. This week, Marchese, the drug provider, threatened to sue the Windsor Regional Hospital for defamatory remarks after the hospital did its best to communicate the situation to its patients. My question is simple: Does the minister think that escalating conflict and finger-pointing is benefiting patients in any way?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: What I can tell you is that my first and last concern has always been for the patients who are affected. That's why, immediately upon learning about this underdosing issue, the appropriate steps were taken. Patients were notified. They had rapid meetings with their oncologists. They had group meetings where they could get answers to the questions that they of course had. We set up a working group with all of the partners around the table, who are working through the issues. We've appointed a third party investigator to look at the entire safety of our cancer drugs supply chain. That work is well under way.

We owe it to the patients of Ontario, not just the patients affected by this underdosing but all patients, that we get answers to the very legitimate questions that they have.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Taras Natyshak: The minister response would be all well and good if it wasn't simply after the fact that these measures were brought into place. Ontario's patients seem to be the ones who continue to be left out of the equation. They want transparency, accountability and answers on how this could have happened.

This week, New Democrats urged the government to grant Ombudsman's oversight over our health care system because patients need someone rooting for them and asking the tough questions. Will the minister finally make sure that someone is working for patients and grant Ombudsman's oversight over our health care system?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Ontarians have well-deserved confidence in our health care system. Our cancer outcomes are amongst the best in the world. The safety of our cancer care system is beyond reproach, but we must always strive to make it better. Whenever an issue arises that instructs us on how we can strengthen the system, I can assure you that we will move on those recommendations.

Even the member from Nickel Belt acknowledges that an Ontarian who gets cancer has one of the best chances of survival anywhere in the world. The member from Nickel Belt said that "we have an excellent health care

system" and "an excellent cancer care system." The member is right. I have said over and over again that we have an excellent system but it is not a perfect system, and we are striving every day to make it better.

NORTHERN ECONOMY

Mr. Phil McNeely: My question is for the Minister of Energy. Minister, a strong northern Ontario economy is important not only for people in northern communities but for the health of the province in general. Our government has been a strong supporter of the north and is taking action to address challenges such as job creation, revitalizing transportation infrastructure and improving vital access to the Ring of Fire.

Part of helping the northern economy grow is ensuring that our largest job creators are supported. Will the minister please update the House on what our government is doing to help northern industries?

Hon. Bob Chiarelli: I thank the member for Ottawa—Orléans for the question. The member is right: A strong northern economy is vital for the province as a whole. That's why we introduced the Northern Industrial Electricity Rate Program in 2010 to assist Ontario's largest industrial electricity consumers reduce their energy costs. These firms are key economic contributors and job creators in the north, and this program supports their employees and communities while maintaining global competitiveness.

Our government is committed to helping the north succeed. That's why we announced in this year's budget that we are investing \$360 million to extend the program for an additional three years, thanks to the advocacy of our northern caucus members. That's why the members opposite should be supporting this budget.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Phil McNeely: Thank you, Minister, for your response. I'm glad to hear that our government is continuing its strong support for northern communities with this investment.

The Northern Industrial Electricity Rate Program has been an important program for large firms across the north as they grow and create jobs, but the global recession and its after-effects have created unprecedented challenges for the north, especially the forestry sector. Can the minister provide more details about this program extension and how it will help forestry and other sectors continue to thrive as the economy continues its recovery?

1130

Hon. Bob Chiarelli: As I mentioned, we are making a \$360-million investment in northern Ontario in this year's budget. The Northern Industrial Electricity Rate Program was created to help key northern industries like forestry. It reduces energy bills for large consumers in the north by 25%. In fact, since 2010 this rate program has created or protected nearly 16,000 jobs in the north. Those are jobs across 24 northern forestry, steel and mining-related facilities.

As the member mentioned, these industries have faced unprecedented challenges through the global recession

and its after-effects, so I hope all parties in this House stand with us and support the budget to help northern Ontario residents.

POWER PLANTS

Mr. Rob Leone: My question is for the government House leader. Today in the justice committee investigating your government's gas plant scandal, things took an interesting turn. Your party adopted a new strategy: Instead of evading questions in justice committee, you've now undertaken to ask irrelevant questions. The member from Vaughan asked question after question unrelated to the true government costs and the cover-up that the government instituted, instead using his 30 minutes taking cheap political shots—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member will withdraw.

Mr. Rob Leone: I'll withdraw.

This is a committee with a mandate to get to the bottom of a \$600-million-and-counting scandal that leads directly to the Premier's office. Government House leader, will it take a judicial inquiry and the threat of jail time for this Premier and her party to start taking this matter seriously?

Hon. John Milloy: I want to ask, if the questions were so irrelevant, why did the Leader of the Opposition not answer them? The questions that we were asking were very straightforward. We asked why he was so aggressive in his campaign to cancel the gas plant, why he said that if he was Premier he would cancel it. We asked similar questions to the ones they've asked our members: What kind of analysis and due diligence was done? Mr. Speaker, 28 times questions of that nature were put to the leader of the opposition, and 28 times he avoided asking them. If they are so irrelevant, I am not sure why he would not be forthcoming. If they are so irrelevant, I'm not sure why the PC candidates from that area are not forthcoming. Maybe in the supplementary, the member can talk about the efforts they're making to have those PC candidates come before the committee.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Rob Leone: I have a little message for the government House leader: As the government corruption meter rises, so too do our calls for a judicial inquiry go louder.

After acknowledging YouTube videos and reading quotes—many quotes—the Liberals weren't getting the answers that they were looking for. The government House leader begged the leader of Her Majesty's loyal opposition to come to the justice committee, and this morning he did. What the Liberals' star witness said this morning is that the McGuinty-Wynne government has not learned its lessons from this scandal, and that they'll do it again if given the chance. That's right, Mr. Speaker: They will spend hundreds of millions of dollars to buy another election if given a chance. We expect the Premier and her office to act responsibly, or at least be truthful with the people of Ontario when her government officials come before a standing committee of this Legislature.

Government House leader, will it take a threat of jail time to achieve some honesty from the party across the aisle, or are you so committed—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Be seated, please. Government House leader.

Hon. John Milloy: Let me get this straight: When the Liberal Party, in the last election, promised to cancel the gas plant, it was the worst thing that has ever befallen this society since the Macarena or the plague, and when the Progressive Conservative Party makes the exact same promise, we don't want to talk about it. Some 28 times we asked the Leader of the Opposition just to simply acknowledge his position, and he wouldn't. Why the double standard?

When it comes to a judicial inquiry, we are following the advice of their very own member, who said, "The cost of a public inquiry is excessive. We don't believe that that's necessary. We're paid as individuals to represent our constituents and to hold the government, and that's where we expect this hearing to take place." I could not agree with the honourable member more.

ELLIOT LAKE INQUIRY

Mr. Michael Mantha: My question is to the Minister of Labour. Last week, at the Elliot Lake inquiry, a representative of the Ministry of Labour said the ministry bore no responsibility for the tragedy in which Lucie Aylwin and Doloris Perizzolo tragically lost their lives. The ministry official testified that the employer is responsible for the protection of their workers but that the workers are also responsible for their own safety. They also said that the ministry officials were a check on the system and could not be disciplined as a result of this disaster.

To even imply that these two women were more responsible for their own protection in their place of work than the Ministry of Labour is ridiculous. The Ministry of Labour inspection offices were housed in the Algo mall for 10 years but did little to address conditions in the leaking mall situation.

Will the minister call the federal occupational health and safety inspectors to investigate the Ministry of Labour's role and recommend whether changes or other actions are warranted?

Hon. Yasir Naqvi: I want to thank the member opposite for the question. Speaker, as you know, and as the House knows, the government established the Elliot Lake commission of inquiry. By establishing that public commission, the government has clearly demonstrated its commitment to an independent review of the circumstances surrounding the collapse of the Algo Centre Mall.

The commission is authorized to review the policies, processes and procedures of the provincial government. This includes the policies and procedures of the Ministry of Labour, which were addressed directly in evidence this past week. The government has been providing full and complete co-operation to the commission in fulfilling its mandate and will continue to do so.

The matter of the collapse of the Algo Centre Mall is now before the commission, and the government is of the view that the commission remains the proper forum for examining this issue. It would be inappropriate to comment on any evidence that has been heard by the inquiry, and of course the government looks forward to the commission's recommendations.

VISITOR

Mr. Jagmeet Singh: I'd like to invite the House to join me in welcoming to the House today a good friend, an activist and an organizer who founded a women's empowerment group and a cultural group that promotes Punjabi culture: Sumeet Kaur Gill.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): There are no deferred votes. This House stands recessed until 3 p.m.

The House recessed from 1138 to 1500.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

DOUG FINLEY

Mr. Toby Barrett: I thank the Ontario Legislature for the opportunity to pay tribute to Senator Doug Finley, 1946-2013, remembered as the attack dog who won the 2004, 2006 and 2008 federal elections and was a player on the Ontario scene.

Doug's mother-in-law, Muriel Dennis, introduced us 15 years ago. I wined him and dined him at Arby's in Simcoe, and he agreed to come out of retirement to run my 1999 re-election. The boundaries had changed. We had to win Harry and Bob Nixon country.

A ruthless manager and a GOTV technician, we won three provincial awards and changed provincial, municipal and federal campaigns forever. We also got the most votes out for the Jim Flaherty campaign, next to Jim. Doug Finley was the one you wanted working for you, not against you.

A Scottish nationalist, Quebec Liberal operative and one not to suffer fools, Doug was a senior executive at Rolls-Royce Canada in Montreal, president of Standard-Aero, senior VP of Avcorp Industries and CEO of Fernlea Flowers down in Haldimand-Norfolk.

Over the past week, he attended the Senate, frail, but undoubtedly the fire still burned deep—pugnacious and feisty to the end.

My heart goes out to his wife, Diane, human resources minister and Haldimand-Norfolk MP. She knew the softer side of Doug. She knew of his life with a good cigar and that low-flying bird, Famous Grouse.

Thank you, Senator Finley.

ISLAND AIRPORT

Mr. Michael Prue: It was my privilege last night to attend a meeting in the Beach. It was called Jets Over the Beach. It was put together by the local member of

Parliament, Matt Kellway. There were many residents there. The issue is the proposal of allowing jets to fly into Billy Bishop airport on the Island.

There was documentation given out to the people who were in attendance: letters from the Toronto Port Authority that outlined that it is, in fact, their responsibility and the responsibility of Transport Canada as well; and a tripartite agreement with the Toronto Port Authority, the city of Toronto and the airport itself that sets all the stuff.

But there is a role for the province—my reason for speaking here today. The province does appoint an appointee to the Toronto Port Authority, and the province would ultimately be responsible for any environmental assessment, should the airport be expanded to include jets.

The issue for the people in the Beach is primarily one of noise and noise abatement. The Beach is one of the noise-sensitive areas, and flights are not supposed to go over there; if they do, they're not supposed to fly within 2,500 feet. The records of complaints have continued to escalate: an average now of some 272 complaints registered with the Toronto Port Authority per year.

I want to thank Gwen and Gord Fogel, the primary people, because they brought out the fact that there are 17 million visitors to the Beach. Neighbourhoods are at risk, the Leslie Street Spit, the birds and the Toronto Islands. Please, let's be sensitive about this.

M&M MEAT SHOPS

Ms. Soo Wong: I'm very pleased to rise this afternoon to recognize the outstanding work of M&M Meat Shops across Ontario and a local business owner in my riding of Scarborough-Agincourt.

This past Saturday, I had the honour of assisting in the 25th annual M&M Meat Shops Charity BBQ Day in support of the Crohn's and Colitis Foundation of Canada, better known as CCFC. This recognized charity is dedicated to finding a cure for Crohn's disease and ulcerative colitis, and improving the lives of children and adults affected by these diseases.

As many of my colleagues here in the Legislature and many Ontarians from across the province are aware, Crohn's and colitis are conditions that affect the gastrointestinal tract. For people with Crohn's and colitis, there are few things as important as finding a cure.

Over the past 25 years, M&M Meat Shops have raised more than \$23 million for medical research dedicated to finding a cure for inflammatory bowel disease.

Dr. Kevin Glasgow, who is the CEO of CCFC, wanted to express his thanks to M&M shops and supporters. He said, "We are extremely grateful to those who support M&M Meat Shops Charity BBQ Day. Our 25-year partnership with M&M Meat Shops has made a tremendous difference...."

Mr. Speaker, I'd like to end my remarks by thanking Tony Zheng and his amazing team from Scarborough-Agincourt, as well as the Scarborough Lions members for their volunteer work this past Saturday. It was a great

success, and to everyone involved, I want to say thank you and congratulations for this 25th anniversary of barbecue day at M&M.

GUL NAWAZ

Mr. Frank Klees: I rise to pay tribute to a true friend, a trusted adviser, a loyal and enthusiastic supporter, a stalwart of his community, an exemplary citizen of Ontario and Canada. Gul Nawaz left behind a legacy of good works, a reputation for honesty and integrity, and a circle of friends that crosses all ethnic, racial, social and political divides.

Gul never stopped until his work was done. That work came to an end on Saturday, May 11, when he responded to his maker's call, from behind his desk, no doubt having argued for one more moment to complete his final transaction. Knowing Gul, that was probably a contribution to one of his many charitable causes, whether his beloved Credit Valley Hospital, the Mississauga Arts Council, the Peel Multicultural Council or—and, Speaker, this speaks to his deep wisdom—the federal and provincial Conservative parties.

I had the pleasure of knowing Gul Nawaz as my friend for more than 25 years. Yesterday, I had the honour of speaking at his funeral service. As I stood before his family and friends, I asked them to do something in honour of Gul. I asked everyone to smile, because there was no one whose smile was more uplifting, more infectious and more sincere. That smile, together with his clear and gentle eyes and encouraging words that never spoke malice of anyone, are what endeared this man to everyone he met.

Untiring in dedication, unwavering in loyalty and uncompromising in his principles, Gul Nawaz will continue to live through the many people he touched and inspired throughout his life. Our thoughts and prayers continue with his wife, Ghazala, his family and his friends, far and wide.

NURSES' AWARDS

Mr. Taras Natyshak: I am pleased to rise in the Legislature today to acknowledge some local superheroes in scrubs, who were recently recognized for their important work in the field of nursing last week in Essex country.

Elsie Galbraith is among the first honourees. Just days away from retirement, she received Hôtel-Dieu Grace Hospital's annual Jeanne Mance Nursing Excellence Award. "I'm totally overwhelmed," said Galbraith, who has worked for nearly 40 years at Hôtel-Dieu, most recently in the trauma program.

Three nurses at Leamington District Memorial Hospital also received special recognition on Monday. The three latest Daisy Award winners are Michelle White-Lavadan, Mary Ann Baldwin and Cathie Morrison.

Windsor Regional Hospital presented Margaret (Peggy) Beadow with its lifetime achievement award. Beadow, who has worked as a registered nurse for 50

years, stated, "I always wanted to be a nurse; I went right out of high school."

Nursing Excellence Awards will also be presented to Windsor Regional nurses Shelley Farrand, Mary Sauve, Deborah Archibald, Ruth Wilson and Sukhwinder Saini.

Gerry Carey is also the recipient of the hospital's Global Mitra nursing award, which recognizes a nurse whose work speaks to the hospital's commitment to diversity, and Ena Montelone and Deb Ruston are the hospital's latest Daisy Award recipients.

Shauna Carter, an 11-year veteran of the nursing profession, receives the sixth annual Lois Fairley nursing award, and states, "I'm just overwhelmed with joy." The Lois Fairley award recognizes a local nurse whose work has positively affected the lives of patients or their workplaces.

I want to thank these special members of our community for their dedication to nursing and exemplary service to Essex county.

1510

EDITH HEMINGWAY

Mrs. Laura Albanese: It is with great pleasure that I rise today to speak about one of my constituents who recently celebrated her 90th birthday. Edith Mabel Hemingway is an inspiration to all of the people who know her. What is amazing about Edith Mabel Hemingway is that she turned 90 and she's still enjoying her second career working for McDonalds at the Runnymede and Bloor location.

For the past 23 years, right after she retired from her previous career, Edith has been taking the same bus every week to get to work. When she first started to work at McDonalds, she was stationed in the kitchen, but she soon asked to be transferred to the dining room, because she very much enjoys getting to know her customers.

Mrs. Hemingway has worked with dedication and has been committed to other people's well-being throughout her life. During the Second World War, she moved from New Brunswick to Ontario to serve in the army's nursing corps at Sunnybrook Hospital. I was honoured to join Edith Mabel Hemingway, her family, friends and neighbours to celebrate her lifetime accomplishments. She's a wonderful example of work ethics, diligence, energy and joviality, so I would like to wish her a happy birthday from all of us here at the Legislature.

TED BLOWES

Mr. Randy Pettapiece: Today I want to remember and pay tribute to Ted Blowes. Ted passed away on Saturday, May 11, at the age of 76.

Ted was an incredibly passionate community leader and volunteer. He was known affectionately around town as "Mr. Stratford" for his tireless work and his giving spirit. Ted was a secondary school teacher for 34 years, retiring as the head of the geography department at Northwestern Secondary School. He was actively

involved in public service, serving six terms on Stratford city council: two as alderman and the last four as mayor.

Ted will be forever remembered as one of Stratford's most prominent volunteers. He was involved with a countless number of organizations, including the Stratford Festival. He founded both the Stratford Citizens for the Environment Club and the Stratford Beautification and Environment Awareness Committee.

Ted has been widely celebrated for his achievements and dedication. He was recognized as the Stratford Rotary Club's Paul Harris Fellow, the city of Stratford's Man of the Year and senior of the year, and is a Queen's Silver Jubilee Medal recipient. On November 5, 2012, I was proud to honour Ted with the Queen Elizabeth II Diamond Jubilee Medal. He was recognized for his outstanding record of public service and his dedication to environmentalism.

I know that all MPPs will want to join me in sending our condolences to Ted's children, his partner Patricia and his entire family. Ted was an admirable leader and will be remembered for all that he did to make Stratford such a wonderful community.

LOCAL FOOD

Ms. Helena Jaczek: I would like to encourage all Ontarians to support our province's local food industry by visiting local farmers' markets and roadside food stands. In my great riding of Oak Ridges–Markham, there are many of both of these that my constituents and I enjoy attending regularly. Markham alone has three farmers' markets and seven on-farm markets and pick-your-own farms. This includes the Markham Farmers' Market, which opened this past Saturday, Reesor Farm Market and Whittamore's berry farm, which is also famous for its jams and pies.

In fact, Reesor Farm Market, which also operates Reesor Farm Kitchen in Stouffville, has been providing the greater Toronto area with fresh, locally grown fruits and vegetables for over 25 years. In the township of King, the King City Chamber of Commerce and Agriculture's Farmer's Market will open on May 23 this year.

Oak Ridges–Markham has a thriving agriculture and food industry. Strawberries, apples, poultry, beef, pork and zucchini are just a small taste of the types of produce and food grown in my great riding. Farmers' markets and food stands present Ontarians with an engaging means to learn about our local food industry and play a role in highlighting the interconnectedness of rural and urban Ontario. I encourage my constituents and colleagues to choose local food and help local economies by going to their local farmers' market or roadside food stand.

CARBON MONOXIDE DETECTORS

Mr. Ernie Hardeman: Earlier this month, the Yukon passed legislation that would require carbon monoxide detectors in all homes. This follows the tragic deaths last year of five people due to carbon monoxide poisoning. That legislation will save lives.

Here in Ontario, I brought forward a bill to require carbon monoxide detectors. I've introduced it four times. It's passed second reading unanimously three times, it's passed committee unanimously, but it has never been called for third reading.

It's named the Hawkins Gignac Act after a family of four in my riding who died from carbon monoxide poisoning four years ago. We've been working since then to get this bill passed. Over the time we've been debating this bill, Ontarians have had more unnecessary tragedies. Carbon monoxide is the leading cause of accidental poisoning.

Last spring, all three parties made an agreement to move forward private members' bills. Our party has been clear: This is one we wanted to move forward. The Premier told the fire chiefs earlier this month that it was something we needed to make happen, but her party has been dragging its feet in making it law. The third party says they support carbon monoxide detectors. Publicly they say the bill should move forward, but now they are part of the problem.

It's time to put aside party issues. It's time to honour our agreement. It's time to move this bill forward to save lives. I ask all parties to commit to unanimous consent so we can finally pass the Hawkins Gignac Act and ensure all Ontarian families have the protection of a carbon monoxide detector.

STATEMENTS BY THE MINISTRY AND RESPONSES

NATIONAL PUBLIC WORKS WEEK

Hon. Glen R. Murray: I rise today to draw our collective attention to the central role public works and infrastructure play in strengthening our economy, creating jobs and building healthy communities in Ontario. From roads, highways and transit systems that take us from work to schools where our children learn and the hospitals where we are cared for; to the parks and recreation centres we all enjoy; to the vital infrastructure we don't see, the water pipes underground and the broadband Internet towers that connect us to the world, public works and infrastructure are the foundation of Ontario.

Our public works partners are the people on the ground, putting our unprecedented investments in Ontario's transportation, communications and public service systems and facilities into action. That is why, on behalf of the new Ontario government, I am pleased to declare next week, May 19 to May 25, 2013, National Public Works Week in Ontario.

I wish to invite all members to join me in acknowledging the thousands of men and women who work within the sector, and to acknowledge in the legislative chamber today representatives in the gallery from the Ontario Public Works Association, including OPWA president Joe Johnson, OPWA directors Michelle Albert and Barry Kelly—if they could just stand, Mr. Speaker—

along with Darla Campbell, executive director of the Ontario Coalition for Sustainable Infrastructure, who are all here today to join us.

I would like to take a moment to thank these people, on behalf of our government and the Legislature, and the thousands of dedicated people who work in this sector.

Public works and infrastructure support everything Ontario businesses and families do, and every dollar invested in infrastructure is a dollar invested in economic development, job creation and a high quality of life. That is true for our investments in colleges and universities, hospitals, schools, transit, roads, highways, sewers and clean water systems.

In fact, the Conference Board of Canada recently found that each \$100 million of public infrastructure investment in Ontario boosts our province's GDP by \$114 million, particularly in the construction and manufacturing sectors. That's why Ontario has invested an unprecedented \$85 billion in public infrastructure since 2003.

Two years ago, we released Ontario's long-term infrastructure plan, known as Building Together. In both this plan and the 2012 budget, we committed to invest more than \$35 billion in infrastructure over the next three years. Once again in the 2013 budget, we are committing to invest more than \$35 billion in infrastructure, including almost \$13.5 billion in 2013-14 alone. These investments are expected to support over 100,000 jobs on average each year going forward.

1520

This past August we announced the Municipal Infrastructure Strategy, which includes nearly \$90 million to address critical municipal infrastructure projects. At the end of April, we announced plans to create a fund of \$100 million for this year to help small rural and northern municipalities build roads, bridges and other critical infrastructure. Funds will be made available in this program by October 1 of this year.

At the same time, the government will consult on the components of a permanent program for roads and bridges and other critical infrastructure investments in small and rural municipalities for the 2014 budget. This fund will be in addition to the Municipal Infrastructure Investment Initiative.

Our strategic approach to municipal infrastructure is paying off. These investments have helped municipalities modernize their infrastructure and create jobs to strengthen their local economies.

Our commitment to improving and maintaining transportation infrastructure has meant more than \$17 billion in investments to design, repair and expand highways and bridges across the province.

Since 2003, we have invested more than \$16.1 billion in public transit in Ontario, including more than \$7.7 billion in GO Transit alone. In addition to this, we've committed \$8.4 billion for light rapid transit in Toronto and almost \$1 billion for light rapid transit in Ottawa and the Kitchener-Waterloo region.

Finally, our provincial agency, Infrastructure Ontario, remains a global leader in innovative procurement, financing and project management. IO is managing 83 capital projects for the Ontario government using our alternative financing and procurement model, worth approximately \$38 billion in capital construction costs, with value-for-money savings of \$3 billion.

Mr. Speaker, Ontario is leading a once-in-a-generation rebuild. Every step of the way we will depend on the skills and knowledge of those employed in public works. Now more than ever we need to work together with our public works stakeholders to get the most value possible for these investments while strengthening the economy and supporting jobs.

Ontario's public works and construction sectors are amongst the best in the world, and on behalf of all Ontarians we salute and thank them.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and to our guests in the gallery who represent these rather fine men and women, thank you.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): It is now time for responses.

Mr. Frank Klees: I'm pleased to rise on behalf of the Ontario PC caucus to recognize the contribution to our quality of life by the many public works practitioners employed by federal, provincial and municipal governments, consulting engineers, utility companies, contractors and suppliers throughout Ontario and Canada.

Throughout this year's National Public Works Week, from May 19 to May 25, the focus will be on the men and women who provide leadership on the important issues of public works and the underlying infrastructure we all too often take for granted. Whether hospitals, schools, roads, bridges, transit or energy and water systems, none would exist without the professional knowledge, the innovation and management expertise of the many professionals engaged in the public works sector.

In that context, I want to recognize the work of the Ontario Public Works Association and express our appreciation for their commitment to promoting professional excellence and public awareness through education, advocacy and the exchange of knowledge regarding public works in Ontario. Their working relationship with organizations such as the Ontario Good Roads Association, the Ontario Water Works Association, the Municipal Engineers Association and the Water Environment Association of Ontario has ensured ongoing consultations on best practices, on issues ranging from planning to construction and maintenance of our public works.

I also want to acknowledge other important partners in public works in this province, such as the Consulting Engineers of Ontario, the Professional Engineers Ontario, the Ontario Association of Certified Engineering Technicians and Technologists, and the Ontario chapter of the Solid Waste Association of North America. To the professionals who comprise the memberships of these organizations, we say thank you for the contributions you make to our communities, to our province and to our country.

This year's public works theme is most appropriate: "Because of Public Works...." Speaker, when we think of those words, the rest follows logically. Pretty well any major structure we see throughout our community that gives us the quality of life that we enjoy in this great province completes that sentence:

—our schools, universities and libraries that form the basis of learning;

—our hospitals and long-term-care homes that provide the security of our health care and social services;

—our roads, highways, bridges and transit that connect our neighbourhoods and facilitate the social and economic activity that makes our province great; and

—our municipal utilities that deliver reliable energy and safe water supplies that we so often take for granted.

We have much to celebrate during this National Public Works Week, and we welcome those who are representing this great sector to our Legislature this afternoon.

Ms. Catherine Fife: It's a pleasure to stand up to acknowledge the important work of public works and to acknowledge that next week is National Public Works Week in Ontario. Certainly, it's a valuable opportunity to acknowledge the thousands of men and women who build and maintain our infrastructure and keep Ontario competitive.

It's also a pleasure this week to recognize the essential role played by the dedicated men and women who contribute to public works and infrastructure across this great province. Those who serve the public contribute a great deal to our progress towards building vibrant communities and strong local economies. We see examples of this all over Ontario—from transportation systems and schools to recreational facilities, public workers have a huge impact on the quality of life for all Ontarians. For this reason, it is essentially important that Ontario's government brings more accountability to public works projects, especially in light of the consistent and seemingly constant attacks on their integrity, collective bargaining rights and working conditions.

In good and bad times, people need to know that public dollars are being managed responsibly and well. It is essential that the role of public works employees is respected and defended by those in a position to do so, and we are in that position.

Public works employees need to be able to trust their government to protect the integrity of their employment and to provide them with the right to contribute to decisions being made regarding their future.

Ontario public works employees should be protected by the people elected to represent them. They do not deserve to have any job stability stripped away to create a more so-called flexible labour market, one of the strategies put forward by the Ontario PCs.

Public works is an area where government accountability is important. We need to see employees treated fairly, spending taken on responsibly and public needs responded to promptly. We need to move ahead with clear plans for public works across this province.

We also need to understand that cutting public works results in service reductions. For example, the people of

Kitchener–Waterloo and Guelph have waited years for Highway 7 upgrades and redevelopment. For years, residents in both regions have expressed and experienced growing safety concerns, and certainly there has been a negative effect on the local economies. Residents are clearly looking forward to the start of this project in 2015 after decades of consideration.

Clear plans to maintain bridges and roads, build recreational spaces, education centres and communication systems—New Democrats want to see plans that are transparent, accountable and fair.

There is such an opportunity within public works to create steady jobs and prosperous communities. We are committed to ensuring that the public works sector is a major player in the recovery of this economy and this province.

PETITIONS

FISHING REGULATIONS

Mr. Steve Clark: I'm very honoured to be able to present this petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario, which reads as follows:

"Whereas the Ontario Fishing Regulations Summary is printed each year by the Ministry of Natural Resources and distributed to recreational fishermen throughout the province to inform them of all the relevant seasons, limits, licence requirements and other regulations; and

"Whereas this valuable document is readily available for anglers to keep in their residence, cottage, truck, boat, trailer or on their person to be fully informed of the current fishing regulations; and

"Whereas the MNR has recently and abruptly drastically reduced the distribution of the Ontario Fishing Regulations Summary such that even major licence issuers and large fishing retailers are limited to one case of regulations per outlet; and

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"Whereas anglers do not always have access to the Internet to view online regulations while travelling or in remote areas;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to immediately return the production of the Ontario Fishing Regulations Summary to previous years' quantities such that all anglers have access to a copy and to distribute them accordingly."

I'm pleased to affix my signature to the petition. I'll send it to the table with page Samantha.

AGRI-FOOD INDUSTRY

Mr. Jonah Schein: "To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas a healthy connection to our food system is vital to the health and environmental, social and economic well-being of all people in Ontario;

"Whereas too many young people in Ontario do not have access to nutritious food and grow up without basic food literacy or food skills;

"Whereas food bank use in Ontario is at an all-time high and over 412,000 individuals every month cannot afford to feed themselves or their families;

"Whereas poor diet and a lack of access to nutritious foods is a leading cause of poor health and growing health care costs in our province;

"Whereas urban sprawl and poor planning continue to destroy valuable farmland, water resources and local food systems;

"Whereas sustained investment in local food and increased support for Ontario-grown foods will strengthen our food and farming sector and create jobs in Ontario;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That this government strengthen the Local Food Act as part of a broader provincial strategy to put food first;

"That this government develop a provincial strategy that recognizes the importance of food to our environment, health and social and economic well-being."

Speaker, I agree with this. I will sign it and give it to page Karinna.

CHILD CUSTODY

Mr. Kim Craitor: It's a pleasure to stand up and read the following petition, which is titled Grandparents' Rights:

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the people of Ontario deserve and have the right to request an amendment to the Children's Law Reform Act to emphasize the importance of children's relationships with their grandparents as requested in Bill 48 put forward by" the member from Niagara Falls; "and

"Whereas currently, subsection 21(1) of the act provides that a parent of a child or any other person may apply to a court for certain orders respecting custody of or access to the child. An amendment to that subsection specifies that a grandparent may apply for such an order; and

"Whereas currently subclause 24(2)(a)(i) of the act provides that where a court makes a determination relating to certain applications in respect of custody of or access to a child, the court shall consider, among other things, the love, affection and emotional ties between the child and each person entitled to or claiming custody of or access to the child. An amendment to that subclause specifies that this includes grandparents; and

"Whereas relationships between children and grandparents are a special bond that should be maintained;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to amend the Children's Law Reform Act to emphasize the importance of children's relationships with their grandparents."

I'm pleased to sign my name to this petition.

Since I'm on my feet, point of order, Speaker?

Mr. Frank Klees: You can't do that.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Point of order from the member from Niagara Falls.

Mr. Kim Craitor: See? I can do it. Nice try.

Mr. Speaker, very quickly, I just want to introduce the students from Notre Dame school from my riding of Niagara Falls.

Ms. Sylvia Jones: There's nobody up there.

Mr. Kim Craitor: They're gone now, but they were there just a second ago.

AIR QUALITY

Ms. Sylvia Jones: My petition is to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas Ontario's Drive Clean program was implemented as a temporary measure to reduce high levels of vehicle emissions and smog; and vehicle emissions have declined significantly from 1998 to 2010; and

"Whereas the overwhelming majority of reductions in vehicle emissions were, in fact, the result of factors other than the Drive Clean program, such as tighter manufacturing standards for emission-control technologies; and

"Whereas from 1999 to 2010 the percentage of vehicles that failed emissions testing under the Drive Clean program steadily declined from 16% to 5%; and

"Whereas the environment minister has ignored advances in technology and introduced a new, computerized emissions test that is less reliable and prone to error;

"Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly as follows:

"That the Minister of the Environment must take immediate steps to begin phasing out the Drive Clean program."

I support this petition and give it to page Jack.

UTILITY TRANSPORTATION VEHICLES

Mr. John Vanthof: "To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the use of all-terrain vehicles (ATV) is legal on schedule 2 highways in northern Ontario; and

"Whereas many residents of Ontario have switched to utility transportation vehicles (UTV); and

"Whereas the use of UTVs in schedule C of the Highway Traffic Act is allowed north of areas in far northern Ontario and unorganized territory...;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"Therefore, be it resolved that the government of Ontario direct the Ministry of Transportation to enact legislation to allow the use of UTVs on class 2 highways throughout northern Ontario."

I fully agree, sign my signature and give it to page Brendan.

JOB RELOCATION

Mr. Phil McNeely: "Fairness to Orléans.

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the federal government has already moved approximately 4,700 RCMP employees from the downtown Ottawa to Barrhaven;

"Whereas the federal government is in the process of moving 10,000 DND employees from the downtown of Ottawa to the former Nortel campus near Kanata;

"Whereas the DND has provided information that there are approximately 4,600 DND personnel presently living in Orléans;

"Whereas the city of Ottawa estimates that each permanent job attracts another 1.5 jobs;

"Whereas this move is contrary to the city's goals of sustainable and balanced development;

"Whereas the action by the Conservative government has contributed to the reduction of new home starts in Orléans by 24% and increased home starts in Kanata by 22% from 2011 to 2012;

"Whereas this action by the Conservative government has decreased the average home value in Orléans by \$24,000 and in Gloucester by \$38,000 while all other parts of the city show an increase;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the province of Ontario intervene in this action and request the city of Ottawa to carry out a socio-economic study to evaluate the impacts on the communities of Ottawa, Orléans."

I agree with this petition. I will sign it and submit it with Brigid.

PHYSIOTHERAPY SERVICES

Mr. John O'Toole: I'm pleased to present a petition on behalf of my constituents. It reads as follows:

"Whereas the Ministry of Health is planning major changes to services provided by OHIP for physiotherapists as of August 1st, 2013; and

"Whereas this will dramatically reduce the number of allowable treatments to 12 per year for people who are currently eligible for 100 treatments annually; and

"Whereas funding for physiotherapy services to seniors in long-term-care homes would be cut by almost 50%, from an estimated \$110 million per year to \$58.5 million per year; and

"Whereas ambulatory seniors in retirement homes would have to travel offsite for physiotherapy; and

"Whereas under these changes scheduled for August 1, the cost of visits under the CCAC (community care access centre) model will rise to \$120 per visit, rather than the current fee of \$12.20 per visit through OHIP physiotherapy providers; and

"Whereas these changes will deprive seniors and other eligible clients from the many health and mobility benefits of physiotherapy;

"Therefore we, the undersigned, ask that the de-listing of OHIP physiotherapy clinics as of August 1st not proceed and that the provincial government guarantee there will be no reduction in services currently available for seniors, children and youths, people with disabilities and all those who are currently eligible for OHIP-funded physiotherapy."

I'm pleased to sign and support this and present it to Anjali.

HOSPITAL SERVICES

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: "To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas St. Joseph's Health Care centre has decided to close its less than 15 year old community hydrotherapy pool on June 28/13. Hundreds of people in pain will be denied this imperative therapy which has been specifically ordered by their physicians and physiotherapists. There is no other affordable pool in the area with three depth levels, salt water at least 92 degrees F with excellent accessibility and hydrotherapy leadership. This decision is in opposition to the statements of the health minister to increase health dollars in the community for physiotherapy and for seniors. Pool patrons' requests to work with St. Joseph's to continue this program have been ignored. The sacrificial work of fundraising to build the pool is being ignored.

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"We ask you to direct St. Joseph's Health Care centre to continue its hydrotherapy program in this excellent, appropriate pool. This decision will save huge amounts of health dollars both now and in the future."

I sign my name to this petition and give it to page Jack to deliver.

TRANSFERT D'EMPLOIS

M. Phil McNeely: « À l'Assemblée législative de l'Ontario :

« Attendu que le gouvernement fédéral a déjà transféré quelque 4 700 employés de la GRC du centre-ville d'Ottawa à Barrhaven;

« Attendu que le gouvernement fédéral se prépare à transférer 10 000 employés du MDN du centre-ville d'Ottawa à l'ancien campus Nortel près de Kanata;

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« Attendu que le MDN a indiqué qu'environ 4 600 employés du MDN résident actuellement à Orléans;

« Attendu que la ville d'Ottawa estime que chaque emploi permanent attire 1,5 emploi;

« Attendu que ce transfert d'emploi est contraire aux objectifs de la ville visant le développement durable et équilibré;

« Attendu que l'action du gouvernement conservateur a réduit les mises en chantier de maisons à Orléans de 24 % et a augmenté les nouveaux chantiers à Kanata de 22 % entre 2011 et 2012;

« Attendu que cette action du gouvernement conservateur a contribué à la réduction de la valeur moyenne des maisons à Orléans de 24 000 \$ et à Gloucester de 38 000 \$ alors que partout ailleurs à Ottawa, on marque une augmentation de la valeur immobilière;

« Nous, soussignés, adressons à l'Assemblée législative de l'Ontario la pétition suivante :

« Que la province de l'Ontario intervienne dans cette action et demande à la ville d'Ottawa de mener à bien une étude socio-économique pour évaluer les impacts de telles décisions sur les communautés d'Ottawa, Orléans. »

HEALTH CARE FUNDING

Mr. Jim McDonell: I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

“Whereas the Ontario Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care unilaterally introduced cuts to the ophthalmology funding for physician services and diagnostic testing, retroactive to April 1, 2012; and

“Whereas the legislated cuts to the funding for ophthalmology diagnostic tests are up to 80%; and

“Whereas these cuts were implemented without consulting physicians about the impact such cuts will have on the health care of patients;

“Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to protect ophthalmology services and consult with the physicians before making cuts to our health care system.”

I will pass this off to Madison.

SERVICES FOR THE DEVELOPMENTALLY DISABLED

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: “Whereas agencies that support individuals with a developmental disability and their families have for several years (beginning in 2010) faced a decline in provincial funding for programs that support people with developmental and other related disabilities; and

“Whereas because this level of provincial funding is far less than the rate of inflation and operational costs, and does not account for providing services to a growing and aging number of individuals with complex needs, developmental service agencies are being forced into deficit; and

“Whereas today over 30% of developmental service agencies are in deficit; and

“Whereas lowered provincial funding has resulted in agencies being forced to cut programs and services that enable people with a developmental disability to participate in their community and enjoy the best quality of life possible; and

“Whereas in some cases services once focused on community inclusion and quality of life for individuals have been reduced to a ‘custodial’ care arrangement; and

“Whereas lower provincial funding means a poorer quality of life for people with a developmental disability and their families and increasingly difficult working conditions for the direct care staff who support them; and

“Whereas there are thousands of people waiting for residential supports, day program supports and other programs province-wide;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

“(1) To eliminate the deficits of developmental service agencies and provide adequate new funding to restore services and programs that have in effect been cut;

“(2) To protect existing services and supports by providing an overall increase in funding for agencies that is at least equal to inflationary costs that include among other operational costs, utilities, food and compensation increases to ensure staff retention;

“(3) To fund pay equity obligations for a predominantly female workforce;

“(4) To provide adequate new funding to agencies to ensure that the growing number of families on wait-lists have access to accommodation supports and day supports and services.”

I agree. I'm going to sign it and give it to Benjamin to deliver—

LAND USE PLANNING

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Further petitions? The member from Newmarket–Aurora.

Mr. Frank Klees: Thank you, Speaker. I was concerned there that we wouldn't make the clock, but we obviously have. Thank you.

This petition is to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

“Whereas municipalities are required to produce official plans that are compliant with the Places to Grow Act and the provincial growth plan; and

“Whereas the province of Ontario prescribes population growth and intensification targets through the provincial growth plan that must be met by municipalities; and

“Whereas even if the designated growth and intensification numbers are met, they are deemed to be minimum numbers; and

“Whereas the Ontario Municipal Board may approve densities to be located in areas not identified in the official plan, resulting in significant additional costs to the municipality because of required changes to long-term infrastructure plans, and also disrupts the character of existing communities;

“Therefore, we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to pass the Preserving Existing Communities Act, 2013 ... that amends the Places to Grow Act, 2005 to provide that a decision made by a municipal council is final and may not be appealed to the Ontario Municipal Board if the following conditions are satisfied:

“(1) The decision is to refuse a request to amend the municipality's official plan with respect to land that is designated for one or more of the following: stable residential area and parks and open space.

“(2) The municipal council has passed a resolution stating that the requested official plan amendment would not be in the best interests of the municipality.”

I affix my signature to this petition and, given that it is my private member's bill, I will do everything I can to ensure that this place processes that—

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): The time for petitions is over. Orders of the day.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

NON-PROFIT HOUSING CO-OPERATIVES STATUTE LAW AMENDMENT ACT, 2013 LOI DE 2013 MODIFIANT DES LOIS EN CE QUI CONCERNE LES COOPÉRATIVES DE LOGEMENT SANS BUT LUCRATIF

Resuming the debate adjourned on May 8, 2013, on the motion for second reading of the following bill:

Bill 14, An Act to amend the Co-operative Corporations Act and the Residential Tenancies Act, 2006 in respect of non-profit housing co-operatives and to make consequential amendments to other Acts / Projet de loi 14, Loi modifiant la Loi sur les sociétés coopératives et la Loi de 2006 sur la location à usage d'habitation en ce qui concerne les coopératives de logement sans but lucratif et apportant des modifications corrélatives à d'autres lois.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Further debate?

Mr. Peter Shurman: I notice on my copy of orders of the day, we have spent 15 hours and 36 minutes of accumulated time debating Bill 14 here in the Ontario Legislative Assembly. I think it's time that it comes to an end, and I hope that you'll bear some indulgence as I relate a little story—I hear applause behind me—that has to do with, ultimately, politicians.

Four surgeons are meeting at a surgical convention. The first one is from New York, and he says, "When I'm in the operating theatre, I love operating on accountants." The others say, "Why?" and he says, "Well, when I open them up, everything is numbered." The second surgeon, who is a young woman from Chicago, says, "For me, electricians are the best people to operate on, because when you open them up, everything is colour-coded." The third surgeon comes from Los Angeles, and he says, "I like librarians. When you open them up, everything is coded according to the Dewey decimal system." The final surgeon is somebody from Washington—I could say Ottawa—and he says, "I like operating on politicians." The other three say, "Why politicians?" and he says, "Well, they have no spine, they have no guts, they have no gonads and they have no brains, plus one end is interchangeable with the other."

I'm a politician, and we're all politicians in here, and this bill is very much a bill that was designed for politicians and has been the subject of political games. So forgive me the attempt at humour, but I had to say that. I'm glad that it's coming to an end, because there were

over 100 pieces of legislation that died when the McGuinty government shut down the Legislature on October 15, 2012—just disappeared—and there are people, many people, because we exist on behalf of people, who were injured by the fact that legislation either disappeared or was severely delayed. This was an aspect of it. It's not that hard of a bill. This government put their own interests ahead of getting on with the job and helping those people. The previous version of this bill, which was then numbered Bill 65, died on the order paper when the McGuinty government prorogued the House, and here it is back as Bill 14.

The Co-operative Housing Federation of Canada's Ontario region represents about 555 non-profit housing co-operatives, home to about 125,000 people across the province, several thousand of them living in my own riding of Thornhill, just north of Toronto. There are 156,000 households on a wait-list to access affordable housing, and again I have to say people think, "Oh, look at Shurman. He comes from Thornhill, rich suburb; York region, rich area." No, we're not any richer than anywhere else as a region or as a particular riding. We are in the same boat as everybody else. We have a long wait-list—in some cases, people have been sitting on it for 10 years—looking for affordable housing in York region.

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We have Ontarians on wait-lists that basically run like molasses in January, so we have to do what we can to facilitate, and Bill 14 is just one of those ways. Most households that were housed in 2011 were on waiting lists for an average between two and four years to be placed, but some did indeed wait 10 years, and in some cases more than 10 years. That's a very long time. That's a time—and I could cite examples of it, and I make no light of this—where you get on the wait-list and you die before you actually get placed.

Vacancy rates across the province, particularly in urban centres, have really tightened, with the provincial average now at 2.9%. This makes it even more difficult for people to find affordable housing. Affordable housing, once it's found, is something that you treasure; disputes are something that you want to put aside. One in five Ontario renter households are spending more than half of their income on housing. There's a growing gap in the incomes of tenants and homeowners. Median tenant incomes have actually declined by \$5,000 over the last 20 years, from \$41,000 to \$36,000, which aggravates the problem even further.

We are in a challenging economic situation that has been hampered by the McGuinty-Wynne record of sky-high spending and a record deficit. We have a credible plan to get our finances in order so that jobs can be created and Ontario's economy can thrive again.

The broken dispute resolution system also clogs up our courts. This costs all Ontarians time and money, and that's what this bill purports to fix. We tend to agree that with a little bit of modification in committee, that's exactly what it's going to do. The Landlord and Tenant

Board dispute resolution process needs to be streamlined. The cost of hearing and resolving these disputes in the courts is currently estimated to be as much as \$5,000 on each side—money that needn't be spent, or at least not in that degree.

Bill 14 has one big area of concern in its current form: It would waive the \$45 registration fee for low-income applicants. Forty-five dollars is a very significant cost for some applicants. Most of us in this place will say, "I don't want to part with 45 bucks," but they reach in their pockets and that's 45 bucks—if you're at the low-income end, \$45 can represent what you're going to eat or if you're going to eat in any particular week. So we can't make light of it, and \$45 enters into this bill as a prime aspect of it. However, waiving this fee would increase applications to the Ontario Landlord and Tenant Board, and this would only cause further delays at the OLTB. Who are we helping, then? Do we really need another layer of complication to further the delay for people?

We think that there is a modicum of good ideology behind this bill. We think that it can be resolved. We think that it deserves to go to committee. We think that, with a pending vote, it will go to committee, and we hope that it will come back and be passed. Let's get this bill to committee so that it can be fixed to address this and any other issues.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Comments and questions?

Mr. Jonah Schein: Maybe it's a sign of spring, but I'm feeling hopeful and optimistic that we're going to end this debate today. Harvey Cooper and friends: I feel like I've barely had a chance to get to know you, but I'm going to miss seeing you around here. Thank you for being here. We'll see you soon.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Further comments and questions?

Mr. Kevin Daniel Flynn: I'm feeling quite hopeful too, because I think Bill 14 is a bill whose time has come, and it appears that time may be this afternoon. It's time to move on, Speaker.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): The member for Leeds–Grenville.

Mr. Steve Clark: I, too, would like to join with my colleagues and thank the Co-operative Housing Federation of Canada for being here. I think we all owe them a big round of applause for their advocacy, but most of all for their patience.

I hope you guys aren't going to prorogue on them again. You did that the last time. Don't do it now. Let's get this bill into committee.

Interjections.

Mr. Steve Clark: Don't get all upset about it. Come on now. We're going to let debate collapse today.

Interjections.

Mr. Steve Clark: See how excited we are?

Anyway, I look forward to seeing you all in committee.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Further comments?

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: Apart from all the partisan nonsense—Harvey, all of you, thank you for the incredible work you do day in, day out. Thank you, and please extend our thanks to all who have been active around this bill. We're so thankful it's going to end today and get to committee. We're so happy that you'll finally, finally get it passed. Thank you, again.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): The member has two minutes to respond.

Mr. Peter Shurman: I bow in the direction of Harvey Cooper et al. I know you're happy about this; you should be. Congratulations in advance because I know that it will work its way through committee.

Let me also say thank you to—actually she didn't speak, but let me say thank you to the member for Scarborough–Agincourt for the very, very clear and concise hand signals that she sent. Maybe next time build a little fire on your desk; we can make it smoke signals.

Also the members for Davenport, for Oakville, for Leeds–Grenville—who else spoke?—Parkdale–High Park. Those four members for adding their voices to this—I know that they share all of our interests in seeing this bill now move on.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Further debate?

Ms. Jeffrey has moved second reading of Bill 14, An Act to amend the Co-operative Corporations Act and the Residential Tenancies Act, 2006 in respect of non-profit housing co-operatives and to make consequential amendments to other Acts.

Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

Second reading agreed to.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Shall the bill be ordered for third reading?

Hon. Mario Sergio: No, no.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): What committee?

Hon. Mario Sergio: To the Legislative Assembly committee, Madam Speaker.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Okay. Orders of the day?

LOCAL FOOD ACT, 2013

LOI DE 2013 SUR LES ALIMENTS LOCAUX

Resuming the debate adjourned on May 9, 2013, on the motion for second reading of the following bill:

Bill 36, An Act to enact the Local Food Act, 2013 /
Projet de loi 36, Loi édictant la Loi de 2013 sur les aliments locaux.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Further debate?

Mrs. Christine Elliott: It's a pleasure to rise today to speak to Bill 36 on behalf of my constituents in Whitby–Oshawa. While my riding is predominantly urban, we're also blessed to have a significant rural component, home

to a number of local food producers. So getting this bill right is important to me and certainly important to my constituents in Whitby–Oshawa, as it should be important to all Ontarians no matter where they might live.

In short, the PC caucus is certainly supportive of this bill's spirit. We're happy that the McGuinty-Wynne government at least recognizes the importance of Ontario's rural communities and industries to the sustainability and success of the province.

However, like most Liberal bills, the Local Food Act is lacking any substance whatsoever. It does little to nothing to deal with the true issues and barriers facing Ontario's agricultural industries today. The Liberals could have worked across the aisle to develop a substantive bill to genuinely aid Ontario's agricultural industries, but, once again, we see that this government is having a one-way conversation.

This bill could have addressed a number of pressing issues, and these are issues that all of us, as members, have heard from our local agricultural producers: things like the maze of red tape and regulation faced by Ontario's agricultural industries; the impact of skyrocketing hydro bills on Ontario's farmers and small businesses; and additional fees that, courtesy of the Liberals, continue to make life more and more difficult for small businesses, like eco fees on tires, which particularly hurt farmers who have to buy industrial grade tires for their equipment. I know that many members of my caucus, the PC caucus—my colleagues—have talked about this as a particular issue affecting farmers in their ridings.

So instead of dealing with these major issues, the bill's content merely nods to Ontario's agricultural industry.

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For instance, it provides that the minister may establish goals or targets to aspire to with respect to local food, and it provides that the minister may direct a public sector organization to provide information regarding local food targets. In other words, a major portion of this bill is merely a plan to establish a plan. How typical.

Well, I can tell you that the people in Ontario are tired of talk, and we in the PC caucus are tired of empty legislation that fails to deal with the root causes of Ontario's economic woes; and heaven knows, there are many these days. We're sitting at a situation where we've got 500,000-plus people who don't have a job. We've got a deficit of about \$12 billion and growing.

It's okay to dedicate a week to local food. We in Whitby–Oshawa have a phenomenal local farmers' market in Brooklin, in Whitby, that features Durham region's food growers. However, government isn't just meant to cover up bad policy with another commemorative week. There's so much more to be done.

We should strive to develop legislation that truly tackles the issues and barriers that face Ontario's food growers. We should work diligently to create a jurisdiction that has the best conditions in North America for small businesses, including Ontario's agricultural producers. That should be the target for us at Queen's Park,

and this bill, in its proposed form, has failed to achieve that.

Madam Speaker, we've heard from hundreds of farmers about the challenges they're facing, and we've heard from hundreds of agriculture and local food organizations who have submitted proposals for this bill which have been ignored in favour of a bill that has no substance.

I'd like to start by acknowledging the hard work of the member for Oxford, who has been listening carefully to ideas from stakeholders and engaging with them. Based on his consultations, the member for Oxford has developed practical solutions outlined in his white paper on agriculture, food and rural affairs called *Paths to Prosperity: Respect for Rural Ontario*.

One group of active stakeholders wrote to the Premier in response to her Local Food Act. These stakeholders include the Ontario Federation of Agriculture, FoodShare, Sustain Ontario, Loblaw, Food Forward, Toronto Food Policy Council, Holland Marsh Growers' Association, the Organic Council of Ontario, Ontario Fruit and Vegetable Growers' Association, and Ontario Farm Fresh. They write, "We ... feel that the Local Food Act can and should do more than promote awareness and strive to improve procurement. We believe the key to really accomplishing the goals of stronger food systems in Ontario lies in improving the basic food literacy of all Ontarians."

They also write that "a Local Food Act should also address the very fundamental issue of food access—the ability of all Ontarians to procure nutritious and culturally acceptable food at all times...."

These stakeholders tell us that, "A well-crafted Local Food Act will help strengthen Ontario's food and agricultural sector...." But what we've heard here in this bill is not well crafted. It does nothing but leave these stakeholders hoping for something more substantial.

The government should look to the Ontario PC white paper on agriculture, food and rural affairs for concrete proposals to bolster agriculture and local food in Ontario. There, they will find that we, as PCs, have addressed what farmers have identified as their number one issue; that is, red tape and government paperwork, an issue we've addressed on several different occasions, including our white paper on economic development, *An Agenda for Growth*.

Farmers say that they spend far too much time filling out paperwork at the expense of working on their fields and innovating their processes and techniques to deliver better results. To make matters worse, in our agricultural survey last summer, 77% of farmers told us that red tape is not decreasing but increasing, but absolutely nothing in Bill 36 addresses the regulatory burden that our farmers, agribusinesses and food processors are facing.

The member for Oxford has put forward constructive ideas to tackle this challenge, and we should be listening to him.

For instance, we would propose to review licences, permits and certificates to see which ones could be

combined and which ones should be eliminated. The PC white paper also suggests: (1) creating a regional food terminal, (2) implementing a one-window access to government for farmers and agribusinesses and (3) a dedicated fund for the Risk Management Program.

With government bills doing little to facilitate on-the-ground action, it makes me particularly proud to see the fantastic new initiatives in the areas of food and agriculture in my own riding, and I'd like to spend just a moment speaking about that. Durham College, in both Whitby and Oshawa, is building a new 36,000-square-foot building at its Whitby campus with a brand new Centre for Food. The facilities will accommodate 900 new students and house culinary, hospitality, tourism, agricultural and horticultural programs. Through this program, students will learn about local food and the farming industry. They will be the farmers, food processors and vendors of tomorrow in Ontario.

This program will be at the cutting edge of innovative, sustainable food and farming technology. Chef Jamie Kennedy has spoken enthusiastically about the Centre for Food. He commented that "the Centre for Food has been designed to create a unique learning environment for students, which captures the spirit, innovation and progressiveness of the local food movement. I know this centre will attract students from across this country as they learn about growing, harvesting and preparing food." I'm certainly proud to see this focus on sustainable local food in my own riding, and I'm disappointed that this progress at Durham College stands in such stark contrast to the empty bill proposed by the government.

The people of Ontario want to buy local food. Over 80% of shoppers intend to purchase Ontario fresh food and believe it is fresher and of better quality. Why isn't this government building on the momentum by tackling areas that farmers are truly concerned about to enhance agriculture and local food?

The PCs are committed to working with stakeholder groups, processors and farmers, academic institutions and future growers to put forward amendments that will address some of the issues in Bill 36. We believe in the importance of local food and supporting farmers. That's why we want a real food act for Ontario, one that will truly deal with the underlying conditions that negatively impact local food producers, rather than just paying lip service to this vital industry.

So I'll certainly close with endorsing a Local Food Act that truly means something, and I hope that, as we discuss this bill, we will get to that in the course of our discussions and once it gets into committee.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Comments and questions?

Mr. John Vanthof: Once again, it's an honour for me to be able to speak on agriculture in Ontario and to follow the remarks from the member from Whitby-Oshawa.

She makes some very good points about the vagueness of the act. The purpose of the act, as it now stands, is to set out the goals and objectives over three years—if it's

passed into law—after it's passed into law. It just doesn't make sense. If we're going to set out the goals and objectives, there should at least be a framework of how you're going to do it or what you're going to do with those goals and objectives.

That isn't in the Local Food Act now, and that's something that—and I'm hoping it goes to committee. That's something that we should be able to change, to actually give it a purpose, because the farmers, the processors, the retailers and the consumers deserve that. If we're going to spend the time and the money that it costs to do these things, to debate these things, to change laws, we should at least, at the very minimum, ensure that what we're doing has a purpose and has a real one.

As we've said so many times in this House, on this side, this act is in essence not a whole lot more than a press release, and that's a disservice. That's a disservice not only to the people in this House but to the people across the province. So it's time that this act, the Local Food Act—that we push it through to committee where the stakeholders can actually make amendments, help us make amendments to make this worthy.

I have a processor in Cochrane who makes sausages, and due to some of our extra red tape—not due to safety concerns but due to specific red tape—can't get those sausages into some retail places. That's something that we should address with an act like this, and hopefully we will get the chance to do so.

1610

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Comments and questions? Minister.

Hon. Michael Coteau: I just wanted to stand today in support of Bill 36, the Local Food Act. I hope we can move it along here today and bring it past second reading.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Further comments and questions?

Mr. Steve Clark: I'm pleased to provide a few comments, and I appreciate the member for Whitby-Oshawa. The one thing I didn't get a chance to mention when I had my rotation in debate was a conversation our agriculture critic had prior to the presentation and the introduction of this bill. It was a conversation he had with the Minister of Rural Affairs.

The minister had given him an indication that a previous bill from our caucus, actually from my predecessor, now-Senator Runciman, tabled in 2008 regarding a liquor licence amendment to allow fruit wine sales at farmers' markets—the minister alluded to the fact that it would be included in the Local Food Act, and it wasn't. So we were a bit surprised.

I hope that when the bill does get to committee, we will find out the great mystery of why this section wasn't included. It was a bill, as I said, that was introduced by Mr. Runciman in November 2008 and that received second reading in December 2008. There was a decision among the House leaders to actually put this bill before the committee; in fact, a number of Liberal members spoke in favour of the concept of having fruit wines sold at farmers' markets.

Then, to everyone's surprise, even after the House leaders decided that the bill wouldn't die on the order paper and would be carried over, when the bill was being debated—I'm checking Hansard; the member for Dufferin-Caledon was there—to all of our surprise, the Liberal members voted against it. In fact, the member for Oxford told me they even voted against the title of the bill. So I hope this great mystery of fruit wines in farmers' markets—why that concept wasn't included in the Local Food Act. I'm confident the government members will stop the mystery and tell me what happened.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Further comments?

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: I'm pleased to stand up and talk about the Local Food Act, because I'm really proud that the New Democrats have proposed suggestions to "buy Ontario." When we're talking about local food, we should be promoting buying Ontario local food. That makes a lot of sense and supports our local businesses.

I wanted to read: in April 2009, the McGuinty government proposed "\$24 million ... to develop the logistics to get more Ontario-grown food into the province's schools, hospitals, food service companies and other institutions," but to date, the money hasn't been allocated.

Mr. Jonah Schein: Good idea; no accountability.

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: Absolutely, no accountability. That was where I was going with that, actually, so thanks for the lead-in.

Here we are again: a good idea, where you have a Local Food Act, and we're saying, "Let's promote local business. Let's buy Ontario and create new jobs." This government, in 2009, made a promise to allocate money to that type of program, but we have yet to see those results. We have yet to see that promise come to fruition.

When we're talking today in the House about local food, I think we need to make sure we think about accountability. The things we say when we make promises through a bill, we need to deliver. That's why New Democrats have said this government needs to be held accountable in many ways, including delivering results to Ontarians through the budget and to local food.

We shouldn't forget, when we allocate funds to programs to make sure we support our Ontario economy with local food, that we need to see those funds come to light and make sure we're accountable to the people of Ontario when we make promises.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): The member has two minutes to respond.

Mrs. Christine Elliott: I would like to thank the member from Timiskaming-Cochrane, the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration, the member from Leeds-Grenville and the member from London-Fanshawe for their comments.

I think that, at the end of the day, what we end up with, with Bill 36 in its present form, is really a lost opportunity. We have a great opportunity here to talk about the great products we have here in Ontario, to

celebrate them and to use them, and we should be supporting our farmers and our agricultural producers to be able to reach their full potential.

I say that for a couple of reasons. One is, just in terms of the health of our population here in Ontario, we should be eating as much local food as possible. It's healthier; it should be less expensive. We need to teach people how to use it; there are lots of cooking opportunities.

I actually personally believe we should bring home economics back into the classroom, because it was a basic program that worked. We learned about the food guide; we learned about nutrition. I think we should be bringing that back. We should be talking about things like that.

In the context of our discussion on Bill 36, we should be looking at this as a great economic driver. We have hundreds of thousands of people out of work. Agriculture has long been one of the backbones in our economy. We should be supporting agriculture and supporting agribusiness as well, which is the value added, so that we can continue to employ people and make it worthwhile for many people who are struggling on family farms right now, who are being tied up with red tape and regulation. We want family farms to pass from successive generations to keep that land in production and be able to continue to have a sustainable food supply here in Ontario. It's important to generations of Ontario families.

We have a proud history of agriculture here. We need to support that so we need to get this bill—get some teeth into it; get some meaning into it; and really make it into a bill that will really support our farmers. So I would urge the government to proceed on that basis.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Further debate?

Ms. Wynne has moved second reading of Bill 36, An Act to enact the Local Food Act, 2013. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry?

All those in favour of the motion, please say "aye."

All those opposed to the motion, please say "nay."

In my opinion, the ayes have it.

Call in the members. This will be a 30-minute bell.

Pursuant to standing order 28(h), the request has been made that second reading of Bill 36 be deferred until deferred votes on Wednesday, May 15.

Second reading vote deferred.

STRONGER PROTECTION FOR ONTARIO CONSUMERS ACT, 2013

LOI DE 2013 RENFORÇANT LA PROTECTION DU CONSOMMATEUR ONTARIEN

Resuming the debate adjourned on May 1, 2013, on the motion for second reading of the following bill:

Bill 55, An Act to amend the Collection Agencies Act, the Consumer Protection Act, 2002 and the Real Estate and Business Brokers Act, 2002 and to make consequential amendments to other Acts / *Projet de loi*

55, Loi modifiant la Loi sur les agences de recouvrement, la Loi de 2002 sur la protection du consommateur et la Loi de 2002 sur le courtage commercial et immobilier et apportant des modifications corrélatives à d'autres lois.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Further debate?

Mr. Steve Clark: I'm pleased to have the opportunity this afternoon to join in the debate on Bill 55, the Stronger Protection for Ontario Consumers Act. I always welcome the chance to talk about consumer protection. Ladies and gentlemen, let's face it; I think we would all agree that the more we can do as provincial legislators to protect people from being ripped off by unscrupulous business practices, the better off. So I appreciate the opportunity.

Bill 55, the particular bill that we're debating this afternoon, is an attempt by the government to shore up consumer protection in the province by amending three pieces of legislation: the Consumer Protection Act, by providing a cooling-off period for people who have purchased a water heater from a salesperson at their door; the Collection Agencies Act, to set out some new operating procedures for debt settlement services; and the Real Estate and Business Brokers Act, to remove the restriction against charging a fee and a commission for buying or selling a house.

There are some worthwhile steps being taken in this bill. While there are some areas of concern and places where I think we'd be looking to bring forward some amendments, it's definitely something that I personally would like to see come before committee. Certainly as MPPs, our constituency offices hear from people day after day who've been taken advantage of, whether it's from a high-pressure salesperson at their door or a deal that hasn't lived up to what was promised.

1620

When I talk about constituency offices, I worked at a constituency for my predecessor, and although this bill doesn't deal with it, I quite vividly remember calls, almost on a weekly basis, about energy retailers who would sign someone up at the door with a gas retailing contract—only to find at a later date that the contract wasn't basically what was promised at the door.

I told the story when I had a two-minute hit on a previous speaker about the fact that I live very close to the 401, and quite often travelling salespeople will stop at the end of our street in Brockville and sort of canvass our street. So it's quite common that I would have a salesperson at my door. A couple of Fridays ago, on Friday night, the doorbell rang. I went out, and there were two young lads at the door. I looked at them, and I said, "Hey, you're hot water heater salesmen." They were quite surprised. They said, "How do you know?" And I said, "Well, I'm a member of provincial Parliament, and we actually have a bill in front of us to deal with some of your business practices."

They were quite shocked that there was a bill before the Legislature that would deal with their sales practices. In fact, it was funny: I couldn't then get them to turn that

clipboard over so I could see what company they worked for. But they were very nice and thanked me for my interaction with them, and off they went rather quickly down the street.

I have to say that I haven't had any people knock at my door since then. I don't know if I've got a little X on the house or something. Anyway, I thought I was a nice guy at the door, just telling them what was going on here in the Legislative Assembly.

When we talk about high-pressure sales tactics, I think Ontarians could stand to have some protection from the government opposite. They certainly like to engage in a tireless sales pitch, and I also think they engage in some false advertising. They do a great job writing the titles of these bills, putting them out in the media, using their spin, trying to make it sound like these bills are solving all the world's problems. Let's face it: This bill, the Local Food Act or the Ambulance Amendment Act don't actually do everything the government claims. In some cases, they don't do anything, and in other cases, like Bill 55, which we're debating this afternoon, they do very little. Bill 55 puts in place some good steps, but ultimately, anyone who thinks it's the final word on consumer protection is in for a very, very rude awakening.

Back to the title of this bill, I think I'm going to introduce my own private member's bill inspired by the Liberal government. I'm going to call it the Don't Judge a Bill by its Title Act. It's going to require that the government actually write a bill where the contents match the title. This Stronger Protection for Ontario Consumers Act is just the latest from this government with a wonderful title that just doesn't hold up when you look at what actually is in it. But I have to concede that it's not the worst example from this government. The honour has to go to the Prosperous and Fair Ontario Act (Budget Measures), 2013. That's the budget bill.

While so many government bills don't actually do what their titles promise, which I think is bad enough, this bill actually does the opposite. If we allow this government's budget bill to pass, we'll be creating a less prosperous and a less fair Ontario. I'd like to see the finance minister explain to me how he thinks Ontario is going to prosper when this budget actually increases the deficit, thanks to the unconscionable decision to jack up spending by \$3.6 billion. And how are we creating prosperity by continuing a trend that has seen the Ontario debt double during 10 years of Liberal mismanagement. The fact is we aren't creating a more prosperous province, because everyone knows you can't spend your way to prosperity. If we could, those—

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Point of order.

Hon. Tracy MacCharles: I believe we're speaking about Bill 55.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Yes. I will remind the member. Thank you.

Mr. Steve Clark: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I just got carried away because of the title of that act. It just drives me crazy when you put a title in there and it doesn't live up to what's billed.

I may get back to some of that fairness later on in my speech, Speaker. I may ask your indulgence later. I know the minister is quite anxious to hear me talk about consumer protection.

There is an example that the minister is aware of, and it's from Kathleen Dickenson, who is a resident of Kemptville and who wrote to me about consumer protection. Although I'm going to quote some of her letter, I'm not going to mention others because there is a mention of a company and a file number for the OPP report. I'm going to be cautious with how I present this. She wrote to me and she says, "I'm writing to advise you of an incredible situation I find myself in, abandoned by a system that should protect innocent homeowners."

"An individual came door to door Tuesday providing estimates for driveway repaving in my Kemptville, Ontario, neighbourhood. He gave me a verbal estimate and his business card, and asked me to let him know if I was interested, as he was working on several other driveways in my area." It mentions his business card.

She later on in the letter says, "My husband came home from work on Thursday (approximately 3 p.m.) to find this individual working on our driveway. He had ripped out the interlock bricks in front of our door, removed asphalt at the edge of the paved section of our driveway and at the street, removed gravel and dirt to bring the level down below our concrete garage pad etc."

"When my husband confronted him, he claimed I had agreed to the work. My husband asked him to leave. I came directly home from work and contacted the police."

Later on in the letter it talks about the OPP bringing the individual there, and ultimately they deemed it was a civil matter.

At the time she filed a claim with her house insurance, and the claim at the time was denied. The reason provided was that her policy didn't cover faulty construction work.

She says, "Although I consider this destruction of property, without criminal charges, my insurance will not help me."

"The responsible individual has indicated that he has only been in Canada for a few weeks, and was in the paving business in Ireland for 25 years."

"He has offered some minimal work, at no cost, to correct his alleged mistake, but I have no confidence in the quality of any work that he may do."

"I'm completely incredulous that someone can destroy my property with no request to do so whatsoever, and that I am then bound by a pass-the-buck criminal and insurance system to either pay out of pocket to fix the destruction and seek restitution in Small Claims Court, or have potentially inferior work forced on me by the responsible individual, with absolutely no assurance of quality workmanship."

Then she goes on to say, "Please tell me what the government of Canada is doing to protect innocent homeowners, who are taxpayers, Canadian citizens and federal public servants, from being preyed upon in such egregious ways?"

So here is a homeowner who has done all the things right. She senses something is not right, she refuses to sign an agreement for this guy to do any work, and without her consent he shows up when she's away and starts doing it anyway. Fortunately, I can update the story to say that after my office and the media got involved and with some further inquiries by Ms. Dickenson, her insurance company has stepped up, so I'm glad about that.

You may be asking, though, what was the ministry's response to all of this? The day after I spoke to the minister—and I'm sure this was a coincidence, Speaker; I'm sure it has to be a coincidence—the member for Glengarry–Prescott–Russell had one of those famous planted questions during question period. Here's how he led it off: "My question is to the dedicated Minister of Consumer Services. Spring has finally arrived, and many homeowners are thinking about possible renovations that they might want to do to their homes. Renovations and small construction projects are great ways to stimulate the local economies and also tend to employ locals, and people buy materials locally."

Of course, the minister did offer all kinds of assurances that her ministry has lots of information for consumers—information for consumers. No protection, mind you, just lots and lots of information.

It's ironic that even when a planted question is asked, the minister didn't really have any answers that could truly help someone in Ms. Dickenson's situation.

To close out the story—actually, last week my office got an answer from the ministry, and it really was no better than the one that the member for Glengarry–Prescott–Russell received in the House. They wrote, "In this case the Consumer Protection Act, 2002, does not apply as no agreement was entered into by Ms. Dickenson, and as such, the ministry cannot take action."

"Ms. Dickenson may have legal recourse in this case and may wish to consult a lawyer about her options."

1630

Again, I just want to remind Ontarians to keep that answer in mind when they hear the government talking about this bill and the great things they're doing involving consumer protection.

It will provide some help in a few limited areas, but there still needs to be MPPs standing up and going to bat for their constituents. They'll be told, "Sorry, we can't help. I hope your constituent has the time and money on their hands to take the contractor to court." Personally, I don't think that's consumer protection, and I think that the ministry should be doing more than just giving information.

I want to spend some time also talking about this door-to-door sales component of this legislation because I know it's something of concern to constituents in my riding. We've seen examples of unconscionable salespeople who like to target seniors in particular with their too-good-to-be-true scams. In this bill it's good to see that the minister's doubling the cooling-off period for water heater rentals to 20 days. It's interesting that this is the only type of contract for which they've implemented

this measure. Why not take a look at some other future performance types of contracts right now?

I think people should be aware that this bill can still leave them open for some severe penalties if they don't completely resolve the contract cancellation within those 20 days. Our critic was here earlier, the member for Stormont–Dundas–South Glengarry, and he pointed out in his address that cancellation charges can run consumers into the hundreds of dollars, and I think that's very significant.

The bill we spoke about earlier, Bill 14, talked about waiving a \$45 charge at the Landlord and Tenant Board and how groups have come to us and said how important it is for consumer protection that we be able to waive that \$45 charge, yet this piece of legislation opens consumers up for hundreds of dollars of penalties. So I want to put that into perspective because we spoke about Bill 14 earlier today.

Beyond the cancellation, the companies can also hit the consumer with huge damage charges if there's even a scratch on those tanks that are up to 10 years old.

What's also missing here is the requirement for a salesperson—and I think this is very important—to provide full disclosure of the costs and penalties associated in the contract up front. Again, hopefully members will agree that having all those costs and having that disclosure up front is important. The best consumer is an informed consumer, and I think that is a very, very important item that we need to include in this bill.

If you require companies to disclose all of the details of the contract in plain language prior to someone signing it, that's a lot better than trying to fix the problem after the fact. I'm sure our constituency offices all have examples of that.

These are just some of the questions and concerns that our caucus and our critic the member for Stormont–Dundas–South Glengarry have raised.

So perhaps it's not surprising that one of the proponents of the bill is a company under investigation by the Competition Bureau.

You know, speaking about the bill today I'm reminded of an area of consumer protection that I've tried to engage with previous ministers on. In fact, it was about a year ago, as we were preparing for the May long weekend, sort of the official kickoff of the summer, that I tried to get some action on gasoline prices. I asked the government to step up and help me tackle an issue that has phones ringing off the hook in my constituency office.

The concern wasn't just the price of gas, which we all know went up higher thanks to this government's HST. It was the fact that gas companies in one of my communities in my riding, in Brockville, were charging prices that were significantly higher than those in other eastern Ontario communities. Those people who were calling were using very strong words, words like "collusion" and "price gouging." Here's what my local daily newspaper, the Brockville Recorder and Times had to say. This is a quote from their newspaper story: "Once known as an

oasis of competitive gas prices, Brockville is quickly gaining a reputation as a place motorists want to avoid."

The quote from Pierre St. Jean, who was gassing up at the time the reporter was there: "Prices are terrible compared to Ottawa."

The story later goes on to say, "Clerks at a couple of gas bars did note on the condition of anonymity, however, that they are hearing complaints from motorists upset at" those "local prices."

They later on said that they hear it all the time from people, especially those who are travelling through eastern Ontario, using 401 and 416 going forward.

"So motorists are left to speculate why prices are lower all around Brockville, where the cost jumped"—in this story—"as much as six cents Thursday night to just under"—at the time—"1.25 per litre at outlets across the city."

The paper then went on and ran a poll and found that 98% of folks thought that there was something fishy with the way they fluctuated. I had asked the minister of the day whether she was with the 98% or with the 2%.

Hon. Tracy MacCharles: Point of order.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Point of order?

Hon. Tracy MacCharles: Bill 55, please.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): I'm listening very carefully to the remarks.

Continue.

Mr. Steve Clark: If the minister wants to pick up the discussion, she can just go on YouTube and watch the exchange and decide whether she wants to take up the issue of consumer protection when it comes to gas prices. I know that she said in the House that consumer protection is a bit of a passion of hers as a minister, so I hope that she'll consider taking up the challenge. We're looking forward to another long weekend, and I think it's very important that we all have consumer protection on our minds.

As well, during the debate the member for Glengarry–Prescott–Russell talked about the other sections of this act. Certainly, he and the member for—Mr. Smith. What's his riding?

Ms. Sylvia Jones: Prince Edward–Hastings.

Mr. Steve Clark: Prince Edward–Hastings; that's right. Sorry to Mr. Smith. He had the real estate side of the discussion, and I found that—

Interjection.

Mr. Steve Clark: I know, Joe. It's 20 minutes, right?

He talked about the real estate side of it, and I know he had a private member's bill that he was encouraged by the government adding to the system. I know that consumer protection—I know it just deals with debt settlement, door-to-door sales and the real estate side, but I do really think that when we go back to our ridings, especially now that we're moving into a break week and we'll be in our constituencies—rather than this last six weeks when we've been back and forth—we will get a chance to engage with our constituents, talk to them about this bill and really understand the real consumer protection issues that are taking place in the province.

I look forward to further debate on the bill. I want to apologize to the member for Prince Edward–Hastings for messing up his riding name.

Mr. Todd Smith: That's okay—wherever you're from.

Mr. Steve Clark: Yes, wherever I'm from.

Thank you very much, Speaker, for allowing me to debate Bill 55.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Comments and questions?

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: I'm glad to speak to Bill 55, the Consumer Protection Act. Ontario New Democrats have long called for consumer protection. Certainly that's nothing new to us. We've also talked about consumer protection in the form of a consumer advocate, because what the member was talking about was someone who couldn't find recourse. They went to the OPP, they went to the insurance company, but if they had a consumer advocate, they could call that office and get their voices heard and get direction on what happened and where to go and what resources they had so they'd have an actual agency advocate to hear them. That was what the frustration was for his constituent. No one was there to listen to the fact that this person came on to her property and started work without her consent.

I think that's a step forward, and I hope that when this bill gets sent to committee—if we're all in agreement, of course—some of that expertise, testimony, deponents coming to the committee, will maybe express the need of how important a consumer advocate is for consumer protection. You can have the bill say “consumer protection,” but if there is not an advocacy to actually enforce for consumers concerned, it kind of leaves it a little bit weak there.

We know that over many, many years, there have been abuses to consumer services by sales reps who come around knocking door-to-door. Consumers are sometimes not educated on the contracts, because they can be very complicated.

1640

I'm glad to see that this addresses the door-to-door sales of water heaters. Hopefully this will have some protection for people who are faced with entering those contracts and some recourse in that timeline where they sign that contract and back out.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): The Minister of Consumer Affairs.

Hon. Tracy MacCharles: Thank you, Speaker. I'm thrilled, of course, to be up talking about Bill 55, the Stronger Protection for Ontario Consumers Act. I was absolutely thrilled to introduce this recently into the House. When we talk about consumer protection, it's something that all the parties can agree is a good thing to do. Protecting consumers has a number of other benefits; it not only protects the consumer per se, but it builds their confidence in the marketplace. When we have a strong marketplace in Ontario, that's good for the economy and it's good for jobs.

I think that's why we can all readily agree that consumer protection is a very important thing in Ontario and

that Ontario can be very proud of the number of consumer protection provisions already in place. Bill 55, as we're talking about today, seeks to bring even stronger measures forward.

We have very strong education and awareness programs around consumer protections. We have a 1-800 number. We have compliance and enforcement measures under the Consumer Protection Act and we have hefty fines, if need be, against corporations and individuals if there are violations of that legislation.

It is important that we keep responding to changing trends in the marketplace, and Bill 55 proposes to do just that in terms of door-to-door sales of water heaters, putting stronger rules around debt settlement companies and modernizing things around real estate transactions. I just wanted to add to the comments from the member from Leeds–Grenville that it's not just about real estate transactions, but dealing with phantom bids. There's a lot in that bill and I look—

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Thank you. Further comments?

Mr. Jim McDonell: I'm happy to rise to address the comments made by my colleague from Leeds–Grenville, who is always very insightful and makes some good points. This bill addresses some key issues in the Consumer Protection Act that have been long overdue. Some concerns were had with the bill and those are some things we'll be working for. There's no question we're looking for a very strong competitive field out there, especially in the hot water sales that we're talking about.

We have two large incumbents. We still haven't addressed the issue with allowing new, smaller companies into the field and allowing for the seamless cancellation of the former contracts. We have some issues there that we would like to see addressed so that we really have true competition.

As well, we have some payment issues that make it very difficult for small companies to compete when they're restricted in billing, because if somebody has an issue with their hot water heater, do they really have to wait 20 days? It makes it very difficult sometimes. Maybe the wording can be changed to make that a little bit easier and more friendly, actually, for the consumer. There's no question door-to-door sales can be high-pressure, and they pick on certain elements of our society. We want to see that that's done right, and that the bad apples don't create a bad name for everybody else.

Debt settlement is certainly an issue that needs to be regulated. We need to look at it and make sure, again, that we have some real teeth in it that stop the bad players and protect the part of our business where we seem to not always get the most favourable of reviews. But in actual fact, it is a needed service. We'll work through committee and we're also looking to make sure that at least some of these changes are made.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Further comments? Yes, the member for Caledon—

Ms. Sylvia Jones: Dufferin–Caledon.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Dufferin–Caledon.

Ms. Sylvia Jones: Thank you, Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise and comment on some of the comments that were made by my colleague from—Leeds–Grenville; I should know that by now. The issues and the stories that he was raising and talking about in his speech were, to me, what we should be discussing when we talk about consumer protection bills. I think that we could have done a much more thorough job to ensure that what's in here is actually what we're seeing in our communities and back in our ridings. I think, quite frankly, that they missed the mark, and some of the comments that the member from Leeds–Grenville made highlighted that to me. If we had done a more thorough job of trying to figure out where the issues were and how we as legislators could resolve them, then perhaps this debate and discussion could have been a more fruitful use of our time.

There are certainly some good aspects of Bill 55, which the member spoke of, but there are also some glaring omissions that I wish we would have been able to cover. Perhaps I'll be an optimist and say that we can start dealing with some of those in committee, but I am concerned because, as we all know, you can't add brand new things in committee. You can only amend existing items that are in the legislation. Even in committee, you are actually quite limited as to what you can extend and add to a piece of proposed legislation. The member's personal examples that came from his riding really bring home that there are issues out there, but there are issues that we still need to deal with.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): The member for Leeds–Grenville has two minutes to respond.

Mr. Steve Clark: I want to thank the member for London–Fanshawe, the Minister of Consumer Services, the member for Stormont–Dundas–South Glengarry and also the member for Dufferin–Caledon for their comments.

I also would like to ask for unanimous consent to call the special debate filed by Mr. Wilson on April 29, 2013, to be called for debate on Monday, June 3, 2013, and to recognize that, given that June is classified as Dairy Month, we ask the Speaker to recognize the special role that Ontario's great dairy farmers play to add to the economy of the province of Ontario and supply management.

I therefore ask for unanimous consent of the aforementioned and request that the Speaker issue a letter of congratulations to the Dairy Farmers of Ontario to recognize their hard work.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Okay.

"I believe we would have unanimous consent to call the special debate filed by Mr. Wilson on April 29, 2013, to be called for debate on Monday, June 3, 2013, and to recognize that, given that June is classified as Dairy Month, we ask the Speaker to recognize the special role that Ontario's great dairy farmers play to add to the economy of the province of Ontario and supply management.

"I therefore ask for unanimous consent of the aforementioned and request that the Speaker issue a letter of

congratulations to the Dairy Farmers of Ontario to recognize their hard work."

Do I have unanimous consent? Seeing none, further debate.

Mr. John Vanthof: I'm really looking forward to speaking on Bill 55, an act to amend the Collection Agencies Act, the Consumer Protection Act, and the Real Estate and Business Brokers Act, but first I'd like to take a moment. If we're going to declare June Dairy Month, which is a great idea, we should perhaps talk to the House leaders first and actually do it the way the House actually works. Then it would be declared Dairy Month, instead of trying to play games with the Dairy Farmers of Ontario, as the Tories are trying to do. Thank you, Speaker, for allowing me to veer off.

On behalf of my constituents, I think this bill has its problems, and I'm going to get into these problems, but for the people at home, this is one of those bills that actually could make a difference directly in their lives. Because a lot of the stuff we talk about here is very important to the province as a whole. All of it is incredibly important, but a lot of it, for lack of a better—if you're sitting at home just trying to pay your bills, it's way up in the stratosphere, what we're talking about. We're talking about the budget and we're talking about all the bad things we talk about, like Ornge and eHealth, but that's way up here for people. Bills like this—consumer protection—are the bread and butter for the people watching at home, for the people who are having to face one of these door-to-door guys.

1650

I live in the country. I've always lived in the country. We don't get a lot of energy retailers, and I'm going to go into that. This bill doesn't specifically talk about energy retailers, because they're dealt with somewhere else. It has changed, but they're still out there. But in the country, we don't get them that often because, quite frankly, there's no money in it because the houses are too far apart and most of us aren't served by—so the first time I actually encountered the energy retail field was when I ran the first time provincially. I was knocking on doors, and in certain neighbourhoods where people were already having a hard time getting by, there were little stickers on the doors. These neighbourhoods had been targeted by high-pressure salespeople who were going to save them some money, and didn't save them any money at all.

These people were just trying to get on with their lives. They didn't have the capacity or the time to really realize what these people were doing to them. Quite frankly, a lot of them didn't know what recourse they would have. With this bill, they still won't, because those same people will still be targeted. I know that the government has done something—has done a little—on the energy retail sector, but my office is still dealing with them. It's so bad in the energy retail field, and still is.

I don't have any big cities in my riding; we have small towns. Small townspeople know each other. If we hear there's an energy retail crew coming to the town, we con-

tact the paper, we contact the council, we put out press releases and we try to get them booted out of town. Now, should that be put into a law? I don't think so. But at least we're trying to protect the people beforehand. That's a big issue, and we still have to do that. Every MPP in this House, I'm sure, has had to do things to protect against these people.

One of the problems I have with this specific act is it's putting energy retailers, insurance brokers and real estate brokers kind of in the same package. I've dealt with a lot of real estate brokers and, by and large, they're not the same type of people as energy retailers or water heater salesmen.

You know the big difference? It's something my dad taught me a long time ago: If someone comes to your house unannounced, uninvited, to sell something, they're probably not doing it in your best interest; they're doing it in their best interest. That's a big difference here. Those people—the water heater salesmen, the energy retailer, the person who is going to fix your roof, but you have to do it this morning otherwise your two-for-one deal, two roofs for one, won't be there in another three hours—aren't there to help you.

It concerns me a bit that the way this is packaged, the real estate brokers are kind of in the same package. For some reason, it seems like an odds-and-ends bill. Some good things, and they sweep it all together and everybody gets swept into the same dustbin. I have a bit of a problem with that; I have a lot of a problem with that.

But let's go for the water heater folks. The cooling-off period, all those things—I think part of this is, there should be a much bigger education component to warn people actually before, because, you've got to remember, these people are at home, minding their own business, and someone who is highly trained on how to do this, on how to push this water heater or whatever down somebody's throat—these people are trained to do this and they pick where to do it.

There has to be more than just a cooling-off period. Is a cooling-off period, a longer one, better? Yes. Am I going to stand here and say it's a regressive step? No, of course not. It's a step forward; hopefully we can do something to make it, perhaps, a bigger step. Somehow put more—and this would be a long-term thing, but maybe we should actually start—we've talked a lot in the Local Food Act on how we should have food literacy in schools, right? Great idea. Maybe we should have consumer literacy in schools, you know, to actually warn people how the world really works.

It's because there are a lot of people out there, and these people are trained; they're very good at their job and they're extremely high pressure. Maybe we should go back to my dad's—if someone comes uninvited, unannounced and they're going to give you the deal of your lifetime, maybe that's not a good thing.

It's almost like—and I'm going to stray a little bit, but last night, my good friend the member for Timmins—James Bay and I, we were—he's moving, so we were helping him move. I got an email from some place in—

oh, I can't remember the country's name, but someone had \$3.8 million waiting for me. So we were discussing whether I should announce today that I'm not running again. I'm done. I'm going to a warm place and I'm done with this job. But it's the same type of deal, except these people—we can laugh at that, but this is a long way away—are right in your face, in your door, and it's a huge, huge problem.

So I'm hoping, I truly want this bill to go to committee, and I want to strengthen it as much as I can—as much as we can—because it's not just water heaters; the energy retailers are still a problem. The member before me talked about laneway repairs—anything like that—somehow we have to see if we can somehow help people defend themselves against that.

On the Collection Agency Act, the amendment to the collection agencies—and the amendment, for the folks at home, isn't to the collection agencies, it's to the debt settlement people. So if you open up certain newspapers, half of this one page is psychics and the other half is how you can reduce your debts and fight off the creditors.

These people really aren't coming to your door; you're going to them. You're already in bad shape because obviously you're being hounded by a debt collection agency, but the problem goes even farther back. The problem is that these people once again are being assaulted by “Buy now, pay later; buy now, pay later,” and quite frankly, they are suffering, in a lot of cases—not in every case, but in a lot of cases—from falling behind in wages. They feel they're falling behind, and credit is too easy. Interest, you know, sounds cheap, but on a lot of credit things, it isn't cheap. They find themselves, before they know it—

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: Trapped.

Mr. John Vanthof: —trapped. They look at these debt settlement agencies as a way out. Some of them don't provide a way out but provide good, solid advice. I think even from these agencies, the danger with a lot of these things is you lump the good and bad into the group.

If I could back up a step, with the people who come to your door and aggressively try to shove something down your throat, they're not good or bad; they're all bad. But with the debt settlement agencies, there are good ones, fairly good ones, and there's fly-by-night ones that are basically just going to make your problems worse.

1700

Once again, when this bill—if it goes forward to committee, I'm hoping that the stakeholders in that sector come forward and present to the members of the committee so that whoever is on that committee, whichever committee it gets sent to, can actually take a good, hard look and make sure that the consumers are protected, and also that the good don't get lumped in with the bad.

Part of the problem—why there are so many debt settlement agencies and why we need so many is because people are falling behind. Once again, our whole society is built on “the more you buy, the better for the economy.” A lot of these people can't afford to buy, but

society is geared to make them buy. That's something that we have to be cognizant of. These agencies are filling a void. Some of them are doing what they should be doing; some of them aren't. There's something in here that they can't—the process has to be done before they get paid. Well, really, if you're a legitimate agency, I'm not sure if it's a long process, if that's really what we're aiming for.

In the few minutes I've got left, I'd like to talk about the Real Estate and Business Brokers Act and the changes that are being proposed here. Once again, real estate brokers fall into a different category than the—I'm looking for a word, because if you haven't gathered yet, for the members here and the folks at home, I really don't like energy retailers. I really don't like the people. I don't think it's unparliamentary: Real estate brokers are not like the piranhas who come to your door and take your money.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): I think I—

Mr. John Vanthof: I withdraw. I sincerely withdraw, Speaker.

But once again, real estate brokers provide an essential service, and I believe that they are—over my lifetime, we've bought and sold a few houses and bought and sold a few farms, and had some very good experiences with real estate brokers and a few not so good. It's like any other sector; there are good and there are not so good.

I think these amendments, specifically about proving whether there were other offers—I think that's a step in the right direction, because once again, if you always—in small-town Ontario or in the country, we tend to deal with the same people for years. You build up relationships, but once in a while there's someone else who's going to take it if you don't take it, and that's why you have to move now. Well, if you've dealt with the same person for years, you kind of know if it's upfront or not—at least you hope you know—but once again, it's becoming more high pressure all the time, so perhaps some of these proposals are warranted.

On behalf of my caucus, I think we all—that this bill goes to committee and that we take a good long look at truly protecting consumers. I think that's the most important. It's called the Stronger Protection for Ontario Consumers Act, and if we really—I've heard today, again, and I've said it many times, that the government across the aisle is very good at naming acts, and they are. Lots of times, the name says more than what's in the act. Well, I'm very hopeful that this time, we actually look at the name and say, “Okay, we're going to do everything possible to actually protect consumers.”

I'm going to go back: One of the biggest parts—I think every MPP has had people come to their office, and we have gone to the wall for them. I've had a discussion with the MPP from Kenora–Rainy River on things she did for people in her riding on the energy retailer front. We've all had that. We've all done it.

But there's a problem, because not everyone thinks of going to the MPP or they don't all happen to hear about the workshop that the MPP is holding. The Minister of

Consumer Affairs said, “They have a 1-800 number.” Well, not everybody thinks about the 1-800 number; not everybody is willing to wait and wait and wait on the 1-800 number. Somehow we have to do a much better job of educating people.

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: A consumer advocate.

Mr. John Vanthof: A consumer advocate—that's a good idea. I think that's in here; I should have read that.

Mr. Jim McDonell: It's not in the bill.

Mr. John Vanthof: But we should think about doing that.

Interjection: The Ombudsman.

Mr. John Vanthof: We're giving a lot of work to the Ombudsman, but really, couldn't we somehow, when we see there's a problem, when we see that people are being preyed upon—shouldn't there be an office to say, “Whoa, there's something wrong there. We should put a public statement out”? There are public statements out now. Go look at the Ontario budget. We're spending, right now, a lot of money advertising the Ontario budget. In my riding, on the radio, “Inform yourselves about the advantages of the new Ontario budget.”

Couldn't we as a Legislature, when we know people are being preyed upon, say no and put out an advertising campaign of, “Know your rights. Here are your rights when someone comes to your door”? Why couldn't we have advertising or something like that to warn people, or at least to inform people?

Once again, we don't want to trample on legitimate businesses—I've run a business for a long time—but when there are 107 of us and we all have people coming in to our offices with the same complaint. Couldn't there be something of a stronger protection that, when something is identified, would trigger the consumer advocate to put out a warning? Wouldn't that be a novel idea, someone who could inform people.

The Conservative member before me said that he saw a couple of people with water heater salesman; they were across the road. He came across and said, “Hey, you guys are water heater salesmen.” And he had the advantage because he was a member of provincial Parliament and he knew because he'd been discussing this. Wouldn't it be great if a lot of people knew what these people were capable of when they came to the door? That would make a big difference, and in the big picture it would save people grief, it would save people money and it would make this province a lot better a place to live. So yes, a consumer advocate who had the power to inform people would make a big difference in this bill. With that, Speaker, I'd like to thank you for your time. Thank you very much.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Thank you. Comments and questions?

Mr. Vic Dhillon: I'm very pleased to speak in support of Bill 55, the Stronger Protection for Ontario Consumers Act, 2013. This bill deals with three things: door-to-door sales, debt settlement services and real estate consumer protection.

The Ministry of Consumer Services received over 3,000 complaints about door-to-door sales. That's the

number 2 ranking in the type of complaints that the ministry has gotten, amongst the top 10. Currently under the Consumer Protection Act there's very limited protection for consumers with regard to door-to-door water heater rentals. The door-to-door water heater sales—this bill intends to do four things. It requires that the salesman states in clear language the rights that the consumer has, and it would double the cooling-off period from 10 to 20 days, in which delivery would be prohibited, and it would have stronger remedies if these rules are breached, which include some very high fines. Also, what I think is a very important part of the bill is that this change requires that the call be recorded to verify the key terms and conditions of the contract.

1710

It's a great bill. I think it goes a long way in addressing some of the most common problems that people face when—

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Thank you. Further comments and questions?

Mr. Jim McDonnell: I rise again to talk about the comments made by the member from Timiskaming-Cochrane. He brings up some issues. We have a bill here that addresses just a very little bit of the consumer protection part. It's funny, I met with a couple from my riding just last week. They came in and they showed me their hydro bill, and they really were there to say they could no longer afford their home. I looked at their tax bill. Their taxes were very reasonable, which made me assume that the house they were talking about was very modest. The hydro bills were killing them; they were over \$400 every two months. They had somebody in, an electrician, to look and see if they could somehow do something. They had already converted to gas hot water and a gas clothes dryer. They had literally done everything they could, but they still were saying, with expenses going up—fixed income, both retired—they could no longer afford to live in their house, and they didn't know what they could do. This is a common subject that I hear in our riding.

We need to look at consumer protection, but people need to be protected from this government. We've seen rates go up so high. Their pensions may be indexed at 1% or 2% a year. They just can't keep up, and they're getting desperate. Their comment to me was they didn't know if I could do anything, but they wanted to make sure that I knew just how hard it was to stay in their house. I was somewhat amazed at some of their bills. Even their property taxes—not to point fingers at the township, but really, their increases are—I know some of the local mayors, having been one myself, no longer have money to put into roads. They're going in regulation.

We just have to do something, and it's time that we do something to really protect the consumer.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Further comments?

Mr. Rosario Marchese: I always like the speeches of my colleague from Timiskaming-Cochrane because he's full of practical suggestions, and he's a man full of

wisdom. The last comment he made in his speech had to do with, "Wouldn't it be wonderful to have a consumer advocate in this province?" It would be good to have a consumer advocate everywhere in fact, but wouldn't it be good to have a consumer advocate in this province?

The problem that we have in this province is that we are always dealing with caveat emptor—the lawyers would know that expression—which in plain English is "Buyer beware." The onus is always on the buyer. Wouldn't it be wonderful to reverse that and put the responsibility on those who commit fraud, on the corporations, to be a little more responsible on anything that has to do with condominiums and making sure that we protect them before they get into a situation where somebody is about to commit fraud against them?

We need someone who protects consumers, and while Bill 55 protects consumers a little more than we do now, we need to send it to committee to make it a bit stronger. That's what we want, and we want to make sure that we indeed talk about a consumer advocate that would protect consumers, and we should be thinking about that on a regular basis, because we can't rely on the buyer to always beware of what he's doing. In fact, most people buy a product hoping that everything is going to go all right, that everything is going to be all right. They say, "No, no, read the fine print. You better read the fine print." Well, what human being reads the fine print? I don't think lawyers even read the fine print from time to time. So we need a consumer advocate to help out. That's what we—

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Thank you. Further comments?

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): The member for Ajax-Pickering.

Mr. Joe Dickson: I just want to make a couple of comments on the member from Timiskaming-Cochrane on Bill 55—a couple of valid points. He indicated that some of the salespeople are good and some are not so good, and he's right. He's talking about perhaps expanding the bill. He's right again, and I would certainly concur with him because sometimes those most impacted are people like single mothers with young children, and they're devastated. He knows, I know and I think all members know, because we have to go and visit the families.

On all of the protection that's coming forward, whether it's door-to-door sales or hot water heaters—that's perhaps one of the worst cases ever in that scenario. The debt settlement services and the predatory debt settlement—just the fact that they're going to have to now show certain things and certain fees publicly is going to solve some issues.

The real estate consumer protection: That's the phantom offers that come in, nothing signed. Now they're going to have to do that. On the à la carte services, you're going to remove the prohibition from the fee commission structures. Why should someone be paid twice?

It goes on and on. I agree to expand it wherever you can. I was just thinking, I was in a parking lot on the

weekend doing some charitable work, and three men came along with big boxes of goods for sale. Having been on local council and regional council etc., I said, "Oh, you must have paperwork on that." They pulled out a packing slip. It could have been a speeding ticket for all I know. I said, "What about your jurisdiction to do this? Do you not understand the legislation? I helped put it in place in this community 20 years ago." "Oh, well, we've got the authority." I said, "Well, look, here's my card"—

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): The member has two minutes to respond.

Mr. John Vanthof: I'd like to thank the member from Brampton West and the members for Stormont-Dundas-South Glengarry, Trinity-Spadina and Ajax-Pickering.

I think they all said it. We're all looking for ways to make it better for consumers. The member from Kenora-Rainy River brought something up, and I'm going to have to correct my remarks a little bit because if you take my remarks literally, I would like to stop door-to-door sales by Girl Guides, and that's not the point. I can joke about that, but that's not the point, and I think everyone can see there's a difference.

But the member from Trinity-Spadina brought up a good point, that the onus is always on the buyer. Sometimes I think we have to go a little bit further and make sure that—and I think this bill, on the real estate part, does that to a point. It puts a bit more onus on the broker. I understand that there is—you can't divulge prices, and we're okay with that, but to make sure that the offers are legitimate offers and not just wink-wink, nudge-nudge, because you've got to buy now. There's a difference.

If this bill goes to committee, we have to take a long, hard look and make sure that it does live up to the title as much as it can because it's not just water heaters, it's not just energy. There's a whole genre out there, and when you fix one, they just move to the next. We have to take a look at how we can protect consumers as a whole from predatory retail door-to-door practices.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Further debate?

Hon. Glen R. Murray: It's a pleasure to stand and support Bill 55, the Stronger Protection for Ontario Consumers Act. We're truly trying here to do a couple of things: better protect consumers from high-pressure door-to-door sales, better protect vulnerable and indebted consumers from predatory debt settlement services and improve the rules protecting buyers and sellers of real estate.

1720

One of the ones that interests me the most is the issue of indebted consumers. Often people, when they've lost their jobs in a recession, start living on their credit cards, hoping that that job is just a week away and they'll be back on their feet. They go through their savings, they give up their liquidity and it puts them in a very difficult situation. At a point of greatest vulnerability, those folks are often much more easily pressured, because they don't feel very confident and they don't feel very secure. I think that is particularly important.

Prohibiting upfront fees before services are rendered and a limit on the amount of fees I think is critically important and a very positive step forward. To require clear contract disclosures, I think, is really, really critical, and misleading sales practices and advertising are also very, very important.

The ability of people to lure debtors into contracts that really provide absolutely no benefit or very little benefit in settling the debt—the fees are often usurious, and the person or the agency has very little involvement in negotiating payment or finding a reasonable outcome. Too often, they also provide for escape clauses that invalidate the contract if the person is sued.

On real estate, it's particularly important, because we're in the middle of a real estate boom in many parts of this province, where people are high-pressured. I remember looking at 57 different condos over two years before I finally found a place to live. I remember all the tricks: \$50,000 for a city view. Having been a mayor, I went down to check at the planning department. The city view was there, but only for another six months. It was going to be the back end of the Monarch condominiums view. People were charging \$50,000 and \$75,000 more for a city view, never actually telling them that the city councillor in that area had lifted the height restriction, so they actually were not going to see the CN Tower or the lake or any of the things that were being marketed. They were going to be looking into a concrete wall. So there is a huge amount of consumer concerns around that.

People have talked about high-pressure sales. My mother is a pretty astute person; she's 85. I'm always amazed—the building she lived in was known to have a lot of seniors in it—how many times she calls me at home in the evening because someone is on her doorstep with some deal or creating some sort of crisis that something has gone wrong that she has to pay for to fix. That is just really unfair, especially given, with an aging population, the number of elderly women who are living on their own, who are particularly vulnerable.

I also just want to say in passing that I really enjoyed the commentary by the member from Timiskaming-Cochrane. He has become one of my favourite members. He actually makes me laugh every time I'm in the House.

Interjection.

Hon. Glen R. Murray: Well, I love everybody, you know, but I have to say he's one of the most down-to-earth and humorous people. I want to thank him for the great goodwill he brings to this House all the time. He's really a delight.

I want to talk a little bit about debt settlement, because I think there's a lot more we have to do. As a minister, I cannot bring forward a bill or anything like that. But I want to talk about how serious things are getting as things change.

We have called this phase 1 of our legislation, so rather than repeating the same speaking notes we've all been running through, I'd like to talk a little bit about what I see as some of the things we have to move forward to deal with in the future.

I was a victim of identity theft, and it was one of the most shocking and appalling experiences I've had in my life. Usually, I'm not easily made afraid of things, but I actually felt, probably for the better part of a year, that I was trapped in a situation not of my making that I couldn't get out of. I just want to describe how serious this is, and why I think predatory debt services really compound these things.

I got a phone call one day—it was about five or six years after I moved back to Toronto—from a credit collection agency claiming I owed tens of thousands of dollars to Home Depot and Best Buy. Now, I know this will feed a stereotype that's terrible, but I actually haven't shopped at Home Depot or Best Buy. I couldn't figure out how this happened. The bills were over two years old; there were almost 30 months since the purchases had been made. So I'm sitting there thinking, how could I owe all this money in a store I've never been in, and how could almost 30 months go by before I would actually know that I owed that money?

Well, this is what happened. At the Whitby Home Depot, a place I've never been into in my life, someone walked in there with a cancelled letter. That's all they had. Apparently, at the end, I found out that they'd actually gotten all my personal information by going to car dealerships. Have you ever been in a car showroom? They actually leave your signed contracts out on someone's desk—there's a Porsche dealership and a Volvo dealership and an Acura dealership in my neighbourhood; I'm always going there—and it has your social insurance number on it. You have to fill out all this information. The car salespeople just leave that at their desks.

So what people do is they take a BlackBerry like this and they just take pictures, so they get your social insurance number and all of that. They figure out where you live and then they just go and try to find a cancelled piece of mail. What they actually often do is they go into the mailrooms or into that area in front of the—where people throw out their—you know, you get all that junk mail and stuff, and in a condo there's a big blue bin full of all the crap that came in that no one wants, and they'll pull out a few people, if they can match that.

So these big-box retailers will actually give you a credit card based on if you can get a social insurance number and a cancelled envelope. They got a Home Depot credit card in about five minutes. They actually advertise—when I actually called Home Depot, the first thing this person said was, “You can get this credit card in less than 12 hours with no questions asked.” Well, that was the problem. Then they went and spent \$5,000 on the first day, took that credit card and the same information and got a Best Buy credit card and went on a shopping spree.

Now, they love to advertise that there's no money down, no payments for 18 or 24 months, so this person didn't owe anything. Two years went by and there was no default on payment because they weren't required because of this great deal. So 30 months later, six months

into default, I then find out. Then you go to try to get the issue resolved. Well, actually, you find out it's not Home Depot and it's not Best Buy; it's Wells Fargo and it's Citibank in the United States.

Then I got into a three-month game going back and forth, where Home Depot said, “Well, it's not us. You have to deal with Wells Fargo.” Wells Fargo said, “No, no, we didn't sign the card. You have to deal with Home Depot.” Home Depot would say, “No, your loan is with Wells Fargo.” The same thing went on between Citibank and Best Buy. This went on for three months.

Meanwhile, my credit rating is now in the tank. Try to call the credit bureau and get it changed. It's you against Wells Fargo, Citibank, Home Depot and Best Buy. Well, I didn't win that battle. I would have been stuck with an absolutely flat credit rating and money—I could not prove that it wasn't me, because the videotapes they keep—because they videotape those things at the store, at the credit branch—they only keep for six months. Again, since it's 30 months before the default comes in, all the tapes are gone. This is the kind of scam that goes on. They did phone me to offer me debt services, along the lines of the ones we're regulating.

The only reason I got out of it is that at the time I was a Star columnist. I wrote a column about this experience in the Toronto Star, on consumerism. Because they were getting so much bad press—I got over a thousand emails and people who, from across Canada, responded to that column. Without that column, I would have never gotten out of it. I still meet people today who have never been able to resolve that issue because they can't beat the big US banks and they cannot beat the credit bureaus. The credit bureau has no obligation to the consumer, and it's the consumer is guilty until he can prove himself innocent.

It was interesting to see how much money this costs the economy every year. It is really pervasive. It is the most common form of theft—identity theft and the resulting theft that takes place. So I'm hoping as we move forward—and I think what is a very good start in these areas that we actually start to take on in the second phase of this legislation. These are the kinds of non-partisan issues I think all of us would want to support, that we really have to start tackling the idea of security, identity, identity theft, and put regulations on requiring reporting of credit cards and verification of identity before credit cards are given out. I think there's a lot more too.

1730

The kinds of things we're doing today take about five or six really critical issues—and I really credit Minister MacCharles. It takes a whole bunch of those high-pressure sales. This bill really deals with the people who are very vulnerable and most vulnerable to predatory deals, to debt services, to home sales and those kinds of things, as my friend from Ajax-Pickering says, without hurting Girl Guides and Boy Scouts and all the other people who sell good things at our doors. But this is just an area we're beginning to look at in consumer protection. There is an endless more amount to do.

The other piece about in the marketplace, the stuff you don't know—I'd like to take a minute. The idea that you actually have to report and report in writing now when you go to buy a house, this high pressure sales that there's so many people bidding on it, is also really critical. We have a high-pressure consumer market. There are very difficult times right now for people who are trying to get into their first household. The threshold now is 20%. It is now harder to get a mortgage than ever before. For young people today, if they don't get into homeownership early, it is very hard to do it.

Our jobs are increasingly urban. In almost every one of the world's economies now, the large urban regional economies—Paris, London, Frankfurt, Berlin—are where most of the job growth is in an innovation economy. The world is actually rapidly urbanizing. It is creating huge pressures on rural, small town and northern communities to retain population. When people come in to cities and they have to quickly find a place to live, they are also increasingly vulnerable to these high-pressure sales, and people can get talked into that. The fact that we actually are slowing that down, finally putting some obligations on the real estate agents to produce in writing and taking that pressure off—

I dare say that one of the things that I've really liked about this debate in the House is that members on both sides, and I could say three sides—this is a pretty triangulated relationship these days—have all raised some very, very positive ideas about going forward, because the one thing about consumer protection today is that because of the Internet, because everyone has a camera, because our information is so easily accessed and it's so hard to protect yourself, sometimes I almost feel like we're chasing a jet plane to catch up to all of the legislation.

I also just to want to really thank Minister MacCharles, because she's been one of the—she's not a terribly partisan person, and she's really been reaching out to all of us, certainly in our caucus here in government and I know to members of the opposition, to start to build this. When she talked about this as phase 1, and that there would be a second and future legislation, I think there was an acknowledgement that what we're trying to do here is not wait to solve every problem but let's get early action on the stuff that is well established, in which we've got consensus with industry, we've got support to move forward on in this House.

But I'm hoping this bill gets through quickly because it's a solid, excellent piece of legislation. It's a good start and because we need to get this to committee because I'm sure that when this goes to committee this will be a discussion, as it often is, where people come down and say, "I'm really glad you're doing this, but I'd also like you to do this, this and this." And I don't think that's a bad thing.

I was talking with some of my friends across the way there that one of the things that Premier Wynne has been trying to do is open up this House, make private members' bills a more important part of the discussion, try to

reflect more of the consensus of the House in important government legislation, look at the kinds of things that aren't partisan issues, that whether you're representing Kenora or Cornwall, these are things that matter to people. I'm hoping that spirit has been embraced.

I've been a little bit concerned about the official opposition in that, but I want to commend the third party because I think that the members of the third party have responded positively. I mean, we all have to kick each other in the shin; there's a partisan game that goes on. While we think it's somewhat necessary, I think most people outside these halls look at us during question period—every time I bring my mother down, she says, "I raised you to be better than that, Glen." She walks in and she says, "Don't these people know their mothers are watching?" But we've really reached out, and I appreciate that, because I think that when we actually get those chances to be Ontarians before we're Liberals, Conservatives or New Democrats, it often brings out the best. These kinds of legislation, when you listen to the discussions around it, people have responded to it.

I look forward to it going to committee because, quite frankly, a number of members opposite spoke to it, and some of the members of the third party I thought had some very positive suggestions about how this bill can be strengthened. I certainly, as a government member, would be very supportive of that. I'm sure the minister will be as well, but these also touch some of the very basic things. A lot of these are very home-centred: your ability to buy a home, to have a clean and safe process, not to be intimidated, to be told the truth, to have a point of accountability, and, while people have free access to your home, that there are responsibilities for people.

The 20-day cooling-off period, I think, is one of the most important things, especially for elderly people. My sister lives in Florida; she's a nurse. I'm married to a nurse. I'm surrounded by nurses. Nurses make lists; they organize your life.

I am not—it may surprise you—the most organized person. I have sticky notes. I have sticky notes on my forehead in the morning; I have sticky notes by the telephone. When I go out the door in the morning, Rick puts sticky notes on everything, including my bag. I have lists of things. No one makes more lists than nurses.

Interjection.

Hon. Glen R. Murray: The Minister of Economic Development, Trade and Employment is agreeing. He's a doctor; he knows the importance of nurses with lists, I think.

But it's interesting to me—I'm a parent and a grandparent, and my mom is a great-grandparent now—how much that is important, and how we have to take care of each other intergenerationally.

In our right-on-time lives, 10 days is not much time when sometimes people innocently sign something, and they have to get to other people and get that kind of support—being able to get to a family member who then has the time to review whatever was signed by Mom or Dad, and to put that together.

This is the hard part of this job, Madam Speaker, when you actually have to use up all of your time so we can get enough time under the wire, so we can actually get the bill passed. I've got two more minutes, and I'm really running out of steam here. I could tell a few good jokes. My favourite one is that one about how politicians are people who see the light at the end of the tunnel, and order more tunnel. That was always a problem until I became Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure, because the light at the end of the tunnel is getting more tunnel bored—

Ms. Dipika Damerla: You could talk about subways—

Hon. Glen R. Murray: I could talk about subways, but then the Speaker is going to tell me, as I'm desperately close to the end—

Interjections.

Hon. Glen R. Murray: Fortunately, the Speaker is a wonderful woman and a good friend, and she's allowing me, with some humour, the ability to try and talk out the clock.

I know the irony of me having trouble talking out the clock, and I know at caucus I'm going to have to live this one down. But—

Interjections.

Hon. Glen R. Murray: Can't someone heckle me and say something that will really get my blood boiling? You're all being so nice today.

Hon. Michael Chan: The Big Move.

Hon. Glen R. Murray: The Big Move. We could talk about the Big Move, and we could talk about the Pan Am Games. We could talk about twinning highways in northern Ontario, which is a good thing. We could talk about the rural roads and bridges program—

Interjections.

Hon. Glen R. Murray: Yes, we could talk about how beautiful Shoal Lake is, and Lake of the Woods, and—

Interjection.

Hon. Glen R. Murray: Pardon me? There you go. We could talk about all the great things happening on the waterfront. Madam Speaker, I'll get back to the bill.

Interjection.

Hon. Glen R. Murray: Yes, I know, I know.

Anyway, about those water heaters: Really, no one should be forced to have to buy a water heater. I mean, what do you do when you actually have four or five water heaters? I don't know. But I have had consumer issues.

I know what I'll talk about for the last minute: the relationship to some of the other things that we've actually done, that I think interface with this bill.

I've actually spent about \$12,000 on HVAC systems in my condo, because they didn't work. One of the things, one of the other pieces of consumer protection, is the College of Trades, because we now, for the first time, will actually be able to verify whether the person was an electrician, a plumber or was properly qualified.

One of the big challenges that I've had, having had my condo just renovated—it was interesting to find out that a

number of the people who came into my condo to do this work—and not very well, because I've had the electrical replaced twice—weren't actually electricians, weren't actually qualified.

Building on the tradition of the College of Trades—I know I'm stretching it—that's another consumer protection which I think actually proposes to do that.

Ms. Sylvia Jones: It's a tax.

Hon. Glen R. Murray: It's not. It's not.

Anyway, I've really covered the water front, Madam Speaker, so thank you very much for allowing me to be a little bit silly.

To all my members who are here this afternoon talking this through: Thank you for your good humour and your friendship. God bless and keep you all safe, and may you get home to your families tonight in some reasonable period of time.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Questions and comments.

1740

Ms. Laurie Scott: It's a pleasure to rise today to rebut some of the minister's comments on Bill 55, the Stronger Protection for Ontario Consumers Act, that was brought in. He has told some interesting tales. Living in a small town in rural Ontario, I don't get that many door-to-door salespeople—not that I'm asking for them to come to the door.

Interjection: You're never home.

Ms. Laurie Scott: I'm never home, yes. In political life, we're never home.

You certainly do hear tales from the riding—or the more populated sections that get door-to-door salespeople coming to their doors—and the need for some type of consumer protection that may or may not be actually addressed in this piece of legislation, but we give some benefit of the doubt for that.

I certainly acknowledge the part on the real estate section. My friend and colleague from Prince Edward-Hastings has brought in his private member's bill for the electronic signing for transactions, which I think we heard loud and clear, certainly, from the real estate industry up in my riding of Haliburton-Kawartha Lakes-Brock. We're happy that the government has addressed some of the issues.

There are always many angles to bills that are brought forward here, but certainly I think we're all in agreement of consumer protection that needs to exist. Some of us disagree with how exactly to get there.

We look forward to more debate in the Legislature of the details of the bill. I know that in such a short time I can't go into too many details on this, Madam Speaker, but I'm sure that my colleagues that will have longer time to address this bill will bring forward some remarks and maybe some changes we'd like to see within it.

I thank the minister for the very interesting and entertaining comments that he brought to the House this afternoon.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Further comments?

Mr. Jonah Schein: I'm pleased to join the debate on Bill 55, the consumer protection act, and to follow the remarks made by the Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure.

This bill speaks to an issue that's certainly important to members of my community. More and more people are often being ripped off, one way or another, and they don't actually feel like there is a way to protect themselves, so the issue of consumer protection is important.

I think we all have personal experiences of this. I've been a victim of credit card fraud in the last couple of weeks. I now have to spend that time hunting down that issue—and, Speaker, I'm privileged; I've got lots of resources to do that work, and still it's not that easy for me to do. But if you're somebody who doesn't have language skills, who's working night shifts, who has—

Interjection: A bunch of kids.

Mr. Jonah Schein: —a lot of kids to take care of—they need support on these issues.

I would say, to this bill, first of all, it's a good thing. I think it's a modest bill. It points us in the right direction. Again, I don't think it goes quite far enough. Even the Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure was talking about things like identity theft, which is a real issue, yet this bill doesn't really do anything to address that issue. I think there's a lot more that this bill could do, and that's why I think we should move it on to committee.

Overall, constituents of mine in Davenport feel like there isn't accountability on a number of issues, whether it's their rights as consumers, whether it's rent control issues, whether it's a lack of labour enforcement officers in Ontario right now.

We need more accountability for people in Davenport and across Ontario. That's why New Democrats are proposing that we actually have a consumer advocate. That's somebody who can be called upon when people need that person, and it's something that's accessible to all people of Ontario.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Further comments?

Ms. Soo Wong: I'm pleased to follow the Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure and speak—

Interjection: It's not easy to follow him.

Ms. Soo Wong: Absolutely. It's very, very challenging. He knows the issue very well.

In terms of Bill 55, the section that I want to focus on is the door-to-door sales, because I have heard many, many concerns on this particular section of the bill.

In terms of vulnerable seniors the minister talked about, with respect to his own personal family issue—but also in my riding of Scarborough—Agincourt, in the sense that even the ministry identifies it as one of the top two issues that the complaints are coming to the ministry about.

If the bill is passed, it will address the door-to-door sales, and especially the pressure tactics of sales. I remember, when I was a young girl, that not only were they selling water heaters; they were selling knives, pots and pans—I don't know what else—

Mr. Bas Balkissoon: Vacuum cleaners.

Ms. Soo Wong: Vacuum cleaners, that's right—from my colleague here from Scarborough—Rouge River.

The other thing is they were also trying to sell you driveways, roofers and everything under the sun.

Vulnerable seniors, but also new Canadians in my riding of Scarborough—Agincourt, as well as those whose first language is not English, will have some challenges understanding the contracts.

If the bill is passed, Madam Speaker, it will address some of these issues in terms of the pressure-tactic sales, but also making sure the contract language is clear and that it's plain and simple so that people can understand.

As the Minister of Consumer Services talked about earlier, if passed, this legislation will also have the 20-day cooling-off period. I recently received a call from a constituent whose mother had this pressure tactic and signed the contract and now is trapped with the contract.

I'm hoping that all members will pass the bill.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): The member for Prince Edward—Hastings.

Mr. Todd Smith: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. It's a pleasure to join the debate and comment on the presentation by the Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure. I just want to remind the minister that he did ask for us to heckle him during his presentation, so I hope tomorrow in question period his request is heard loud and clear.

As a result of this bill that we're debating here today, Bill 55, there are three concerns that have been outlined: the debt settlement issue, the door-to-door sales issue, and the real estate issue. I believe I had the opportunity to speak for 45 minutes about this bill in the leadoff, and most of the time I spent talking about the real estate section, so I won't bore those who may be tuning in to the OLA network on a regular basis by going into all that again.

I can tell you, as the former news director at Quinte Broadcasting in Belleville, as the tulips started to come out, so did the door-to-door salespeople right across the province, and when they started to come out—as we've pointed out several times here today, there are some reputable people who go door to door, but there are some bad apples out there as well, and in the newsroom we used to hear an awful lot about the bad apples. We would get calls on a regular basis from seniors—and not just seniors, but those who had been victimized by people who are selling the vacuum cleaners door to door.

Quite often at this time of year, we heard about the people who were willing to pave your driveway at a reduced cost because they had some extra asphalt left over from a job that they did earlier in the day. They wanted \$500 from the homeowner. They said they'd come back and finish up the driveway at a very cheap, reduced cost of maybe \$2,000 if you gave them a little bit of a down payment. But then you would never see those guys again, except for the tail lights, heading off with your \$500.

These are problems across the province; there's no question about that. We just don't believe Bill 55 goes far enough.

I look forward to heckling the minister tomorrow in question period—because he asked for it, right?

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): The minister has two minutes to respond.

Hon. Glen R. Murray: It's always nice to discover that this is a House with some rather fine and funny people.

I want to thank the members from Prince Edward—Hastings, Scarborough—Agincourt, Davenport, and Haliburton—Kawartha Lakes—Brock—and I hope I didn't miss anybody—for their comments.

I think that most of us are pretty ethical people. I can't imagine, Madam Speaker, you would sell someone a poodle, claiming it was housebroken when it wasn't. I think most people who are in retail and who run businesses are pretty ethical people, and that probably needs to be said. Sadly, there are enough people whose approaches are less ethical and take advantage of people that make this kind of legislation necessary.

The member for Haliburton—Kawartha Lakes—Brock makes a very good point: There are differences culturally. I live in a condo in downtown Toronto. There was a certain advantage when we had the family farm in Alexandria, Ontario, because my job was to shoot the groundhogs that were causing problems for the cows, and when I sat out there shooting groundhogs, we never had anyone come to the front door. I was a terrible shot, and those are really small, little guys. You don't exactly, in the city, have those kinds of advantages that you do in rural communities. There is an advantage to having a kid who is 14, with a shotgun, who's a really bad shot—maybe the best deterrent possible to keep untoward peddlers off your front lawn. So there are some great advantages to rural living that many of us who now live in the cities, who spent much of our childhoods in rural Ontario, remember fondly.

There are many days, actually, in city life when it's probably a good thing, especially in traffic, that we don't have shotguns to protect ourselves from things. I've always said one of the greatest reasons for investing in transit and congestion is to bring down the temperature on our highways, and keeping urban folks in traffic unarmaged may be a good consumer protection.

1750

Madam Speaker, thank you for your humour and thank you to my colleagues.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Thank you very much.

Pursuant to standing order 47(c), I am now required to interrupt the proceedings and announce that there has been more than six and one-half hours of debate on the motion for second reading of this bill. This debate will, therefore, be deemed adjourned, unless the government House leader specifies otherwise.

Hon. Liz Sandals: Madam Speaker, we're having such a fascinating debate on groundhogs that we would like the debate to continue.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Further debate?

Ms. Sylvia Jones: It's an honour to rise this afternoon on behalf of the residents of Dufferin—Caledon to discuss not groundhogs but Bill 55, Stronger Protection for Ontario Consumers Act.

Bill 55 was introduced last month, on April 15, and has received a fair amount of debate so far, and that's a good thing, I think, because the issues Bill 55 sets out to address are the kinds of issues that affect Ontario families each and every day. Now, admittedly, things like water heater contracts aren't necessarily as eye-catching or scandalous as \$600-million scandals to save Liberal seats, but you know what? These issues are still worth talking about.

So we have before us here Bill 55, which amends the Consumer Protection Act, the Collection Agencies Act and the Real Estate and Business Brokers Act. In other words, what we have before us could be called an "omnibus bill." For those watching at home who may not be familiar with that term, the omnibus bill is one that amends multiple different pieces of legislation simultaneously. Usually this is done under the overarching goal of instituting a particular theme or mindset across multiple ministries and acts, and usually there is a great deal of frustration on the part of the opposition in such circumstances, as well as the public, in some cases, because omnibus bills are generally far lengthier and complex than what could be called standard legislation.

In the case of Bill 55, though, I really must say that I know I, for one, would have been happy to support a far more robust omnibus bill than the one we debate before us here today. That's because the fact is that while the contents of Bill 55 are sound, the reality is that this is a very, very narrowcast piece of legislation.

Bill 55 amends the three acts I mentioned earlier and addresses some consumer concerns in three industries: debt settlement, water heaters and real estate. This is a healthy process because certain industries have evolved and others have faded. Consequently, the Consumer Protection Act needs to be updated to reflect these changes in our society. But I suppose my question is, why just these three issues? Frankly, if this government were really concerned about consumer protection, then Bill 55 would have contained a dozen more amendments. So I'd be really interested to know how the minister arrived at these three areas alone. I think this legislation could have been a far more effective bill if it had addressed many more issues of consumer protection and in a more thorough way.

At any rate, the three issues addressed in Bill 55—let's consider debt settlement services. Debt settlement services seems to be one of those issues that is chronically on the peripheral of public concern. I imagine this is because the use of debt settlement services is probably not as widespread as some other issues. However, for anyone who has found themselves in the unfortunate circumstance of requiring debt settlement services, it can be quite the harrowing experience.

So for those who are unfamiliar with the industry, here's how it basically works: Someone who has accumulated an excessive amount of debt and needs to tackle it has the option of seeking out a debt settler. Now, many debt settlers can be honest and indeed very helpful but, as always, there are those who are not.

I want to pause for a moment here and remind members that there is a policy suggestion brought forward by our PC caucus colleague from Nepean–Carleton to include financial literacy in our education system. To me, some of what we are trying to change, modify and improve in Bill 55 could be incorporated into some financial literacy happening with our students in our education system. If people understood the value of keeping their debt down, of paying their credit cards when they come in on a monthly basis, of not buying on credit if they don't have the financial means to pay it off, then some of this could have been resolved and we wouldn't have so many people who unfortunately have to rely on debt settler services. And therein lies the issue, because for consumers and particularly those who are often selecting a debt settler under the duress of impending financial ruin, it is often difficult, if not outright impossible, to tell the difference between the good operators and the bad ones.

Unfortunately, however, the promise of getting out of debt quickly, effortlessly and cheaply is usually too much for people in difficult financial situations to resist. One area where Bill 55 potentially helps strengthen consumer protection is in this industry, by prohibiting debt settlers from charging upfront fees.

Picture this for a moment: An individual is tens of thousands of dollars in debt, maybe even more, and they're told they can get out of it as soon as possible but they have to agree to such and such fees up front. What do you think the individual is going to do? That is a section of Bill 55 that I think will help out significantly in relieving some of the pressure on people who find themselves in that unfortunate circumstance. Having to resort to a debt settlement service is already a stressful experience, particularly because your credit rating can, and most likely will, be significantly affected for the worse.

While I commend this change, there is one glaring absence from this bill on the issue of debt settlement services, and that is the fact that collection agencies can still harass an individual even if they've already settled their debt with a debt settler. This is problematic because an individual has effectively already settled their debt with the debt settler, whose job it is now to just settle the debt. It only makes sense that there should be some measures to address the issue. Basically, what I would have liked to have seen is something along the lines of a measure whereby if a contract with a debt settler guarantees that the consumer will be left alone by collectors, then legislation like this gives that contract teeth so that the collectors get off the person's back.

Another area where Bill 55 does hit the right notes, however, is with regard to addressing certain issues with

advertising in the debt settlement industry. Certainly we in the PC caucus firmly believe in responsible and honest advertising. That is a central means by which consumers choose their products. Therefore, it only makes sense that the more honest the information given to the consumer can be, the more decisions they will be able to make and the better our economy will be.

It reminds me of some of the misleading advertising that we have had to experience and that we as MPPs in our constituency offices have had to deal with, where seniors or people on a fixed income are calling after the fact and trying to get help and assistance from our offices. I'm sure every one of us has had to deal with this, where these fly-by-night operators come into a community, basically pepper the community with lowball offers that are only available for 48 hours, and if you try to follow-up and either get the work corrected or get the money back, then you're faced with, who are they, where are they, how do we follow up with them?

I think there are many things in Bill 55 that we could deal with and we could improve. I look forward to having the committee study some of the improvements that we've already talked about during debate and hope that can happen. I see the Speaker is rising, so I will wrap up for now.

Second reading debate deemed adjourned.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Pursuant to standing order 38, the question that this House do now adjourn is deemed to have been made.

I would ask those of you who are not staying for the late show to make your way out so that we may continue.

ADJOURNMENT DEBATE

PHYSIOTHERAPY SERVICES

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): The first person is the member for Hamilton Mountain, who has given notice of dissatisfaction to the minister responsible for seniors with the answer to a question on May 9.

1800

Miss Monique Taylor: I'm happy to have this opportunity to discuss this serious matter, one that has been raised by several of my constituents, primarily seniors living in long-term care or supportive housing—but not only my constituents. We have been hearing from Ontarians across this province, and they have expressed great concerns about this government's plan to change the way physiotherapy services are administered.

In question period a few days ago, I took the question to the minister responsible for seniors. The minister rose in this House and assured members “that there are no changes with respect to accessibility to the system or to the care that seniors are receiving in community care, in retirement homes.”

But the government's plan just doesn't add up. We have been asking the government to provide a detailed

plan for maintaining services but have yet to see it. For seniors living in retirement homes, no plan for continuing their access to the service has been provided.

We are told that more seniors will receive care, but the budget is being cut. To put it simply, the government has some explaining to do and some evidence to provide if we are to believe that care is going to be maintained.

Currently, the annual billing from the designated physiotherapy clinics, the DPCs, is approximately \$200 million per year. When these changes take effect, the government has indicated that their new plan will have an annual budget of \$156 million. That's \$44 million less.

The DPC Association has challenged these numbers. The DPCA tells us that currently \$110 million is spent on physiotherapy in long-term care alone, and this will be cut to \$68.5 million under the government's new plan. This is the very plan that the minister assured us would continue to provide the same level of care for seniors.

The minister said in his answer, "Ontario will provide more than 200,000 additional seniors with one-on-one physiotherapy." But where is that physiotherapy going to take place?

Just last Friday, I met with a group of Hamilton physiotherapists, and what I learned at that meeting was absolutely shocking. They have informed me that the residents at Macassa Lodge, a long-term-care home in my riding, will no longer receive the same level of services in their home.

The minister said that this one-on-one physiotherapy "will be provided in long-term-care homes and local community centres," but the residents are being told to go out into the community to find a community centre that offers physiotherapy. They're fearful of what this will mean for seniors who have shown great success in these programs. They're hopeful that this government will change its approach and restore full in-home service for these seniors.

Many of these seniors rely on this service in their home. They're unable to travel great distances, and some of them are unable to travel at all. Last week, I quoted Barb Wyatt, who said, "If this program is cancelled, I have no other choice; I don't drive and I can't afford public transit that frequently."

It's physio that is keeping them comfortable in their life. Seniors who needed to be lifted out of bed to use the washroom now find themselves with enough strength to go on their own, without assistance. Seniors who have had bad balance are now able to walk confidently and safely. Seniors who were unable to pull themselves out of a chair now find themselves able to walk.

Last week I quoted Dorothy, and will do so again: "They just gave us this program to keep us healthy and in shape, and a couple of months later it's ripped from beneath us."

If the government seriously believes that access to physiotherapy will continue in the same way, we need to see the full plan. While there are probably positive aspects to this overall plan, the government has refused to provide details on the new system and how the system will be maintained for the clients.

The bottom line is simple: Ontarians who are receiving this service today should continue to have full and uninterrupted access to these services. The government needs to release a detailed plan as soon as possible so that seniors will be able to be reassured that services that they rely on will be there for them.

We owe it to the people who built this province, and New Democrats will continue to pressure the government on this issue, to ensure that no senior is left behind. Thank you.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): The minister has up to five minutes to respond.

Hon. Mario Sergio: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker, and I'm delighted to put in my five minutes in response to the member from Hamilton Mountain. Of course, I can appreciate that she's advocating on behalf of her people, and why not? She was elected to do exactly that, even though the figures that she has given out differ with the ones I have and the ones that I'm sure the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care will provide.

Let me say that I am first of all delighted with the hard work that the Minister of Health has been putting in, making some changes and bringing in some reforms to the entire health care system. This is one aspect. Given the fact—and I hope that the member understands the difference between my responsibility representing seniors in retirement homes and those living in long-term care, who fall within the Ministry of Health, represented by the minister herself, who is here tonight. There is quite a difference. They don't fall within my own ministry.

Let me say that I'm very delighted that the minister has been working so hard to bring this change and this reform. It's exactly to the point that the member from Hamilton Mountain has said, that we don't want to see anyone who is in need of receiving this service or any other service left behind.

We are dealing with a system that is so antiquated—never been touched, never been changed since the early 1970s. This has been a service that has been provided to our people since the 1970s. Why the changes now? It's exactly to the point that the wonderful member from Hamilton Mountain has made: We want to provide this kind of service, and more, to more people, to more seniors throughout Ontario, as much as possible.

I don't have to tell you, Speaker, or the members of the House, that presently we are dealing with 92 providers, if my memory serves me well, for the whole of Ontario—for the full Ontario. I think it's about time—and of course, during this year, our population has increased. I don't have to tell you that the seniors' population is increasing on a daily basis. It is my responsibility to see that the seniors living in retirement homes receive the care they need so they can live not only more independently, but longer and healthier; and remain engaged and active as long as possible. I'm sure that not only I, but every member of this House, including the member from Hamilton Mountain, would like to see more seniors receiving all the benefits that the Minister of Health has recently announced.

I don't see any difference between the seniors in Sault Ste. Marie, where we have two clinics—the only two clinics serving northern Ontario and both of them are in Sault Ste. Marie. I don't think that's fair. I don't think that's right. I don't think this is serving the wider senior population or all the other populations throughout northern Ontario, and it's about time that we make some changes for the better.

For that, I have to say that I'm delighted that the minister has brought these particular changes. I have so much to say, and in five minutes I just can't. So I hope that in the future, we will have some other occasions.

Presently, Madam Speaker, we have approximately 215,000 people accessing this particular service. Now, with this change, we will have an additional 218,000 people getting access to this particular service, for a total of about 500,000 people. The reason why the minister has brought these particular changes—and the changes will affect all other people as well, not only in retirement homes or long-term homes—is because we want to make sure we can reach as many seniors and non-seniors as possible throughout Ontario.

I think it's about time that we make some changes to this antiquated system since the early 1970s. Madam Speaker, I'm delighted that we're speaking about it and that the minister has brought these changes to the system. I thank you, Speaker, and I thank the member as well.

1810

LABOUR DISPUTE

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): The member for Haldimand–Norfolk has given notice of his dissatisfaction with the answer to a question given yesterday by the Minister of Labour. The member has up to five minutes to make his remarks.

Mr. Toby Barrett: Speaker, I asked for this late-show debate. I felt the Minister of Labour didn't have time to fully answer some of my questions about the lockout of Steelworkers down at Nanticoke.

This is important. We have to be cognizant of the value, the importance and the benefits of the steel industry, its customers, its suppliers, the people who work down there and the community that it supports. All must strive for productivity and value-added economic activity.

I ask this government to recognize the significance of the direct and indirect employment from Nanticoke and Hamilton and for hundreds of miles in that area. Don't forget the value chains. Going backwards: iron ore, coal, the scrap industry; and going forward: the end use, the distribution, the trucking, the value-added engineering. These are all jobs that are threatened by this lockout.

Public policy should be key. It certainly is with other jurisdictions which impact steel production. There are obviously economic consequences of any labour dispute: a loss or reduction of production.

I'm not a steel man, but I used to be, in American Can Workers Local 25. I was also a consultant at Nanticoke. I

helped Steelworkers 8782—Stelco—set up their employee assistance program.

We understand that Canada settled its bitter three-year lawsuit against US Steel—an investment of something in the order of \$50 million at both Hamilton and Lake Erie. I haven't seen the paperwork. That might be something our Minister of Labour could inquire about.

This is the third lockout in three years—the last time at Hamilton, with an estimated loss of \$25 million in wages. This is the second lockout at Lake Erie in three years.

We're asking, what did the government do the last time? What did you learn last time? What has the mediator accomplished? I'm told his role could not be divulged to me.

Specifically, Minister, what are you doing? Have you talked to the company? I've talked to the company. Have you spoken with the union? I have.

We recognize the steel industry—we recognize the consolidation, the globalization—dramatic changes in the last 10 years. It comes with loss of local ownership, local control. There are gains—gains in managerial expertise, new technology, pools of capital, and resultant savings—but it comes at a price: intense competition between mills to garner investments with respect to some of their projects, all directed from the head office.

Labour disruptions can benefit other mills within the same company. Hamilton and Lake Erie are shut down. How does that benefit Gary, Indiana? I've been down to Gary—massive steel operations down there. They want to keep them running.

So there's a necessity to frame public policy—obviously, provincial labour legislation that can best support future investment and try to avoid some of these tragedies and work for success all year around.

I visited the line on Mother's Day. It was after midnight. There was a cold wind coming off Lake Erie. It's tough stuff down there. There really has to be a better way beyond burn barrels.

There has to be more of an alliance between management, the workers—obviously, suppliers who are dealing with the threat of China. They make steel in Brazil, Russia, India.

When we come out of this recession, there's a potential for demand—steel for that Windsor bridge, for culverts, for so much of our electrical infrastructure—but labour relations seem to get in the way. This is where this Ontario government needs to come in. I need to know, what is the minister doing to get Steelworkers back to work? I'm asking, can you pull people together? Can you have a meeting locally? Can you go to Pittsburgh? Can you go to Washington? Talk to the union; talk to the international union; talk to the international company.

Things have changed. This government has to keep up. This government has to reinvent its ways of dealing with these kinds of situations.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Thank you. The minister has up to five minutes to respond.

Hon. Yasir Naqvi: I want to thank the member for the opportunity to speak further on this issue and for raising the points that he's raised today.

Speaker, some negotiations can be very challenging, especially when they take place in the public eye. We recognize that at times the collective bargaining process can be difficult on the worker, their family and the community. That's why we have worked very hard over the past nine years to restore fairness, balance, dignity and productivity to labour relations in Ontario. I'm proud that 97% of labour contracts in Ontario are now settled without disruption—97% are now settled without disruption. I'm proud of the work everyone in Ontario did to get us through the last recession. I want to commend those who represent employers and unions at the negotiating table who work together to develop an agreement that reflects the needs of both parties.

Agreements reached at the negotiating table are the best agreements. They are the most stable agreements and the most productive ones. As for this exact lockout or other labour disputes, it is ultimately the responsibility of the employer and the union to resolve their differences at the bargaining table. As you must know, the role of the Ministry of Labour in the collective bargaining process is not to intervene and dictate outcomes but to help facilitate a solution. During labour disputes, our government is focused on assisting the parties with the collective bargaining process. It's a shared responsibility. We have a highly skilled mediation team with a tremendous record for helping to resolve disputes. They work tirelessly to bring the parties together and help find the common ground which leads to healthy negotiations.

In his original question, the member opposite mentioned previous lockouts in this particular factory. Prior to the lockout in 2009, a Ministry of Labour mediator met with the parties four times to assist at the bargaining table. During the last round of bargaining, a Ministry of Labour mediator met with the parties roughly seven different times. Most recently, during this set of negotiations, a Ministry of Labour mediator has been assisting the parties at the bargaining table. In fact, they have met with the parties on seven different occasions to help with the negotiation process.

Our mediators, as with all other negotiations, are working tirelessly to assist the parties at the table. I encourage the parties to make every effort to return to the bargaining table; and of course Ministry of Labour mediators are available to help facilitate, help mediate that conversation.

Now, Speaker, what's concerning is the approach that the party opposite continues to raise, and that is their right-to-work-for-less strategy. We know that approach does not work. The member opposite is presenting a road map that takes Ontario workers on a race to the bottom. We saw it in their white paper, and we are seeing it in the Legislature with the three bills recently reintroduced by the PC labour critic, the MPP for Lanark-Frontenac-Lennox and Addington. These bills call for varying amendments to the Labour Relations Act that seek to violently disrupt the delicate balance we have created in labour relations. The schemes presented by the official opposition would mean lower wages and, in turn, a reduced buying power, which would have a dramatically negative effect on the economy.

This path to poverty would destroy the balanced and productive labour climate we have worked so hard to achieve and would quickly lead to further labour strife. It would also lead on average to a \$1,500 annual pay cut for both unionized and non-unionized workers across the province.

In Ontario, we are proud of the standard of living we have for our workers, as well as the level of investment we continue to attract to the province. So I ask the member to stop advocating for a system that will take Ontario workers on a race to the bottom and instead to ensure that we are focusing on the robust labour relations system that we have in place.

Particularly in this instance, with this lockout, I would again encourage parties to come back to the table. We as the Ministry of Labour are available to help mediate an agreement which will work in the best interests of both parties and the community.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): There being no further matter to debate, I deem the motion to adjourn to be carried. This House stands adjourned until 9 a.m. tomorrow morning.

The House adjourned at 1820.

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