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Tuesday 10 March 2015

Mardi 10 mars 2015

Speaker
Honourable Dave Levac

Clerk
Deborah Deller

Président
L'honorable Dave Levac

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Deborah Deller

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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
OF ONTARIO

Tuesday 10 March 2015

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE
DE L'ONTARIO

Mardi 10 mars 2015

The House met at 0900.

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

Prayers.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

AGRICULTURE INSURANCE ACT
(AMENDING THE CROP INSURANCE
ACT, 1996), 2015

LOI DE 2015 SUR L'ASSURANCE
AGRICOLE (MODIFIANT LA LOI DE 1996
SUR L'ASSURANCE-RÉCOLTE)

Resuming the debate adjourned on March 5, 2015, on the motion for second reading of the following bill:

Bill 40, An Act to amend the Crop Insurance Act (Ontario), 1996 and to make consequential amendments to other Acts / Projet de loi 40, Loi modifiant la Loi de 1996 sur l'assurance-récolte (Ontario) et apportant des modifications corrélatives à d'autres lois.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): When we last discussed this bill, the member from Kitchener–Conestoga had just finished his speech. It's now time for questions and comments.

M^{me} France Gélinas: I'm hoping very much that my phone doesn't ring. I'm pleased to add my two minutes to this. Basically what I want to talk about is that although I live in northern Ontario and we're covered in snow right now, there is a viable agricultural economy in Nickel Belt and northeastern Ontario. Much of that agricultural economy was based on the fact that we had horses, that we had a racetrack and that all of the hay that grew had been specialized to make sure that we feed those race-horses. With the cancellations of the racetracks through the Slots at Racetracks Program, all of those farmers are hurting.

There is no insurance for those farmers now. Nickel Belt will continue to grow hay, but there's nobody to eat it. That's a real blow to agriculture in my riding, and this is a real blow to the agriculture economy because, you see, if you're a farmer who grows hay to feed the horses at the racetrack, you have the money to buy a tractor, to buy a trailer, to fix your barn, and that allows you to have other crops. We're starting to grow soy and other grains in Nickel Belt and doing well with it. But when you lose your main crop, when you lose the horses that eat the hay that grows all over Nickel Belt, then it is a real step back

for all of those farmers. Some of them are not going to make it and are not making it. There is no insurance for that. This is the doing of the government that cancelled the slots at racetracks, and they would need insurance from their government. Thank you, Speaker.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): I thank the member. Further questions and comments?

Mr. Bob Delaney: It's a pleasure to follow my colleague from Nickel Belt. You know, this is a bill that I think in the end all three parties are going to support. So let's just cover some of the things that the bill does.

In 2013, which is the last year for which we have reliable statistics, there were more than 14,000 insurance customers representing five million acres and nearly \$3 billion in liabilities that were insured under the production insurance program. Now, this program covers more than 90 commercially grown crops. For many of the folks where I come from, these are the things that you customarily buy at the grocery store. So one of the things that we often tell a lot of our rural folks is that, as we would find that happy medium in getting rural people to grasp urban issues and urban people to grasp rural issues, sometimes we have to explain that often in the cities—in order to overcome that disconnect—people think farm products come from the grocery store. We have to explain to them the other part, which leads back to the farm.

Here are some of the things that production insurance also covers. It covers grains and oilseeds, tree fruits and grapes, processing vegetables, fresh market vegetables, specialty crops and forage. A lot of these terms are ones that our rural cousins are far more familiar with than we are in the city.

Some of the reasons that this bill is so important is because production insurance costs so much less when we do it as a province than it does when we do it on an ad hoc basis. That's part of the reason that we need to get this bill enacted very quickly. So, for example, ad hoc costs would include the full cost of payments in a bad year, and the bad year is governed by weather.

Speaker, thanks for the opportunity to stand up and to comment on something that's important to those of us in the city as well as to those of us in rural areas.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further questions and comments.

Mr. Steve Clark: It's a pleasure to provide a couple of minutes of comments to the member for Kitchener–Conestoga on Bill 40.

I just want to note that I've got 17 members of our caucus—

Interjection: I'm one of them.

Mr. Steve Clark:—who have yet to speak to this bill. In fact, I have four members here this morning who are excited and enthused about speaking to this bill.

Interjection: Chomping at the bit.

Mr. Steve Clark: I'm so glad the member for Gengarry–Prescott–Russell is here, and I hope at some point maybe he can clarify his comments. He was almost gloating yesterday that he has received money for a new cohort of students at Alfred and I haven't received funds for a new cohort of students at Kemptville College. I think both facilities—and I've never been on the Alfred campus, but I firmly believe that Ontario needs agriculture education both at Alfred and Kemptville. I think they're both very wonderful campuses.

As I have quoted many times in the Legislature, there's a report that the University of Guelph and OAC have tabled that has essentially said that, given present demand, we still have a 3-to-1 gap between graduates at the diploma and the degree level and available jobs. So if the government is really committed to providing 120,000 new agriculture jobs, we've got to have educational opportunities in this province. I know this government is reluctant to do it, but they need to make a commitment to not just one of those campuses—and I see the minister of francophone affairs is here; she has committed funds to one campus. We have to commit to both campuses. We have to treat both facilities, at Kemptville and at Alfred, the same. We've got to make that commitment. If we're going to meet the agri-food challenge, if we're going to meet that job challenge, we have to do it. We're committed to it on this side of the House. We're also committed to speaking on Bill 40. I've got four members here. I'm asking the government to let us debate this bill.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further questions and comments.

Hon. Michael Gravelle: I thank the third party for letting me stand up and speak to this. I wanted to follow up the remarks of, particularly, the member for Nickel Belt, but obviously my other colleagues, and I do hope that all three parties support this.

The points that were made earlier by the member for Nickel Belt certainly motivate me to stand up and speak about the fact that agriculture and farming and farm innovation is such a huge part of the northern Ontario economy. It has been very much identified in the northern Ontario growth plan as one of the priority areas, agriculture—and aquaculture, may I say, as well.

We are particularly pleased that through the Northern Ontario Heritage Fund Corp. we've been able to focus on ways that we can work with the farming alliances in northern Ontario.

A couple of months ago, I was up in New Liskeard at a Northern Ontario Heritage Fund board meeting and was able to announce significant support—funding, resources—through the Northern Ontario Farm Innovation Alliance for funds to help there with the tile drainage, which makes an enormous difference in the farming sector. It doubles the yields, quite frankly, on the ground, and that's huge. There's more funding coming to north-

western Ontario as well, but this is a good example of how we view it as an absolute priority.

0910

May I say again, it's a small, little-known fact, but the executive director of the Northern Ontario Farm Innovation Alliance is the daughter of the MPP for Timiskaming–Cochrane. She does a marvelous job.

We are going to continue to support those kinds of innovations and continue to make agriculture a huge part of the economy, certainly all across the province, but very much an important one in northern Ontario. Of course, part of that would be supporting this piece of legislation that is before us today. Thank you.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Back to the member from Kitchener–Conestoga.

Mr. Michael Harris: Thank you, Speaker, and good morning. You know what? I'd like to thank the folks who chimed in on the debate for Bill 40: of course the member from Mississauga–Streetsville; my colleague to the left, from Nickel Belt; the wise House leader on this side, the member from Leeds–Grenville; and, of course, the Minister of Northern Development and Mines. Thank you for that.

When I last left off, I was talking about transparency and really questioning the fairness and openness of the grant processes that were put in place. It's just something that we don't want to see happen again. We need to make sure this is in place. You heard in the comments just recently the disappointment that we've heard in the government closing Kemptville and Alfred agricultural colleges. These colleges are an important part of developing our future farmers.

I know, from my experience coming from a rural community, not too many of my friends were able to stay on the family farm. Many of them would have loved to but, you know, farmers are aging, and we need to encourage more young people to get into the business.

I have to mention the 100th anniversary recently of 4-H Canada, something that I participated in when I was a young lad and that I hope my children will also participate in, as they may, too, want to look at a career in agriculture. These colleges are an integral part of developing our young people so that they are the future farmers of tomorrow, including even Alfred College, in fact the only French-language agricultural diploma program in the province. Closing it will prevent many francophone students from training for careers in agriculture.

With that, I appreciate the time given to speak on Bill 40. I know many of my colleagues who are here today also want to speak to Bill 40. I look forward to listening to them on those remarks.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further debate?

M^{me} France Gélinas: It is my pleasure to add a few minutes to the debate on Bill 40. You see, I represent a riding in northeastern Ontario, and a lot of people don't equate Nickel Belt with agriculture. When they think about Nickel Belt, they think about nickel and they think

about the mines. Yes, absolutely, all of the nickel mines are in my riding and Nickel Belt will continue to do good in mining, but we also have some beautiful, beautiful agricultural land in areas of my riding called Rayside-Balfour, called the valley. We have some multi-generational farmers who are there in beautiful agricultural land.

The first thing I want to talk about is basically what happened when the Slots at Racetracks Program was cancelled. That came as a surprise in the middle of the winter. It was March. The then-Minister of Finance stood up and said that this program was going to be cancelled. For farmers whose farms are under four feet of snow, to be told that next year's crop is not going to have a buyer—it's not a good time to hear that kind of stuff. Is there insurance out there for government policies gone awry? Because the farmers in Nickel Belt would like to have this kind of insurance when their government makes decisions like this.

Last year, for the first time in decades, we did not have horse racing at Sudbury Downs. Sudbury Downs stands closed. It was the only racetrack throughout Ontario that was never able to put a deal together. Although the government had put deals in place with every racetrack in southern Ontario, the one and only racetrack in the north never had a deal.

I worked with the Minister of Agriculture, and I thank him for working with me. He gave us the services of Mr. Walling. Mr. Walling was a consultant who helped Peterborough's Kawartha Downs put a deal together. Kawartha Downs looks very much like Sudbury Downs; it is privately owned—Sudbury Downs is privately owned by the MacIsaac family—and so is Kawartha. They were able to put together an agricultural society. The agricultural society is well on its way to being formed in Nickel Belt also. It would be the not-for-profit society that would hold the licence that would run the races at Sudbury Downs. The MacIsaac family would continue to hold on to and own Sudbury Downs, but they would enter into a rental agreement with the agricultural society so that we could continue to have racing, with its so-important role that it has on agriculture.

As I have said before, it's hard to understand why every other track in Ontario was able to conclude a deal while Sudbury Downs, the only track in northern Ontario, sits idle. I know that it is tied into the OLG and the new gaming framework. This part is proving so, so difficult for us. We have an owner who is willing to enter into a rental agreement; we have a not-for-profit agency that is willing to hold the licence and do the racing. We certainly have shown, through the good work of Mr. Walling, through the support of the Minister of Agriculture, that there is a future for horse racing in northern Ontario. There are people who are excited about owning horses and racing them and training them, with all of the spinoff jobs that go directly into agriculture—because racing horses basically depends on there being the right kind of hay and the right kind of products for them to perform. This deal is so close to being there.

The Minister of Northern Development and Mines just talked about the northern Ontario farm alliance, as well as the possibility of his ministry helping put together a strong and robust agricultural society so that we see success and we can rebuild horse racing. The sticking point is really the agreement with the OLG. For people to invest in owning horses, there needs to be more than a one-year deal. Right now, the slots at the Sudbury Downs are on a month-to-month: They never know from one month to the next if they will continue to have slots at the Sudbury Downs. This doesn't work for us. They need at least a four-year agreement so that it makes it worthwhile for people to make those purchases and to make sure that we invest back into our agricultural sector in Nickel Belt, to make it strong and robust like it was before. I ask the government to do the right thing, to look at the devastating impact they have had on the farmers and agriculture in Nickel Belt, and bring back horse racing.

Everything that could be done on the ground has been done. The players are willing to move on with this new model, where a not-for-profit agricultural society would hold the licence, would do the racing, but we need this deal from OLG. OLG is not easy to deal with. They certainly don't see us as a big market. Nickel Belt will never be a big market, but that doesn't mean that we should be ignored; that doesn't mean that it is okay that for the last two months they have not connected back with us.

0920

We need them at the table. Horse racing being part of gaming, the OLG has to be willing to give a four-year agreement for the slots at Sudbury Downs so that we know there is a future and we know that we can bring the horses back and the racing back, to the delight of everybody. It used to be a family event where people would go to the racetrack to celebrate. I remember celebrating my in-laws' anniversary—I think it was their 68th—where the whole family went to the racetrack. We went to the dining room and basically had a beautiful meal together as a family and bet on the races. Kids always like to see horses. They are a beautiful animal. Everybody likes to see the horses. But right now they're gone, and our community wants them to come back.

J'aimerais profiter de l'occasion également pour rappeler que pour la communauté franco-ontarienne, le collègue d'Alfred est ce qui a permis à l'agriculture de continuer à profiter dans tout l'Ontario. Le collègue d'Alfred, c'est là où on a formé—tu regardes la jeune génération de fermiers, d'agriculteurs et d'agricultrices dans mon comté; ils ont tous été formés au collègue d'Alfred. On nous a donné un rapport dans lequel on met une structure corporative au collègue d'Alfred, ce qui n'a pas beaucoup de bon sens. Moi, des structures corporatives compliquées, avec Ornge, je vous garantis que j'en ai vues plusieurs. Bien, si tu regardes ce qui se passe à Alfred, c'est vraiment difficile. Le collègue d'Alfred, ce sont des racines profondes dans l'agriculture de partout en Ontario, et ça aussi a besoin de continuer.

Je remercie le ministre de l'Agriculture pour nous avoir soutenus au travers de M. Walling pour ramener

l'hippodrome à Sudbury Downs pour permettre de recommencer les courses de chevaux dans le nord de l'Ontario, dans mon comté de Nickel Belt. On a une société agricole qui a été mise en place. On a un partenariat entre le propriétaire de l'hippodrome et la société d'agriculture. Ce qui nous manque, c'est vraiment qu'OLG vienne à la table pour donner un contrat d'au moins quatre ans pour que les machines à sous continuent à Sudbury Downs pour nous permettre de ramener les chevaux. Avec les chevaux, c'est l'agriculture dans Nickel Belt qui devient plus robuste et plus solide.

Je vous remercie, monsieur le Président, de m'avoir accordé ces quelques minutes. Je vois que mon temps est terminé. Merci.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Questions and comments? The member from Beaches–East York.

Mr. Arthur Potts: Thank you, Mr. Speaker—the great agricultural riding of Beaches–East York.

I'm delighted to have an opportunity to rise and respond to the member from Nickel Belt's comments, particularly her comments related to the horse racing industry in Sudbury at Sudbury Downs. It would be delightful to have racing continuing up there, and I know those negotiations are continuing.

But more importantly, with the whole Slots at Race-tracks Program, we know we did the right thing in removing the slots—an unaccountable program. It lacked the transparency. It lost its focus on the customer experience in racing. So we're going down the right track. We've created some funding which will allow for the horse racing industry to become better and better and be built on a firm foundation.

But what we see very clearly in the debate that we're hearing on the other side of the House, when we're talking about horse racing, we're talking about education in agriculture, we're talking about Alfred College, we're talking about Kemptville College, is that we're talking nothing about this bill before us. This bill is about the Agriculture Insurance Act. So we're trying very hard to listen—listening and giving opportunities to members opposite. They can have input. But if they're not going to speak to the bill, understand that we've spoken to this bill now for over 11 hours—11 hours.

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Order.

Mr. Arthur Potts: The best comments on this bill are coming in the heckling from the other side. It certainly isn't coming up during their reasoned discussion. Seventy-five members have already spoken to this bill. We've extended the debate past the mandatory six and a half. We're trying to be inclusive. But since the members are not speaking to the bill anymore, Mr. Speaker—and I appreciate you give them great latitude to talk about extraneous issues. But what we're trying to do is put other agricultural products into the insurance act to help farmers.

We have unanimous agreement on this bill going forward, and I think it's time to send it to committee. We want to hear from people about what they want to see

insured, whether it's bees or pork or fowl. That's what this bill is about. We look forward very much to having it in committee.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further questions and comments?

Mr. John Yakabuski: It's a pleasure to join the debate for Bill 40 this morning. Unfortunately, what I have, under the rules of this House, is two minutes to address the speech of my colleague from Nickel Belt.

I'm reading between the lines of what's happening on the other side of the House, and it grieves me deeply. It appears to me that the government is once again going to display their arrogance and exercise their power and invoke closure on this bill. I have not had the opportunity—I would like the opportunity to speak about agriculture in my riding. I would like to speak about the fine people who support our economy, as farmers, in our ridings. But I'm not likely to have the opportunity. I hope that there's a change of heart and that the minister does not invoke closure, but I have a great fear that that's exactly what he plans to do very shortly.

Not only have I not spoken to this bill; I have 17 members of our caucus who have not spoken to this bill. The great agricultural heart of Ontario is represented by members of my caucus. Are we not going to have the opportunity to speak to this bill in a more wholesome way—a 10-minute rotation, and not simply a two-minute response to another member's speech?

I thank the member for Nickel Belt for informing us about how important agriculture is in northern Ontario, which is very often overlooked. The average person doesn't see that. I remember the first time I went to visit our son up at Halfway Lake Provincial Park. I remarked to my wife that I couldn't believe the amount of agriculture going on between North Bay and Sudbury, and Sturgeon Falls and all that area there. It was amazing to me, the amount of agriculture.

But I want to talk about agriculture in the great riding of Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke, and I hope that that House leader gives me the opportunity.

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Be seated, please. Thank you.

Further questions and comments?

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: This bill is very supportable, and it seems that we have a lot of support in the House. But one of the interesting parts of the bill is that Ontario is actually behind other provinces in extending insurance to agricultural products. This bill would allow including currently ineligible products, such as livestock.

I took it upon myself to make sure that I reached out to farmers. I went to the Ontario beef association's AGM recently—the beef farmers—and I sat at a table with members from the Renfrew riding, which the member from the PC caucus just talked about. They talked about the need for BSE insurance. That was a real devastation when that happened to livestock and farmers' livelihoods. So it's good to see that this bill will open up those doors and discussions to extend that coverage.

The member from Renfrew has talked about farming in his area. We often go out to Renfrew, because we have family there and we visit. He's absolutely correct: They have wonderful farmland out there. That's proven with the fact that the beef farmers that I spoke to—they have beef farmers out there. They have agricultural—growing all kinds of products like corn. It's a real thriving industry, and it needs support.

This is an important bill. They need to have that insurance expansion, and I think that putting this forward in the House is a good first step. But we also know that it needs to have some funding and regulations attached to it. It can't survive on its own without practical means to move it forward with some funding and regulations.

I appreciate the opportunity to speak to this bill.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further questions and comments?

Hon. Madeleine Meilleur: It gives me great pleasure this morning to speak in favour of Bill 40, the Agriculture Insurance Act. It seems that everybody is in agreement about this bill, so it will be better if we send the bill to committee and pass Bill 40 as soon as possible. It would be good for the agricultural community.

0930

I know that the MPP from Glengarry–Prescott–Russell—

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Stop the clock, please. Thank you.

I would remind you that, if there are going to be any comments that would in fact add to the debate, the members should at least be in their seat when those comments are being made. I thank everyone in the assembly for that.

Back to the Attorney General, to continue with your two-minute questions and comments.

Hon. Madeleine Meilleur: I was talking about the good member from Glengarry–Prescott–Russell, who represents a very agricultural community, where le collège d'Alfred is. I know that the member from Nickel Belt spoke about le collège d'Alfred and reminded us of how good le collège d'Alfred is. Le collège d'Alfred was to close at least four times. This time, we wanted to make sure that le collège d'Alfred is on a solid foundation because the college trains the next generation of agricultural professionals in the area.

I wanted to thank the member from Glengarry–Prescott–Russell for the good work that he did. Now La Cité collégiale will take over. La Cité collégiale is a great community college in my riding. They already train quite a few youth in different professions, so they will be able to take over. I'm sure that they will work with the farmers in that area to make sure that le collège d'Alfred is a strong college, that we have many students there and that we will not see the closure of the college. On the contrary, it's going to grow and be very successful.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Back to the member for Nickel Belt for her closing remarks.

M^{me} France Gélinas: It's clear that New Democrats support Bill 40, and we want an expansion to insurance.

The point that I had brought forward was really to remind people that agriculture exists outside of the greater Golden Horseshoe area. It exists in northeastern Ontario; it exists in Nickel Belt. But it has been given a severe blow. That severe blow came when horse racing never was able to continue. Every other racetrack was able to continue, but the one in Nickel Belt—the only one in northern Ontario—was not.

The people on the ground, through the support of the Ministry of Agriculture, have been able to show that there is a strong future for horse racing in Nickel Belt, that all of the pieces have been put together. We're waiting on one last piece, and this is to make sure that the OLG gives a multi-year agreement to Sudbury Downs to run the slot machines at Sudbury Downs. Right now they're month to month, and month to month is not conducive to somebody buying a horse and training it for horse racing. We need this agreement to be multi-year; we need it to be four years. So all I'm asking is for OLG to come to the table, to settle that piece, and we will see horse racing coming back to northern Ontario, coming back to Sudbury Downs, and that will allow our agricultural economy to flourish like it was on a path to do before.

I hope the people responsible at OLG will do the right thing, will come back to Sudbury Downs and strike that deal for the good of horse racing and agriculture.

Mr. Ted Arnott: Point of order, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): I recognize the member from Wellington–Halton Hills.

Mr. Ted Arnott: Mr. Speaker, agriculture and agribusiness is the most important industry in my riding, and I'm looking forward this morning to speaking in response to the government's Bill 40.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): That is not a point of order, but I recognize the member.

Further point of order: I recognize the member from Sarnia–Lambton.

Mr. Robert Bailey: Yes, I'd like to prevail upon the indulgence of the House, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to introduce three guests from my riding. They're here with the Sarnia Lambton Chamber of Commerce: Rory Ring, Rob Taylor and Peter Hungerford.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): To the member for Sarnia–Lambton, that was not a point of order, but we do welcome all of our guests in this Legislature.

A point of order, the member from Prince Edward–Hastings.

Mr. Todd Smith: Prince Edward county and Hastings county are two fine agricultural areas in this province. I really look forward to speaking to Bill 40 this morning—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): That is not a—

Mr. Todd Smith: —and I would appreciate that—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): I don't see that as a point of order.

Further debate? I recognize the Minister of Community Safety and Correctional Services.

Mr. Ernie Hardeman: A point of order.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): To the member from Oxford, I would ask what your point of order is.

Mr. Ernie Hardeman: My point of order, Mr. Speaker, is that I've heard a lot of discussion in the House this morning that there may not be a full debate on the bill that we're debating.

I've been in this House for 20 years, and I've always been speaking on behalf of my agriculture community. I really find it distasteful that the government would—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Thank you. I appreciate it. Thank you very much. Again, I really don't see that as a point of order.

To the Minister of Community Safety and Correctional Services. Further debate.

Hon. Yasir Naqvi: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I really appreciate you acknowledging me, and I'm very pleased to speak to Bill 40 this morning.

Our government is very much committed to helping our agri-food partners manage risk. I'm personally very excited to speak on this bill. Even though I come from a downtown urban riding, that is, Ottawa Centre, I can tell you that we, in my community, very much love our farmers and rely on our farmers' markets from the local community to ensure that we've got fresh food available to us. In fact, I have the great distinction of having Canada's Central Experimental Farm—the entirety of that experimental farm—located in my riding of Ottawa Centre, where a lot of research, over the years, has been done. It's a heritage farm and something that my community and I are very proud of.

I mentioned I have four farmers' markets located in my community—one at the Parkdale food market, which is a very exciting place. It has been there for a long, long time. Then, we have a community-run farmers' market called the Main Farmers' Market in old Ottawa East. This is entirely run by the community, and it has grown every single year for the last five years, when it started. Then, the Ottawa Farmers' Market has two locations: one in Westboro, which continues to grow; and then, the Landsdowne farmers' market, which has come back again at Landsdowne Park. If any of my colleagues have not been to Ottawa recently and have not been to Landsdowne Park in the Glebe, I welcome them to come and visit Landsdowne Park, because it's an exciting new place to be. Then, we've got—the Ottawa Farmers' Market has been back. Our hope is, Speaker, that it's going to be a year-round market in the Aberdeen Pavilion, which, as many of you know, is a heritage building. That's why this bill is very important to me and for the well-being of our farmers. That's why we need to move forward with this bill and send it to committee as soon as possible.

We know that business risk management programs like production insurance help producers deal with situations that are outside their control, such as weather, disease and extreme market fluctuation. Production insur-

ance makes timely payments to producers and eliminates the need for costly ad hoc responses to adverse conditions. Ontario's current inability to offer production insurance plans for commodities beyond crops and perennial plants represents a significant gap within our system. When producers suffer losses and don't have production insurance coverage, they may come to us for direct, or ad hoc, assistance. We have seen ad hoc programs cost the province millions of dollars in a single year. Further, production insurance is also premium-based. This means the costs are shared by farmers and the government, which encourages best practices and appropriate sharing of risk. This bill, if passed, will help our farmers better manage risk and encourage greater innovation, job creation and growth in the agri-food sector.

Speaker, as you know, we introduced this important piece of legislation in November 2014. We allowed the debate to continue when we reached six and a half hours of debate so that more members would have an opportunity to present their views on this bill, that all members support.

0940

This bill has seen 11 hours of debate and, according to my count, up to now, there are 76 members who have either spoken to this bill or have participated in the debate during questions and comments.

Speaker, I believe that there has been considerable debate on this bill, and we have heard a wide range of viewpoints, opinions and perspectives. It is time that this bill is put to a vote for second reading and, hopefully, referred to committee, where the real work—

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Member from Prince Edward–Hastings, come to order.

Hon. Yasir Naqvi: As members know—

Interruption.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Order. Order. Thank you. I hope that the right wrists got lots of exercise from that little demonstration. I would ask that we allow the member to continue his debate and that we listen intently.

At this point in time, back to the Minister of Community Safety and Correctional Services.

Hon. Yasir Naqvi: Thank you, Speaker. As I was saying, it's time that the bill is put to a vote for second reading and, hopefully, referred to committee, where the real work takes place. As members know, in committee, members from all parties will hear from all stakeholders who have an interest in this bill. In committee, members will have an opportunity to move amendments to strengthen the bill. At the same time, the House can move on to debate other substantive matters.

There are a number of pieces of important legislation already introduced, which the government would like to debate and move through the legislative process: for example, Bill 6, the Infrastructure for Jobs and Prosperity Act; Bill 9, Ending Coal for Cleaner Air Act; Bill 37, Invasive Species Act; Bill 45, Making Healthier Choices Act; Bill 49, the Ontario Immigration Act; Bill 52, Pro-

tection of Public Participation Act; and Bill 73, Smart Growth for Our Communities Act.

Speaker, we'd like to spend time debating some of the other important pieces of legislation currently before the House, but we can't until Bill 40 is dealt with. As a result, I move that this question be now put.

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Order, please. Order, please. Sit down.

I've had the opportunity to listen to a lot of debate in this sanctuary, the Legislature. We are talking about a very important bill here. I concur that there have been a number of opportunities for members of this Legislature to in fact speak to this bill. But I am of the opinion that there are still others in this Legislature who are prepared to speak to this bill in terms of representing their ridings as well, so I will allow the continuation of debate.

Questions and comments—I'm sorry; you still have time left.

Interjection: No, he doesn't.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): No, he sat down.

Hon. Yasir Naqvi: I sat down.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Questions and comments?

Mr. Randy Hillier: Thank you, Speaker. I'm one of the 17 members of the PC caucus who have not spoken to this bill yet. Really, that is an important thing to understand: Over half of the PC caucus has not had the opportunity to speak to this bill. I really have to speak in the strongest terms to the government House leader for moving closure when so many people have not spoken to this bill.

I also want to take issue with his idea, or his statements, about bringing this into committee, where there will be a great deal of further discussion. We have all seen—I have seen directly—how this Liberal government operates in committees. They limit, purposely constrain, the amount of public participation in the development of public policy and legislation. So this view, "Put it off to the committee and then there will be good discussion," is absolutely horse feathers.

If this government truly is interested in developing good public policy, then we will allow good public debate in this chamber. That's where public policy is safeguarded: through debate in this chamber. Over 17 members have not spoken to this bill, just on the PC side. I would suggest to the Liberal members that if they don't want to debate and they want to expedite this bill, then do as your member from Beaches—East York said: Sit down, be quiet and don't be involved in the debate; let others, who have substantive arguments and comments to make, proceed and debate this bill the way it was intended to be debated.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further questions and comments?

Mr. Jagmeet Singh: Excellent. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my honour to join in the debate. One of the things that I've talked about before is how

important it is to encourage and support our agriculture here in Ontario. One of the things that I mentioned before, and I think it's very important to highlight, is that for food security, for sovereignty, for independence, nations need to be able to provide their own food. It's something that ensures that the country is able to feed its own citizens. That's one of the most important things we can do as a nation, and that's why efforts and steps to ensure that our farmers are protected would encourage the ability for them to continue to feed us. I think that's absolutely important.

Again, I mentioned before and I want to reiterate this: I personally feel connected to the importance of supporting our local farmers in Ontario as both my parents came from farming families, and they were able to provide a livelihood for themselves for centuries. But in addition, they were able to support their community.

Farmers are the backbone of any society. They are the ones that literally put food on our tables. The more we can actually support them, the more we can ensure that we have a healthier society.

One of the things I notice with a lot of young people is that we've lost connection with where food is grown. I think that when we talk about nutrition and encouraging youth in general in terms of encouraging proper nutrition and to ensure that we have a healthier society, having a connection to where the food is grown, how food is grown, would ensure that people realize the difference between packaged and processed foods and real food that's actually grown from the earth, and the nutritional benefits of that food.

The more we support our farmers, the more we can encourage a healthier society by making sure we purchase local produce, which is healthier, more fresh. We can also ensure that we have that autonomy because we can provide food for our own citizens.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further questions and comments?

Hon. Bill Mauro: I won't take too long this morning, but I guess I would just provide a few remarks. I think that sometimes when people who are interested in the goings on of the Legislature here at Queen's Park in Toronto are following these debates on television, they probably sometimes are less than certain as to exactly what is going on here. I think the machinations sometimes in this place can be very difficult for people following at home to really be sure what's going on. I guess I'm making reference to really what's happening here often is basically what we refer to around here as "inside baseball," where people following on television won't be quite sure as to what the motivations are of individual parties when they're debating particular legislation.

We're here with Bill 40 today, the Agriculture Insurance Act. For those who are interested in this and following it on television, we have now debated this particular piece of legislation for 11 hours, and 77 members of the Legislature have spoken to this particular piece of legislation. We've extended debate beyond the six-and-a-half-

hour threshold so more members would have had the opportunity to speak.

I'm only here today, Speaker, to say to the people who are interested in this issue, who are following it on television: No matter what you may think, please don't be left with the impression that this particular piece of legislation has not had full opportunity to be debated at this point. That's all we're trying to convey to people. We just want them to be left with no impression beyond that: 11 hours of debate; 77 members of the Legislature having spoken to this; six and a half hours, the minimum, extended to 11 hours in total. No matter what you might be left with when you're finished trying to figure out exactly what it is that's going on here, just remember those two numbers: 11 hours of debate; 77 members have spoken to this.

Speaker, anybody who is going to stand in this place and suggest that this legislation hasn't had full debate is trying to, I would say to the people who are following this on television, maybe be a little—what's the word we would use?—to misdirect exactly what's been going on here.

0950

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Thank you. Further questions and comments?

Mr. Ernie Hardeman: I'm pleased to rise for a few comments on the House leader's presentation.

I do want to say that I'm pleased at the fact that on my point of order—I was maybe a little bit close to being out of order, Mr. Speaker, but I'm happy to hear that at least the message got out that it's very important for those of us who want to speak to the agriculture bills so that people at home can know where we stand, but even more so, so that people at home can understand what's in this legislation and what impact it will have on them.

I just want to explain to the House leader, because obviously he doesn't seem to understand how important it is that each individual member gets to speak on the issue. Even though the comments may be similar to what someone else has already said, and obviously sometimes it will be totally opposite of what other members have said, I think my people at home have the right—when there's an agriculture bill going through, one of the best two agricultural counties in Ontario has the right to be heard.

I just want to point out that we did an agriculture survey across the province, and people got to reply to the survey. One of the comments, I think, is quite applicable here. One of the farmers said, "Inability to access all the support that is supposed to be out there for young farmers. We are in our early thirties and just recently took over the family farm. It has been two years and we still have not been able to successfully access the government help or guidance that you hear about. Everything is such a complicated, messy process, we are honestly giving up. We are going it alone and doing our best."

That's a southwestern Ontario vegetable farmer. Mr. Speaker, the reason that one is so important is because the vegetable farmers are already part of this program.

This program that we're talking about in this bill is in fact going to extend it to others. But even the vegetable farmers don't understand the program. That's why it's so important that we have the opportunity to speak to this bill so we can get the message out to all our producers of what the government is doing. In this case, most of the time they are wrong in what they're doing.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): I thank the member from Oxford.

Back to the Minister of Community Safety and Correctional Services for his final remarks.

Hon. Yasir Naqvi: Thank you very much, Speaker. I appreciate you giving me the opportunity to speak again. Although I'm disappointed by your ruling, I respect your ruling. But I do want to restate again that we have had substantive debate on this bill. We've had 77 members speak, over 11 hours of debate from all members of the House talking in substantive terms as to what this bill means to our communities. I had the opportunity, of course, to speak earlier.

But I think it's really important that we take the next step and we take this bill to committee so that we can hear from the farmers directly and we can hear from their associations directly. They want to have a say in this bill as well so that we can be better informed, and if amendments need to be made to the bill to further strengthen the bill, we can make those amendments.

It's interesting, Speaker, because one of the comments I often hear from the broader community out there is, why does it take so long to pass a law? People don't understand. They actually think, Speaker, that as soon as you table a bill, as soon as they hear that a bill is tabled, it's law. They want to know, "How can we use that bill?" It's very disappointing to tell them, "Oh, no, no, no. That was just first reading. Now we have to go through second reading and we have to go through committee and third reading."

The process exists for all the right reasons. I've stood in this House many, many times reminding the members opposite, actually, that we should respect the process at all times—no ifs and buts about it. But there is a time, when we've had ample debate on an issue, that we need to make sure that it moves to the second stage, that it goes to a stage like a committee where you can get, then, the broader community, the outside world, coming inside in this process and being able to influence as to what we, as policy-makers, are doing on behalf of our constituents.

Again, I personally feel strongly that this bill, Bill 40, which is an important bill, has had a substantive amount of debate. Seventy-seven members have spoken in 11 hours of debate. I think we take it to committee so that we can hear from important people who make this province work and they can influence this bill.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): I thank the Minister of Community Safety and Correctional Services.

Further debate?

Mr. Todd Smith: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I really enjoyed your ruling this morning and the fact that I am able to bring some remarks on behalf of the folks

who sent me here from Prince Edward and Hastings riding. I do represent Prince Edward county and Hastings county.

Before I get into my remarks, I would just like to make a comment about your ruling and the fact that the government is trying to stifle and muzzle the official opposition and the third party members, who were sent here by their constituents to bring their thoughts to certain pieces of legislation. This government is saying that 11 hours has been enough debate; it has taken them 11 years—11 years—to bring substantial reform with the Agriculture Insurance Act. Eleven hours is by no means much. It gives me the opportunity to bring some remarks on Bill 40 here this morning, and I appreciate that opportunity in spite of the government's best efforts here.

If I could just add one more thing: The House leader for the government mentioned that it does take a long time, in fact, for legislation to become law in this province. That's part of our democratic process. This government wants to shut down democracy so that they can put their agenda forward, whether it's here in the Legislature or at committee. I've been a member of committees where they have tried to do the exact same thing—shut out people from contributing to the debate at committee as well. They're trying to do the same thing to members of the opposition here at Queen's Park.

But I digress. I move on to representing the members of Hastings county and Prince Edward county here in the Legislature. I represent one of the great agricultural ridings in Ontario as well. The Hastings County Plowing Match and Farm Show every August is a great event. It brings farmers from all across eastern Ontario and even from southwestern Ontario and northern Ontario to farmers' fields in Stirling or Quinte West or Tweed. It has been a great event in our riding. It's an opportunity for me, as the member of provincial Parliament—and I know our federal members appear as well at the farm show—to speak face to face with farmers in our community and understand the issues that they're facing, issues like red tape and how it's slowing down progress on their farms and their ability to get their product to market.

We have some great organizations in our riding: the Hastings Federation of Agriculture, which I get to meet with very often, quarterly; and the Prince Edward Federation of Agriculture. The Hastings beef farmers are great, and they always speak to me about the issues that they're facing in their industry. Of course, almost every time that I speak in the Legislature, I speak of the Prince Edward County Winegrowers Association and the great things that are happening in their burgeoning wine industry in Prince Edward county and what it means for tourism in our area. The Egg Farmers of Ontario—we have one of the largest egg producers in the entire province in the Tweed area. Vance Drain and his family are producing some grade-A eggs for the province of Ontario.

But they're all dealing with different issues that aren't included in Bill 40. That's why a lot of us on this side of the House, when we've been bringing remarks on Bill 40, have been expanding it: because this bill could have been

expanded to include more of the issues that farmers are dealing with.

I had the opportunity on Friday in Prince Edward county—and a plug for the great Maple in the County festival, which is coming up on the 28th and 29th of March. It's maple syrup producers in Prince Edward county. There are about 15 of them in all. They do a great job of producing great maple syrup, of course, one of the great exports of our entire country. We are the leader when it comes to maple syrup, and that's a great festival. If you have the opportunity to be there on the 28th and 29th, make sure you visit Fosterholm Farms or Vader's or Hubbs Sugarbush. Those are just some of the great producers that will be having special celebrations on that Saturday and Sunday later this month.

We have a great jewel in our community in the Stirling area; it's called Farmtown Park. I see the member from Northumberland–Quinte West is here. I know that Mr. Rinaldi has been at the events at Farmtown Park along with me over the years. The Quinte Agricultural Hall of Fame that we have there is a great opportunity to recognize members of our agricultural community who have done great things in our community to push that industry forward, to create jobs and to continue the legacy and even start the legacy of great farming practices in Hastings and Prince Edward counties and also in Northumberland county. So that is a wonderful place. If you ever get the opportunity, Mr. Speaker, they have some great vintage farm equipment at Farmtown Park, right next to the Stirling arena in Stirling.

I mentioned red tape. I was fortunate enough, in my first couple of years here as the member for Prince Edward–Hastings, to serve as the small business and red tape critic. That affects every farm in Ontario. They are dealing with red tape. I know that our member from Oxford, who was our agriculture critic for the first two or three years that I was here and is a former Minister of Agriculture, has gone to great lengths to survey farmers across the province and find out what the biggest issue facing the family farm or agri-food business in this province is, and it is red tape. That's what concerns me, not so much about this piece of legislation but other pieces of legislation that the House leader documented when he was talking about some of the important pieces of legislation that are on the agenda here at Queen's Park. There are pieces of legislation that are worrisome for those in our agriculture industry.

1000

In the case of the Great Lakes Protection Act—and Prince Edward county is right there in Lake Ontario; it's a small island in Lake Ontario. This bill, the Great Lakes Protection Act, is going to supersede all other bills, and there are worries about that bill and what it will mean for farmers, not just out in Lake Ontario but right across this province. These are issues that need to be discussed as well. They're going to supersede the Nutrient Management Act; this bill could potentially supersede the Nutrient Management Act. There are real issues that need to be dealt with in our agriculture industry.

We do know that our farmers are the greatest stewards of the land that we have. They care about the land, because that is their breadbasket; that's where they make their living, and that's where they're feeding Ontario.

Abattoirs are disappearing right across the province because of red tape. We need those abattoirs. If we don't have the abattoirs, we are going to continue to have a negative impact on the agri-food industry—

Mr. Arthur Potts: A point of order, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): I recognize the member from Beaches–East York on a point of order.

Mr. Arthur Potts: I think standing order 23(b) suggests that they should be speaking to the bill. I don't see any way an abattoir would be insured under this. It may be in the broad concept, but it's not—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): I thank the member. I do see this as not a point of order. The member, in my opinion, is in fact addressing the bill. I thank the member.

Continue, please.

Mr. Todd Smith: Abattoirs are very important. I know there aren't many in downtown Toronto, where the member is from, but they're very important to the agriculture industry.

The Kemptville College issue is a huge one for farmers in my riding. We talk about the succession planning, to make sure that we have those next generations coming through. Kemptville College has been around for 100 years. And while the government last Friday—or Thursday, I believe it was—did come to an agreement to save Alfred College, with Boreal College coming on board—this is an important college in eastern Ontario that has graduated most of the farmers that we have, not just in eastern Ontario but across the province. There needs to be the same kind of lifeline for Kemptville College, which is so important to the farmers and agri-food business in my riding.

The Slots at Racetracks Program was devastating in my area. We now no longer have anyone involved in the harness racing industry in my region, in Hastings and Prince Edward counties. They've all had to sell and move because of the devastating effects of that 2012 budget that killed the Slots at Racetracks Program in my riding.

Energy prices are killing farmers in my riding as well. The most common complaint that I hear, after red tape, is the electricity. Some provinces have a special electricity rate for farmers. I'm not sure why we couldn't investigate something like that for our farmers.

As for Agricorp, when I was at the farm show and plowing match in Hastings county a couple of years ago, we were talking about the overpayments that came out from Agricorp and the fact that they had to claw back the money that was given to them years earlier. They had invested that money in their farms, and Agricorp, despite the fact that they had made a mistake, comes back and tries to claw back that money from farmers in my area. It has been a huge issue.

But the bottom line is, while this bill is a step in the right direction, and we are supportive of this bill and

getting it to committee so that we can discuss it further, it's 11 years late and it's many, many dollars short.

The members of the government are saying that 11 hours of debate is too long for this bill. There are real concerns for farmers in Hastings and Prince Edward counties, and there are real concerns for farmers in Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke and Oxford and Wellington–Halton Hills and York–Simcoe. This government doesn't want to hear from the members who were elected by their constituents. We need to discuss this further, and I appreciate your ruling this morning, Mr. Speaker. Thank you.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further questions and comments?

Ms. Jennifer K. French: Of course, it's my privilege to stand in this House and address Bill 40. I did have the opportunity to speak to it at length. I had that chance, and that was a great opportunity for me to learn a lot about agriculture. I am familiar with the term “abattoir,” so I did make that connection already to agriculture. But I appreciate the chance to stand here and add my voice again.

Also, I enjoyed listening to the member from Prince Edward–Hastings' comments. My father lives in his riding and is someone who is thoroughly enjoying the opportunity, in his retirement, to learn a bit about farming, and through him, I'm able to learn a bit about farming. It is a beautiful area, and it is beautiful and rich land. The member from Prince Edward–Hastings mentioned egg farming and the wine industry. It is a rich industry. I can't believe I'm standing in the Legislature and talking about my father and his farming adventures, but I get a kick out of that, and I hope that you will too. He has learned about egg farming and he has built a little place where the chickens can roost and do their egg laying. It has been quite an adventure. Apparently, they start out small and they get bigger, and there's a lot to learn—and this is just an individual.

I think the opportunity for debate and for consultation in committee gives us a chance to actually speak to those who do it not just as a hobby or in their retirement, and certainly draw from the industries and find out how best to inform this bill and, hopefully, others like it. As we know, there's a lot more that could and should be addressed than this bill covers. This is a step in the right direction.

I really appreciated the member from Prince Edward–Hastings' comment about the 11 hours of debate—that they've had 11 years, so let's see if we can't get started.

I look forward to it also getting to committee and hearing from those who would make it better.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further questions and comments?

Mrs. Marie-France Lalonde: Thank you very much for this opportunity. It is very interesting to hear members of the opposition talking about a bill and, in my opinion, holding it back here in this House. When I think about how important this bill is for the farming industry and I hear the opposition talking about “11 years, 11 years”—

well, we, as a government, are trying to create this space where we can send it to committee. Holding it back in more debates is not going to get anything accomplished.

I was very surprised—I'm a new member. There was this very nice convention called ROMA, which is the largest rural association community coming together, and not once in this House was there a question raised during question period by the opposition.

When you talk about the farming industry, we were there. We were at the table. We engaged in conversation with the farmers, and Premier Wynne made it clear—it is time that we move this forward to committee.

I look at this bill—and when I stand up in this House and I think about why I started in politics, it was also to make things more efficient. I'm very much in favour of democracy. I understand. But we had an extensive amount of hours in this House; I will reiterate: This has been debated for close to 12 hours. Over 78 members talked about it, and actually, speakers are talking again in this House. We're talking again. We're just standing up again.

This is my first time, and I am happy to talk about it, but in the sense that we need to bring this closer for our committee. We need to make sure that the people of Ontario, our rural friends, our farmers understand that this is what we want to do.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further questions and comments?

Mrs. Julia Munro: I'm pleased to have two minutes in which to respond to the member for Prince Edward–Hastings.

I would like to begin by reminding the government members that this is the foundation of our democratic process. It was not many years ago that when you got up to speak, there was no time limit. You could speak for the day or for however long.

1010

Democracy is not measured by its efficiency. It is the opportunity for thoughtful discussion.

When we look at this particular bill, it is of significant importance, because it takes a step forward in the question of moving from just crop insurance to include animal, so it's called the agricultural products insurance fund.

This is a huge step forward, and it is one in which this bill relies heavily, as many of the government's bills do, on the regulatory process. What people need to understand is that the regulatory process is not a public process. It is by invitation only. It is not required to do anything, in terms of publication, of thoughtful process. It just comes out with regulations at the end.

People need to understand that this, in itself, makes it very difficult for the people—that is, the farming community; the agriculture and the agri-foods community—to have a clue before, de facto, these regulations come into place. This is the only time that people have an opportunity.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further questions and comments?

Mrs. Lisa Gretzky: It's my pleasure to rise and join the debate on Bill 40. I just find it interesting, as we go around the room—the member from Prince Edward–Hastings brought up abattoirs, and the parliamentary assistant did too. I believe the Minister of Agriculture stood up and said that that wasn't relevant.

I can tell you that I grew up in London. When I was a child, my father would take my brothers and I to an abattoir just outside of London. We learned that an abattoir is very much directly linked to a conversation about agriculture.

I think that just shows the importance of debate, that we got to stand up today. Hopefully, the member from Beaches–East York learned something new about his portfolio.

The member from Oshawa also brought up that her father has begun a hobby—although I'm sure there's still lots of work to it—of having chickens for eggs. Something that I learned during my time here as an MPP—I had farmers in, and they were talking about the difference between egg chickens and chickens they raise for meat. Growing up in London, although we were surrounded by an agricultural community, of course, we didn't have chickens or cows or pigs. We often had little gardens, but not large gardens. So it was interesting to learn that there is a difference, even within the agricultural community, with those who raise the same animals but they do it for different reasons.

I had an interesting side conversation with the member from London–Fanshawe about my time growing up in London, and how at the Western Fair they used to have the agricultural building, and we would go in and see all the different animals and learn about other purposes for the animals, other than just ending up on the table.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Back to the member from Prince Edward–Hastings for his final comments.

Mr. Todd Smith: Thank you again, Mr. Speaker, for the opportunity to speak on behalf of the residents of Hastings and Prince Edward counties here this morning on this piece of legislation, Bill 40.

I'd like to thank the members of the Legislature who have provided some information or their views on my remarks—the members from Oshawa, Ottawa–Orléans, York–Simcoe and Windsor West—for their contributions to this debate as well.

I'd like to thank the members of my riding who have come to me and met with me over the last three years to discuss very important agricultural issues, people like Darrell Russett of the Hastings beef farmers; people like Gayle Grills of the Hastings Federation of Agriculture, and Linda Huizenga; Oliver Haan, from the Ontario pork producers, who comes from the Marysville area in my riding. We have one of the largest chicken-producing regions in the province, in Prince Edward county. Those people have come to me with their issues over the years.

These are all important people, involved in various industries in the agri-food sector in Ontario, in Prince Edward county and in Hastings county. In 10 minutes,

even, Mr. Speaker, it has been very difficult to get their issues on the table to discuss them—people like Vance Drain, from the egg farm up in Tweed that is producing great eggs in this province. There are so many important stakeholders in Prince Edward and Hastings counties who are unable to get their views on the table in 10 minutes. The fact that the government wants to shut out those voices, through me—shutting them out is sickening, actually.

For more than a decade, this government that sits across from us has pushed aside the agriculture insurance issue and beefing up this very important program. At the same time, they've been blowing billions of dollars that could have helped our agriculture industry.

We have four OPP investigations that have taken precedence now. The least we can do is talk about an important industry, the agriculture industry in Ontario.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for the opportunity.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): I thank the member from Prince Edward–Hastings.

Second reading debate deemed adjourned.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Seeing—
Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Order, please.

Seeing as how it is now 10:15, this Legislature stands recessed until 10:30.

The House recessed from 1016 to 1030.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Mr. Robert Bailey: I'd like to welcome and introduce to the chamber today representatives from the Sarnia Lambton Chamber of Commerce in the persons of Rob Taylor, Rory Ring, Monica Shepley, Helen Cole, Debbie Harksen, Don Wood, Jim Bradshaw, Ken Faulkner, Leo Stathakis, Lianne Birkbeck, Marty Raaymakers, Murray McLaughlin, Peter Hungerford and Shauna Carr. They're here for Sarnia–Lambton Day both today and tomorrow.

Mrs. Lisa Gretzky: I'd like to welcome several University of Windsor student representatives from the Canadian Federation of Students who are joining us today: Mohamad El-Cheikh, Ronnie Haidar, Abdullahi Abdulla and Anne-Marie Roy. Welcome to Queen's Park, wherever you are.

Hon. Liz Sandals: Today is Friends and Advocates of Catholic Education Day. Everybody is invited to a reception at 5 o'clock. I'm not even going to try and introduce everybody, but I just wanted to especially recognize James Ryan, who is the president of the Ontario English Catholic Teachers' Association, and Kathy Burtnik, who is the president of the Ontario Catholic School Trustees' Association.

Mr. Bob Delaney: Speaker, two of our pages have brought some guests, so I ask members' indulgence to introduce them. On behalf of page Inaya Yousaf, who represents the riding of Toronto Centre, we'd like to wish welcome to her mother, Sasdia Yousaf; her father, Yousaf

Siddique; her sister Iman Yousaf; and her sister Minal Yousaf.

Applause.

Mr. Bob Delaney: Thank you. Shukria.

On behalf of page Arlyne James from Eglinton–Lawrence, we'd like to welcome three of her friends today: Hattie Coburn, Andy Coburn and Signy Matthews.

Ms. Catherine Fife: It's my pleasure to welcome my parents, Allan and Sheila Wood. My mom ran for us in the provincial election, so we'd like to welcome her.

Hon. Eric Hoskins: I'd like to welcome the Dietitians of Canada, who are here with us today. Welcome to Queen's Park. Joining us are Linda Dietrich, executive director, Dietitians of Canada; Mary Lou Gignac, executive director of the College of Dietitians of Ontario; and Leslie Whittington-Carter, who is government relations coordinator, Dietitians of Canada.

Mr. John Yakabuski: I want to welcome to Queen's Park today, from my riding of Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke, Bob Schroeder, who is here with the Friends and Advocates of Catholic Education. Great to see you here, Bob.

Hon. Jeff Leal: It's a great pleasure for me to introduce Allan and Sheila Wood in the members' west gallery—just great constituents of mine in Peterborough. They do a wonderful job of advocating for many causes in the riding of Peterborough.

Mr. Bas Balkissoon: I'd like to welcome today a school from my riding of Scarborough–Rouge River, the Islamic Foundation of Toronto school grade 10 civics class. They're accompanied by teacher Saajida Khadim, and they are in the west gallery.

Mrs. Kathryn McGarry: In the members' gallery today, I'd like to introduce to the House a long-time resident of Cambridge, Meg O'Brien. Meg is very proud of her son Damien O'Brien, who also joins us—known to very many in this House, a long-time resident of Cambridge and about all things Cambridge, one of the reasons I'm sitting in the House to introduce him today. Thank you and welcome.

Mr. Han Dong: I would also like to welcome the Ontario English Catholic Teachers' Association. I just had a great, productive meeting with two of them, Kathy and Andrew. They're somewhere back there. Hi. I just want to say welcome to them.

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

ORAL QUESTIONS

BY-ELECTION IN SUDBURY

Mr. Steve Clark: Mr. Speaker. I hope you'll give me some leeway as our Premier sprints to her seat.

My question is in fact to the Premier. Premier, the RCMP raided the headquarters of the Ontario Provincial Police Association on Friday. Yesterday, it was announced

that three senior OPP officials—the president, the vice-president and the CAO—are all taking voluntary leaves of absence while the investigation is ongoing.

Back in mid-December, I wrote to the Chief Electoral Officer and the commissioner of the OPP, and an investigation has been launched ever since that involves your deputy chief of staff and a senior Liberal operative in Sudbury. To this day, both of those individuals have yet to step aside, even as the investigation into their alleged bribes continues.

Premier, why is it that individuals who represent our police know to step aside when they're under investigation, but your staff does not?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: The member opposite knows that this is an active police matter, and that I'm not going to be able to comment any further—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Prince Edward-Hastings will come to order, and the member from Lanark will come to order as well.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Mr. Speaker, on the issue of the Sudbury by-election, I've been very, very clear that there is an investigation ongoing. I've been clear about the trajectory of what my intentions are, in terms of if there is a charge—that Pat Sorbara would step aside. I've made that statement publicly. We're going to let the investigation take place outside of this Legislature.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Steve Clark: Back to the Premier. Premier, I can't believe, in a scrum this morning, you acknowledged that you still have yet to meet with the Ontario Provincial Police about the ongoing investigation. But then again, when pressed on the allegations against your staff, you were quoted as saying, "I will not force someone to resign over allegations I do not believe to be true." That's the quote.

The people who are investigating you know when to do the right thing, and they've done it. The police have done the right thing, Premier. My question is, is your staff above the law?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Again, I take this matter very seriously. I've spoken to it repeatedly. The independent investigation is ongoing.

I just would remind the member opposite that I think he himself said that it's important to "stop interfering in an ongoing investigation and let it run its course."

We have to make sure that kind of interference doesn't happen, Mr. Speaker. I'm not going to do that, and I don't think the other side should either.

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

Mr. Steve Clark: Back to the Premier: In a news release, the OPPA wrote that it is "in the best interests of the association and its membership, effective immediately," that the members take "voluntary leaves of absence from the OPP Association."

Premier, the opposition, the public and the police know that it is in the best interest that your operatives step aside while they are under investigation. Premier, will

today be the day that your government finally demonstrates integrity? Premier, will today be the day that Pat Sorbara and Gerry Lougheed step aside?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Minister of Community Safety and Correctional Services.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Minister of Community Safety and Correctional Services.

Hon. Yasir Naqvi: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and I appreciate you acknowledging me.

I want to remind the member opposite again that the OPPA investigation he refers to, or any other police investigation, is exactly that, Speaker—

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Stormont will come to order. I would almost ask him to withdraw, if I thought I heard what I thought I heard.

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Okay. Thank you. Carry on.

Hon. Yasir Naqvi: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As I was saying, these are matters which are being dealt with by the police. These are live investigations. We should respect that. As we've said repeatedly, these are matters to be taken seriously. They need not to be discussed here in this House. I heed the advice of the member opposite when he said let the police do their work; let the police do their investigation. We respect that.

1040

BY-ELECTION IN SUDBURY

Mr. John Yakabuski: My question is to the Premier: We have risen again and again in this House to try to compel you to do the right thing concerning the Sudbury by-election scandal by removing Pat Sorbara and Gerry Lougheed from their positions of power and authority. You are so off the mark on this issue.

Yesterday we learned that three senior officials from the Ontario Provincial Police Association stepped aside, or were asked to step aside, when they became the subject of a police investigation.

Premier, will you do the right thing and remove your deputy city chief of staff, Pat Sorbara, and your political bagman, Gerry Lougheed, until this police investigation has been completed?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Let me just remind the member opposite that the OPP and the OPPA operate entirely independently and I have no knowledge of the situation there. It's an active police matter and obviously I can't comment on it—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Oh, I think you knew I was coming for you. The member from Renfrew, come to order, please. The member from Lanark, come to order.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I've been very clear about our position in terms of co-operating with the authorities in an investigation that's taking place outside of this

House. We will continue to work with the authorities as is appropriate, not in this Legislature.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. John Yakabuski: Premier, what a sad response to such a simple question.

On election night last year, you said that the people had put their trust in you and that you wouldn't let them down. You said that you would lead with integrity, that people would not be taken for granted—such hollow words.

Premier, you love to point to examples of people doing the right thing. Well, here's a clear-cut example of just that. The OPPA officials who are under police investigation had the decency to step aside until the matter is cleared up.

Why is it that police officers in this province can do the right thing, but Liberals can't? Why won't you put Gerry Lougheed and Pat Sorbara in the penalty box until this is completed? Is that simply because of Liberal arrogance?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: The Minister of Community Safety and Correctional Services.

Hon. Yasir Naqvi: I think the member opposite knows that we have something called presumption of innocence in our system of democracy, where we do not judge people until they are proven guilty, if that's the case. And that determination is made by the judge, not by the members of this House. We should respect that, Speaker.

In fact, even the Chief Electoral Officer in his report said, "I am neither deciding to prosecute a matter nor determining anyone's guilt or innocence. Those decisions are respectively for prosecutors and judges." The Chief Electoral Officer is absolutely right. It is a matter for a judge to decide if any charges are laid. As we know, in this matter, no charges have been laid. There's a live investigation. We should respect that police investigation and we should not interfere in the matter whatsoever.

In our system of democracy, people are innocent until they are proven guilty. In this case, everyone is innocent because no charges have been laid.

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

Mr. John Yakabuski: Premier, the arrogance over there is something that I believe you'll live to regret.

I remind you again: Three officials from the Ontario Provincial Police Association have stepped aside. They have done the right thing. We find out today that you haven't even interviewed with the OPP about the Sudbury by-election scandal.

Premier, you were so quick to interview with the Chief Electoral Officer about this scandal, but you can't find the time to interview with the OPP. Is it because the Chief Electoral Officer is a provincial appointee but the OPP carry handcuffs?

Interjections.

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

Minister?

Hon. Yasir Naqvi: Again, I don't know how many times we need to remind the members opposite that this is not the place or the time in the House to be interfering in a police investigation. In fact, if the member from Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke looked to the member from Leeds–Grenville, he should take his advice, which is not to interfere in an ongoing police investigation.

It is disappointing that the Conservatives, being the official opposition, are not focusing on the real issues that are facing Ontarians. They don't want to talk about things that will help—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Lanark is warned, and the member from Prince Edward–Hastings: second time.

Carry on and finish, please.

Hon. Yasir Naqvi: It is time that we focused on the real issues at hand. We need to focus on making sure that we are growing our economy. We need to make sure that we are creating good-paying jobs for all hard-working Ontarians in all four corners of this province. I ask the opposition to really start focusing back on things that people have sent us here to talk about, and that is our economy and our jobs.

BY-ELECTION IN SUDBURY

Ms. Andrea Horwath: My question is for the Premier. When it comes to the Sudbury bribery scandal, this Premier is in lockdown mode. I have a question, and that is, is that on Pat Sorbara's advice?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Mr. Speaker, let me just say that I have answered this question many, many times and I have been very clear—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Next one.

Carry on, please.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I've been very, very clear that there is an investigation ongoing. There was some heckling about how I haven't had a meeting with the authorities. That's being scheduled. I just think the members opposite need to understand that that's a scheduling issue. I have said repeatedly that I am co-operating with the authorities, I will co-operate with the authorities. That was always my intention and it's what we're doing.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Has Pat Sorbara been providing management issues briefings to the Premier on the Pat Sorbara issue?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Again, the fact is I've made a public statement. I've made a statement about the situation in Sudbury; I've made a statement about my decision to have Glenn Thibeault be our candidate in Sudbury—Glenn Thibeault, who apparently is an amazing photographer, because the photograph on the front of the Globe yesterday of the terrible derailment in Gogama was taken by our member for Sudbury.

That is an issue that I think is very worthy of our discussion in here: the very important issue of rail safety.

It's one that we should all be calling on the federal government to work with us on, to make sure that we have all the protections in place for people across this province.

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

Ms. Andrea Horwath: I'm not sure I got an answer to whether or not Pat Sorbara is providing advice to the Premier on the Pat Sorbara issue.

I know Pat Sorbara wasn't on the Premier's staff when the Premier was promising to change and to make things open and transparent around here. I also notice that the Premier hasn't used the word "openness" once in this place since the Liberal bribery scandal broke, and she only used the word "transparency" once. She won't even say whether or not Pat Sorbara attends cabinet meetings. It's obvious that the Premier is being neither open nor transparent, refusing to answer questions.

I wonder, has Pat Sorbara told the Premier to dial back the rhetoric about openness and transparency around here?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Mr. Speaker, where I'm going with this—I studied linguistics. This would be an interesting exercise, to go through which words each of us uses in the House and the number of times, and count those words, and then work up an exercise for a linguistics student to see if we could get at the underlying themes that run through our discourse.

Again, let me just say, we are co-operating with the authorities in an investigation that's going on outside of this House. We're working co-operatively with the OPP to set up a meeting, and that's what I mean when I talk about working co-operatively with the authorities. That is happening outside of this House.

The openness that I have demonstrated in terms of committee work, in terms of telling the people of Ontario—

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

BY-ELECTION IN SUDBURY

Ms. Andrea Horwath: My next question is for the Premier. The Liberals seem to think that the law, good ethics, integrity and the responsibility to answer questions—

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Minister of Economic Development, come to order.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: —all end at the door to this Legislature. Will the Premier stop hiding behind the OPP investigation and start answering questions, like whether Pat Sorbara continues to attend cabinet meetings?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I have been very clear about where I will be answering questions on this specific issue, and that is with the authorities as part of an investigation that's happening outside of this House.

1050

I would just remind the leader of the third party, much as she wants to stand in judgment of people, that the Chief Electoral Officer clearly stated: "I am neither deciding to prosecute a matter nor determining anyone's guilt or innocence. Those decisions are respectively for prosecutors and judges."

That process is under way. Those decisions have not been made, and they will not be made by the leader of the third party or anyone else in this Legislature.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: There are four OPP anti-rackets investigations into this Liberal government, but the Premier seems to think it's okay, because the investigation is out there, and she won't tolerate questions in here. This place belongs to Ontarians, and Ontarians deserve answers from their Premier. It doesn't matter whether those questions come in the interrogation room, at a media scrum or right here in the House. Ontarians deserve answers on the Sudbury bribery scandal.

Who made the decision to offer Andrew Olivier a job to step aside?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: It actually does matter. Not only do I tolerate questions; I embrace questions. I am here, day after day, to answer questions. That's why I'm here.

Quite frankly, I thought that this morning there might be a question about Gogama. I thought there might be a question about assets and investment in transit and transportation infrastructure. I thought that there might be a question about a whole range of issues that are important business of this government. But I am here and I am answering this question, and I will say that it does matter what words we use.

The member to the right of the leader of the third party knows this. The member for Timmins-James Bay said, "You do have a larger responsibility to make sure you're careful in the use of your words so you don't interfere in any ... way." And that's true for me—

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

Ms. Andrea Horwath: With all due respect, I think that the opposition and the people of Ontario would rather have the Premier answer questions than embrace them.

The Premier won't say who made the decisions in the bribery scandal. She won't even answer a simple question about the meetings Pat Sorbara has attended since the bribery investigation became public, which has nothing to do with the investigation at hand.

The Premier doesn't have any evidence for her version of events. She won't even explain why the story that she has been clinging to is undercut by every single piece of evidence that we currently know exists. She insists that she behaved nobly and that everything is above board.

If everything is A-okay, can the Premier explain why it is that she's more comfortable answering questions in the OPP interrogation room than she is here in Ontario's Legislature?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Minister of Community Safety and Correctional Services.

Hon. Yasir Naqvi: What the Premier wants to talk about, and what we all should talking about, are the issues that are important to Ontarians.

I ask the leader of the third party if she wants to play the word count game. Let's play the word count game. How many times has the NDP spoken about the minimum wage in this House? How many times has the NDP talked about raises for personal support workers in this House? How many times has the NDP talked about raising child care workers' wages in this House? How many times has the NDP talked about public transit in this House? That is the problem. They have lost their soul. They have lost their values. They don't stand for anything. They want to talk about anything but the real issues for Ontarians.

Interjections.

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

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Order. The member doesn't help when he walks by and heckles.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Order, please. Start the clock.

The member from Kitchener–Conestoga.

BY-ELECTION IN SUDBURY

Mr. Michael Harris: My question is to the Premier, and Premier, my constituents thank you for tolerating my question today.

Premier, your predecessors Ferguson, Hepburn, Frost, Davis, Peterson and Rae have one thing in common: All had at least one cabinet resignation during their watch, many with more than one and many due to allegations, investigations, and/or concerns that prompted action to ensure accountability. Chris Stockwell, Jim Wilson, Bob Runciman, cousin Greg Sorbara, Mike Colle and David Caplan all went on to take the honourable step aside. Heck, even Dalton McGuinty got out of Dodge when the weight of accountability became too great.

Yesterday, three senior OPP union officials, one a former Liberal candidate, stepped aside.

Premier, take the lead. Ensure that bribery investigations against your deputy chief of staff aren't conducted while the alleged culprit remains in your office—

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

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Mr. Speaker, I welcome the question from the opposition member. I value the ability in this House to have a debate. I think it's an extremely important part of the democratic process. It's extremely important that the opposition have the opportunity to hold government to account. I think it is incredibly important and central to the workings of a democratic system.

What is also essential is that there be a separation between an investigation that's going on that really is not a political process, that is a process that has to happen apart from the political machinations, the political debate in this House. That has to happen outside the Legislature.

I am taking part in that investigation and working with the authorities. I have said I would do that, and that's exactly what I will do.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Michael Harris: Back to the Premier.

Premier, your Deputy Premier is right. Your continued rope-a-dope refusal to be accountable is getting so boring.

That said, today marks a significant milestone in your deflect, dither and delay strategy. Today not only marks the passing of the 100th question yardstick on the exact same subject, it also marks exactly one month since the OPP announced their intention to bring you in to discuss the bribery offers clearly heard on the Oliviergate tapes.

Premier, on this milestone day, for your sake, for your government's sake, even for the media's sake, do the right thing. Have Pat Sorbara and Gerry Lougheed step aside, and finally give some straight answers on this whole sordid affair so we can all move on.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Again, I've said that we are going to take part in and I am going to take part in the investigation that's happening outside of this House. We've been in touch with the OPP, Mr. Speaker. We're arranging an interview, and we're working with them to arrange dates. If the question is, when am I going to meet with the OPP, the answer is, when we can arrange a date for that to happen. That discussion is ongoing.

I've been very clear that I will work with the authorities but that that investigation has to take place outside of this House, not in this Legislature.

BY-ELECTION IN SUDBURY

Mr. Gilles Bisson: My question is to the Premier.

Premier, we learned yesterday that the OPPA—after an investigation, members of the executive board stood aside in order to allow things to unfold, so that they took their resignation—

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The Minister of Economic Development.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: I will try again. Speaker, my question is for the Premier. We've learned that three members of the OPP Association are under investigation by the RCMP. For what? We don't know. But unlike the Sudbury investigation, there doesn't appear to be taped evidence.

It's interesting to note, however, that two of the officials have stepped aside while the investigation is under way. No charges, no findings of guilt or innocence—but they stepped aside.

Why won't the Premier's deputy chief of staff and her police services board appointee step aside while the bribery investigations are under way?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Mr. Speaker, as I said, I know nothing about the investigation that's going on in the OPPA. The OPP and the OPPA are separate organizations. They're independent organizations.

On the situation that we're dealing with, I've been clear about my position, I've been clear about the decision that I made regarding the candidacy in Sudbury, and I've been clear that we're working with the authorities on the investigation that is taking place outside of this Legislature.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Premier, what drives people back home crazy is the double standard that your government has when it comes to accountability. Why is it that members of this assembly, when they've been in similar situations, have done the right thing and stood aside? The OPPA has done the right thing; they stood aside. But you have a different standard. Oh, no, you don't have to follow any type of standard; you don't have to follow the law. People just keep on going the way they were.

People expect their government to be different in the sense of making sure that you take responsibility. So I ask you again: Why is there a double standard for Liberal people while it's not the same for anybody else?

1100

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: To the Minister of Community Safety and Correctional Services.

Hon. Yasir Naqvi: I think what's driving people crazy at home is that the opposition parties are not focusing on the real issues of the day. That's what people are talking about, and that's what people are concerned about. What they want is for the members opposite to really take the time in question period to hold government to account on issues that are important to them, like creating jobs in their communities, like making sure we're building public transit in our communities, like making sure that we've got quality health care and that good schools are running in our communities. That's what we were elected to do. That's what my constituents want me to focus on, and I'm sure the members opposite are hearing from their constituents as well that they should be focusing on real issues, issues that are directly important to their communities—and stop scandalmongering.

EDUCATION

Mrs. Cristina Martins: My question is to the Minister of Education. I know that Ontario's publicly funded education system stands as one of the best in the world. This progress that we've made is the result of the dedication, work and vision of this Liberal government working hand in hand with the education community to create a world-class system. I am proud to be part of a government that recognizes the importance of investing in people, specifically through investing in education. We are proud of the progress we have made across Ontario in all of our four diverse, publicly funded school systems: the English public, English Catholic, French public and French Catholic systems.

Our government is focused on ensuring success across all of our publicly funded systems, including the French and Catholic boards. We believe the Catholic boards play an important part of our vibrant and diverse education system. That's certainly true in my great riding of Davenport, where we have a number of wonderful Catholic schools.

Mr. Speaker, through you to the minister: Can the minister share with this House how we continue to ensure we remain committed to all publicly funded education systems across Ontario, including the Catholic systems?

Hon. Liz Sandals: Thank you, Speaker, and thank you to the member from Davenport, who I know is a strong supporter of Catholic education.

As I mentioned earlier today, the Friends and Advocates of Catholic Education are here at Queen's Park, and I'd like to welcome supporters from the Ontario Catholic School Trustees' Association, the Ontario English Catholic Teachers' Association and the Assembly of Catholic Bishops of Ontario, who will be here later in the day.

Indeed, as the member says, together we have indeed built an excellent system. Over the past 10 years, we've been able to raise the graduation rate from 68% to 83%, and our government remains committed to providing an excellent education, and that includes the Catholic school system.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary.

Mrs. Cristina Martins: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the minister.

We are recognized around the world as having one of the best publicly funded education systems in the English-speaking world. I have two young sons that are part of the Catholic school board here in the city, and I know first-hand this is so true. I know our government's renewed vision, Achieving Excellence, continues to focus on basics like reading, writing and math, while placing an emphasis on other skills like critical thinking, communication and collaboration.

Part of our government's plan entails working with our four diverse publicly funded school systems, the English public, English Catholic, French public and French Catholic, to ensure students continue to achieve excellence and success in my riding of Davenport and across the province. Supporting a world-class education system is part of our government's economic plan that is creating jobs for today and tomorrow.

Mr. Speaker, through you to the minister: Can the minister share with this House how her commitment to working with all boards across Ontario has helped ensure student success and well-being?

Hon. Liz Sandals: We want every child and student in Ontario to gain the knowledge, skills and personal characteristics that will allow them to be successful, productive and actively engaged citizens. By working with all four publicly funded school systems across Ontario, we have a lot to be proud of when it comes to our accomplishments in education. We have invested \$12 billion in school infrastructure since 2003. All four- and five-year-olds now have access to full-day kindergarten,

and our students remain competitive in math, performing above the OECD average.

On April 9, 2014, we released a renewed vision for education entitled *Achieving Excellence: A Renewed Vision for Education in Ontario*.

We will continue to work with all of our education partners, including our friends from Friends and Advocates of Catholic Education, to ensure that all our students achieve success.

BY-ELECTION IN SUDBURY

Ms. Sylvia Jones: My question is for the Premier. As we saw yesterday with the RCMP investigation of the OPPA, when others are under investigation, they step away from active duty so that they are unable to share notes and talk to other individuals also under investigation. Yet you have taken a very different course of action with Pat Sorbara. She still works in your office, where she is under your direct supervision and direction. After three weeks of daily questioning by the opposition and the media, it is impossible to believe that you have not discussed the details of the allegations made by the Chief Electoral Officer in his report from February 19.

Why are you more interested in protecting Pat Sorbara than ensuring that the investigation can proceed without concerns that stories are being changed or e-mails deleted?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Again, I challenge the premise of the question from the member opposite. The member opposite can believe what she chooses to believe, but I hope she believes the Chief Electoral Officer when he wrote this: "I am neither deciding to prosecute a matter nor determining anyone's guilt or innocence. Those decisions are respectively for prosecutors and judges."

Mr. Speaker, that's why there's an investigation going on. It is going on outside of this House and we are working with the authorities, as I said we would.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Ms. Sylvia Jones: Speaker, it's not what I believe; it's what the people of Ontario believe and what they want answers from. The Chief Electoral Officer's report was released almost a month ago. Police officers, teachers, lawyers, even cabinet ministers understand they need to step away from active duty when investigations are ongoing. Even administrative duty would be an improvement. What makes you think that you and your staff are above the law?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Well, Mr. Speaker, again, this is another question where the opposition is asking me to answer questions, which I have done, but they're asking me to answer these questions in such a way that I would be interfering in an investigation that's going on outside of this House. And then they would be the first to criticize if I did that.

The fact is that I have to do what I have said I would do. I said that I will work with the authorities, and we are doing that. We're working to set up a meeting with the

OPP. I've been very clear that we will co-operate with the investigation. But I've been equally clear that that investigation has to take place outside the Legislature.

BY-ELECTION IN SUDBURY

Mr. Jagmeet Singh: My question is to the Premier. I want to pre-empt. I know the Premier might try to answer this question by saying that this is not about guilt or innocence, but I'm talking about the seriousness of the offence. Criminal offences related to bribery—

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Stop the clock, please. The deputy House leader is warned.

Carry on.

Mr. Jagmeet Singh: Thank you. Criminal offences related to bribery are quite serious. In fact, section 125 of the Criminal Code of Canada: "Influencing or negotiating appointments or dealing in offices," is an indictable offence and can carry up to five years in prison.

Now, it's a serious offence, but the Premier doesn't seem to be taking very seriously at all that her deputy chief of staff, Pat Sorbara, is facing criminal investigations. Does the Premier really think that this scandal shouldn't concern us?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I've said over and over again that I do take this matter very seriously. I take it very seriously. I take it seriously enough that I will answer the questions in the appropriate venue, not in the Legislature, where the investigation is not taking place. Those investigative questions are taking place outside of the Legislature.

I think the member opposite is a trained lawyer. I would have thought that he would have understood that that independent investigation needed to take place outside of this House, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Jagmeet Singh: I'm glad the Premier recognizes that this offence is very serious. Let me continue by pointing out that violating the Election Act is also very serious. In fact, a general offence in the Election Act carries a \$5,000 fine, but an offence relating to bribery is considered a corrupt practice and it actually includes a fine of \$25,000 and imprisonment for up to two years. Just like violating the Criminal Code, violating the Election Act is also a very serious offence.

1110

Can the Premier explain this to me—this is not about the investigation. This is a simple question. Can the Premier explain why, with two serious investigations, that despite these serious penalties, Pat Sorbara shouldn't just be put on leave?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Again, Mr. Speaker, let me go back to what the Chief Electoral Officer said. I know that the member opposite takes very seriously what officers of the Legislature say. The Chief Electoral Officer said this, clearly stated: "I am neither deciding to prosecute a matter nor determining anyone's guilt or

innocence. Those decisions are respectively for prosecutors and judges.”

Mr. Speaker, there's an investigation going on. It's taking place outside of the Legislature.

HEALTHY EATING

Ms. Ann Hoggarth: My question is to the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care. Every year, Dietitians of Canada and dietitians working all over Ontario help to promote healthy eating through celebrating Nutrition Month in March.

I know that my constituents in Barrie are focusing on promoting healthy eating. The goal of the 2015 national Nutrition Month campaign is to inspire Canadians to eat better at work and make other positive changes for a healthy workplace.

Registered dietitians work in many settings in Ontario, bringing evidence-based nutrition and food advice to consumers, clients and patients. The public can have confidence that registered dietitians, as regulated health professionals, have the training and skills to provide safe, ethical and competent care. Welcome to the dietitians that are here with us today.

Mr. Speaker, through you, I ask the minister: What is our government doing to promote healthy eating and active lifestyles?

Hon. Eric Hoskins: Thank you to the member from Barrie for this very important question. I want to begin by acknowledging not just the dietitians that are here in the gallery with us today but the thousands of dietitians right across this great province that are working so hard each and every day to keep Ontarians happy.

It's important that we ask these questions about health care and other topics that are important to Ontarians, especially seeing as the opposition is not asking these important questions of the day.

I want to say that, as we all know, dietitians play such a critical role in keeping people of all ages healthy and helping them to avoid chronic illnesses like diabetes and heart disease. Increasingly, we see people looking to prevention as the key to staying healthy, and we know that people in Ontario are interested in this approach.

That's why our action plan for health care and our Healthy Kids Strategy have both identified healthy living as a top priority.

Thank you again to our dietitians. They do great work. They do great work across this province each and every day.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Ms. Ann Hoggarth: I'm very proud of our government's Healthy Kids Strategy.

On March 18, the sixth annual Dietitians Day is being celebrated, to recognize the work of dietitians and the value they bring to our health care system. By preventing and managing chronic diseases and promoting recovery, dietitians are a cost-effective investment in the health care system. Promoting access to dietitians' care and

supporting them work at full scope of practice helps achieve health system goals.

My constituents want to know how to access this very important information. It turns out that Ontarians can speak directly with a registered dietitian for free by calling EatRight Ontario.

I know that our government introduced legislation to promote healthy eating and lifestyle. Through you, Mr. Speaker, I ask the minister: What will this legislation entail?

Hon. Eric Hoskins: To the Associate Minister of Health and Long-Term Care.

Hon. Dipika Damerla: Thank you to the member for this very important question. And she's right: This fall, our government did indeed reintroduce the Making Healthier Choices Act. If passed, the act will require restaurant chains, convenience stores, grocery stores and other food service establishments with 20 or more locations to post the number of calories in standard food and beverage items, including alcohol. What this means is, you will be able to walk into your favourite Tim Hortons and see the calories in an Iced Capp or a doughnut.

I believe this is about empowering Ontarians. We're giving them the information they need so that they can make the right choice. I'm very excited by this bill. I know people across Ontario are looking forward to this legislation. The legislation is going through second reading right now, and I look forward to support from all members to make this law.

BY-ELECTION IN SUDBURY

Mr. Jeff Yurek: My question is to the Premier. Premier, we learned yesterday that three senior officials from the Ontario Provincial Police Association took voluntary leaves during an ongoing police investigation. Premier, actions speak louder than words. The OPPA is working to maintain their integrity, while you're working really hard to bring shame to the Office of the Premier.

Why have you not required Pat Sorbara and Gerry Lougheed to step aside during the OPP investigation?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: To the Minister of Community Safety and Correctional Services.

Hon. Yasir Naqvi: I want to remind the member opposite that the Chief Electoral Officer has been very clear. He has made no finding of innocence or guilt. In fact, he says, "I am neither deciding to prosecute a matter nor determining anyone's guilt or innocence. Those decisions are respectively for prosecutors and judges." I think that's something that's really important. I think all members should be very careful that they are not making any assumptions about anyone being guilty until they are actually proven so in the court. As we know, Speaker, there is a live investigation; there have been no charges laid. We should respect the process and let the independent authorities do their work as they are mandated to do, because that is their job. We should take that time to focus on issues that are important to our communities. I

know the member opposite has important issues he wants to—

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

Mr. Jeff Yurek: Back to the Premier. Premier, you've stood in this House, claiming you are co-operating with the OPP. However, it has been over a month, and you've yet to meet with the police. Average people who have nothing to hide would meet with the police as soon as possible, regardless of their schedule. Premier, wouldn't you agree that delaying the meeting with the OPP is tantamount to interfering with the OPP investigation?

Hon. Yasir Naqvi: Well, Speaker, if you're talking about hiding, I think what Ontarians want to know is how many jobs—100,000 jobs?—the opposition is going to cut. Why are they hiding? Why are they not telling us exactly what those jobs are going to be? The last estimates that we received is that 22,700 of those proposed 100,000 job cuts are going to be in the education sector. The question is, is that still correct?

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Stop the clock, please. I'm going to remind the minister—I've said this on a couple of occasions—when I'm hearing the answer, I need to see it relate at least somewhere to the question. I will put that to him to pull it back towards that.

Hon. Yasir Naqvi: Absolutely, Speaker.

The point of the matter is that there are important issues that need to be discussed as they relate to our communities; important issues that need to be discussed when it comes to building our communities up. We know the party opposite only believes in cutting good, hard-working public service jobs and not focusing on what's—

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

BY-ELECTION IN SUDBURY

Ms. Catherine Fife: To the Premier: Premier, I hope you embrace this question on behalf of the citizens of Ontario. I also hope you answer it.

The Premier says she is working with the police, but the Premier's aides, her office and her government are the ones that are at question. We don't really know if she is co-operating, because she's not answering any of our questions. Can the Premier tell Ontarians whether the Ontario Liberal campaign director, Pat Sorbara, has been interviewed by the police?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Well, again, Mr. Speaker, the measure of my co-operation with the authorities will happen as part of the investigation. It's not a measure of what I'm doing in this Legislature, because the investigation is not taking place in here. I know the member opposite knows that. She knows full well that there has to be a separation between the political discussion that happens in the Legislature and the investigation that is independent. That's why the investigation is taking place outside of the House.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary.

Ms. Catherine Fife: Again to the Premier: Actually, what happen in this Legislature does matter. If the Liberals are so insistent that they are co-operating with the police, will the Premier tell Ontarians exactly what assistance she has provided to the police and to Elections Ontario, and explain what the investigators have requested and what has been turned over, please?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Mr. Speaker, of course what happens in this Legislature matters. It matters very, very much, and it matters that we not interfere with an investigation that is taking place independently of the Legislature. The questions that the member opposite is asking are really the stuff of the investigation. That investigation is taking place outside of the House, and I will be and am co-operating with the authorities.

1120

PAN AM GAMES

Mr. Han Dong: I have a real question on government programs. My question is to the minister responsible for the Pan Am Games. The Pan and Parapan American Games are coming. With just four months away, the excitement is building. I know many people in my riding of Trinity–Spadina have bought tickets to the games.

We also have a venue in my riding that is being refurbished for the games. The playing fields at U of T are being transformed into two world-class field hockey pitches. The fields are Ontario's first international-calibre field hockey venue, and they will double the number of fields available for the sport in the greater Toronto area. The facility is also expected to be the highest-quality two-turf facility in Canada, according to Field Hockey Canada.

Can the minister tell us more about how we are preparing for the games?

Hon. Michael Coteau: I'd like to thank the member from Trinity–Spadina for his great question on government program and policy.

We're in great shape when it comes to the Pan Am and Parapan American Games. So far, we've been able to sell almost 300,000 tickets—

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Member from Hamilton East–Stoney Creek, come to order.

Hon. Michael Coteau: —we have 52,000 people have signed up to volunteer and, as many of the members know, last week we unveiled our new medals for the Pan and Parapan Am Games. They're incredible medals. In fact, we had a great collaborative effort with the arts sector. Christi Belcourt, a Métis visual artist, helped develop those medals. Like I spoke about last week, it's the first time Braille has been incorporated into the medals for any major game.

We are 17 Fridays away from the opening of these games. We are so proud of the fact that many of our buildings that are set up for these games are being used for community uses, including our athletes' village. I'll talk a little bit about that in the supplemental.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Han Dong: Thank you, Minister, for this answer. I heard that—

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I'm not sure that the member heard me the first time, so I'm going to repeat it when everything is quiet. The member from Hamilton East–Stoney Creek, come to order.

Put your question, please.

Mr. Han Dong: I encourage the members across, if they have questions, please use their opportunity to ask those questions to the minister directly, not to use my time.

The legacy of these games is truly amazing. These new sports facilities are built for generations of Ontarians to enjoy. The venues will not only be used by our high-performance athletes, but also by beginners and students who are just learning new sports.

As a post-game legacy, the Pan Am fields will host a number of different sports at U of T. They will add to the existing sports facilities, benefiting students on campus and members of my community.

Can the minister tell the members of this Legislature about the legacy the athletes' village will leave behind?

Hon. Michael Coteau: I want to tell you a bit about the athletes' village. This village is part of a broader revitalization of the West Don Lands and Toronto's waterfront, and it has accelerated the pace of the development in that area by 10 years.

The project includes 808 market housing units, 100 affordable housing units and 253 affordable rental units. It also contains, for the first time, a residence for George Brown students—it's a 175,000-square-foot, eight-storey building that will be home to 500 students per year—and an 80,000-square-foot new YMCA facility. The YMCA facility includes a gymnasium, swimming pool, fitness studio, space for youth and community-accessible green roofs. Ten per cent of the units will be fully accessible in the actual building, which I think is an incredible accomplishment for this government. But most important—

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

BY-ELECTION IN SUDBURY

Mr. Bill Walker: My question is for the Premier. Your chief of staff, Pat Sorbara, is currently under OPP investigation involving the Sudbury bribery scandal, yet she continues to have access to and ability to influence cabinet decisions and senior members of your inner circle. When three OPP staff became subjects of a police investigation, they immediately stepped down so as to not keep asserting their influence on that office and tarnishing the reputation of their association.

Premier, why are you continuing to allow Pat Sorbara to stay in her position in the midst of a police investigation?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Minister of Community Safety and Correctional Services.

Hon. Yasir Naqvi: Again, Speaker, I remind the member opposite—and he's heard the answer before—that we have something called presumption of innocence in our system of democracy. We should respect that. In fact, the Chief Electoral Officer restated that very clearly in his finding. If you like, I can read that passage to him again during the supplementary.

I think what we really need to focus on are issues that are important to our communities. I'm sure the member opposite has a hospital that he wants to build in his community. This will be a great opportunity for him to advocate on behalf of his community by speaking on those very important issues.

Let the police do their work, which they're very much capable of and responsible to do. Speaker, as you very much appreciate, it will be highly inappropriate if we, as a government, interfere in that police investigation.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Bill Walker: Back to the Premier: The people of my riding believe that law and order is a fundamental tenet of democracy, and no one, including the Premier, is above the law. The OPP union put their membership and integrity first. You're not doing that. Your steadfast refusal to rise above your own political needs and put the interest of the public first is a serious breach of the integrity of your office. You are not above the law, Premier.

Will you do the honourable thing and ask Miss Sorbara and Mr. Lougheed to step down from their staff positions until the bribery investigation is complete?

Hon. Yasir Naqvi: Speaker, the member is absolutely correct: No one is above the law, nor is this a kangaroo court. We need to make sure that there's a process in place, and we should respect that process. The process dictates that people in our system are innocent until they are proven guilty. They are not to be judged as the members opposite are trying to judge certain individuals when not even one criminal charge has been laid.

I'll read again what the Chief Electoral Officer said in his own ruling: "I am neither deciding to prosecute a matter nor determining anyone's guilt or innocence. These decisions are respectively for prosecutors and judges."

I ask the members opposite to let those prosecutors and judges do their jobs.

BY-ELECTION IN SUDBURY

Mr. Paul Miller: My question is to the Premier. Can the Premier tell us how many of the Premier's staff and inner circle—including the Deputy Premier herself, who seems to know about your conversations with your soul—have been interviewed by the OPP anti-rackets division?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Minister of Community Safety and Correctional Services.

Hon. Yasir Naqvi: Again, I remind the member opposite that we should not be talking about a live police investigation in the House. We should focus on issues

that are important to the people of Ontario. That is the responsibility that has been given to us. The Chief Electoral Officer has been very, very clear that he's making no judgment in terms of innocence or guilt of any individual, and he has asked, in his report, that we let the prosecutors and judges do their jobs.

I respectfully and humbly ask all members to respect the ruling of the Chief Electoral Officer, to respect the work that the OPP is doing in that regard and not meddle in a live police investigation.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Paul Miller: The Premier keeps insisting that she won't answer questions because there's a police investigation ongoing. Who on the Premier's staff and who at the Ontario Liberal Party have the police requested interviews with, and who has been interviewed?

I'm having visions: gas plants, Ornge, eHealth. I'm having visions. It's like an instant replay, Speaker. Here we go again. This is scandal number seven. Keep going, guys. You're doing a great job.

Hon. Yasir Naqvi: Again, I think the member should be focusing his vision on minimum wage. He should be focusing his vision on supporting personal support workers. He should be focusing his vision on supporting our child care workers. He should be focusing his vision on building good public transit. He should be focusing his vision on making sure that there are good-paying jobs in our communities. That is what Ontarians have asked us to work on. It's a very sad day when we see that even the NDP has stooped so low that they focus on just scandalmongering.

We know there's a process that is ongoing. We know there is a live police investigation. We should respect that police investigation and let the OPP do their work.

1130

YOUTH EMPLOYMENT

Mrs. Kathryn McGarry: My question is for the Minister of Natural Resources and Forestry. It's a very important policy question, one that I know that my constituents in Cambridge care very deeply about.

This is the time of year that Ontario's secondary and post-secondary students look for job opportunities for the summer ahead. In previous years, the Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry has been a leading ministry for providing summer jobs to youth in Ontario. Early last year, my own son Alex applied for such a position and spent his spring and summer as a fire ranger.

Youth in my riding in Cambridge are looking to learn new skills and develop real employment experience that they can carry with them into the workplace. However, many youth are concerned about whether or not they'll be able to find a summer job this year.

Mr. Speaker, through you to the minister, would the minister please inform the House whether or not his ministry will again be hiring young people this summer?

Hon. Bill Mauro: I want to thank the member from Cambridge for giving me an opportunity to highlight this.

Last week, in Thunder Bay, I was fortunate to be part of an event out at a Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry fire base, where we were able to highlight for students who are looking for summer job opportunities MNRF's program. Once again, this year we'll be offering somewhere in the neighbourhood of 1,900 summer youth employment opportunities right across the province.

Speaker, it's important to note that those job opportunities will be in 30 different communities. They're in close proximity to 30 different communities right across the province of Ontario. I highlight for my northern colleagues and friends that about 800 of that 1,900 will be in northern Ontario.

One of the programs is a youth stewardship program, Speaker. Given our ministry's commitment to biodiversity, to wetlands and invasive species, it's very important work that they're doing as well.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mrs. Kathryn McGarry: Thank you to the minister for his response and his commitment to providing summer jobs to youth in Ontario.

I know from knocking on doors in Cambridge and North Dumfries that many parents and youth were disappointed when the opposition Conservatives voted against the Youth Jobs Strategy in 2013, so they are happy to hear that our government remains committed to helping young people find summer jobs.

I also know that parents and young people want to find summer youth employment that provides meaningful experience, builds their resumés and gives them real hands-on experience in a field of work that interests them.

Many youth in my riding are looking for summer jobs that move them out from behind a desk, out of the offices and into Ontario's vast natural environment.

Speaker, again through you, will the minister please tell this House how his ministry is providing summer job opportunities that provide hands-on experience in Ontario's great outdoors?

Hon. Bill Mauro: Once again, I thank the member from Cambridge for the question. Speaker, I really want to highlight one of the programs that we offer through summer employment. It's called the First Nations Natural Resources Youth Employment Program. Confederation College works to provide training. They're employed through MNR.

I had an opportunity to go to that graduation ceremony last summer down at Marina Park in Thunder Bay. When I listened to those young men and women speak at that graduation ceremony, I can tell you that it was very emotional and very moving. We actually witnessed, I would say—and I'm not overstating it at all—young men and women, who, through this work experience, had just participated in something that for them was very transformative. I don't think I'm overstating it at all.

This program had availed them of an opportunity to truly engage in something that they felt incredibly passionate about. I think people who work in MNRF take that with them no matter what their jobs are. Even if they don't stay in MNRF, when they leave this ministry, they

have learned life skills and have had great mentorship opportunities.

This particular program and opportunity for me was wonderful. I want to thank the college, John Hatton from the college and MNRF for providing that opportunity through this particular program for aboriginal youth.

BY-ELECTION IN SUDBURY

Mr. Jim McDonell: To the Premier: Three senior OPPA members came under investigation and did the right thing by stepping aside and ensuring that they can't influence the process that's being investigated.

Your deputy chief of staff, Pat Sorbara, is also under investigation, for bribery, but continues to have access to your office, your staff, ministers and civil servants, influencing public policy. By refusing to show leadership in your own office, you are dragging your own office and our democracy into the muck.

Premier, when will you end this travesty and remove Pat Sorbara and Gerry Lougheed Jr. from their positions until the investigation—

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

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Minister of Community Safety and Correctional Services.

Hon. Yasir Naqvi: I thank the member opposite for the question. Again, if he's going to ask the same question that all his colleagues have asked over question period, he'll get the same answer, which is that this is a live police matter and it's being investigated by the police and we should respect that.

I know the member's community, Stormont–Dundas–South Glengarry, very well, and I know that there are some important issues in his community. I'm surprised that the member opposite is not focusing on talking about jobs in his community. I know the previous member, Jim Brownell, who was a great member of this Legislature, would not waste any time but to talk about his own community. It's sad to see that the member opposite, when he had the opportunity through a question, is not doing that.

This is a police matter, Speaker. We should respect that. We should let them do their job. As the Premier said again and again, she is co-operating. I think that's the proper course, and we should focus back on issues that are important to our respective communities.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary.

Mr. Jim McDonell: My residents of Stormont–Dundas–South Glengarry want a government that follows the law.

In due time, we will know why the RCMP executed a search warrant at the OPPA. But you have known for months that your staff is under investigation for bribery. In Canada's Criminal Code, bribery includes public appointments and is punishable by up to 14 years in prison. Everyone but you realizes that this is a serious crime, yet you and your government stand by two Liberal operatives who are on tape apparently doing just that.

When will you show some leadership in your own office and remove the stench of bribery by having Pat Sorbara and Gerry Lougheed Jr. step aside until the investigation is complete?

Hon. Yasir Naqvi: I'm sure the member opposite knows the law of the land is that you're presumed innocent until found guilty.

In this case, Speaker, there have been no charges laid. The Chief Electoral Officer is absolutely clear that he's not making any determination of innocence or guilt, and he's actually asking all of us to respect the process and let the prosecutors and judges do their work.

The members opposite should also respect the law and let the police do their work.

VISITORS

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The Minister of the Environment and Climate Change on a point of order.

Hon. Glen R. Murray: Just a quick point of order: Our page captain today—Inaya's parents and her family are here. That's Sasdia, Yousaf, Iman—and it was Minal who was heckling the opposition earlier.

DEFERRED VOTES

INTERIM SUPPLY

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): We have a deferred vote on a motion for interim supply.

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

The division bells rang from 1137 to 1142.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Would all members please take their seats.

On March 9, Mr. Naqvi moved that the Minister of Finance be authorized to pay the salaries of the civil servants and other necessary payments pending the voting of supply for the period commencing April 1, 2015, and ending on September 30, 2015, such payments to be charged through the proper appropriation for the 2015-16 fiscal year following the voting of supply.

All those in favour, please rise one at a time and be recognized by the Clerk.

Ayes

Albanese, Laura	Flynn, Kevin Daniel	Meilleur, Madeleine
Anderson, Granville	Fraser, John	Milczyn, Peter Z.
Baker, Yvan	Gravelle, Michael	Murray, Glen R.
Balkissoon, Bas	Hoggarth, Ann	Naidoo-Harris, Indira
Ballard, Chris	Hoskins, Eric	Naqvi, Yasir
Berardinetti, Lorenzo	Hunter, Mitzie	Oraziotti, David
Bradley, James J.	Jaczek, Helena	Potts, Arthur
Chiarelli, Bob	Kiwala, Sophie	Qaadri, Shafiq
Colle, Mike	Kwinter, Monte	Rinaldi, Lou
Coteau, Michael	Lalonde, Marie-France	Sandals, Liz
Crack, Grant	Leal, Jeff	Sergio, Mario
Damerla, Dipika	Mangat, Amrit	Sousa, Charles
Del Duca, Steven	Martins, Cristina	Takhar, Harinder S.
Delaney, Bob	Matthews, Deborah	Thibeault, Glenn
Dhillon, Vic	Mauro, Bill	Vernile, Daiene
Dickson, Joe	McGarry, Kathryn	Wong, Soo
Dong, Han	McMahon, Eleanor	Wynne, Kathleen O.
Duguid, Brad	McMeekin, Ted	Zimmer, David

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): All those opposed, please rise one at a time and be recognized by the Clerk.

Nays

Armstrong, Teresa J.	Hardeman, Ernie	Nicholls, Rick
Bailey, Robert	Harris, Michael	Pettapiece, Randy
Bisson, Gilles	Hatfield, Percy	Sattler, Peggy
Clark, Steve	Hillier, Randy	Scott, Laurie
DiNovo, Cheri	Horwath, Andrea	Singh, Jagmeet
Dunlop, Garfield	Jones, Sylvia	Smith, Todd
Fedeli, Victor	Mantha, Michael	Tabuns, Peter
Fife, Catherine	Martow, Gila	Taylor, Monique
Forster, Cindy	McDonnell, Jim	Vanthof, John
French, Jennifer K.	Miller, Norm	Walker, Bill
Gates, Wayne	Miller, Paul	Yakabuski, John
Gélinas, France	Munro, Julia	Yurek, Jeff
Gretzky, Lisa	Natyshak, Taras	

The Clerk of the Assembly (Ms. Deborah Deller): The ayes are 54; the nays are 38.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I declare the motion carried.

Motion agreed to.

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

The House recessed from 1146 to 1500.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

ROMAN CATHOLIC SCHOOLS

Mr. Garfield Dunlop: On behalf of the PC caucus, I'd like to take this opportunity today to welcome, basically, Catholic education day here at Queen's Park. There has been a strong lobby today and there is also a reception this afternoon at 5:30 down in the legislative dining room.

I just wanted to read a statement that came with the invitation from the Catholic education stakeholders. It says here: "Catholic schools have been a part of Ontario's communities for over 170 years. They are an integral part of Ontario's public education system, helping millions of students to achieve their full spiritual, academic, physical and emotional potential. Catholic schools respond to the aspirations and goals of approximately one third of the Ontario electorate and we are grateful for the publicly stated support of all three of Ontario's political parties."

That was signed by Thomas Cardinal Collins of the Catholic diocese of Ontario, Kathy Burtnik of the Ontario Catholic School Trustees' Association, and James Ryan from OECTA.

I also want to say at this point that I had an opportunity in my riding over the last few years, until his passing, to work with Father Carl Matthews, who was a priest, of course. He worked diligently on getting full funding for Catholic education back in the 1980s. He became an inspiration to me and also somewhat of a mentor to me on Catholic education.

I just want to say, on behalf of our caucus, welcome to everyone here today. I hope they take part in the activities. I hope people have an opportunity to meet with their Catholic representatives, because they do provide a really great option for education here in the province of Ontario.

GO TRANSIT

Mr. Wayne Gates: Mr. Speaker, thank you for allowing me to speak today. I'm always happy to rise in the House and talk about Niagara.

Since his election, the new regional chair, Alan Caslin, has advocated for one of the biggest issues in my riding: bringing a two-way, daily GO train all the way to Niagara Falls. I'm happy to work with all the regional councillors—those who are returning and those who are new—to make a daily GO train to Niagara a reality. I'm happy to say that after the last municipal election we once again have a united Niagara. It isn't often you can get 12 municipalities to agree on anything, but in Niagara we've done it.

I'd also like to personally thank the mayors in my riding—Lord Mayor of Niagara-on-the-Lake Pat Darte, Mayor Jim Diodati of Niagara Falls, and Mayor Wayne Redekop of Fort Erie—for their continued support to bring a GO train to Niagara. It doesn't matter what area they represent, who they represent or what political party they side with: Everyone agrees we need a GO train from Toronto to Niagara Falls.

I invite everyone here and watching at home to join us this Friday, March 13—Friday the 13th—at 11:30 in Niagara Falls to kick off a new public campaign to support bringing a GO train to Niagara. The Premier said that GO to Niagara was a high priority. The member from St. Catharines and caucus chair of the Liberal Party said that he could see it coming in 2015. The people of Niagara want it in 2015. Let's bring the GO train all the way to Niagara Falls in 2015.

JAG PILLAY

Ms. Indira Naidoo-Harris: It is with a heavy heart that I rise today in memory of a dear friend who recently passed away, a selfless social advocate and a true giant in the South African Canadian community. Jag Pillay, or Uncle Jags, as he was affectionately known by those close to him, was a devoted father to his children Kamerni and Anisha, and a doting grandfather to Spenser, but he was much more than that. He spent his entire life working tirelessly for others.

He was one of the founding members of the Nirvana Cultural Society and the Canadian African national congress of South Africa, and he played a central role in supporting numerous organizations and social causes throughout the world, including the Stephen Lewis Foundation, Princess Margaret hospital, Nelson Mandela Children's Fund, organ transplant research in Toronto, earthquake relief in Pakistan and Haiti, and victims of the Bhopal gas tragedy in India. The list goes on.

The defining quality about Jags is that he was selfless, always working hard for others. He taught me so much about what it means to help others. Perhaps the most incredible thing about him was his humility. He never sought public recognition or personal gain for his efforts. He was a silent warrior, a quiet crusader and an unspoken hero. His only priority was to help others in any way that he could.

The outpouring of support for Jags at his funeral last Saturday was overwhelming, and it was truly an honour to have been asked to take part in his service. Jag Pillay made the world a better place, and he leaves behind a legacy of leadership, compassion and kindness.

Uncle Jags will be greatly missed.

SARNIA LAMBTON CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

Mr. Robert Bailey: I rise today to inform the members of the Legislature that tomorrow at noon the Sarnia Lambton Chamber of Commerce will be hosting the much-anticipated Sarnia–Lambton Day reception at Queen's Park.

The Sarnia Lambton Chamber of Commerce is the area's most influential business advocacy group, representing over 1,000 businesses and over 17,000 employees. They have come to Queen's Park with innovative, made-in-Lambton solutions to some of Sarnia–Lambton and Ontario's biggest issues.

During meetings on March 10 and 11, they will be presenting ideas to members of this Legislature and of the government and opposition that will drive economic growth and prosperity in southwestern Ontario, ideas like growing Sarnia–Lambton's burgeoning bio industries, building the critical heavy-haul trade corridor, building the momentum for the Sarnia refinery Saber project, increasing technology commercialization and supporting Lambton College's centre for health education.

Though the ideas have been created in Sarnia–Lambton, if they are supported by this government and members of this Legislature, the spinoffs would provide all of Ontario with much-needed jobs, tax revenue and research.

I want to thank all the members of Sarnia–Lambton's delegation who have come to Queen's Park today for this very important work. Once again, I want to extend the invitation to all members and staff to join us tomorrow for Sarnia–Lambton Day at Queen's Park in rooms 228 and 230.

BOWL FOR KIDS SAKE

Mrs. Lisa Gretzky: Last weekend, I took part in the Big Brothers Big Sisters Bowl for Kids Sake in my riding of Windsor West. Big Brother Big Sisters of Windsor Essex hosts this event to raise money to support their programming for young people in our community. In 2014, this event included 800 bowlers and raised over

\$52,000 to support five youth mentoring programs coordinated by Big Brothers Big Sisters.

At this year's event, I was proud to see so many others in our community taking part, including educators from OSSTF. My team, aptly named Windsor West Orange Crush, was joined by Windsor corrections officers from OPSEU Local 135. Although they out-fundraised me, I think I out-bowled their captain and Local president Randy Simpraga. I was also glad to see our local fire-fighters come out and show their support.

I would like to add that these men and women put themselves at risk for us every day and yet still had the time to come out and support our community's youth on their night off. It's important that we continue to give these emergency responders the tools they need to do their job safely so they can return to their families and participate in community events like Bowl for Kids Sake.

Events like Big Brothers Big Sisters of Windsor Essex Bowl for Kids Sake are true community-building partners, and I would like to thank our community leaders for their ongoing support of this and similar events. I hope everyone in this chamber will come to Windsor and bowl with me next year, but—full disclosure, Mr. Speaker—I did bowl over 100.

INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY JOURNÉE INTERNATIONALE DE LA FEMME

Mrs. Marie-France Lalonde: International Women's Day is an opportunity to celebrate the successes and contributions of women all around the world in the past and present. On March 6, I was able to recognize five outstanding Orlean's women who have made significant contributions to our community.

Janet Gray is the chairwoman of the Canadian Association of Retired Persons, known as CARP, and serves as president of the Orlean's Women Business Connections and the Ottawa Women's Canadian Club.

Kathy O'Neill, vice-présidente, planification et services de soutien à l'Hôpital Montfort, est une chef de file dans la promotion de la santé et du bien-être des femmes et des jeunes filles au sein de la communauté d'Orléans.

1510

Laura Dudas is the long-time president of the Blackburn Hamlet Community Association, who has engaged women in the democratic process by running in last year's municipal elections.

Kathy Smart is a celebrated health icon and is known as North America's gluten-free expert, who has encouraged people to live and eat healthier.

Last but not least, Yasmine Fathers is the president of the Bradley Estates Community Association, where she advocates continuously for her neighbours.

Félicitations à toutes ces femmes extraordinaires. You exemplify the kindness, caring and commitment we want to see across our province.

UNIVERSITY LABOUR DISPUTE

Mrs. Julia Munro: I would like to extend my regrets that CUPE Local 3903, representing teaching assistants, graduate assistants and research assistants, voted against the latest offer by York University and will therefore remain on strike.

It is unfortunate that students and families, who are not at the negotiating table, will suffer from classes being dismissed while the strike persists. I understand that these families, some of whom are constituents of mine, rightfully have concerns, and have a lot at stake. When students apply for and attend university programs, they have no intention of seeing their studies delayed, and students are eager to complete the four years of study ahead of them.

Strikes such as the ones occurring now at York and at the University of Toronto make it difficult for students to get the most out of their post-secondary education. These strikes also have the unfortunate effect of tainting students' views of their educational institutions and their experiences attending those institutions.

It is my hope that the unions and universities can resolve these work-related issues as soon as possible so that students may resume their studies.

WORKPLACE MENTAL HEALTH

Ms. Eleanor McMahon: I rise in the House today to speak to you about mental health in the workplace.

We know that one in five Ontarians will be diagnosed with a mental illness in their lifetime. Further, the annual cost of mental illness and addictions in Ontario is estimated to be approximately \$40 billion.

The chamber of commerce in my riding of Burlington understands this issue and has shown great leadership with a policy resolution to the Ontario Chamber of Commerce on workplace mental health. Many members of the chamber are already showing leadership in this area too, demonstrating that promotion, prevention and early interventions lead to a positive return on investment.

Last Friday, March 6, together with the Minister of Labour, we hosted a round table on workplace mental health at the Burlington chamber to engage with companies that have introduced strong workplace mental health programs for their employees and to draw upon their experiences. Leaders of businesses from all sizes—small consulting firms to Bell Canada—shared best practices for accommodation and prevention. Clinicians joined us too, as did our community foundation, which has ably highlighted this issue in its ongoing excellent work.

We heard from a representative at Cogeco about the role HR is playing to support mental wellness. We heard about Bell Canada's mission to build leaders within their company who can identify the signs of distress, start a conversation with an at-risk employee and access appropriate resources. We also heard about how the mental health dialogue is rapidly changing within the Halton Regional Police Service.

The CEO of the Ontario Psychological Association, here today for a Queen's Park reception, shared with us

the steps they are taking with business leaders and front-line personnel, as well.

This round table was not the first conversation we've had on the topic of mental health, nor will it be the last. I look forward to continuing the work we've started together to make positive changes to workplace mental health, and I thank all of the leaders in my riding for their leadership on this issue.

INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY

Ms. Daiene Vernile: In my riding of Kitchener Centre, we staged our first International Women's Day event this past Friday. The theme for this year, as mandated by the United Nations, was "Make It Happen," so we invited three very successful women in our community to share with those who gathered how they make it happen every day. I asked each guest to tell us about their big life goals and who inspired them.

Our first speaker was Sara Casselman, operations manager at the Sexual Assault Support Centre of Waterloo Region. Sara is at the front line of public service, advocating for assault victims.

Meghan Hennessey, only in her late 20s, was very inspiring to the young women who attended. She works at a high-tech company that produces robots in Kitchener. With relatively few women employed in the tech field, Meghan showed us the possibilities for the future.

Karen Redman is a well-known local public figure. As Kitchener Centre's first elected female federal member of Parliament, Karen is now serving on regional council, sharing her know-how and continuing to serve our community. She also encouraged us to think big, to not be afraid to make lofty goals and to see the value in reaching out to mentors.

Mr. Speaker, I owe a huge thanks to my staff—Shelly, Carolyn, Alice and Tony—who made this event happen. Next year, we hope to stage an even bigger and better International Women's Day event in Kitchener Centre—and hopefully I'll have my full voice then.

REPORTS BY COMMITTEES

STANDING COMMITTEE ON GOVERNMENT AGENCIES

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I beg to inform the House that today the Clerk received the report on intended appointments dated March 10, 2015, of the Standing Committee on Government Agencies.

Pursuant to standing order 108(f)(9), the report is deemed to be adopted by the House.

Report deemed adopted.

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

990046 ONTARIO INC. ACT, 2015

Mr. Natyshak moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill Pr16, An Act to revive 990046 Ontario Inc.

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

First reading agreed to.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Pursuant to standing order 86, this bill stands referred to the Standing Committee on Regulations and Private Bills.

PETITIONS

DOG OWNERSHIP

Mr. Todd Smith: I have a healthy pile of petitions here.

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas aggressive dogs are found among all breeds and mixed breeds; and

“Whereas breed-specific legislation has been shown to be an expensive and ineffective approach to dog bite prevention; and

“Whereas problem dog owners are best dealt with through education, training and legislation encouraging responsible behaviour;

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

“To repeal the breed-specific sections of the Dog Owners’ Liability Act (2005) and any related acts, and instead implement legislation that encourages responsible ownership of all dog breeds and types.”

I will sign this and send it to the table with page Victoria.

MISSING PERSONS

Ms. Catherine Fife: “To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas Ontario does not have missing persons legislation; and

“Whereas police are not able to conduct a thorough investigation upon receipt of a missing person report where criminal activity is not considered the cause; and

“Whereas this impedes investigators in determining the status and possibly the location of missing persons; and

“Whereas this legislation exists and is effective in other provinces; and

“Whereas negotiating rights to safety that do not violate rights to privacy has been a challenge in establishing missing persons law;

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

“We ask that the Attorney General’s office work with the office of the privacy commissioner to implement missing persons legislation that grants investigators the opportunity to apply for permissions to access information that will assist in determining the safety or whereabouts of missing persons for whom criminal activity is not considered the cause.”

It’s my pleasure to affix my signature and give this petition to page Andrew.

1520

WATER FLUORIDATION

Mrs. Kathryn McGarry: I have a petition addressed to the Ontario Legislative Assembly.

“Whereas fluoride is a mineral that exists naturally in virtually all water supplies, even the ocean; and

“Whereas scientific studies conducted during the past 70 years have consistently shown that the fluoridation of community water supplies is a safe and effective means of preventing dental decay, and is a public health measure endorsed by more than 90 national and international health organizations; and

“Whereas dental decay is the second-most frequent condition suffered by children, and is one of the leading causes of absences from school; and

“Whereas Health Canada has determined that the optimal concentration of fluoride in municipal drinking water for dental health is 0.7 mg/L, providing optimal dental health benefits, and well below the maximum acceptable concentrations; and

“Whereas the decision to add fluoride to municipal drinking water is a patchwork of individual choices across Ontario, with municipal councils often vulnerable to the influence of misinformation, and studies of questionable or no scientific merit;

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

“That the ministries of the government of Ontario adopt the number one recommendation made by the Ontario Chief Medical Officer of Health in a 2012 report on oral health in Ontario, and amend all applicable legislation and regulations to make the fluoridation of municipal drinking water mandatory in all municipal water systems across the province of Ontario.”

I agree with the petition, affix my signature and give it to page Eileen to bring forward.

REALTORS

Mr. Victor Fedeli: “To the Legislative Assembly”—
Interjection.

Mr. Victor Fedeli: No, no, the yellow ties can stay.
Interjection.

Mr. Victor Fedeli: No, I would never do that.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Carry on.

Mr. Victor Fedeli: It’s about wind turbines.

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas Ontario real estate salespeople are prevented by the Real Estate and Business Brokers Act, 2002 from incorporating their businesses through a personal real estate corporation; and

“Whereas other regulated professions, including chartered accountants, lawyers, health professionals, social workers, mortgage brokers, insurance agents, architects and engineers, can all form personal corporations; and

“Whereas permitting real estate salespeople to incorporate would create jobs and increase government revenue;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to pass the Tax Fairness for Realtors Act, 2015 and give real estate professionals in Ontario the ability to form personal real estate corporations.”

I agree with this, sign my name and give it to page Rachel.

DOG OWNERSHIP

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: “To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas aggressive dogs are found among all breeds and mixed breeds; and

“Whereas breed-specific legislation has been shown to be an expensive and ineffective approach to dog bite prevention; and

“Whereas problem dog owners are best dealt with through education, training and legislation encouraging responsible behaviour;

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

“To repeal the breed-specific sections of the Dog Owners’ Liability Act (2005) and any related acts, and to instead implement legislation that encourages responsible ownership of all dog breeds and types.”

Of course, I agree. On behalf of the 1,000 dogs or more that have been euthanized because of this through no fault of their own—

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

WATER FLUORIDATION

Ms. Indira Naidoo-Harris: I have a petition here addressed to the Ontario Legislative Assembly. It’s concerning “Fluoridate All Ontario Drinking Water.

“Whereas fluoride is a mineral that exists naturally in virtually all water supplies, even the ocean; and

“Whereas scientific studies conducted during the past 70 years have consistently shown that the fluoridation of community water supplies is a safe and effective means of preventing dental decay, and is a public health measure endorsed by more than 90 national and international health organizations; and

“Whereas dental decay is the second-most frequent condition suffered by children, and is one of the leading causes of absences from school; and

“Whereas Health Canada has determined that the optimal concentration of fluoride in municipal drinking water for dental health is 0.7 mg/L, providing optimal dental health benefits, and well below the maximum acceptable concentrations; and

“Whereas the decision to add fluoride to municipal drinking water is a patchwork of individual choices across Ontario, with municipal councils often vulnerable

to the influence of misinformation, and studies of questionable or no scientific merit;

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

“That the ministries of the government of Ontario adopt the number one recommendation made by the Ontario Chief Medical Officer of Health in a 2012 report on oral health in Ontario, and amend all applicable legislation and regulations to make the fluoridation of municipal drinking water mandatory in all municipal water systems across the province of Ontario.”

I support this petition, and I will sign it and hand it over to page Morgan.

HUNTING

Mr. Jeff Yurek: “To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas the greater hunting community disagrees with the decision made by the Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry ... to close ‘McGoogan Tract’ for hunting purposes;

“Whereas the MNRF did not consult with the public/hunting community on their decision to close this piece of crown land;

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

“To reopen ‘McGoogan Tract’ to allow hunters in the community to hunt on this piece of crown land during the hunting season.”

I agree with this petition and affix my signature to it.

HOSPITAL SERVICES

Mrs. Lisa Gretzky: “To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“We request that the Legislative Assembly of Ontario keep the obstetrics unit open at Leamington District Memorial Hospital.”

This may be the shortest petition ever, but I fully support it and sign my name to it and give it to page Dhairya.

CREDIT UNIONS

Mrs. Kathryn McGarry: I have another petition addressed to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

“Whereas Credit Unions of Ontario support our 1.3 million members across Ontario through loans to small businesses to start up, grow and create jobs, help families to buy homes and assist their communities with charitable investments and volunteering; and

“Whereas Credit Unions of Ontario want a level playing field so they can provide the same service to our members as other financial institutions and promote economic growth without relying on taxpayers’ resources;

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

“Support the strength and growth of credit unions to support the strength and growth of Ontario’s economy and create jobs in three ways:

—maintain current credit union provincial tax rates;

—show confidence in Ontario credit unions by increasing credit union-funded deposit insurance limits to a minimum of \$250,000;

—allow credit unions to diversify by allowing Ontario credit unions to own 100% of subsidiaries.”

Speaker, I agree with the petition, affix my name and give it to page William to bring forward.

HYDRO RATES

Mr. Todd Smith: “To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas the Auditor General of Ontario defines the global adjustment charge on hydro bills as ‘mostly consisting of the difference between the market price and the price paid to generators as set by the board for OPG or under contract with the government or the OPA’; and

“Whereas the Auditor General says the global adjustment has been rising steadily over the last few years and is expected to continue to rise from \$700 million (prior to the 2009 passage of the Green Energy Act) to \$8.1 billion by 2014; and

“Whereas the Liberal government’s 2010 fall economic statement stated that hydro bills are expected to rise 46% by 2015, and that new renewable power generation would account for 56% of that increase; and

“Whereas small to mid-sized businesses across Ontario are seeing the global adjustment portion of their monthly hydro bills increase significantly to the point that it is now larger than the actual energy portion of their bills; and

“Whereas many of those businesses are now delaying investment or hiring, or both, and considering either closing or moving outside of the province of Ontario as a result of delivered-to-market industrial energy rates that are now the highest in North America;

“We, the undersigned, do hereby petition the government of Ontario to reverse course on its expensive energy policy by cancelling the feed-in tariff ... subsidies and treating Ontario’s energy as an economic development tool so that it once again is a competitive advantage for Ontario in retaining and attracting jobs and investment.”

Thank you, Speaker. I’ll sign this and send it to the table with Fardin.

HOSPITAL SERVICES

Mr. Percy Hatfield: I too have one of those short petitions.

“We request that the Legislative Assembly of Ontario keep the obstetrics unit open at Leamington District Memorial Hospital.”

I fully agree with this petition. I will sign it and give it to page Madison to take up to the Clerk.

WATER FLUORIDATION

Mrs. Kathryn McGarry: I have another petition to the Ontario Legislative Assembly about fluoridating all Ontario drinking water. It has been read out a couple of times. I just found this, so I’m going to just paraphrase it quickly.

“Whereas fluoride is a mineral that exists naturally in virtually all water supplies, even the ocean; and

“Whereas scientific studies conducted during the past 70 years have consistently shown that the fluoridation of community water supplies is a safe and effective means of preventing dental decay, and is a public health measure endorsed by more than 90 national and international health organizations; and

“Whereas dental decay is the second-most frequent condition suffered by children, and is one of the leading causes of absences from school; and

“Whereas Health Canada has determined that the optimal concentration of fluoride in municipal drinking water for dental health is 0.7 mg/L, providing optimal dental health benefits, and well below the maximum acceptable concentrations; and

1530

“Whereas the decision to add fluoride to municipal drinking water is a patchwork of individual choices across Ontario, with municipal councils often vulnerable to the influence of misinformation, and studies of questionable or no scientific merit;

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

“That the ministries of the government of Ontario adopt the number one recommendation made by the Ontario Chief Medical Officer of Health in a 2012 report on oral health in Ontario, and amend all applicable legislation and regulations to make the fluoridation of municipal drinking water mandatory in all municipal water systems across the province of Ontario.”

I agree with this petition, sign my name and give it to page Andrew to bring forward.

ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION

Mr. Ernie Hardeman: I have a petition here to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

“Whereas the purpose of Ontario’s Environmental Protection Act (EPA) is to ‘provide for the protection and conservation of the natural environment.’ RSO 1990, c. E.19, s. 3.; and

“Whereas ‘all landfills will eventually release leachate to the surrounding environment and therefore all landfills will have some impact on the water quality of the local ecosystem.’—Threats to Sources of Drinking Water and Aquatic Health in Canada;

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

“That section 27 of the EPA should be reviewed and amended immediately to prohibit the establishment of new or expanded landfills at fractured bedrock sites and

other hydrogeologically unsuitable locations within the province of Ontario.”

I affix my signature as I agree with this petition.

LGBT CONVERSION THERAPY

Ms. Catherine Fife: “To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas in 2013 the fifth edition of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-5) removed transgender and gender non-conforming identities from the mental disorders category;

“Whereas LGBT youth face 14 times the risk of suicide compared to their heterosexual peers and 77% of trans respondents in an Ontario-based survey had seriously considered suicide with 45% having already attempted suicide;

“Whereas an Ontario study found that transgender youth aged 16-24 have a 93% lower suicide rate when they feel supported by their parents in the expression of their gender identity;

“Whereas LGBT conversion therapy seeks to prohibit gender and sexual orientation expression, has no professional standards or guidelines in how it is practised and is condemned by all major professional associations of health care providers; and

“Whereas Ontario’s Ministry of Health currently funds LGBT conversion therapy through OHIP;

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

“That the Ministry of Health immediately cease funding all known forms of conversion therapy.”

It’s my pleasure to affix my signature and give this to page Riley.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

SUPPLY ACT, 2015

LOI DE CRÉDITS DE 2015

Mr. Bradley, on behalf of Ms. Matthews, moved second reading of the following bill:

Bill 72, An Act to authorize the expenditure of certain amounts for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2015 / Projet de loi 72, Loi autorisant l’utilisation de certaines sommes pour l’exercice se terminant le 31 mars 2015.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further debate?

Hon. James J. Bradley: I’m delighted to be here today to discuss the Supply Act for the 2014-15 fiscal year. I will be sharing my time with the parliamentary assistant for the Treasury Board Secretariat, the member for Etobicoke Centre.

The Supply Act, if passed, will give the Ontario government the legal spending authority to finance its programs and honour its commitments for the remainder of this fiscal year. Passage of the Supply Act would

constitute the final approval by this assembly of government and legislative office program spending for the fiscal year that will close at the end of this month.

Up to this point in the current fiscal cycle, temporary spending authority for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2015, has been provided through the Interim Appropriation for 2014-2015 Act, 2014. Pending the Legislature’s vote, the enactment of this Supply Act would repeal and replace this short-term legislation. The Supply Act would be deemed to have come into force on April 1, 2014, which was the start of the current fiscal year, and it will be in effect until April 1, 2015, when fiscal 2015-16 actually begins.

Speaker, it is very important to note that the Supply Act does not authorize any new expenditures whatsoever. All expenditures incurred under the Supply Act would be in accordance with the 2014-15 estimates.

The estimates set out a comprehensive account of the government’s intended expenditures for the fiscal year and include details of the spending plans that were presented in our 2014 budget.

To recap, last week the Legislature gave its concurrence to the estimates for fiscal 2014-15. In doing so, it approved the estimates of 10 ministries and offices that were selected for review by the Standing Committee on Estimates. The estimates for ministries that were not called to the standing committee and all legislative offices of the Ontario government received deemed concurrence.

So today, as we near the end of this current fiscal year, we turn our focus to the Supply Act. The Supply Act provides necessary legal spending authority for vital payments made to institutions and individuals, such as hospitals, schools, municipalities and vulnerable people.

I stress again: This is not about approving new spending. It is about providing authority for the government to finance its programs and honour its commitments. I hope the members of this House will join me in supporting Bill 72, the Supply Act.

Now I yield the floor to the member for Etobicoke Centre, whom you’ll have to recognize.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further debate? I recognize the member from Nipissing.

Hon. James J. Bradley: I said I was sharing.

Mr. John Yakabuski: It doesn’t work like that. It’s a rotational thing.

Mr. Victor Fedeli: Thank you, Speaker, for the opportunity to speak to this. When we spoke yesterday for 10 minutes, we talked about all of the various rating agencies and organizations that are very critical of the government of Ontario’s financial position. In fact, I spoke yesterday about the chamber of commerce document entitled How Bad Is It? When you get a document entitled How Bad Is It? you must presume it is pretty bad.

The Canadian Federation of Independent Business weighed in; the Bank of Canada weighed in; the Conference Board of Canada—all of these organizations have talked about how this government’s numbers are simply

wrong, but no organization hit home even more than the government themselves did, Speaker. Only four months after passing their budget, they had to come back to the Legislature and confess that they were off by \$500 million. Speaker, in four months, their budget was off by half a billion dollars.

What I wanted to talk about today is: the consequences of debt and deficit here in Ontario and the fact that there is a bill here that wants to go forward. But let's talk about the consequences of not being able to balance your budget.

I'm going to talk specifically at first about my hometown of North Bay and my riding of Nipissing. I'm going to quote from a couple of our local newspaper articles, where Nipissing University had some layoffs this year. In fact, President Mike DeGagné said that round one of the layoffs affected the administration side of the university; they let 16 people go at Nipissing University because this government can't balance their budget. When you wonder about debt and deficit—those aren't very sexy topics, but debt and deficit have very real consequences in each and every one of our homes, and to these 16 people at Nipissing University—and I know all of them. One of them who was there just got her 25-year pin. She's now home.

1540

That was followed by round two at the university. It's 22 professors at Nipissing University who are now gone; 22 professors gone. So here we go, Speaker, with a total of 38 people at Nipissing University gone. This is one university in my hometown.

Let me talk a little bit about the hospital, the front-line workers who are now gone from the North Bay Regional Health Centre. Let's talk about—this is all very recent—the 94 full-time staff at our North Bay Regional Health Centre who are gone: 54 RPNs, 54 nurses, two pharmacy techs, four secretarial staff, two health-record typists, one material management aide, eight ward clerks, two operating-room attendants, nine distribution attendants, three environmental services attendants, one support services worker, one linen worker, one hairdresser—so, Speaker, there's no hairdresser left for the long-term psychiatric patients—one payroll assistant, one switchboard operator, one buyer and one accounts payable clerk. So 94 full-time staff are gone from our hospital.

Also, 34 part-time staff are gone. Over 100 men and women are gone: 14 RPNs, 13 public support workers, two pharmacy techs, two MDRD techs, a support services worker, another hairdresser and a secretary. That's just in North Bay, where we've now got 128 fewer people, front-line health care workers who are no longer working at North Bay Regional Health Centre.

But it didn't just hit my riding and North Bay. The fact is that the cuts are happening in Ontario's hospitals right across the province, and they're devastating. These are front-line health care workers. The depths of the cuts at this point is truly shocking.

In New Liskeard, in the late fall it was made public that the operating room would be closed 50% of the time,

and 18,000 hours per year of nursing care were cut. In Timmins, the hospital is cutting 26 of its remaining beds. That's 16%, or one in every six beds, in Timmins hospital cut, as well as physio and 40 staff positions. We're talking front-line care workers here. In the Soo: 50 hospital beds and 12,500 hours of nursing care in December. We heard that at the pre-budget consultations. In December, all of the remaining beds in the Penetanguishene hospital were cut and closed.

This is what's happening under this Liberal government because they don't know how to balance a chequebook. They don't know how to control their debt and deficit. They say one thing, but they do the other.

Speaker, we've heard it through the gas plants scandal, we heard it in the MaRS fiasco, we heard it in the Ornge debacle, and we're hearing it in the Sudbury bribery scandal. They say one thing and do the other. They said there would be no changes. But in Georgian Bay General Hospital, which is the amalgamation of Penetanguishene and Midland, 36 complex continuing care rehab and palliative beds were cut. That's 30% of the remaining hospital beds, or one third, being closed down, despite the fact that those hospitals were already at 100% capacity. It sounds a lot like my town of North Bay, where this brand new hospital—we're shutting 60 beds. That's because the Liberal government cannot balance their budget.

These are the consequences in the day-to-day lives of people of cutting front-line health care. In December, a unit at the Charlotte Eleanor Englehart Hospital in Petrolia was closed down. In the fall, the Huron Perth Healthcare Alliance—that's Stratford, Seaforth, Clinton and St. Marys—closed 17 beds across the alliance.

Recently we heard the member from Quinte talking about the devastating cuts at Quinte Health Centre. They lost 58 full-time and part-time RNs.

These aren't the only cuts; these are only the cuts that have been announced in the last couple of months, the last two or three months. That's what we're hearing because this government cannot balance their budget.

In the last year, the Scarborough Hospital made public its plans to close 20 surgical beds, two operating rooms, thousands of surgeries, outpatient clinics and tens of thousands of nursing hours. Major cuts are coming—

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Member from Newmarket-Aurora, come to order.

Mr. Victor Fedeli: I know the facts hurt, Speaker, but they're going to hear them.

The cuts at Winchester District Memorial Hospital—cuts happened all across in Renfrew, Perth—

Interjection.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Member from Newmarket-Aurora, second time.

Mr. Victor Fedeli: —Smiths Falls, Arnprior, all across southeastern Ontario. In addition, the Wingham hospital has also faced major cuts.

Speaker, this list can literally go on and on. I know in North Bay, the Near North District School Board had

eight people that they let go. And here we go: 60 beds closed in that hospital—60 beds. My mother was in that hospital two weeks ago, in the aisle for 12 hours waiting to get a room because these clowns are closing 60 beds.

Speaker, this is enough. I can't take any more from these guys.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): I would ask the member to withdraw.

Mr. Victor Fedeli: Withdraw—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Thank you.

Further debate?

Ms. Catherine Fife: It's my pleasure to stand up to speak to the supply motion. I will note on supply schedule A that we are discussing the expenditures of a little bit over \$87 billion. Schedule B is \$2.3 billion.

The thing that people don't really understand—because we're talking about the money today, which is good; we need to be talking about the money in this House—is that this is an expression of the expenditures that were listed and through the estimates committee. But it all comes back to budget 2014-15, and I think the story of budget 2014-15 is quite astounding.

I think that what happened during the last election, and we have to talk about it a little bit—

Hon. Glen R. Murray: You lost.

Ms. Catherine Fife: Oh, no. Actually, there's an interesting new level of arrogance on that side of the House which is really quite astounding. But the post-election evaluation of this budget—I think the Globe and Mail editorial from July 14 said it best: "Ontario's Budget: On Second Thought, This Might Hurt." It tells the story of what was really in this budget. It's on page 244, for the new members who didn't have to campaign on that. On page 244, there are 6% cuts in every ministry with the exception of health, the education sector—although there's a note on that, because of course \$500 million is also coming out of that ministry; the post-secondary and training sector, although my experience is the same as the member who spoke formerly. We are seeing cuts in staffing at Wilfrid Laurier and the University of Waterloo; these announcements came out today. We have never seen operational funding at such a low level for post-secondary education in the history of this province. It's coming out of the front-line services.

Interjections.

Ms. Catherine Fife: I understand: You don't want to hear it. Maybe you should go get a coffee or something, but I'm going to talk about the truth. I'm going to talk about what's actually in this budget that you supported and how it's impacting the people of this province. That is our job.

I'll go back to the \$600 million—the Auditor General found \$8.2 billion. We underestimated on the savings that could be found in this province because of pure incompetence on that side of the House—pure incompetence, Mr. Speaker.

1550

But the Globe and Mail actually goes on to say—

Interjections.

Ms. Catherine Fife: I don't know; maybe they're interested.

"The confusion comes from the gap—the very wide gap—between the Kathleen Wynne government's rhetoric surrounding the budget, and the actual budget."

What a huge wake-up call it is for the people of this province, because those cuts are playing themselves out. We're seeing it through the estimates, and we're seeing it through the expenditures that are before us today in the House.

"The actual budget, the Liberal government's multi-year spending plan, is an austerity budget." The Globe and Mail said it best. It is.

In fact, we know that austerity budgets don't work. They don't bring back the economy. They don't serve the people of this province. That story didn't get told during the election, but it is our job in this House to tell that story to the people of this province.

Interjections.

Ms. Catherine Fife: I understand they're very upset.

It's going to be a long three and a half years, don't you think? I sometimes like to quote musical artists just to keep myself engaged. As Mumford and Sons say, you're going to spend the next three and a half years trying to bite your own neck. Until you shift the way that you are spending and investing money in this province, this economy will not recover, because it's going to all the wrong places for all the wrong reasons and will not, with due respect, get this economy back on track.

Just to recap:

—6% cuts in every ministry;

—cuts to health care—the reduction in front-line nursing staff, which we know, through evidence and research, makes a difference in the quality of care;

—cuts to education and schools closing—that discussion paper for education is being travelled around the province. They're looking for \$500 million. Those cuts, obviously, are going to hurt our northern and rural communities the most. The enrolment is not there because the jobs aren't there. It's all connected. The jobs leave, the families leave, the schools close. We know that this is the truth.

The cuts to transportation and the closing of bus stations across the north is a huge issue. It's shameful how northern Ontario is being treated by this government.

Of course, in Kitchener-Waterloo, we're still waiting for that bullet train. I was shopping in the local Zehrs, and a lady came up to me and asked, "When are we going to get that bullet train?" I said, "We're lucky we've got GO service." We've been promised more efficient GO service for almost a decade now. The business community has come to the table with a strong plan for infrastructure investment for the rail. They've made the business case, the economic case, for that improved rail service. Anyway, they are still waiting for the fantastical bullet train. The plan today, which was actually revealed in the newspaper—

Mr. John Yakabuski: Who promised that bullet train, anyway?

Ms. Catherine Fife: It's not coming any time soon. Don't hold your breath.

Privatizing public hydro companies: It's astounding that this government is selling off this public asset. We know from history that this isn't a good plan. There's this myth of unlocking value. Really, you're looking for quick money now, and the rest of the province will pay the price down the line. Quite honestly, it's more than discouraging. We should know that privatization of public assets has not served this province well. It has not.

The opening of new corporate tax loopholes that don't create jobs—we know that they don't—but help wealthy companies: It's a news flash here. The banks are doing fine. They're making their money.

This budget obviously fails to address basic principles of tax fairness or consider any modest changes to the corporate tax rate. Even Mr. Regg Cohn put it in his article today: Why isn't this government considering revising the tax regime? He actually cites an increase in corporate taxes—a modest, modest—

Interjections.

Ms. Catherine Fife: I know that you guys won't go for it. The PCs would never vote for anything like that. They're very busy trying to convert themselves into this new cottony, kitteny version of the party. That's where they are right now.

The fact of the matter is, this province needs revenue. You need revenue. I keep going back to the Auditor General's report, which, for some reason, this Liberal government has completely discounted. I carry it around with me because I just need to remind you that she is an independent officer of this Legislature and she has identified some key areas where this government could save money. She has identified huge amounts of waste.

We knew this government was wasting money. We had a number of examples, like Ornge and eHealth, the gas plants, and just the whole entire energy file, actually. It's hard to imagine a more mismanaged ministry than the Ministry of Energy, which underpins almost all of the economic forecasts for the province. You need a strong and progressive energy file if you're going to attract growth, if you're going to ensure that productivity is actually a factor in the economic plan. The expendable income that Ontarians have—all they've seen is their bills going up.

The best, though, is that the 100,000 jobs that Don Drummond said—he was your hand-picked economist. He identified that this budget, the 2014-15 budget, which highlights 6% cuts in every ministry except for these five—although I must admit, though, when you tell hospitals that you're not going to cut and you're just going to leave their base funding as is, that is a cut.

Of course, in education, Hugh Mackenzie put out a report. He has identified—

Interjection.

Ms. Catherine Fife: Yes, there is more money in education, but it went to new priorities. It went to new pet projects. It went to new little ideas.

Hon. Jeff Leal: Is full-day kindergarten a pet project?

Ms. Catherine Fife: It didn't go to the core base funding of special education and literacy and numeracy.

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Order.

Ms. Catherine Fife: It certainly didn't go to some auditory benefits of the Minister of Rural Affairs.

Interjections.

Ms. Catherine Fife: Oh, they don't like hearing it. They don't like hearing it, and that's okay. That's fine.

Interjection.

Ms. Catherine Fife: Oh, yes. Don Drummond said—you would think mainstream media would have picked it up, but when Don Drummond, their hand-picked economist, said, "This budget is going to result in 100,000 fewer jobs in the province of Ontario"—

Interjections.

Ms. Catherine Fife: He said it. It's a matter of public record. You don't want to hear it. It doesn't matter, because we're actually seeing it play itself out. In fact, the entire privatization agenda of this government is undermining public services in the province of Ontario. People are not getting good value for it, and you don't like hearing it. The \$350-million data storage unit outside of Guelph—Mr. Speaker, this is really interesting. Privacy—maintaining our records—is a right. It's actually a right. It's a huge responsibility that the government has to actually ensure that that data is stored safely and correctly and protected.

Mr. Jagmeet Singh: And securely.

Ms. Catherine Fife: And securely. So this \$350-million state-of-the-art data storage centre was created. We paid for it. You paid for it; I paid for it; we all did. But it's only at 20% capacity because, somewhere along the line, this government decided that these two consulting companies could better protect our data, at a cost of \$50 million a year.

If you buy a hunting licence, Mr. Speaker, it is stored down somewhere in a private company in Ohio. This government—it was really funny. We sent out the press release about the debenture and the selling off of hydro lines, and somebody sent one back to me and said, "I think this government would like to sell the OPP." They'd sell the OPP if they could, because there are four criminal investigations going on about this government. If they could sell off the OPP, they would do it.

Mr. John Yakabuski: It must be unprecedented.

Ms. Catherine Fife: It's unprecedented. You're making Rob Ford look really good these days, I have to tell you.

1600

Instead of making life more fair, the 2014 budget is plowing ahead with new HST loopholes, just another example of where you could actually be saving money and generating revenue. Budgets are supposed to be moral documents. They are supposed to tell the story of the priorities of a government. That's essentially what they're supposed to do, and they are supposed to tell the people of this province where you're going to be investing money.

You know, 6% reductions in every ministry—I mean, it's right here in your budget, so you can't say it's not true. It is. I distinctly remember—I don't know; maybe you might remember, Mr. Speaker—that when Mike Harris made cuts of 5% in every ministry, they burned him in effigy on the front lawn of Queen's Park. And this government has been framing this budget as a progressive budget. Perhaps we didn't tell that story as well as we should have in the last election. Perhaps we didn't. I should have been just carrying this page, page 244, with me everywhere, and showing it to every person at every single door and saying, "This is the truth about this Liberal budget." It is an austerity budget, pure and simple.

I'd like to go back to the Auditor General's report because, as I pointed out, this supply motion is talking about where we're going to be spending money. We've talked somewhat about where the money is not going, but the people of this province already know where the money isn't going because they're living it. They are living the reality of the 2014-15 budget.

The Auditor General, before Christmas—this is the other thing that I carry around a lot with me these days—made some very good recommendations for this government, which have been almost entirely—it's been the sound of silence from the Minister of Economic Development and Infrastructure. If there was ever a time for this government to take infrastructure funding seriously, it would be now, because they have stated that they are going to spend almost \$130 billion on infrastructure.

I don't know where you're going to get the money. If you do sell off parts of hydro, it's going to be dedicated to infrastructure. We can't get any guarantees that any sale of public assets—which we would never support, because it hasn't worked so far. But we can't get any guarantee that that money is actually going to go into a dedicated fund for infrastructure. Of course, that's a huge red flag for us. You can't blame us for not trusting, because there are enough examples to prove why trust does not exist.

But the Auditor General, of course, has made some very specific recommendations, and I like to read them into the Hansard sometimes just so that the hard work of the auditor's office is actually reflected in the Legislature. As I said, for the most part it has been massively discounted, and so you really do have to question why. Why would a government that is so desperate for revenue be so dismissive, in such an arrogant and irresponsible manner, of the Auditor General, the independent officer of this Legislature?

One of her first recommendations is this: "Infrastructure Ontario should, in conjunction with the Ministry of Economic Development, Employment and Infrastructure, gather data on actual cost experience from recent public sector infrastructure procurements and alternative financing and procurements and revise its VFM—value-for-money—"assessment methodology to ensure that the valuation of risks assumed to be retained" under both the AFP and public sector delivery models "are well justified." This is a big question.

Interjection.

Ms. Catherine Fife: The minister without portfolio is outraged at this. He's outraged that the Liberal government has turned their back on the basic principles of fiscal responsibility.

Infrastructure Ontario actually wrote a letter in response to this afterwards, and they were like, "We totally don't agree with," blah, blah, blah. But actually in the report, Infrastructure Ontario's response is quite telling. They say that "the absence of comprehensive, formal data for traditionally delivered projects provides an industry-wide challenge in making meaningful comparisons between the delivery models." So they are saying that they have been challenged to make these points, but this debate about infrastructure funding is playing itself out in a couple of key projects right now in the province of Ontario which we can point to, and which we should be paying attention to, quite honestly.

One, of course, is the Hamilton Pan Am stadium—

Mr. Jagmeet Singh: Pan/Parapan Am.

Ms. Catherine Fife: Pan/Parapan Am. It was one of those touted P3 projects that was supposed to come in on time—it didn't. It was supposed to come in on budget—it didn't.

Mr. Lou Rinaldi: It did.

Ms. Catherine Fife: No, if you talk to the sub-contractors that just filed a lien against the original French company that's running the project—

Mr. Percy Hatfield: They're not getting paid.

Ms. Catherine Fife: —they're not getting paid. So what really does happen?

Mr. John Yakabuski: The little guy gets crushed.

Ms. Catherine Fife: There's a word for what happens to the little guy which I can't say in the Legislature because I'm just too polite. But that risk transfer gets downloaded to the little guy, and they don't get justice. So there we are. We have an example of a P3 project which is not going too well.

There is, though, the current Spadina subway extension, which has plagued each and every government in the province of Ontario. It really would be hard to find a more mishandled budget, but it's for a whole number of reasons. Namely, I might point to oversight and accountability. But we should be entering a whole new era of financial accountability in this province and in this Legislature, which is one of the reasons that we fought so hard to get the Financial Accountability Officer in place—with the support, of course, of the PC caucus.

So I just want to say that it was really interesting for me to hear that the Premier immediately trumped her best friend, Mr. Tory, and said, "You know what? If this project had been an AFP, this just would not have happened." That's an interesting rationale: to come in so many years after the fact and weigh in on that infrastructure project.

But I just want to offer you a quick comment about Kathleen Wynne's response to the revelation of a reported 15% cost overrun on the Spadina subway. Of course she suggests that the 15% overrun would not have

happened if the project had been procured by P3, but she didn't mention that such price certainty comes at a steep cost, and Ontario's 74 P3 projects have, as already mentioned, cost an additional \$8 billion over the project base cost, equivalent to a 30% cost overrun on every single P3 project. Basically, the Premier of the province of Ontario is suggesting that Toronto should have paid an extra \$800 million to avoid a \$400-million cost overrun. That's not good value for the taxpayers, and of course it makes some good headlines for the Premier.

The most important thing is that there is an imperative for us to figure out where the money is going. I said yesterday that I like following the money. I like following the money because it isn't about ideology. You can't be pigeonholed, stereotyped or typecast because when you follow the money in this province, it is not being invested either in a responsible way or with the proper financial oversight or even with a business plan. If you just look across the street—every day I walk by the MaRS building. There's a big “for lease” sign. You would have thought that before the government got into—I don't even know if there was a contract, but it was—

Mr. John Yakabuski: It's a disaster; \$300 million of overspending.

Ms. Catherine Fife: Yes, but \$256 million to begin with, and no business plan.

I just visited the Child Witness Centre in my riding—and there are some across the province—they have been operating on \$165,000 a year in annual budget since 2006. Yet, across the street, there's no business plan, no strategy and 250-some-odd million dollars, and then they strike a committee to say, “How are we going to make this business viable? How are we going to get our value for this original loan which some people would admit wasn't well thought out?” They strike a panel, they get some big minds and big thinkers, and then those people come back and say, “We need \$86 million more to get that original \$260 million back.” This is—well, it's a little bit insulting; it's insulting and it's not responsible.

1610

If only these decisions were made with at least some foresight. That's why, Mr. Speaker, I'm so proud that we have the Financial Accountability Officer in place. Because the thinking, beside the FAO—which some of the new members might not know—is that there should be a lens applied to all of those contracts. I could argue that that MaRS deal would have not gone through if the Financial Accountability Officer had had a go at that contract and had looked at that business plan and had determined that, if you have no strategy to fill that building, then people—just because you build it doesn't mean they're going to come.

So what we have here, in the province of Ontario, as we discuss the supply motion of some \$87 billion, we are definitely looking at—it all comes back to budget 2014-15. I'll just leave you with this thought, Mr. Speaker. If you have a government that isn't going to listen to the Auditor General of this province and isn't going to do

their due diligence when that independent officer comes forward and highlights inefficiencies, huge inefficiencies—it's kind of demeaning, actually, to call \$8.2 billion “a financial inefficiency”; that's pure incompetence. But on the energy and the smart meters, for instance—I mean, this government is not tracking immunization.

So she comes forward. She brings this report to this House, and all we get is pushback on this. It's astounding. It's astounding to the general population, because they kind of understand that an auditor, who follows the money and highlights serious gaps in rationale and then has the government just ignore it, essentially—that's the definition of an irresponsible government.

There are a lot of things in this province that are at stake around health care and education and climate change and the environment and infrastructure and transit and transportation. This would be a time for this government to signal that, in the three and a half years that we still have left together, they are serious about economic recovery. I would argue that, unless they start listening to the Auditor General, we will not recover, and I would argue that the drag on the economy currently is the Liberal government of Ontario.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further debate? I recognize the member from—

Mr. Yvan Baker: Etobicoke Centre.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Etobicoke Centre.

Mr. Yvan Baker: I'm honoured to speak in the House today in support of Bill 72, the Supply Act for the 2014-15 fiscal year.

Mr. Speaker, in this Legislature—and I mentioned this yesterday but I want to reiterate it today—we debate a range of important issues that all of us believe will improve the quality of life of Ontarians and people in our communities. This Supply Act is one of those things that is important because it will ensure that we can continue to invest to support a better quality of life for all Ontarians.

I would like to share with you what I mean. As the deputy government House leader noted, the Supply Act provides the necessary legal and spending authority that ensures we can pay for important priorities like schools, hospitals and transit, and so I urge all members of the Legislature to approve this bill.

I'd like to take a few moments to reflect on the achievements of the past year—I think those are important to talk about—that the Supply Act will allow us to continue to support.

As you know, our government, under the leadership of Premier Wynne, was given a strong four-year mandate by the people of Ontario. We were elected in great part because we made a commitment to take a balanced and thoughtful approach to government. We have a bold plan to build Ontario by focusing on a number of priorities. These include investing in people's talents and skills, building modern infrastructure and transit networks, and creating a dynamic and supportive business environment

on a foundation of fiscal responsibility. We're deeply committed to both protecting and improving the services that matter to people, and also to be fiscally responsible. That's the balanced approach that the people of my riding in Etobicoke Centre asked me to pursue and in my colleagues' ridings on this side of the House, and I'm sure on the opposite side as well.

We're not only going to make sure we're taking a balanced approach, but we're going to make sure that every dollar counts. That's another thing that I heard in my community: "When you go to Queen's Park, please make sure that you make every dollar count and that you get value for taxpayer money." There's no question that the folks on this side of the Legislature—and I work closely with Minister Matthews of the Treasury Board, who is working very hard to make sure that happens. But I know that's the case for all ministers in our government.

Now, we have a goal to eliminate the deficit by 2017-18. I can tell you that we're well on our way to accomplishing that goal. The member opposite will be glad to hear that. As the finance minister clearly laid out in the fall economic statement, the government is focusing on four strategies to get us back to a balanced budget. I'd like to reiterate those because I think they are important pillars of how we're doing that.

The first point is that we're going to ensure that everyone pays their fair share of taxes. This means tackling the underground economy, corporate tax avoidance and contraband tobacco. This is just a matter of fairness. This is just making sure that the taxes that are on the books today—that everyone pays their fair share. That's the first thing.

The second point is that we're going to work to maximize the value of government assets and use the funds to build the new generation of public infrastructure. So we're not just talking about investments for today, but we're talking about the investments that are needed for tomorrow to build up our economy and to improve our quality of life.

As someone who has worked in business in my prior life, I can say that this practice of looking at assets, of looking at the—

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): I do appreciate quietness to give the member the opportunity to debate. I would encourage members on both sides not to have conversations across the legislative floor while we do in fact have a member engaging in debate. Please continue.

Mr. Yvan Baker: Thank you, Speaker; I appreciate that.

Let me just go back: The finance minister laid out four points in the fall economic statement that will lead us to a balanced budget.

The first point is that we're going to make sure that everyone pays their fair share of taxes. That's an issue of fairness, Mr. Speaker.

As I was saying, we're going to maximize the value of government assets that the people of Ontario, through

governments of the past and the government of the present, have invested in. As I was saying, as someone with a finance background, a business background, that is just good practice. That's a good way of making sure that we're getting good value for taxpayer money and delivering the best possible outcomes, not just in the present but also into the future.

The third point is that we're going to work to restrain compensation growth in the public sector.

The fourth point is something that I'm very excited about, which is the Program Review, Renewal and Transformation. I know there are a number of members of the Treasury Board here who have been involved in that. I know all the ministries have been involved in that. Everyone is working hard on this. It's a fundamentally new and important approach to multi-year planning and budgeting. It involves taking a line-by-line approach to look through every ministry's budget and to look at the programs and services that it delivers. The program review will manage spending, first of all, by using fresh eyes to take stock of every government program and service in order to determine: Is it still relevant? Is it effective? Is it efficient? And is it sustainable? The review is about finding new and smarter ways of doing things to improve outcomes and to deliver for the people of Ontario the best value for their taxpayers' dollars.

The member for Nipissing was speaking earlier about job losses in his community, and I am very sympathetic to those folks who have lost their jobs. But I can just tell you, Mr. Speaker, that he ran on a platform to cut 100,000 jobs, and that's not the approach we're taking. We're going to move forward with more opportunities that improve efficiency, reduce overlap across government programs and ensure that the government works better for Ontarians.

We will make tough choices about programs and services that are not performing, do not link to government priorities or no longer serve a clear public interest.

At the same time, we will ensure that we create jobs, expand opportunity and invest in priorities like health, education and infrastructure. I think these are all the right places to be investing our taxpayers' dollars.

Then we're going to look across ministries. We're going to look to see if we can achieve better outcomes, better value for money, if we pooled resources or simplified access. Getting back to balance is not an end in itself. I want to emphasize that. Getting back to balance is not an end in itself, but it's a means to an end.

The real goal is that the programs and services that Ontarians rely on will be there when we need them and when the people of Ontario need them.

1620

I would just like to give an example of what I'm talking about. An example of the transformation that's already under way is our five-year Poverty Reduction Strategy, *Realizing Our Potential*, especially as it relates to homelessness. At one time, Ontario had two separate ministries and five different program areas addressing homelessness. There were rigid rules and a complex

administration. We created one program, the Community Homelessness Prevention Initiative, administered by one ministry. This helped us put money where it is really needed, increasing funding by \$42 million—

Mr. Chris Ballard: Increasing funding.

Mr. Yvan Baker: Increasing funding. Let me repeat that, just so it's clear: increasing funding by \$42 million to a total of \$294 million.

Other strategic investments geared to reducing poverty have also occurred across government including health, education and housing programs.

Mr. Speaker, since launching our first Poverty Reduction Strategy in 2008, 47,000 children and their families were lifted out of poverty, and many others were prevented from falling into poverty in the last six years.

Interjections.

Mr. Yvan Baker: I'd ask the members opposite to listen to what I have to say because these are relevant figures.

To help low-wage workers, the government has, again, raised the minimum wage to the highest of any province, \$11 per hour, and has indexed increases for the future.

This year alone, we are investing more than \$1 billion in the Ontario Child Benefit, something that's benefiting children across Ontario and benefiting children in my community.

We'll allocate \$16 million over three years to create about a thousand new supportive housing spaces and related supports to help Ontarians living with mental health issues and addictions.

We'll provide health benefits for children and youth in low-income families to ensure they have access to services not covered by publicly funded health care, such as prescription drugs, vision care and mental health services.

And there is much, much more.

Mr. Speaker, I want to emphasize that while we've been making these investments in our priorities, we've also managed to hold average growth in program spending to 1.2%, which is well below inflation, without cutting services that people in Ontario rely on. Going forward, program spending is projected to grow at an annual rate of 0.8% through 2017-18.

We are investing in the services that the people of my community and, I know, the people of all our communities are concerned about. We're investing in health care, education and infrastructure. These are not all the wrong places; these are all the right places.

We are taking a fiscally responsible approach to balancing the budget and to managing taxpayers' dollars, and we're delivering on our promise to Ontarians. We're protecting and improving the services that matter, and we're being fiscally responsible and making every dollar count. I'm proud to be part of a government that's working very, very hard to do all those things.

I started by saying that we're all here to improve the quality of life of people in communities across our province, and I'd like to reiterate an important point: that the introduction of the Supply Act is part of the government's economic plan to build Ontario up, to

create jobs and to secure our shared prosperity, and therefore, the Supply Act is a fundamental step in doing just that.

The government's plan, as I've outlined, is comprehensive and focuses on Ontario's greatest strengths: our people and our partnerships.

I urge all members of the Legislature to support this act. Without the spending authority that the Supply Act would provide, the government would be unable to meet its obligations to the people of this province and continue the important work before us, for the benefit of the constituents of my community in Etobicoke Centre and for the benefit of the people of Ontario.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further debate?

Mr. Randy Hillier: Speaker, it's my pleasure to speak to Bill 72.

First, I'm going to ask the government to—I think they may have made an error in Bill 72, and I'd like to draw it to their attention. I've gone through all the schedules, A, B and C, and there are three very important ministries that are missing in this Bill 72: the ministry of wastefulness, the ministry of mismanagement, and the ministry of wrongdoing and skulduggery. If those ministries had been included, then we might have a more complete picture of how this government spends its money—

Interjection.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): On a point of order, I recognize the member from Mississauga—Streetsville.

Mr. Bob Delaney: Speaker, the member may not make an allegation against an individual or use language which is calculated to cause disorder. I suspect both of those are either in his statements or part of his motive, and I ask the Speaker to enforce those two standing orders: standing order 23(b)(i) and standing orders 23(h) and (i).

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): I thank the member for that. I would remind the member from Lanark—Frontenac—Lennox and Addington to refrain from dialogue that may not perhaps be parliamentary. Thank you.

Mr. Randy Hillier: Thank you very much, Speaker, for that reminder.

Ontario has become well known as a province that is continually mired in scandals and financial mismanagement: everything from small, little wastes from expensive consultants at eHealth or the Pan Am Games expensing doughnuts and coffee and dry cleaning to the bigger wastefulness such as MaRS and the gas plants and the billions for Ornge helicopters.

Today, the government is seeking concurrence on budget expenditures for \$127 billion, which, of course, includes all those billions of dollars of waste and mismanagement identified by both the official opposition and, of course, the Auditor General, such as the \$2-billion wastefulness on the smart meter program and the extra \$50 billion that Ontario hydro users have had to pay for on their hydro bills.

Speaker, I don't know how anyone in good conscience can vote in favour of this supply bill to grant this government authority to continually waste taxpayers' money with such abandon and in such a cavalier disregard for taxpayers and for any sense of value.

Yesterday, I spoke in this House regarding the interim supply motion, which would grant the government spending authorities for the first half of the next fiscal year without oversight and transparency. At that time, I spoke about the processes that are in place here in Ontario which actually allow, permit and incent the government to spend unwisely and have wastefulness as an invariable and inevitable outcome, when you don't have proper checks and balances. Unlike all other provinces, this Legislature actually prevents its members from doing our job in a diligent, dutiful and responsible fashion.

As I said yesterday, and I'm going to reiterate today, Ontario is the only Canadian Legislative Assembly that both limits the amount of ministries that the estimates committee may call and examine, and also simultaneously passes all other ministry expenses without review by any other body of the Legislative Assembly. We're the only ones. Every other Legislative Assembly in Confederation has a two-step process in their estimates. Those ministries that are not examined by estimates are then referred to either a Committee of the Whole or a subcommittee called the Committee of Supply. We don't do that here. That's one of the big reasons why we have such problems.

I see the Minister of Tourism here. He'll recall how, during estimates, we asked and examined about all the agencies under his authority that did not have their annual reports filed, that did not have their expense claims filed—all statutory and mandatory obligations of the ministry, but they had not got them done. To this day, many of them still remain outstanding and not done. Speaker, how can we expect otherwise when we treat the rules of this House with such disregard for checks and balances?

We examined six out of 27 ministries—that's all: six out of 27 ministries—and all others were deemed to be passed. That's what ends up in this supply bill: all those expenditures, \$127 billion, without proper oversight, without any examination.

1630

Interjection.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Minister of Tourism, Culture and Sport, come to order, please.

Mr. Randy Hillier: Newfoundland, like I said, moves estimates not examined by the estimates committee to the Committee of the Whole on supply.

Nova Scotia: All ministries not examined by the estimates committee are sent over to Committee of the Whole and then to the subcommittee on supply, whereas 56% of our ministries get off without any review whatsoever.

We have the largest budget of any province in Confederation and we have the most minimal oversight over our budgetary processes. Are we mired in scandal and waste-

fulness for a reason? We are. This Legislature doesn't do its job. We're prevented from doing it.

Unlike Ontario, Alberta has no limits on the amount of ministries and agencies that can be called before their estimates. This year, they brought forward 15. We brought forward six. Alberta has no set time limit for consideration of the estimates. Here, by the middle of November, any ministry not considered by estimates is deemed to be passed. We're tying the hands of legislators and preventing legislators from actually doing their job.

Saskatchewan is another one. It has no limit on the amount of ministries or agencies that can be called to the estimates committee. It just goes on and on.

I see there are a number of ministers here in the chamber this afternoon. I would ask that you actually take a look at the standing orders of other assemblies across this country. Do a comparison and see how other assemblies operate. Look at their standing orders and see what we are doing wrong here and what the other provinces are doing better. And then ask yourselves, "Is this the reason why we have such condemning reports by our Auditor General each and every year, why we have continuous scandals raised in this House every week?" There's a reason for it and the reason is right in front of their faces. It's in the standing orders.

We can go through and through. I also want to say, if this government took its responsibilities seriously—when they recalled the House back in July, when this chamber came back in July after the election, and passed a budget, the estimates committee was allowed to resume sitting September 30. But before that, they had introduced and debated a multitude of bills. About 10 different bills were introduced in July by this government. The whole time, none of the estimates were provided or tabled for people to examine or investigate.

If they're serious, why would they bring forward all those bills last summer but withhold the main estimates until the end of September and then only give us to the middle of November to examine them? Was it purposeful? Was it incompetence? Was it a disregard, a cavalier attitude? I'm not sure what it is, but what I am sure of is the standing orders allowed them to do that and they did it. They did it and they didn't care what the results were. They didn't care about the waste and the mismanagement.

Speaker, I would seek unanimous consent that those three ministries be included in Bill 72: the ministry of wastefulness, the ministry of wrongdoing and the ministry of inefficiencies. Could I have unanimous consent on that, Speaker?

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further debate? The member from Niagara—

Mr. Randy Hillier: Speaker, on a point of order: I call for unanimous consent that we include the three ministries.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Please sit down.

I properly recognize the member from Niagara Falls. Further debate.

Applause.

Mr. Wayne Gates: It's a little scary when everybody's clapping before you start speaking.

Mr. Speaker, I was here yesterday when we talked about the supply motion. I've listened very carefully to all my colleagues, and I listened to my colleague from the Liberal Party who said there haven't been cuts to health care. I want to be clear to my friends: In my riding, there have been lots of cuts to health care. The Niagara-on-the-Lake hospital is scheduled to close. The Welland hospital is scheduled to close. These are cuts.

But the one that's really interesting to me, as we celebrated International Women's Day yesterday in Niagara Falls—to my colleagues who are listening—is that you go on a honeymoon to Niagara Falls. Do you know why you go to Niagara Falls? You go to Niagara Falls to make babies. Yet because of the cuts to maternity, you can no longer have babies in Niagara Falls, which makes absolutely no sense to me.

That shows there have been cuts to health care, and I want my colleagues to understand that. I wanted to raise those because in our riding, in the Niagara area, we've had lots of cuts to health care.

Earlier today, I had the privilege of meeting with the chamber from Sarnia, a group of six individuals. Some had small businesses, some were family-owned businesses and some were bigger corporations. What they told me very clearly—and something that I believe we all have to find a solution to—is the cost of hydro. I firmly believe that if you're going to lower the cost of hydro, you can't privatize it because they're going to want to take a profit out of it and rates are going to go up. We've seen that in the province of Ontario. If you're going to drive business away from Ontario—hydro rates have to get under control or they're not coming here. They're not going to invest. They're not going to invest in the plants that we need.

I listened to my good friend from the Niagara region, from St. Catharines. I heard him mention General Motors. I talked about that yesterday when I stood up and talked, and I disagree. The union that represents those workers, I know, has met with the Liberal government more than once. Unifor now represents them. It's a new name; it used to be the CAW. They were very clear that they felt the Ontario government should keep the shares so at least they're at the table when they're looking at investment because we have lots of concerns in the auto industry.

In my riding, I obviously have concerns around the St. Catharines plant. As I said the other day here, we still have, in the St. Catharines plant, 2,500 employees. If you take a look at the auto sector—and you can argue this one way or the other—it creates spinoff jobs, somewhere between seven and 10 other jobs in the auto sector. That's very key for my riding. That means you're now talking 10,000 and 12,000 jobs. These jobs are normally good-paying jobs, some with pensions. Some of the parts manufacturers don't have pensions, but they're getting paid a fair wage with some benefits.

You take a look at Oshawa. I want everybody on that side—because a lot of the Liberal MPPs are from Toron-

to or from the Oshawa area. The Oshawa plant needs investment. They need the government to sit with all the partners. They need the government to sit with the company. They need them to sit with the union and they have to come up with a solution to the auto sector in the province of Ontario—just like we missed out on the investment in Windsor at the Ford plant.

That's why it was important when the union was saying to the Liberal government, "Don't sell the shares. Be at the table. Be able to negotiate with them." We've got lots of concerns around the Oshawa and St. Catharines facilities.

Now, it looks like the CAMI facility in Ingersoll, with the investment they just got, may be in a little better shape. That's why I wanted to raise that.

I want to talk about some of the other stuff that's gone on in my riding that I think—and I might be wrong on this, but you can help me with this—will help balance the budget. That's what we're saying we're going to do by 2017. I listened to the member from across the way talk about poverty reduction. The reality in the province of Ontario since 2009 is that, unfortunately, poverty is going up. Some of that is because of the types of jobs that are out there. Some of that might have been caused by the economic downturn, but the reality is, poverty is going up in the province of Ontario, and we've got to do everything we can.

How do you fix poverty in the province of Ontario? Anybody know? You put people back to work. I'm saying to the agriculture minister, who I talked to earlier today, in Fort Erie, where we have some real challenges around employment: How do we make sure that the town of Fort Erie is going to have an opportunity to keep people working until maybe we get the new marina up and going, maybe the new speedway up and going and really get some energy around that community?

1640

Well, one of the ways that we can do it—because it has been there for over 100 years—is to continue to make sure we support the Fort Erie Race Track. Now, there was a bad decision made a few years ago on getting rid of the slots, and there's a number of reasons around that and how that happened. They thought there was going to be a mega-casino down in Toronto. I believe it was Paul Godfrey who headed up that. He's no longer there. Unfortunately, our slots are gone with him.

What we need is for some form of gaming to come back into Fort Erie.

Hon. Jeff Leal: I was down in Fort Erie.

Mr. Wayne Gates: Yes, you have been down there.

We are working extremely hard. We have new owners down there. But I'm talking about putting people to work, making sure that those 1,000 people who work there—and if we have some form of gaming, that's another 225 jobs. You know what they're going to do when they have jobs? One, they're going to be able to support their family. They're going to support the small businesses in the community. But just as important, they're going to pay taxes. As more people pay taxes,

that helps to run the province and pay for schooling, pay for health care.

I'm looking at a solution in Fort Erie that's already there. There's not a lot of cost to the government. They're just saying, "Let's put it back." The building is there. The machines, where the slots are, I think they're still there. Let's just get it back up and running and get full racing at the Fort Erie Race Track.

I was really pleased last night. I got a call last night around 11 o'clock to say that the town of Fort Erie, the council, has agreed to help and pay \$500,000 in tax dollars to keep the Fort Erie Race Track going. That's important. But here's some of the problem with that and some of the concern that some of the residents have: We are the only community, the only town, that's paying that kind of money back into the racetrack, whereas all the other ones don't do that because they have slots. So if we bring the slots back, we can take that \$500,000 and spend it where it probably—it could be in infrastructure. It could be in all of the things that we should be doing in the town—fixing the sewers; all those type of things.

I think the Fort Erie Race Track is a winner. I know, and I can say this, that the agriculture minister has been down to Fort Erie. We've increased the race days this year from 37 to 40. When I say that, it gives the people that work at that racetrack—it doesn't sound like a lot to some people here—four more days of working, four more days of paycheques. We believe that racetrack could easily run somewhere between 77 and 82 dates, and we're hoping that the government is listening and they hear that and they see the benefit it would be to the province of Ontario.

On the hospitals—and I've talked about this for a long, long time. With no disrespect to anybody—we all have our opinions on how we should fund hospitals—I believe that the way to fund hospitals is the same way we've done it for a long, long time, and that's having them publicly funded and publicly delivered. I'm going to give you an example because I think it's important. It's one thing to stand up here and say, "This is what you should do," but you've got to have some kind of—

Mr. Jagmeet Singh: Evidence.

Mr. Wayne Gates: —evidence to prove that it does work.

I'm going to talk about a hospital in Peterborough. They had a hospital very similar to the new hospital in St. Catharines. The difference is about 25 beds. But here's the big difference: The hospital in Peterborough—where you're from—was built for \$340 million. I might be out by a couple of million dollars, but it's certainly in that range. The one in St. Catharines was \$1 billion.

Now, we can argue and disagree on whether you agree it was P3 or not, but that shows that for a publicly funded hospital, where the government can borrow the money at a much cheaper rate, we can build it cheaper.

So in the St. Catharines situation—and this is what we have in Niagara, and I have this debate with my good friend: that in our area we could have taken that \$600-million difference between what it cost in Peterborough and what it cost in St. Catharines and reinvested it back

into front-line workers, reinvested it back into our hospitals in Niagara Falls, reinvested it into the hospital in Niagara-on-the-Lake. That, to me, makes sense; and that's the argument that I've put forward around that.

On the Niagara Falls hospital, we're looking at a new hospital there, but we're looking at it eight to 10 years away. This isn't something that's going to happen tomorrow. It was announced a year ago, but it's not there.

I really believe we need a debate on how we're going to fund hospitals. Are we going to P3, publicly deliver it, and take that money that we'd normally be giving to some kind of company and reinvest it back into our community? I believe that's the smart way, and I'm not the only one saying it. The Attorney General said the same thing. We spent \$8.2 billion on P3s that we could have spent in the province. So it's not me saying it; there are other people.

I think we need the debate. We can have the debate, and we can figure out where we go, but we need the debate. In my area, we haven't had the debate yet, and I think we need that debate.

I want to talk about the Hamilton stadium, because that's in the news too. It's good to see that the minister is here. I got lucky this afternoon. A lot of the ministers are here participating in this very important debate. I'm hoping the minister will pay attention and listen to this.

Here's the problem that I saw with the Hamilton stadium—and I'm not saying I'm right, but this is what I think the problem was. Take a look at the Hamilton stadium where the Hamilton Ticats are going to be, where they're going to have the soccer for the Pan Am Games. That's a good thing. The Ticats are playing in a new stadium; I think that's a good thing. The Pan Am Games are going to be in Hamilton. The soccer is probably going to be one of the most watched sports. I think they'll play to a lot of sold-out stadiums. Again, that's a good thing.

Here's the problem with what has transpired in Hamilton with the timing of it: Instead of giving the building of that stadium to a company from the province of Ontario when we had people out of work, we gave it to a company in Spain. I think that's a mistake. As it showed up that they're not paying workers, not paying the subcontractors, I think that's an issue that we should address. We should make sure, if we're going to use tax dollars to run the Pan Am Games right across the province of Ontario—I think in the spirit of wanting to do it, we should be putting as many people who live in the province of Ontario to work, as many businesses, whether they're small, medium or large, to work—I think that's the key.

Again, when we're talking about the budget and how we want to get it paid, how do you pay the budget? I don't think it's rocket science here. If you put people to work, they pay taxes, they buy goods at the corner store, and they go to department stores locally. It's all going back into the local economy. When you give the work to a company that's from Europe, they take the money that you're paying them and take it out of your province, out of your country. I don't think that's the right way to go.

I know there's a couple of other people who would like to talk on this, but I do want to talk about a school down in Niagara-on-the-Lake real quick: Parliament Oak school. In the budget, you have \$750 million on closing schools. You call it amalgamating them and all that kind of stuff, but the reality is \$750 million to close schools. What I'm saying to the government is, let's take a look at how we can keep them open. Let's put a fund together on how we can keep schools open and use them as community hubs. The rural schools are really struggling when you close their school because now there's no school in their community. Young kids have to get out of bed at 6:30 to catch a bus to do all that stuff. There is a parent group that is fighting the closure of Parliament Oak.

I believe that this government should take a look at what we can do to keep schools open and make them community hubs. As you know, and we've seen this where they had to reopen a few years later because more people moved into this area, if you want to have young people move into Niagara-on-the-Lake, if you want to make sure that your schools are going to be full, you've got to make sure they're still there. In Parliament Oak, you can have the school open, and if you have to use other things, use them as a community hub. I encourage this government to take a look at that as well.

I appreciate your time.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further debate.

Hon. Glen R. Murray: It was a great pleasure to listen to the members in both opposition parties.

Listening to the member from Nipissing was most entertaining, because the investments in North Bay have resulted in the new Mike Harris library at Nipissing University, which was built by the Liberal government in a spirit of generosity, and a brand new hospital and seniors' home, which I've visited many times. The health care capacity and new facilities and investments in the city of North Bay are unprecedented.

As a matter of fact, for a party that ran on cutting 100,000 jobs to stand up and read a list of hairstylists and nurses that were being laid off, which is a complete fiction, Mr. Speaker, just has an incredible amount of enigmatic contradictions to it in the sense that you're standing here, you wanted to lay off 100,000 more people than we would ever imagine doing, and you're complaining about cuts in a municipality like North Bay, which has never seen greater investments.

Mr. Speaker, as you may know if you pay attention to the new way in which hospitals and schools are designed, we spend a lot of money up front in design reducing the amount of travel time and non-service time for nurses and doctors. We have won international awards, and the member for Cambridge knows that because she was a nurse who worked in one of those hospitals. Actually, my partner, Rick, is an operating room nurse who has worked in other provinces.

1650

There is no province in Canada right now, quite frankly, which better designs hospitals to reduce the amount of administrative overhead and non-productive

time for health care workers. So yes, we are freeing up time, which is exactly what the opposition said that we should do.

If we're not designing hospitals to actually make life easier and healthier for health care workers and providers and have the physical plan of those hospitals support more contact time with patients through innovation and getting savings—now you've mistakenly called that "cuts." But maybe someone can explain the difference to the members of the opposition between cuts and innovation, because my partner, when he worked in Manitoba, worked an average of 70 or 80 hours; he works 30 or 40 hours at most now. Actually, given that he does neurosurgery, which is brains and spines—you want those people to be well rested.

The other piece that's surprising to me is this whine from the official opposition about how Liberals don't care about rural Ontario. In any part of the province right now—the member for Peterborough has made this observation many, many times before—we are spending more in every community on infrastructure: on roads, on sewers, on schools—over 100 new schools. There is not a rural community in Ontario that isn't seeing 500% to 1,000 times more dollars invested. If you want those in absolute terms, every year that the Conservatives were in power post-1995, they spent between \$2 billion and \$3 billion on infrastructure. Today we are spending \$15 billion a year on infrastructure. The last Premier of Ontario who actually had that level of spending, in today's dollars, was Premier Robarts. You have to go back to Premier Robarts to get the level of spending across Ontario on infrastructure.

So when people in the third party call this an austerity budget, I find that completely laughable. When your infrastructure investments in transit, in the electrification of GO—and yes, you're actually going to see plans and the initial work that was done on things like high-speed rail. You're going to see electrification. But it takes a lot of work and planning to go from a province that was spending almost nothing on transit and roads to one that is investing at an unprecedented level.

The third party, also, I find particularly entertaining because there isn't an idea to get back to balance that they like. I listen very carefully every day in the House and I say, "What is the NDP saying to us about how we get back to balance?" Well, it's raise corporate taxes—

Hon. James J. Bradley: Well, they're not asking any questions.

Hon. Glen R. Murray: They're not asking any questions about very much these days—but it's interesting: How would you get back to balance? It's interesting because we had two NDP governments in Canada—we can learn some lessons from this. We had Nova Scotia, where they increased the sales tax by 2%—that didn't make them very popular, which is why there's a Liberal government in Nova Scotia right now—and they increased the tax burden by raising consumption taxes on all the things that middle-class and poor families actually have to spend more money on. So the entire

creativity of the NDP, when they actually have an entire public service in a mid-sized province—the only solution they had to get back to balance was to raise sales taxes.

Now, Mr. Speaker, can you imagine the howling that we would hear from the third party if we raised sales taxes?

The most exciting electoral politics right now are going on in Manitoba, but not in a general election. The NDP is so talented that they managed to make the most exciting electoral show in Canada—

Mr. Arthur Potts: Internally.

Hon. Glen R. Murray: —internally, within one of their party, where their Premier hung on with such confidence by the core of the party that he won by 33 votes, and what did they do—I'll wrap up, Mr. Speaker. I'm sorry; I'll wrap up. I'll simply say this: What was the imaginative solution to balancing the budget in Manitoba? Raising sales taxes again.

I'm going to say that maybe three is the charm. The NDP love to carp on taking equity positions in public utilities. All of that is terribly ideologically awful for them, but raising sales taxes on working families is the only solution they can come up with.

I don't think we have too many lessons to take from the third party, who actually wanted to reduce budget spending \$600 million less than we were proposing to do, which sounds a tad right-wing populist to me.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Stop the clock, please. Thank you.

I beg to inform the House that I have today laid upon the table the post-event report of the 2014 general election from the Chief Electoral Officer of Ontario, sessional paper number 221, tabled on March 10, 2015.

Further debate? I recognize the member from Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke.

Mr. John Yakabuski: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I was surprised that the Minister of the Environment sat down so quickly; I guess he had nothing left to say. I could have used a little time myself to clear my congestion here, but I'm good to go.

I was hoping I was going to have some time to speak to a few bills this week, but it seems that the government is up to their old shenanigans on that.

I do want to talk about Bill 72 here, the Supply Act. This government—in some ways I sympathize with them. They've got a real challenge ahead of them trying to balance the books of this province and turn the deficit into a surplus so that we can start chipping away at that massive debt. I have some sympathy, but then when I start to think logically about it, I forget about that sympathy because you see, Speaker, all of the problems that they've got with debt and deficit are of their own making. They've more than doubled the debt since they've come to power. They spend money with no regard.

We warned them years ago: “If you don't get a handle on how to manage the finances of this province, you're going to find yourself up against the wall before too long.” That's exactly where they find themselves now.

You see, the Premier went around Ontario in the election of last June, throughout May and June, and talked about how she was not going to cut front-line health care. But now, when the proverbial stuff hits the fan, as they say, that's exactly what she's doing. She is cutting health care to people across Ontario. And it's happening all across Ontario. It's happening in my riding.

I sympathize with the hospitals that are left with the job of making the decisions of where they're going to make the cuts, because they're just told by the Premier and those people up in that corner office, “You're going to have to make cuts.”

But what just irks me to no end is how they travelled around the province—in my riding too—and promised that there would be no cuts to health care, that there would be no cuts to front-line services; it wasn't going to happen. And they demonized my party because we told people there were going to be changes; there were going to have to be some tough decisions made.

And now the people are finding that—wow, I wonder how many times the folks on the other side are having a cordial cup of coffee with Smokey Thomas these days? It's not happening. It's not happening. Because you see—and I'm not here to defend Smokey Thomas or his labour group; I mean, I've never had a cup of coffee with Smokey either. But I'll tell you, he probably is justified in feeling betrayed by the government because they told him one thing and now they're doing something else.

Smokey Thomas is never going to say, “John Yakabuski betrayed me,” because I've never seen him at one of my fundraisers. I've never seen any money from any of his people to help support my campaign because he realizes that we're not on the same side all the time. I do support the rights of workers, but more than anything, what I support is being straight with people, giving them the straight goods.

Pardon me, Mr. Speaker. I have to keep my throat wet.

The reason they're faced with these challenges today is because of their mismanagement of yesterday. Let's just see some of the things that they've been up to: \$300 million plus at MaRS. How many of those front-line workers would still be on the job if we hadn't put that money into MaRS? It's a real scandal.

1700

Some \$2 billion at eHealth, a billion dollars on the Ornge scandal—and now they've got those helicopters that were never the right ones in the first place; they're trying to sell them—\$1.1 billion on the gas plants.

My friend from Niagara Falls was talking about General Motors. When they recently sold those shares that they bought at the time of the recession, they lost \$600 million on the sale of those shares. Why did they sell them? Because they need that money in this fiscal year, because they're already further behind the eight ball than they anticipated.

Somehow they have this pipe dream that you can spend, spend, spend and all of a sudden you can just turn this thing around 180 degrees and you'll balance the budget without really inflicting any pain. But that is

exactly what they're doing: They're inflicting a tremendous amount of pain on people because of the mismanagement of the past.

The chickens always come home to roost, Mr. Speaker. That's an old saying, but it's very, very true. You reap what you sow. That's another one. For many years, this government was sowing the seeds of excess and largesse and extravagance and trying to convince the people of Ontario that we could spend our way out of anything, and now we're up against it. We're up against it.

This government is not off to a good start at all in this session. They're now faced with their fourth—their fourth—OPP investigation. Yesterday, there were some revelations that the RCMP raided the offices of the Ontario Provincial Police Association union and have begun a police investigation into activities in that organization. But what is completely different from what's happening here with the Premier and her deputy chief of staff, Pat Sorbara, and her chief bagman up in Sudbury, Gerry Lougheed? The members of the OPPA voluntarily stepped aside until this investigation can be completed. One member was asked to step aside by the board. But, in this case, the Premier continues to defend Pat Sorbara, who was caught on tape offering inducements to Andrew Olivier so that he would not receive the nomination in the riding of Sudbury.

I wouldn't accuse anyone in this House—and under the standing orders, I can't—but I do know this one thing for sure, Speaker: The tapes don't lie. There is no 20-minute gap in these tapes. There is no Watergate gap. There's no splicing. They've been shown in their entirety.

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Stop the clock, please.

I'd just like to remind the Legislature right now that any warnings that may have occurred in the morning session still continue in the afternoon session. Those who may have been warned are very much aware of that. I'm just serving it as a reminder. I would ask again that we allow fair debate. I would like the member to be able to be heard, as I would like with any of the other parties. Again, I thank you for your indulgence.

I turn it back to the member from Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke for further debate.

Mr. John Yakabuski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would hate to see the honourable member on the other side be not only without a portfolio but without a place in the House today.

I want to talk a little bit about smart meters. There's another billion-dollar fiasco. The Auditor General herself has said that their cost went from \$1 billion to \$1.9 billion. That's shameful. Those are the kinds of things that are hurting people on their hydro bills. Hydro is one of the biggest issues for people in my riding. The global adjustment is all part of this Green Energy Act, this crazy idea that you can pay people substantially more than a product is worth and at the end of the day it would somehow make financial sense. Markets don't work that way.

They signed all kinds of crazy deals to pay people way beyond the value of the product they were producing and the energy they were producing, and now we are paying that through our energy rates. Poor seniors and small businesses are paying that through their energy rates, and through 2015 that will have cost the energy ratepayers of Ontario \$50 billion. That's not “million,” I say to my friend from Northumberland–Quinte West. That's not \$50 million; that's \$50 billion.

Speaker, I'm just about out of time and my voice is just about done, which I'm sure will make some of the people on the other side very, very happy. I am going to pass this on now to the other speakers. But my God, if you want to talk about what this government is doing wrong, two hours of debate is simply not enough. We need about two months and then we might actually start to scratch the surface.

They've got to change their ways or this province is in big trouble—big trouble. You've got to start to think about the future, the children, the grandchildren and what kind of Ontario you're going to leave for them.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further debate?

Hon. Jeff Leal: I'm delighted to have the opportunity to get a few words on the record this afternoon during debate on supply.

It's interesting when I hear from the official opposition and the third party the doom-and-gloom message. That's just not reality in Ontario today. The Conference Board of Canada just recently released a study, and they're a very thorough group. They do detailed economic analysis; they look at trends. Their conclusion was that Ontario will grow in 2015 about 3%, almost 3%—2.9%—and that Ontario will lead the nation again in growth.

Just let me highlight what's going on. Just recently Chrysler Canada announced that there's going to be a \$2-billion investment in their Windsor operation. Let me tell you, just last June, Karan and I traded our 2005 Grand Caravan and we bought a 2014 Grand Caravan from J.J. Stewart Chrysler in Norwood, Ontario, one of the largest Chrysler dealers in my part of Ontario. The 2014 van is a gem, with all that new Chrysler technology.

I want to acknowledge that great van. Lou Rinaldi's son is one of the leading engineers with Chrysler Canada. He designs a lot of the air conditioning systems for Chrysler North America and their products they send to Europe. Here in Ontario, we invest in ingenuity and innovation, and Mr. Rinaldi's son represents that generation of new innovators in the province of Ontario.

Let me tell you, I was very sad the other day when the opposition decided to stall Bill 40, the Agriculture Insurance Act. We haven't renewed agriculture insurance in Ontario since 1996. In every back concession—and I travel on a lot of back concessions these days, Mr. Speaker—I chat with people at their kitchen tables. What is their message to me? “Mr. Leal, get Bill 40 passed.”

I was upset that this is being stalled. I want to get it to committee, I want to get it on the road and I want it to get

royal assent to help our commodity groups right here in the province of Ontario.

It's interesting: I want to just—I must have a reference point here. Let me look at this. Here is an article from the Toronto Star, January 28, 2015. It talks about the key plank in the Tory platform last spring—you know, the 100,000 jobs cut. But this is interesting. The Tories all of a sudden have the Sergeant Schultz approach to this: Hear no evil. Speak no evil. See no evil. "I hear nothing. I know nothing. I said nothing." But interestingly enough, the member from—where is he from? The member from Lambton–Kent–Middlesex. Now, he provided the media in Ontario interesting insight. He said—"The documents, which were distributed to caucus members in a closed meeting, then collected by Hudak's staff"—almost like CSIS working there—"mention a proposal to 'decrease the government payroll by 100,000' by contracting out 'many of these jobs ... to the private sector.'

"In the notation on his copy, McNaughton wrote the 100,000 figure was 'bold, specific, great!'" Now, that's interesting.

Everybody else who was at the meeting, including the member from Whitby–Ajax—"I at no time knew about the 100,000 job cuts ... it came with no warning," she reiterated in an interview Tuesday. 'I'm really disappointed Patrick'"—referring to downtown Patrick Brown, our next leader—

1710

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Excuse me, sir.

Hon. Jeff Leal: I'm sorry, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): It's all right, Minister. I would just remind you of the bill we're talking about, and I would ask that your references pertain specifically to that particular bill and that anything that may be on the peripheral or even beyond the peripheral not be included in your remarks for debate.

Hon. Jeff Leal: Thank you. I'm sorry.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Thank you, Minister.

Hon. Jeff Leal: I apologize, Mr. Speaker. I didn't mean to digress there a minute, but it's always interesting when I hear people try to rewrite history, and I get really concerned when people try to rewrite history, so I just wanted to correct the facts today. I know you're interested.

Another thing that's of interest to me is, there has been a lot of talk about Sudbury here and the Sudbury by-election. I note that with regard to people who have made contributions, Mr. Lougheed made a donation to the New Democratic Party, Mr. Lougheed made a donation to the Conservative Party of Canada, Mr. Lougheed donated to the New Democratic Party Mr. Lougheed donated to the New Democratic Party, and Mr. Lougheed also donated to the Conservative Party again. This is just public record, folks. This is not something that I made up in the south end of Peterborough. I wanted to make sure we got that on the record.

But other things are interesting in Ontario's economy today. Just the other day, of course, Loblaw announced that they're going to make a big new investment right here in Ontario. What this tells me is that there's confidence in Ontario—confidence in Ontario going forward.

Just a week ago, I was in the East City Coffee Shop in Peterborough. For those of you who know Peterborough, the East City Coffee Shop, Hunter Street East, right across from the Quaker Oats building—wonderful oatmeal. I recommend that everybody start their day with Quaker Oats made right in Peterborough, a great product. I was sitting there having my usual western sandwich and a cup of coffee, \$5.50. You throw in a buck tip, so that's \$6.50.

What were they talking to me about there? They were saying to me, "Jeff, you got to get on. You've got to keep investing in infrastructure, investing in health care, investing in Peterborough. These are the kinds of things that we're interested in in the East City Coffee Shop in Peterborough." Let me tell you, the clientele that's at the East City Coffee Shop—big business, small business, union people, nurses, doctors, teachers—they all like to go there because you can have a frank conversation. I try to go there on Friday and sit at the middle table. It's an opportunity that we can have a little chit-chat on the issues of the day.

Hon. James J. Bradley: Talk about Gogama.

Hon. Jeff Leal: In fact, yes. I want to thank our new member from Sudbury, who was on the ground there, that devastation that occurred in Gogama dealing with a train derailment. I know our new member from Sudbury—

Mr. Arthur Potts: Failing infrastructure.

Hon. Jeff Leal: Well, failing infrastructure, and where's the federal government? They have responsibility for railroad lines in Canada. I do know that our new member from Sudbury, a great guy, dedicated to his community, will be taking up this cause to make sure that Prime Minister Stephen Harper and Transport Minister Lisa Raitt show their responsibility, make those investments for CN and CP to make sure that cargo that's carried on railroads through communities in northern Ontario, southern Ontario, eastern Ontario and western Ontario is done in a safe manner. The federal government has the responsibility to guarantee that safety in the province of Ontario. Mr. Speaker, that's very important.

The other thing I'd like to mention today is the growth in Ontario's agricultural sector. The agricultural sector in Ontario generates \$34 billion in GDP in the province of Ontario, second only to the auto sector in terms of importance. That's significant. That's something that we need to talk about each and every day. It employs 760,000 Ontarians each and every day. The manufacturing component of our agricultural sector now is about 23%, and growing each day. We know that Loblaws just made a big announcement yesterday about investments that they're going to make in Ontario and right across Canada in the broader agri-food sector. There's growth taking place when you talk to dairy farmers, chicken farmers and egg producers.

But I want to make sure to get on the record today that Ontario farmers, particularly in the supply managed area, are very concerned about these new trade negotiations called the TPP, the Trans-Pacific Partnership. We do know that the United States, Japan, Australia and New Zealand continue to point to the Canadian supply managed system.

The Canadian supply managed system is the best model ever developed for agriculture. It was developed by two very distinguished agriculture ministers from Ontario: Bill Stewart, and from Ottawa, the legendary Eugene Whelan. They came together. They set aside partisan politics to do what was best for Canadian farmers, particularly farmers in Ontario and Quebec, where we have the dairy industry centred and where we have chickens and eggs. They came together because they knew it was just the right thing to do.

Supply management, as I said, is the greatest system ever designed. On our side of the House, we believe in supply management today, supply management tomorrow, supply management forever. Let me tell you, this Premier and this government will go to the nth mile to defend supply management. We want to keep our eyes on what's going on in Ottawa. Maybe some other members from the Brampton area who may be going to Ottawa in the not-too-distant future are going to defend supply management.

Mr. Speaker, I just wanted to get those things on the record.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further debate? I recognize the member from Elgin–Middlesex–London.

Mr. Jeff Yurek: Thank you very much, Speaker, for the opportunity to speak today. After listening to the Minister of Agriculture, you would think Ontario was full of unicorns and butterflies, and everything was perfect. However, I brought the truth of what's really going on. I brought the Auditor General's report, which I will be using during this debate to back up what I'm going to talk about.

Today we're talking about Bill 72, the Supply Act, which basically allows the government to pay their bills after March 31, because they're not going to get the budget passed by the time the new fiscal year begins, and until they do pass it, the government does need the ability to pay their bills. That's why we're here today debating this bill. Unfortunately, the government couldn't get its act together and get a budget presented and passed on time, again, for a record consecutive year that they're unable to do so.

I do want to discuss the fact that this year the government is struggling to reach their goal of only having a \$12.5-billion deficit—\$12.5 billion that we don't have in this province that they're spending. They're struggling; they spend so much money that they have difficulty even reaching \$12.5 billion in overspending. I can tell you today, if the average taxpayer ran their household like this government runs their bank account, nobody would be owning a house, nobody would have a job, and this government would have less money that they could waste.

I'd also like to point out that interest payments have cracked \$11 billion. That's \$11 billion that does not go to the hospitals, does not go to education, does not go to the environment, does not go to social programs. It's \$11 billion given to the banks because they have been spending the money unwisely throughout the years. If you look at the deficit of \$12.5 billion, and the \$11 billion, that's \$23 billion more that is spent than we have in this province.

Mr. Speaker, the Auditor General states that by 2017, the debt of this province will be \$325 billion. Could you imagine \$325 billion? What does the Auditor General say about that, about indebtedness? I think it's important that we read about this because I know most people in Ontario don't get an opportunity to read the Auditor General's report. They go based on what's said here at Queen's Park. If you listen to the government, as I said before, you'd think that it was sunshine and lollipops everywhere around this province. However, "Consequences of High Indebtedness"—this is the Auditor General, an officer of the Legislature: "High levels of indebtedness have consequences for governments, including the following: Debt-servicing costs take funding away from other government programs."

1720

You've heard many members of the opposition state what's going on throughout their ridings, the cuts that are occurring, the quiet cuts, the cuts that everyday people don't see right away but that will affect them later down the road because they don't have the money to do so.

I just learned this week that for the orthopedic surgeons in my hospital, the St. Thomas Elgin General Hospital, the funding was cut off mid-February for them to do any hip or knee joint replacements—cut off mid-February. They're sitting cancelling OR time the rest of February and all of March because they won't get a dime until April, the new funding year. I find it despicable. The wait times are outrageous for the people of my riding to get new hips and knees. Having an elderly person sitting at home, unable to move because of the pain, not only is bad for their health physically, but mentally as well. These people need to get fixed as soon as possible. They need to get back to recovery and enjoying their lives. Unfortunately, this government has spent—what are we saying?—\$12.5 billion more than they needed to. We're \$325 billion in debt, and what's happening? You don't really see it; you don't really hear it. You just hear about wait times: They're working on wait times. But people back at home don't realize the fact that for a month and a half, they fund zero replacement surgeries for hips and knees in Elgin–Middlesex–London. I find it quite serious—as the Auditor General said, the "crowding out" effect, the fact that they are crowding services because they don't know how to rein in their spending. They don't know how to balance a budget.

So, Mr. Speaker, that's a little bit on deficit, interest payments and debt. This is why we always stand up here and profess to this government that if you don't rein in your spending, if you don't try to balance the budget, you're going to destroy the services. Unfortunately, it

happens that the smaller communities around the province get hit first. They are the ones that get nailed first, and if you look on the opposition benches, the majority of the small rural communities in Ontario aren't represented by this government.

Mr. Speaker, I'd like to touch on energy, which is another problem in this province. Their long-term energy plan, which gets revised every year, doesn't seem to have a happy outcome for the people of this province.

And we'll talk about the Auditor General's report again with regard to smart meters. Smart metering—this is the Auditor General, again an officer of the court. "Under the initiative, ratepayers were supposed to use less electricity during peak times; as a result, Ontario would not need to immediately expand its power-generating capacity. Peak demand reduction targets set by the Ministry of Energy have not been met, ratepayers have had significant billing concerns, and ratepayers are also paying significantly more to support the expansion of power-generating capacity while also covering the cost of the implementation of smart metering."

The global adjustment now accounts for 70% of time-of-use rates, while the market price of electricity accounts for only 30% of those rates. People in my riding are being gouged for energy, and it's on the backs of the policy by this government. Again, where's the focus on actually being economically responsible, financially responsible to the people of Ontario? It's being lost.

I'd also like to raise this issue, since we are talking about expenditures that this government is making. There's an account in the Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry called the special purpose account. By legislation, this government is supposed to table reports year by year on how that money is spent. That money is collected from the hunters and anglers of this province, the commercial fisherpeople. That money is supposed to be reinvested into the resource management of this province. It's been three years—three years—since this government has tabled documents outlining the expenses of the special purpose account. It's all I hear from hunters and anglers: "Where's my money going?" Instead, this government comes forward saying that the special purpose account has no money. They need to raise more revenue—because who knows where they spent it?—and what do they do? They introduce a special service fee: \$2 on anything that has to do with hunting and fishing. You buy an Outdoors card, a fishing licence, you buy a deer licence, a turkey licence, a tag—\$2 plus HST. Don't forget the HST. However, the way they manipulate things, none of those service fees go to the special purpose account. It goes to general revenue that they can spend however they want. They still have not yet tabled the documents. The hunters and anglers are getting pretty upset about the lack of respect that this government is showing them, and in addition they're now floating the idea of introducing a seniors' fishing licence. Mr. Speaker, how can you introduce a new fishing licence for seniors when you won't even tell us how you spend the money in the special purpose account and where the

money is going? What are you hiding over there? Let it out. Let us see where the money has gone.

I have a hunch: They're not spending it where they should be spending it. Hopefully that's going to be tabled soon. But for three years—we're heading into the fourth year—this bill speaks to them spending their money because they can't get their budget date correct. But we have questions as to how they spend their money, and they're not transparent. They're not accountable. They're not forthcoming. Hopefully someday you will table these monies and we'll have a good discussion.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further debate?

Mr. Jagmeet Singh: There's something I really want to clarify. When we voted against the budget when it was presented, we had stated very clearly that this budget was an austerity budget. We were mocked for doing so, and people said this was the most progressive budget in the history of Ontario.

Slowly people started to see the cuts, and slowly they started to see the evidence. The Liberal government saying that it was progressive wasn't a fact. In fact, what we realized was on The Agenda. In front of Mr. Paikin, their hand-picked Liberal economist, Mr. Drummond, stated very clearly that, as a result of this budget, he would not be surprised if Ontario was 100,000 less in terms of jobs in the public sector.

This government, this party, campaigns progressively, but they run exactly like their Tory friends.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further debate?

Mr. Bradley has moved second reading of Bill 72, An Act to authorize the expenditure of certain amounts for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2015. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? I heard a no.

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

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

In my opinion, the ayes have it.

Call in the members. This will be a 10-minute bell.

"Pursuant to standing order 28(h), I request that the vote on second reading of Bill 72 be deferred until deferred votes on Wednesday, March 11, 2015."

That is signed by the chief government whip, Mr. Delaney.

Second reading vote deferred.

INFRASTRUCTURE FOR JOBS
AND PROSPERITY ACT, 2015
LOI DE 2015 SUR L'INFRASTRUCTURE
AU SERVICE DE L'EMPLOI
ET DE LA PROSPÉRITÉ

Resuming the debate adjourned on December 9, 2014, on the motion for second reading of the following bill:

Bill 6, An Act to enact the Infrastructure for Jobs and Prosperity Act, 2015 / Projet de loi 6, Loi édictant la Loi de 2015 sur l'infrastructure au service de l'emploi et de la prospérité.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): When this item of business was last debated, the member for Wellington–Halton Hills had the floor, with time remaining.

Mr. Ted Arnott: I appreciate this opportunity to resume my comments on Bill 6, an Act to enact the Infrastructure for Jobs and Prosperity Act, 2014, and appreciate the comments from across the floor from a number of the ministers who are well aware of the need for the Morriston bypass south of Guelph.

I look forward to their continued support to encourage the Minister of Transportation and the Minister of Infrastructure to support getting that project on the southern highways program, the five-year plan that the Ministry of Transportation has for new highway construction.

1730

The Minister of the Environment is well aware of the issue. The Minister of Agriculture and Food is well aware of the issue. The minister without portfolio and deputy House leader, Chair of Cabinet, I know, is very well aware of the issue, and also the Minister of Municipal Affairs, who I know is very interested and very supportive of the need to build the Morriston bypass so as to solve that big infrastructure issue with respect to a number of communities, not just in my riding, but obviously south into Hamilton. I'll talk about that later on.

At the same time, I think I have an obligation to at least tell the members a bit about my views on the bill itself. If I don't soon, the Speaker is going to remind me that we're discussing Bill 6 and not just any infrastructure program in my riding that I would like to see funded as soon as possible.

This bill, as we know, would compel "the government and every broader public sector entity" to "consider a specified list of infrastructure planning principles when making decisions respecting infrastructure."

We know that the Minister of Economic Development, Employment and Infrastructure would be compelled to "periodically develop a long-term infrastructure plan setting out, among other things, a description of the current state of wholly or partly government-owned infrastructure assets"—and that would be a very, very long list, Mr. Speaker, if you think of all the infrastructure assets that the province owns in part or in whole—and a list of their condition, obviously, and an assessment of their long life, "a description of the current state of wholly or partly government-owned infrastructure assets, a description of the government's anticipated infrastructure needs for at least the next 10 years, and a strategy to meet those needs. Each long-term infrastructure plan must be made public."

If Bill 6 is passed, the government would be required and compelled to "consider a specified list of criteria when evaluating and prioritizing proposed projects for the construction of infrastructure assets.

"Subject to specified limitations," the government would be required to ensure "that architects and persons with demonstrable expertise in and experience with"—I

assume that means qualified professional engineers and others—"design relating to infrastructure assets be involved in the design of certain infrastructure assets."

The government would ensure "that certain numbers of apprentices be employed or engaged in the construction or maintenance by the government of infrastructure assets," and the Minister of Economic Development, Employment and Infrastructure would have to "consult with potentially affected persons or bodies before a regulation may be made under the act."

That is, of course, what the government would have us believe the bill is intended to do.

If passed, the Infrastructure for Jobs and Prosperity Act, 2014, would enshrine a set of principles, requirements and recommendations to promote improved infrastructure planning in the province of Ontario. I think that's a laudable goal, quite frankly. I think it's reasonable to assume that we need to have a series of principles that make sense, requirements and authorities to ensure that, in fact, there is good infrastructure planning going forward for the province. No matter who is in government, I think that those are commendable objectives.

Section 1 of the proposed legislation sets out of the purpose of the act, which is "to establish mechanisms to encourage principled, evidence-based and strategic long-term infrastructure planning," which I mentioned earlier. The government is saying they would want to support "job creation and training opportunities, economic growth and protection of the environment, and incorporate design excellence into infrastructure planning." Again, I think these are goals that are reasonable and sensible.

Section 2 of the bill sets out a series of definitions which would be used to interpret the proposed legislation.

Section 3 sets out a specified list of infrastructure planning principles which the government and every broader public sector entity must consider when making decisions with respect to infrastructure. This is one of the most important parts of the bill, in my opinion, where the government actually sets out the principles whereby infrastructure planning would take place.

The principle that they're talking about is: "(1) Infrastructure planning and investment should take a long-term view and decision-makers should take into account the needs of Ontarians by being mindful of, among other things, demographic and economic trends in Ontario."

Surely we would hope that our infrastructure investments are going to be benefiting the province of Ontario over the long term, over, say, a 30-year or 40-year span, depending on the expected life of the project. If you think of a bridge or you think of a school or a hospital, I think most of us would assume that those projects should have a lifespan of at least 30 to perhaps 50 years, and so we should be thinking in terms of the long term when we're developing the infrastructure planning. And I agree with that.

"Infrastructure planning and investment should take into account any applicable budgets or fiscal plans, such

as fiscal plans released under the Fiscal Transparency and Accountability Act ... and budgets adopted under ... the Municipal Act ... or ... the City of Toronto Act.”

I think, obviously, that speaks to our ability to pay for these infrastructure assets over the long term as well. If we have long-term fiscal planning, if we have long-term—unfortunately, under this government, it’s long-term deficit planning. We don’t seem to be getting any closer to this long, much-vaunted goal of a balanced budget by 2017-18. In fact, the deficit is \$12.5 billion this year, apparently. That was the number that was in the provincial budget that was introduced in the Legislature before the election. That was the number for the deficit that was in the provincial budget that was presented to this House in the summer when we sat after the election, and it’s the number that’s in the fall economic statement that the government released before Christmas—a \$12.5-billion deficit, actually up year over year from the previous year of \$10.5 billion.

At the same time, the government would lead us to believe that they are, in fact, getting closer to a balanced budget. You would think, Mr. Speaker, if that were the case, the deficit would be going down a bit each year until it’s zero at 2017-18, if you believe the government in their commitment and if they’re able to achieve it.

But instead we see a deficit that went up \$2 billion year over year from last year to the current fiscal year that is ending in March. This is something that the government doesn’t really talk about too much, but certainly when the next provincial budget comes out, we would anticipate a much lower deficit figure than \$12.5 billion if indeed the government is going to be making meaningful progress towards its goal of balancing the budget by 2017-18, as they’ve said. But I’ve digressed a bit, and I want to get back to talking about the infrastructure principles that are identified in the bill.

The government says, “Infrastructure priorities should be clearly identified in order to better inform investment decisions respecting infrastructure.” Again, I think it is reasonable for the government to go through a priority-setting exercise so as to ensure that money isn’t being wasted and the public dollars, taxpayers’ dollars, are being well spent and in a way that’s demonstrably sensible and that is transparent for all to see. Setting priorities is an important responsibility of government, and I would agree that that should be an important principle.

In number four, they say, “Infrastructure planning and investment should ensure the continued provision of core public services, such as health care and education.” I think all of us in the province of Ontario benefit from a public education system that’s strong and well-resourced and that is supported and encouraged by all of us here in this Legislature, and we all rely on a health care system that is there when we need it. I think that those are the most important provincial government services that the provincial government is responsible for, and, again, those are the priorities, I think, for most of us in our constituencies.

Also, when you talk to people across our ridings and across the province, there are many other subjective opinions on what should be infrastructure priorities. So this is going to be a slightly more difficult exercise for the government, if indeed this bill is passed, to set those priorities. But, again, I think it is incumbent upon the government to set sensible priorities and be transparent about the decisions that are made.

Principle number five that the government articulates: Investment decisions respecting infrastructure “should promote economic competitiveness, productivity, job creation and training opportunities.”

Mr. Speaker, in the recent rounds of infrastructure spending that the federal and provincial governments have announced, particularly after the recession in 2009, one of the key criteria that governments talked about was the need to have shovel-ready projects. I can understand, when there’s an economic downturn and job creation is priority one for government, that shovel-ready projects have a certain attractiveness. But at the same time, I think it’s really important that all of our projects that we look at, especially when we’re going the extra mile to find new money for infrastructure projects—economic competitiveness and long-term economic payback should be very high priorities and high criteria, vis-à-vis shovel-ready, in fact, because I think if we are going into debt to pay for these infrastructure projects, obviously we would want to, and hope to, see a long-term return on that investment.

The government has articulated the belief that, “Infrastructure planning and investment should foster innovation by creating opportunities to make use of innovative technologies, services and practices, particularly where doing so would utilize technology, techniques and practices developed in Ontario.”

1740

I think we hear from a number of different quarters across the province about the need to understand how important innovation is to the future of our economy, whether it’s in business, whether it’s in government or the non-profit sector, or whether it’s here in this Legislature. Even the most recent report from Roger Martin’s Institute for Competitiveness and Prosperity recommended—I think it’s a sensible recommendation—that innovation be included and incorporated into the school curriculum so that we encourage our children, our students, to think in terms of innovation as an opportunity for them and to ensure that they start thinking in those terms, so that going forward when they’re in post-secondary education and they go into the work world, they think in terms of innovation. If that’s always in the back of their mind—how do we make things better, and how do we ensure that our processes continue to be modernized? It’s the whole idea of kaizen, the Japanese concept of continuous improvement. These are things that are really important for our economy. I think it makes sense, and I commend Roger Martin for making that recommendation in his report. I would agree, certainly, that the idea of encouraging innovation in terms of our infrastructure principles is a sensible idea as well.

Principle number seven: “Infrastructure planning and investment should be evidence-based and transparent, and, subject to” legal restrictions. “Investment decisions ... should be made on the basis of public information.” We talk a lot about the need to be more transparent, and certainly the government has, I think, in a general sense tried to suggest that they’re acting in a transparent manner. We see numerous examples in this House where in fact that is not the case and the government is not behaving in a transparent way. But again, I think it’s reasonable that we should set this objective in the legislation and try to challenge government, whoever is in power—there will be changes in government in the next 25 or 30 years, we anticipate; maybe sooner than that—and we need to make sure that our decisions with respect to infrastructure are transparent and that we can get the information out so that people can understand what it is that the government is up to.

Another principle is, “Where provincial or municipal plans or strategies have been established in Ontario, under an act or otherwise, but do not bind or apply to the government or broader public sector ... the government or broader public sector entity should nevertheless be mindful of those plans and strategies” so there’s sort of a comprehensive approach and we’re not doing one-offs. Again, I think that’s something that needs to be considered.

“Infrastructure planning and investment should minimize the impact ... on the environment and respect and help maintain ecological and biological diversity....” Again, I think that all of us in this House would concur that we need to ensure that our natural environment is protected with respect to infrastructure projects, and that whatever infrastructure projects that we have in our long-term plan in no way impact negatively on the environment.

They’re also saying that other principles could be set out by regulation for the government or the broader public sector entity. That, I think, Mr. Speaker, is one of the biggest concerns that I have about the bill. We have these principles enshrined in the act, but at the same time, if this bill is passed in its current form, we empower the minister and the cabinet to change these principles through an order in council. As we know, Mr. Speaker, if that process is pursued, principles could be changed without any public knowledge before the decision is made, and we would probably only be informed after the fact through the Ontario Gazette or if the government chose to inform the general public that they had made changes to the principles. That’s a concern for me.

Obviously, if we need to put the principles in the act, I don’t know why we wouldn’t ensure that if the principles should be changed, that we would come back to the Legislature from time to time to review them, as opposed to doing it through the order-in-council mechanism and through regulation, without giving MPPs an opportunity to scrutinize the proposed principle changes and ensure that we have proper oversight from this Legislature on that aspect of the bill. I would again suggest that there needs to be more discussion about that. I would hope that

if we do go to committee, there will be opportunities for us to discuss that. I’m sure that our party will want to bring forward amendments to that particular section of the bill.

Section 4 of the proposed legislation requires the Minister of Economic Development to develop long-term infrastructure plans setting out, among other things, a description of the current state of wholly or partly government-owned infrastructure assets. Again, that will be a very long list: all the infrastructure assets that the government owns in part or in whole across the province and a description of their state of repair and what’s going to have to be done going forward.

Again, that is a big make-work project for the Ministry of Infrastructure, without question, and for Infrastructure Ontario. The government is giving itself up to three years to develop this list. I really don’t know how long—I was thinking about that, and I’d like to get some expert advice. Again, that’s something that needs to be discussed at committee.

Is it reasonable to take three years to compile that list or could we ask each of the ministries to compile their list of infrastructure assets in less time? You would think presumably that each ministry would have some sort of consolidated list of the infrastructure assets that it owns and maintains. The government is asking or expecting municipalities to do long-term infrastructure planning, have a database and an assessment of their current infrastructure assets. I would hope and expect that most ministries have done the same. So I don’t know if it’ll take three years, but again the government is leaving the door open, if need be, to take three years to develop this list.

If you fast-forward three years—we’re now almost one year—it’s hard to believe—into the mandate of the current government. This three-year period would perhaps be just before the next provincial election. I’m not sure if there’s a political time frame in mind with the development of the three-year provision. I can’t imagine that there’d be politics in any of these decisions.

Hon. Jeff Leal: Not at all.

Mr. Ted Arnott: Never; never. But at the same time, I would caution the members to think about that, and I would hope that it doesn’t take three years to develop that list.

The expectation going forward, if this bill were passed, would be that a new list would be compiled every five years at least, and tabled every five years.

Section 5 would require the Minister of Economic Development to publish a long-term infrastructure plan on a government website and to maintain an archive of the long-term infrastructure plans, and that’s only reasonable. Obviously, if the government has a plan and wants to ensure that the general public has access to it and can see it, it should be prominently on the ministry’s website and easily accessible: people can find it easily, and it’s not buried on the website.

Section 6: The government is going to be required, if this bill passes, to consider a specified list of criteria when evaluating and prioritizing proposed projects for

the construction of infrastructure assets and that the list of criteria to be considered include whether the infrastructure asset is planned for a provincial or a municipal plan or strategy described in principle 7 or section 3 or in a long-term infrastructure plan published by the Ministry of Economic Development, Employment and Infrastructure.

The second criteria is “all related capital costs and operating costs expected to arise over the useful life of the infrastructure asset”—again, at least our best guess of what it’s going to cost over the long term to operate and maintain the asset.

The third criteria would be “whether the construction of the infrastructure asset” would be “expected to,

“(i) be a long-term return on investment,

“(ii) stimulate productivity and economic competitiveness,

“(iii) maximize tax assessment values and tax base growth,

“(iv) support any other public policy goals of the government of Ontario or of any affected municipalities in Ontario, and

“(v) provide a foundation for further infrastructure projects.”

Section 6 would permit the minister, along with the approval of the Lieutenant Governor in Council, to issue additional criteria that would be considered. Again, I would offer the same caution and concern that if we believe that these criteria should be included in the legislation but we can add additional criteria through the order-in-council mechanism, whereby a minister would simply bring the proposal to cabinet without necessarily telling the public about it until after the fact, cabinet approves it and then it has the force of law through regulation—if, indeed, it makes sense to put the initial criteria in the legislation, I question very strongly, should we not come back to the House if we’re going to be adding to the criteria and should we not ensure that legislation needs to be considered so that we can have a fulsome debate in this House?

Again, I would offer that caution to the government when they’re considering moving forward with Bill 6. I hope that we have the opportunity to discuss that issue in committee as well.

Section 6 also permits the minister, with the approval of the Lieutenant Governor in Council, as I said, to “issue additional criteria.” That’s the concern.

Prior to issuing the criteria, the minister is required to consult with such bodies and individuals as the minister “considers appropriate.” What does that mean, Mr. Speaker, that “the minister considers appropriate”? Who is he or she going to consult? Is he going to consult with people perhaps at Liberal fundraisers? Is he going to consult with certain close associates and advisers? Or is he going to have a broad public consultation inviting comment from all across the province and ensuring that he gets the best advice possible? That is not clear in the legislation, as far as I know.

1750

In section 7, if the bill is passed, the government would be required to ensure that architects and infrastructure design experts be involved in the design of certain listed infrastructure assets where the construction costs are over an amount to be set by regulation. The requirement applies to the following infrastructure assets, if they’re wholly owned by the government: transportation assets, including highways, bridges and transit systems; cultural infrastructure assets that are intended primarily for the study and enjoyment of art or their production; and museums and certain other assets identified under the Ontario Heritage Act.

Again, the government would have us believe that they’re trying to ensure a high standard of professionalism in terms of the design of these projects and employing qualified architects and, I assume, as I said earlier, professional engineers to ensure that there is a high standard of excellence in the design of these projects.

Again, I think that’s something that’s going to have to be explored at committee further. There may be groups that want to comment on that and seek clarification of what that means, and I would anticipate that we will hear from qualified professionals who want to get further clarification on that. I think we need to make sure that all interests are considered while, at the same time, working to achieve the goal of having a high standard of design so that these projects are of benefit to the people of Ontario over the long run.

This requirement would also apply to other infrastructure assets wholly owned by the government that are prescribed by regulation and any infrastructure assets partially owned by the government for which the minister provides any funding that may be set out in regulation.

Section 8 would obligate the government to require that certain numbers of apprentices be employed or engaged in the construction or maintenance by the government of infrastructure assets, the number of required apprentices to be set out in regulation.

As you know very well, Mr. Speaker, the government has brought in the Ontario College of Trades, and it has been very controversial. There are many people who are qualified in the trades who are very concerned about the high costs of renewing their membership in the college. They question very strongly the value of the Ontario College of Trades in terms of their day-to-day work. For many people who are in the trades, the cost went up dramatically because of the introduction of the College of Trades. I forget the percentage increase, but it was absolutely significant in terms of what they had paid before for their licences and what they were going to be expected to pay going forward.

Our party, for a number of years, has called upon the government to reform the apprenticeship system. I was very pleased to hear my friend and colleague the member for Whitby–Oshawa, when she announced a number of her economic ideas last week just outside the Legislature, talk about the need to reform the apprenticeship system in the province of Ontario.

Our party, for a long time, has advocated a one-to-one journeyman-to-apprentice ratio, instead of the current ratios, in some cases I believe four journeymen to one apprentice in some of the trades. That reduces the job opportunities for our young people in the province of Ontario by maintaining those ratios. I think there are some who would obviously benefit by the maintenance of the status quo, but we side with the young people who are looking for jobs and need jobs, and we would like to see more apprenticeship opportunities opened up. That has been the position of our caucus for quite a number of years now, and we continue to advocate for that.

I think this may very well be a contentious part of the bill. We need to have further discussion in committee so as to ensure that we understand what the government's intent is with respect to this section of the bill and to ensure that in fact there are job opportunities for our young people. If there are ways to ensure that we can modernize our apprenticeship system to ensure that we open up those apprenticeship opportunities, that would be a good thing for the province of Ontario and obviously a good thing for the young people who would get those opportunities.

Section 9 prohibits action being brought against the crown in right of Ontario as a result of the proposed legislation or anything done as a result of it, providing legal protection so that the government won't be sued.

Section 10 makes clear that any existing legal obligations of a government or broader public sector entity continue unaltered despite the proposed legislation coming into force. Some of these later provisions are, in fact, fairly routine in terms of government legislation of this sort.

I think it is important to point out the fiscal context upon which we discuss this infrastructure issue. As I said earlier, the deficit is \$12.5 billion this fiscal year; the fiscal year ends at the end of March. The government has yet to inform the House when the next provincial budget is going to be presented in this Legislature. We hear various rumours. Usually and typically—and I think it would be in the public interest—the Treasurer, the Minister of Finance, would inform the House when the budget is going to be tabled in this House. In recent years, the provincial government has made it a practice or at least made an effort to present the provincial budget before the end of the fiscal year, before the end of March. In recent years—

Hon. James J. Bradley: Waiting for the feds.

Mr. Ted Arnott: Well, I know the feds are late this year because of a number of external realities that they're facing. But at the same time, we hear that the provincial government in fact might be introducing its budget before the federal government introduces their budget, which would be somewhat unusual, but we will have to see what they do.

Again, I think it would be helpful for the Legislature to know the budget date. I would call upon the government to tell us as soon as possible.

Interjection.

Mr. Ted Arnott: I would anticipate that this budget will be presented in the Legislature, and I think that's a good thing, I say to the Chair of Cabinet. I would prefer that we hear the budget in the House.

I think it's also important to point out that the projected net provincial debt—the number that was put in the fall economic statement, which was presented in the House; the most recent significant economic statement that the Minister of Finance has presented to the House—as of this year is \$287.3 billion, Mr. Speaker, up from \$139 billion when this government took power in 2003. It has more than doubled in the approximately 11 years, almost 12 years now, that this provincial government has held office, obviously demonstrating a pattern of systematic deficit financing of government operations. I would argue an unwillingness on the part of the government to live within its means. I would argue insufficient fiscal discipline on the part of the government, where they seem to think that it's okay to continue to borrow massive sums of money and leave that debt to the next generation. Mr. Speaker, that is something obviously that we're going to be continuing to discuss in this Legislature.

This year's fiscal plan, as outlined in the provincial budget and the fall economic statement, shows that the government intends to spend \$130.2 billion this year, up from \$126.4 billion last year. Again, while the government would have us believe that they're working towards a balanced budget in 2017-18, in fact, year over year, their spending was up almost \$4 billion—\$4 billion. Yet they would have us believe that they're on track to balance this budget in just a couple of years. I don't know how they're going to achieve it. We will have to hear more about that, I'm sure, when the provincial budget is released.

Another important indicator of the level of debt in the province of Ontario is the net debt per capita. The fall economic statement says that the net debt per capita, in effect, the amount that every man, woman and child in the province of Ontario owes because of years and years of provincial government overspending, is \$21,003—\$21,003. Again, that's up from \$11,339 in 2003—almost doubled.

I think, Mr. Speaker, you're informing me that it's 6 o'clock. I have so much more to say, but I think I'm going to have to respect that it's 6 o'clock. I appreciate the opportunity to address the House this afternoon.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): I thank the member from Wellington-Halton Hills, and we will continue his debate at a later time.

Second reading debate deemed adjourned.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Since it is now 6 o'clock, this chamber is adjourned until tomorrow morning at 9 o'clock.

The House adjourned at 1759.

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Clerk / Greffière: Deborah Deller

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Mangat, Amrit (LIB)	Mississauga–Brampton South / Mississauga–Brampton-Sud	
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Miller, Paul (NDP)	Hamilton East–Stoney Creek / Hamilton-Est–Stoney Creek	Third Deputy Chair of the Committee of the Whole House / Troisième vice-président du comité plénier de l'Assemblée législative
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Peter Tabuns
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Comité spécial de la violence et du harcèlement à caractère
sexuel**

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Marie-France Lalonde, Harinder Malhi
Kathryn McGarry, Eleanor McMahon
Taras Natyshak, Peggy Sattler
Laurie Scott, Daiene Vernile
Committee Clerk / Greffier: William Short

Continued from back cover

By-election in Sudbury

Ms. Catherine Fife.....	2780
Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne.....	2780

Pan Am Games

Mr. Han Dong.....	2780
Hon. Michael Coteau.....	2780

By-election in Sudbury

Mr. Bill Walker.....	2781
Hon. Yasir Naqvi.....	2781

By-election in Sudbury

Mr. Paul Miller.....	2781
Hon. Yasir Naqvi.....	2781

Youth employment

Mrs. Kathryn McGarry.....	2782
Hon. Bill Mauro.....	2782

By-election in Sudbury

Mr. Jim McDonell.....	2783
Hon. Yasir Naqvi.....	2783

Visitors

Hon. Glen R. Murray.....	2783
--------------------------	------

DEFERRED VOTES / VOTES DIFFÉRÉS

Interim supply

Motion agreed to.....	2784
-----------------------	------

**MEMBERS' STATEMENTS /
DÉCLARATIONS DES DÉPUTÉS**

Roman Catholic schools

Mr. Garfield Dunlop.....	2784
--------------------------	------

GO Transit

Mr. Wayne Gates.....	2784
----------------------	------

Jag Pillay

Ms. Indira Naidoo-Harris.....	2784
-------------------------------	------

Sarnia Lambton Chamber of Commerce

Mr. Robert Bailey.....	2785
------------------------	------

Bowl for Kids Sake

Mrs. Lisa Gretzky.....	2785
------------------------	------

**International Women's Day / Journée internationale
de la femme**

Mrs. Marie-France Lalonde.....	2785
--------------------------------	------

University labour dispute

Mrs. Julia Munro.....	2786
-----------------------	------

Workplace mental health

Ms. Eleanor McMahon.....	2786
--------------------------	------

International Women's Day

Ms. Daiene Vernile.....	2786
-------------------------	------

**REPORTS BY COMMITTEES /
RAPPORTS DES COMITÉS**

Standing Committee on Government Agencies

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac).....	2786
Report deemed adopted.....	2786

**INTRODUCTION OF BILLS /
DÉPÔT DES PROJETS DE LOI**

990046 Ontario Inc. Act, 2015, Bill Pr16,

Mr. Natyshak

First reading agreed to.....	2787
------------------------------	------

PETITIONS / PÉTITIONS

Dog ownership

Mr. Todd Smith.....	2787
---------------------	------

Missing persons

Ms. Catherine Fife.....	2787
-------------------------	------

Water fluoridation

Mrs. Kathryn McGarry.....	2787
---------------------------	------

Realtors

Mr. Victor Fedeli.....	2787
------------------------	------

Dog ownership

Ms. Cheri DiNovo.....	2788
-----------------------	------

Water fluoridation

Ms. Indira Naidoo-Harris.....	2788
-------------------------------	------

Hunting

Mr. Jeff Yurek.....	2788
---------------------	------

Hospital services

Mrs. Lisa Gretzky.....	2788
------------------------	------

Credit unions

Mrs. Kathryn McGarry.....	2788
---------------------------	------

Hydro rates

Mr. Todd Smith.....	2789
---------------------	------

Hospital services

Mr. Percy Hatfield.....	2789
-------------------------	------

Water fluoridation

Mrs. Kathryn McGarry.....	2789
---------------------------	------

Environmental protection

Mr. Ernie Hardeman.....	2789
-------------------------	------

LGBT conversion therapy

Ms. Catherine Fife.....	2790
-------------------------	------

ORDERS OF THE DAY / ORDRE DU JOUR

**Supply Act, 2015, Bill 72, Ms. Matthews / Loi de
crédits de 2015, projet de loi 72, Mme Matthews**

Hon. James J. Bradley.....	2790
Mr. Victor Fedeli.....	2790

Ms. Catherine Fife	2792
Mr. Yvan Baker	2795
Mr. Randy Hillier	2797
Mr. Wayne Gates	2799
Hon. Glen R. Murray	2801
Mr. John Yakabuski.....	2802
Hon. Jeff Leal	2803
Mr. Jeff Yurek	2805
Mr. Jagmeet Singh.....	2806
Second reading vote deferred	2806
Infrastructure for Jobs and Prosperity Act, 2015,	
Bill 6, Mr. Duguid / Loi de 2015 sur	
l'infrastructure au service de l'emploi et de la	
prosperité, projet de loi 6, M. Duguid	
Mr. Ted Arnott.....	2807
Second reading debate deemed adjourned.....	2811

CONTENTS / TABLE DES MATIÈRES

Tuesday 10 March 2015 / Mardi 10 mars 2015

ORDERS OF THE DAY / ORDRE DU JOUR

Agriculture Insurance Act (Amending the Crop Insurance Act, 1996), 2015, Bill 40, Mr. Leal / Loi de 2015 sur l'assurance agricole (modifiant la Loi de 1996 sur l'assurance-récolte), projet de loi 40, M. Leal	
Mme France Gélinas	2761
Mr. Bob Delaney	2761
Mr. Steve Clark	2761
Hon. Michael Gravelle	2762
Mr. Michael Harris	2762
Mme France Gélinas	2762
Mr. Arthur Potts	2764
Mr. John Yakabuski	2764
Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong	2764
Hon. Madeleine Meilleur	2765
Mme France Gélinas	2765
Hon. Yasir Naqvi	2766
Mr. Randy Hillier	2767
Mr. Jagmeet Singh	2767
Hon. Bill Mauro	2767
Mr. Ernie Hardeman	2768
Hon. Yasir Naqvi	2768
Mr. Todd Smith	2768
Ms. Jennifer K. French	2770
Mrs. Marie-France Lalonde	2770
Mrs. Julia Munro	2771
Mrs. Lisa Gretzky	2771
Mr. Todd Smith	2771
Second reading debate deemed adjourned	2772

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS / PRÉSENTATION DES VISITEURS

Mr. Robert Bailey	2772
Mrs. Lisa Gretzky	2772
Hon. Liz Sandals	2772
Mr. Bob Delaney	2772
Ms. Catherine Fife	2772
Hon. Eric Hoskins	2772
Mr. John Yakabuski	2772
Hon. Jeff Leal	2772
Mr. Bas Balkissoon	2772
Mrs. Kathryn McGarry	2772
Mr. Han Dong	2772

ORAL QUESTIONS / QUESTIONS ORALES

By-election in Sudbury	
Mr. Steve Clark	2772
Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne	2773
Hon. Yasir Naqvi	2773
By-election in Sudbury	
Mr. John Yakabuski	2773
Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne	2773
Hon. Yasir Naqvi	2774
By-election in Sudbury	
Ms. Andrea Horwath	2774
Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne	2774
By-election in Sudbury	
Ms. Andrea Horwath	2775
Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne	2775
Hon. Yasir Naqvi	2776
By-election in Sudbury	
Mr. Michael Harris	2776
Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne	2776
By-election in Sudbury	
Mr. Gilles Bisson	2776
Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne	2777
Hon. Yasir Naqvi	2777
Education	
Mrs. Cristina Martins	2777
Hon. Liz Sandals	2777
By-election in Sudbury	
Ms. Sylvia Jones	2778
Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne	2778
By-election in Sudbury	
Mr. Jagmeet Singh	2778
Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne	2778
Healthy eating	
Ms. Ann Hoggarth	2779
Hon. Eric Hoskins	2779
Hon. Dipika Damerla	2779
By-election in Sudbury	
Mr. Jeff Yurek	2779
Hon. Yasir Naqvi	2779

Continued on inside back cover