



Legislative Assembly
of Ontario

First Session, 38th Parliament

Assemblée législative
de l'Ontario

Première session, 38^e législature

**Official Report
of Debates
(Hansard)**

**Journal
des débats
(Hansard)**

Thursday 29 April 2004

Jeudi 29 avril 2004

Speaker
Honourable Alvin Curling

Président
L'honorable Alvin Curling

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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
OF ONTARIO

Thursday 29 April 2004

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE
DE L'ONTARIO

Jeudi 29 avril 2004

The House met at 1000.

Prayers.

**PRIVATE MEMBERS'
PUBLIC BUSINESS**

HEALTH INSURANCE
AMENDMENT ACT, 2004

LOI DE 2004 MODIFIANT LA LOI
SUR L'ASSURANCE-SANTÉ

Mrs Witmer moved second reading of the following bill:

Bill 57, An Act to amend the Health Insurance Act to make various immunizations insured services / Projet de loi 57, Loi modifiant la Loi sur l'assurance-santé afin que diverses immunisations deviennent des services assurés.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr Bruce Crozier): Pursuant to standing order 96, the member has 10 minutes.

Mrs Elizabeth Witmer (Kitchener-Waterloo): I'm extremely pleased and honoured to be able to bring forward this morning my private member's bill, Bill 57, An Act to amend the Health Insurance Act to make various immunizations insured services. This is an issue that is certainly near and dear to my heart, as a former Minister of Health and certainly as a parent and as someone who has met with families who, as a result of this immunization not being available in earlier years, have lost children to disease or children have suffered disabilities as a result of contracting meningitis or chicken pox.

The timing of this bill today is particularly appropriate, although I don't think anybody has given me this time because of that. This is actually National Immunization Awareness Week; it is from April 25 to May 1. So this week gives us all an opportunity to focus on the importance of providing to our children vaccinations for preventable diseases.

This bill in front of us today amends the Health Insurance Act to specifically provide for immunization against chicken pox, pneumococcal and meningococcal disease. It also provides that it would be universally accessible; in other words, covered by the Ontario health insurance plan.

I know this is an issue that is also near and dear to the hearts of the government members. They did make a commitment in their election document to provide

chicken pox and meningitis vaccines to children, so I know that there is support for this bill from all sides of the House. In fact, recently the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care did appear on TV and indicate that certainly immunization was a priority for him, and he promised that he would take action. So today we have an opportunity to provide hope to parents who have lobbied long and hard to make these vaccines universally accessible to their children.

There is one woman in my community, Kathryn Blain, who lost a son to meningitis and who was recently here at Queen's Park with the Meningitis Research Foundation of Canada. She wants a universal meningitis immunization program for two types of bacterial meningitis—pneumococcal and meningococcal—and that is what is included in my bill. She was here and met with all of us, and left here feeling very optimistic that there did seem to be a commitment and that this would be a priority.

I think she and others recognize that we now have vaccines available, and these vaccines, if they had been available earlier, could have saved the life of her son. This is what she says: "I truly hope in my lifetime to see not another family suffer from this disease, and if that happens, it will be worth all the effort myself and my board members have made."

It's important for us, then, to move forward on behalf of families in Ontario. This bill will give us the opportunity to provide chicken pox, pneumococcal and meningococcal vaccines to all children in this province, free of charge and at the behest of families. It will be up to them to make the decision.

I just want to begin by recognizing the importance of immunization with an excerpt from the Canadian Immunization Guide. They say: "Disease prevention with immunization is the most cost-effective health care intervention available. Because immunization inhibits the spread of the disease, entire populations can be protected from the impacts of illness and death from vaccine-preventable diseases. With the exception of clean drinking water, no other human intervention has had the impact of vaccination on reducing infectious disease—not even antibiotics."

That statement speaks volumes to the importance of not only immunization but also the need to ensure that vaccinations are universally accessible to all children.

Presently, these vaccines are universally accessible to children in other parts of the world, such as the United States, and in some Canadian provinces. However, they are not in the province of Ontario. Although they are available, you can only get them if you can afford to pay

for them. But recently, the National Advisory Committee on Immunization, a committee that included Ontario representation, has recommended that all children except those with specific allergies receive these vaccines.

I would like to share with you a little bit about the impact of these diseases and why it's so urgent to move forward. We've certainly heard from Kathryn Blain, but according to the Canadian Paediatric Society, pneumococcus is the leading cause of invasive bacterial infections in young children. In Canada, in children under five, it causes approximately 65 cases of meningitis, 700 cases of bacteremia, 2,200 cases of pneumonia requiring hospitalization and 9,000 cases of pneumonia treated on an outpatient basis. About 15 deaths are attributed to it.

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In the case of chicken pox, according to the Canada Communicable Disease Report, volume 30, from February 2004, the medical and societal costs of chicken pox in Canada have been estimated to be \$122.4 million annually. So, again, there is a huge cost, but what is so regrettable is the loss of life and the disability for children if they do contract these diseases.

I believe we in this House have a responsibility to make certain that parents in the future have the opportunity to have their children vaccinated, if that is their choice. This bill would provide coverage by the Ontario health insurance plan; however, it would not be added to the list of diseases in the Immunization of School Pupils Act and would be excluded as well from the Day Nurseries Act. This would give parents the choice as to whether they wished to have their children vaccinated, as is currently the case with hepatitis B. Parents can choose based on the information available then, not based on whether they can afford it, as is, regrettably, presently the case.

This legislation would make these vaccinations an insured service whereby the vaccination would be bought by the government and the government would pay doctors for the administration of the vaccine. Presently that happens differently. Parents must get a prescription from a doctor and purchase the vaccines themselves, bringing them back to the office to receive immunization. I have received this information from the region of Waterloo. They go on to say that this creates inequity, because only a small percentage of parents are getting their children immunized. Part of the reason is that these three new vaccines are expensive for children. According to the region of Waterloo public health, it costs \$700 to \$800 per child to get all three vaccines up to age 18 months. That is why it's so important that we make this available to the children in our province.

Prime Minister Paul Martin in his 2004 federal budget has proposed \$300 million for a national immunization strategy to ensure that children across Canada have equal access to vaccines. Certainly our province is now in the position of having access to the federal funding, and I know that two days ago the Manitoba government announced that they would be providing these three vaccines as part of their childhood immunization program at

no cost to Manitoba families. Surely, our children deserve the same.

I would encourage the House today to recognize the need for our children to have access to these vaccinations that will help reduce the death and serious complications of meningitis and chicken pox.

Ms Shelley Martel (Nickel Belt): It's a pleasure for me to participate in the debate today on behalf of New Democrats. I want to say that of course we support the private member's bill that is being brought forward. I appreciate it being brought forward today by the member for Kitchener-Waterloo. I have lots of time for her, and I appreciate the hard work she does. But I'm frustrated today to have to say that had we had some support on this matter from the former government, frankly, we would have been vaccinating for meningitis at least three years ago.

I want to give a little bit of history about how our party has tried to make this a public issue and tried very hard to get the former government to at least move on the vaccination for meningitis. I appreciate this private member's bill includes other vaccinations. I know that's supported by public health units and medical officers of health, and I support it too.

But starting in July 2001, our party first called on the former government to at that time put in place a province-wide vaccination program for meningitis. My colleague Marilyn Churley did a press release on July 19 calling on the Minister of Health at the time, Tony Clement, to move in this regard. We did that because the provinces of Quebec and Alberta had, just at the start of that summer, put in place two programs in their own jurisdictions. In Alberta, in April 2001, they launched a province-wide meningitis immunization program for youth, and in July, Quebec announced free vaccinations for 1.7 million adults and youngsters that were going to start that fall. So we started our call for that vaccination program then.

In September, as school was starting back, we had a press conference here at Queen's Park. Our leader, Howard Hampton, along with Dr Ron Gold, who is an expert in this matter—Dr Gold is professor emeritus of pediatrics at the faculty of medicine at the University of Toronto, the former head of infectious diseases at the Hospital for Sick Children, and medical adviser to the Meningitis Research Foundation of Canada, and we were very pleased that Dr Gold participated with our leader on September 7, 2001, calling on the Conservative government at the time to move forward. He made it very clear from the perspective of his expertise—and he has a lot of expertise—that this was a fundamental issue of protecting both infants and adolescents from a disease that they could be protected from.

Later that fall, the National Advisory Committee on Immunization released a report that very clearly said there were vaccinations available that were safe, starting for infants of two months right through to adolescents. We did a question to the Minister of Health on October 23, 2001, in the wake of the release of that report, asking

him if he was prepared to have Ontario follow the lead of Quebec and Alberta and bring forward a province-wide strategy. We pointed out that Ontario had usually followed any recommendations that had been issued by the national advisory committee, and it was incumbent on Ontario to follow on this particular recommendation with respect to meningitis.

Unfortunately, the response we got at the time was that the government was reviewing the matter but the government really wanted the support and participation and the funding, frankly, of the federal government before they moved forward. I pointed out to the minister in my response that Ontario should show some leadership in this regard. Quebec and Alberta already had. It was a serious public health issue in Ontario because in 2001 eight people died of meningitis and 65 others were seriously affected, and we should agree that it was a serious public health issue and we should move forward even if it meant moving forward on our own.

We followed up on the issue again on January 15, 2002, in an open letter to the then Premier, Mike Harris, and to the then Minister of Health, Tony Clement, again urging them to move forward on this issue. Finally, on February 8, 2002, we got a response back from the Minister of Health. While he talked about the need to do something and his recognition of what the advisory council had to say—that is, that there was a safe vaccine—he pointed out again that Ontario at that point was just reviewing the matter and that no decision had been made.

Well, while there was a review going on, another adolescent died of meningitis in the province of Ontario. This time, 17-year-old Michael Maxwell of Ingersoll, Ontario, contracted meningitis C at the end of March 2002 and died in 29 hours as a result of contracting this terrible disease. His family was not aware there was a vaccination program; his family in fact had a policy of coverage through their union which would have allowed them to have that vaccine paid for through the employer. They didn't know any of this, and this was a terrible tragedy for them. They came to Queen's Park and on April 5 did a press conference with me, just after the death of their son, calling on the provincial government to fully fund this vaccination so that no other Ontario family would suffer the tragedy they had suffered. They were very courageous to do that at that time, and they have continued to pursue this matter by writing federal and provincial politicians. They were in fact featured on W-Five earlier this February talking very publicly about the need to move on this.

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As a consequence of their courage in coming forward, we developed, and I introduced on June 13, 2003, An Act in memory of Michael Maxwell. That would have made a change to Ontario's Health Insurance Act to ensure that there would be a province-wide vaccination program, fully funded by the province, right from two months into the early 20s. That was Bill 107.

Three times I have introduced An Act in memory of Michael Maxwell to try to convince both the former

government and this current government that the right thing to do was to institute a province-wide program so that we could immunize children against meningitis C and protect some of our youngest and most vulnerable Ontarians against this dreadful disease. Three times I've introduced it, and unfortunately my name, in the rotation, has never come up in time to actually debate the bill. So I'm glad the member from Kitchener-Waterloo has an opportunity today and I can make the points I am.

But I want to state very clearly that I think it is regrettable that we could not seem to get the support either from the former government or, frankly, to date from the current government to just unanimously support that bill for second and third reading and put in place a system of immunization that would truly protect some of our youngest and most vulnerable citizens.

The fact of the matter is that it is very cost-prohibitive for parents to pay for some of these vaccinations. When we had our children vaccinated against meningitis C, it cost \$113 per child. If you have a couple of children and you are vaccinating against both meningitis and chicken pox, it becomes very costly. Most insurance plans do not cover the cost of these vaccinations, so parents are put in the very difficult situation of making choices between whether they can afford to do this and what happens if they don't.

The other problem is that there hasn't been a lot of public education about how serious some of these childhood diseases are, so many parents don't even understand how important it is to get this kind of vaccination.

I support the bill today because it is time that we protected some of our youngest and most vulnerable citizens, not just against meningitis C but against the other childhood diseases that the member from Kitchener-Waterloo has noted.

I say again that I regret that we could not get support on this matter, at least with respect to meningitis C, a long time ago, because New Democrats were calling on the former government and the current government, through three private members' bills, to do this as early as July 2001. If we had done it then, Michael Maxwell would be alive today and other young people and adolescents would not be suffering the debilitating consequences of meningitis they are today.

I hope all members support this bill. If the current government is going to do something, maybe they should just pass this bill at second and third reading today and get it done.

Mr Dave Levac (Brant): Thank you for the opportunity to speak to Bill 57, introduced by Liz Witmer. I take on face value that this particular bill encompasses more than strictly smallpox, chicken pox and meningitis. I compliment her for the depth to which she has taken a look at this and spread it to many more areas and opportunities.

I want to spend just a moment to talk a little about private members' public business. This is the one place in which all members get to bring those ideas to the House, supposedly without partisan ideas or along party

lines; where we introduce bills that we think would be for the betterment. The member from the NDP has indicated her struggle and fight for bringing her bill forward since 2001. I remind the House that I've got a bill that would save lives as well, and it has taken three attempts.

I understand and respect what the process is about; that is, governments that are elected have their mandate and have directions and decisions on which way they want to go. Private members' business is an attempt to bring those particular issues that may or may not be on the radar screen.

The previous government had eight years and did things they thought were respected and understood to be a priority and did go in that direction. Our government is going to be doing the same thing. We did take action. The member did acknowledge immediately—and I compliment and thank her for that—that we did move on chicken pox and we are moving on meningitis. In terms of the direction we want to go, we agree with the former minister that this is a direction we want to go for the people of Ontario, particularly for our children.

As a former principal in an elementary school system, I was exposed to the health units process that we have in our schools to immunize our students on a regular basis. I'll go back even further than that. I still have that little button—we used to call it the button of our immunizations. For those that have modern needles, we don't have that any more. But we have that little button on our shoulder to remind us of the fact that we did get our shots.

I want to come back to the principle that there are some people out there—and I would say I'm a little concerned about it, but they have the right, because it's written into the law, to remove their child from immunization. I've had to actually talk to parents about that and acknowledge that they do have that right. They signed a paper that said that either for religious or conscientious objector reasons they wanted to remove their children from that process.

More importantly, we do have the science behind this. That's the important thing I'd like to point out. The science is telling us quite clearly that this is a lifesaver. These are lifesavers here, and wherever we can forward the cause of saving children's lives—I will put a pitch in again, one more, it's probably a little shameless, that my anaphylaxis bill is in the general government committee right now. The government has indicated that kids can die in two minutes with anaphylactic shock, and they need to have a standard of behaviour across schools in Ontario.

These are the types of things—and I compliment the member for that as well—that in private members' public business we step forward and say, "These things are not party-bound." We can all do that, and I think we all will do that. We'll say, "This is what we did, this is what you did, and this is what they did." Having said that, once we put it all altogether, we're still headed in the same direction.

I can tell the member that we are going to support the bill and understand the direction she wants to go. She has

admitted—not "admitted"; I don't even want to use that word. She has acknowledged that all people have tried to move this thing forward. Acknowledging that makes this a better place, because we're not speaking for us in here. What we're speaking for are the people out there. The thing I want to keep driving home is that we are representing them; and if we're representing them, we're looking for the areas in which we can take it back and say, "We tried to do our best for the people of Ontario."

Private members' time is the time when we can really get some stuff done that speaks to what people are talking about, not just simply an agenda that we as Liberals, PCs or NDP present, because those ideas are sacred as well. I want to make sure it's clear that when we speak, we speak as a collective voice when we find the issue we can all agree on and move forward. It does take time. That's the one thing in this place, when we talk about private members' business: It does take time.

We know we want to support this. We know the Minister of Health has taken steps immediately. Before the federal budget, Dalton McGuinty had gotten through a commitment that the money would flow. I think it's somewhere around \$300 million that's going to come back to the provinces. We're getting a chunk of that. We've started the meningitis and the chicken pox, and we're going to move forward.

The concept and the ideas presented here by the former minister are well appreciated. Knowing that, we will be moving this forward as quickly as possible.

Thank you for the opportunity. I look forward to supporting the member.

Mr Ted Arnott (Waterloo-Wellington): About a month ago, I saw a documentary movie called *The Fog of War*. In this extraordinary movie, Robert McNamara, the former United States Secretary of Defense, talks candidly about his life in public service, the things he worked to achieve, his triumphs and successes, his mistakes and regrets. But his eyes lit up, and he spoke with devotion, when he talked about President Kennedy and the privilege he had enjoyed when he served in the Kennedy administration. It was almost as if he was saying, as the highlight of his career in public service, "I served with John F. Kennedy."

Watching the movie and reflecting upon my own public service in this place, it struck me that when my time in the Legislature is completed, whenever that may be, I will look back; and when people ask me what I did at Queen's Park, I will proudly answer, "I served with Elizabeth Witmer."

To say that I have enormous respect for the member for Kitchener-Waterloo would be an understatement. I've come to know her well over the last 14 years. Her commitment and dedication to the people of her riding and the province have been an inspiration to many of us in our caucus, myself included. She works very, very hard. She's smart and knows how to obtain the results she wants to benefit her constituents.

As a minister in the Conservative government from 1995 to 2003, as Minister of Labour she rebalanced the labour laws and fixed the Workers' Compensation Board.

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As Minister of Health for almost three and a half years—the toughest job in government—she supported health professionals, initiated primary care reform leading to the establishment of family health networks, emphasized wellness and promoted healthy lifestyles, expanded long-term care and home care, and built or rebuilt hospitals across Ontario.

As Minister of the Environment, she brought in groundbreaking legislation to sustain and expand recycling programs.

As Minister of Education and Deputy Premier, she rebuilt bridges with education professionals and supported improved student achievement. She appointed Dr Mordechai Rozanski to review education funding, and she immediately announced almost \$2 billion in new education funding in response to his findings.

This is only a short list of the highlights of her accomplishments, but I had the good fortune to serve as her parliamentary assistant for a period of time and I had the chance to attend some of her public events.

I will relate one story when, as Minister of Education, she visited a high school in Guelph, College Heights Secondary School. It was early on a Monday morning, and we met some of the school board officials, staff, administrators and teachers. After the bell rang and the school day began, we went around and toured some of the classrooms and spent a few minutes with a teacher who was employing a new teaching method to help students who were in high school but couldn't read or were actually reading at a primary school level.

This teacher, without boasting, talked about the incredible improvements some of her students had achieved. Many of them, now reading at their actual grade level, inspired by this caring teacher, were now expressing a realistic desire to pursue careers in the skilled trades. This teacher had dedicated her life to helping students succeed—the ones who were struggling, who needed a hand up, who without the special attention of a special teacher would never, ever reach their full potential.

Elizabeth was very impressed with this teacher, to say the least. Now, in a sense this was just one brief interaction in one school in Guelph. But in a larger sense, what was interesting about this event is that College Heights Secondary School specializes in teaching students who will be going directly to work, the kids we speak of as being “at risk.” These are the students who need dedicated, caring teachers most of all. College Heights is the school where Elizabeth Witmer taught phys ed and English during the 1970's. I remember being struck by the fact that when Elizabeth had been a teacher, her professional career had drawn her to want to help the kids who needed her most—the students at College Heights. She was that kind of teacher, and she's been that kind of MPP.

As such, it's not surprising that as our party's health critic, she would bring forward Bill 57. Bill 57 gives all members of this House a chance to support immunization

against diseases that can severely debilitate or even kill a child.

Earlier this week, I sent a copy of this bill to the public health units that serve my riding of Waterloo-Wellington and asked the medical officers of health for their thoughts on it. I received word back the same day from Dr Troy Herrick, the medical officer of health for Wellington-Dufferin-Guelph. The ideas he put forward are very helpful and they support Bill 57. I want to share some of the insights that he provided.

Putting the issue of immunization in a broader perspective, Dr Herrick advised me of the tremendous effectiveness of public immunization programs in winning previous battles against deadly diseases. Taking the example of the measles, he advised that prior to vaccination, over 300,000 cases occurred annually in Canada, and each year there were 300 to 900 deaths. By 2001, an effective vaccination strategy reduced the annual occurrence from 300,000 down to a scant 33 cases—a greater than 99% reduction in the incidence of measles.

Polio vaccine was introduced in the 1960s. Before the vaccine was available, there were 20,000 cases of this disease annually and parents were absolutely terrified at even the thought or the prospect of the word “polio.” In 2001, there were no cases of polio in Canada, and polio is approaching worldwide eradication as a result of the immunization programs that we've pursued.

From this viewpoint, Dr Herrick has portrayed the effectiveness of immunization in saving lives and preventing serious illness in Canada and points to the need to take further action in Ontario. He has also painted a picture of children in Ontario who have been left behind with respect to immunization for chicken pox, pneumonia and meningitis, diseases that we can help prevent by voting for Bill 57 this morning.

Doctor Herrick informed me as to why these diseases need to be prevented. When we think of chicken pox, many people may assume that it's a rather harmless rite of passage, because almost every child gets it. The reality is that as many as six out of 1,000 children who get chicken pox have to be admitted to a hospital. Chicken pox can lead to infectious diseases that can even cause the flesh-eating disease, and deaths, although infrequent, do occur from chicken pox.

The information also contains a figure measuring the cost of chicken pox at \$122.4 million a year, attributed to personal expenses, lost productivity and the use of the medical system: an incredible figure. Using this example, I think the health unit has demonstrated why an ounce of prevention is worth more than a pound of cure. On meningitis, Dr Herrick advises that it has a significant mortality rate of 20% to 40%, making it one of the most feared when it enters the community. Pneumonia can also be deadly: It leads to the death of an average of 15 children under the age of five each year in Canada.

How have children in Ontario been left behind? Consider this quote from the information I received from Dr Herrick: “Currently Ontario is one of only four jurisdictions in Canada that does not provide a compre-

hensive, publicly funded program for all children for at least one of these vaccines. As a result, most parents must arrange for payment for these vaccines either personally, sometimes at prohibitive costs to families, or through their own private insurance.”

The cost of the complete set of vaccinations today could run families between \$700 and \$800 dollars. This is clearly unaffordable to thousands of families in the province. Dr Herrick supports this legislation for us this morning by having said the following: “It is believed that bulk purchases of these vaccines under a publicly funded vaccination program, as a result of Bill 57 would significantly reduce the per dose cost of each vaccine, resulting in significant cost savings to the province, perhaps even as high as 25% to 50%.”

I’m also very glad to have received information on the same day that I requested it from Dr Liana Nolan, commissioner and medical officer of health for the Waterloo region. Her information also supports full coverage for an immunization program as is outlined by Bill 57. Dr Nolan makes a very strong point in noting that the current system places the onus on parents to go out and buy vaccines at the drugstore and then make another appointment to go back to the doctor who must then in turn administer the shots. I would add that there are thousands of families who simply cannot afford the cost, and if the vaccine is not covered by the province, by Ontario’s public system of health care, the parents will question the urgency of the immunization and will be less likely to get it for their children.

Typically, parents maintain an immunization schedule or checklist provided to them by their health unit or doctor for each child. If diseases like meningitis and chicken pox aren’t on the list and it’s expensive and onerous to get the vaccine, it’s far less likely that children are going to get all the shots they need to ensure that they’re going to stay healthy. But by passing this bill today with a strong, and I would hope unanimous, vote—I was encouraged by the comments of the Liberal whip—we will help ensure that every parent and child’s immunization checklist is full and complete.

Mr Jeff Leal (Peterborough): It is indeed a pleasure to take some time this morning in order to support the member for Kitchener-Waterloo on Bill 57. I’ve always been a great admirer of the member. I had the opportunity over the winter months to travel with her on the general government committee dealing with Bill 31, the health care privacy legislation. It was a real positive education for me to be with the member for Kitchener-Waterloo, based on her great experience and depth of knowledge in the area of provision of health care in Ontario. So she certainly provided a great deal of background for the committee and was very helpful as we worked through the issues surrounding Bill 31.

She does come from a long line of political leaders in Kitchener-Waterloo. During my municipal career, I had the opportunity to meet Herb Epp, who was the former member for Kitchener-Waterloo and who served as mayor of Waterloo for a long time, and before that, of

course, the late Ed Good, who was recognized as an individual who was a leader in municipal policy in Ontario. The member for Kitchener-Waterloo is a worthy inheritor of that mantle from those previous members of that area.

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To get on with the bill that the member has put forward, it’s a real opportunity to advance the number of areas we might cover through immunization in Ontario.

Growing up in Peterborough, I remember that at one time all the children on the whole street were suffering from chicken pox. While it was an opportunity to be out of school, indeed it wasn’t a very pleasant experience to go through the suffering of chicken pox. It seemed to go right through the whole school community when I was in grades 2 and 3.

But I learned after that, by spending some time with Dr Garry Humphreys, the medical officer of health in the Peterborough area, that many years ago, particularly for males, there was a link between having had chicken pox and the inability to have children down the road. If vaccination had been provided on a widespread basis, many of these things that cropped up later wouldn’t be with us in our communities.

It’s really the mark of a civil society when we use public policy and public funds to try to eradicate many of these very serious diseases and conditions we face. It’s not a partisan issue. It’s something we want to move forward on for the good of our communities when we ask our public health insurance, OHIP, to cover these types of activities.

We are pleased, in our platform document, to talk about the need to expand what is covered through a more massive immunization in Ontario to make our citizens much more healthy. If we spend additional dollars upfront in the early stages to provide a wide-ranging immunization program, indeed we know that for sure down the road we’ll be able to save our health care system additional dollars. The health care budget in Ontario for the last number of years has increased at an annual rate of some 8% to 10%, which I believe we all recognize is not sustainable over a long period of time.

Private members’ time is certainly an opportunity to look at good ideas brought forward by all members of the Legislature. For me as a new member, it’s a particularly invigorating time to be here, to hear ideas and concepts from all sides of the House to make Ontario a much better place to live.

For example, with regard to measles, at one time here in Canada over 300,000 cases of measles occurred. When I looked at that number, I found it quite shocking. I didn’t realize it was quite that high. When you think that 5% of that population, mostly children, over a period of time have died from measles, it truly is an important issue that we want to move forward.

I thank the member from Kitchener-Waterloo, with her experience in the health care field, for bringing this private member’s bill forward this morning. I intend to support it because it’s important to the children in my

riding of Peterborough that we provide a great deal of coverage, umbrella coverage, to provide an immunization program for these individuals.

Mr Speaker, I'll be sharing some of my time with the member from Ancaster-Dundas-Flamborough-Aldershot.

Mr Joseph N. Tascona (Barrie-Simcoe-Bradford): I'm very pleased to speak on the bill, An Act to amend the Health Insurance Act and to make various immunizations insured services.

I am the father of a number of children in the school system. The work done by the Simcoe county health unit, in terms of making sure that the public health is protected and that young children are protected—it goes without saying the intent of this bill with respect to childhood immunization is a very important and serious public health issue.

I want to quote from some information I have, an article about immunization.

“Because of vaccines, these diseases are no longer common in Canada. However, it is still important to immunize your child for the following reasons:

“When immunization rates drop, these diseases come back. For example, a drop in... (whooping cough) vaccinations in Britain in 1974 was followed by a whooping cough epidemic that killed 36 people in 1978.

“Diseases do not stop at borders. People can carry vaccine-preventable diseases into Canada and spread them to children who are not vaccinated.

“To protect others. Some people can't have vaccines because of allergies or other reasons. An unvaccinated child with a vaccine-preventable disease is a threat to these people.”

We have a role in this Legislature. The former Minister of Health and Long-Term Care has recognized that with this amendment to the Health Insurance Act, which adds, for payment as an insured service, vaccinations for chicken pox, pneumococcal disease and meningococcal disease. It's very important that we act on this as quickly as possible.

It also says in the article:

“Vaccines in Canada are safe, and the benefits of immunization far outweigh the risks. There is no reason to suffer from a disease if there is a safe and effective way to prevent it.

“Many youngsters have some swelling or tenderness at the spot where the vaccine is injected, and some may also develop a mild fever, but these reactions are minor and temporary. Serious side effects such as severe allergic reactions can occur, but are extremely rare, and occur in Canada less often than once per million doses of vaccine.

“On the other hand, the diseases that vaccines fight pose serious threats. Diseases such as polio, diphtheria, measles and whooping cough can lead to paralysis, pneumonia, choking, brain damage, heart problems, and even death in children who are not protected.”

This is a very serious issue, an issue that needs to be acted on now. It should not be based on your ability to pay. It should not be a situation where others are put at

risk because of an oversight of the health care system, an oversight which should not exist any more. The member has put forth a bill here that deserves everyone's support, and I'm sure it is going to get it.

The Deputy Speaker: Further debate? The member for Ancaster-Dundas-Flamborough-Aldershot.

Mr Ted McMeekin (Ancaster-Dundas-Flamborough-Aldershot): Just wait until the name changes, Mr Speaker, to Ancaster-Dundas-Flamborough-West Hamilton. It's going to be even more cumbersome.

As you might expect, Speaker, and as members of the Legislative Assembly who frequent this place would expect, I am up in support of the member from Kitchener-Waterloo's bill. Everybody has had so many nice things to say about the honourable member opposite that one quivers at the thought of what might have happened had a different leadership choice been made on the other side of the House.

Anyhow, as fate would have it, we're in government and the honourable member for Kitchener-Waterloo, with her value base, has made an appropriate intervention here.

1050

Frankly, that's what we're here to do. We come together every morning, Mr Speaker, and you lead us in prayer. You call for guidance, that we might have a deep and thorough understanding of why it is we're here. I've often thought that the deepest and most thorough understandings that evolve in this place are often in private members' business, because it almost, by definition, allows us to be the people we really are and not those phony political, shrill partisans that we all often tend to be. It's our job to be here, and while we'll work on the other part, for today we'll stand and celebrate together that we do, together, want to try to understand what is in the common good and act in that regard.

It's always toughest being last. I think the 11th beatitude is, “Blessed is the man who, having nothing to say, refrains from giving worthy evidence of the fact.” That having been said, let me say that in the recent election and subsequent to that, one of our five core commitments was to try to build the healthiest Ontario possible. There's no doubt in any intelligent person's mind that the way to do that is to embrace things that make sense. Immunization makes sense. You just have to look at what's happened in the past.

For example, as I understand it from some of the research I was able to do, prior to the provision of a measles vaccine, over 300,000 cases of this highly infectious disease occurred in Canada every year and some 15,000 persons, mostly children, died. Since the introduction of a measles vaccine, those deaths have dropped to some 33 cases every year. What more outward and visible evidence do you need than that?

Several speakers have mentioned the provision of federal dollars. In fact, in the call by Roy Romanow to enhance our national immunization strategy, he made reference to the current strategy as being “dated” and “not as well prepared to face new and emerging problems

as is necessary in a country like Canada.” He also noted that in some regions of the country, immunization rates have actually deteriorated as a result of public fear.

I think the member opposite from Kitchener-Waterloo, the member from Nickel Belt and some of the members from other ridings who have spoken understand perhaps that good judgment is based on experience, and maybe experience invariably on bad judgment. We need to be moving forward with this together. As my mother would say, “Make mistakes, but at least make new ones.” Hopefully we can get this one behind us.

I’m pleased to be in my place today. It’s our job to stand in this place and rise to the occasion and the opportunity to make a difference. I have a sign up in my office which says, “If you do nothing else, try to leave this place just a little bit better at the end of the day than you did when you started.” That doesn’t always happen, but I think when I have the privilege of being in this great people’s place, one of 103 people who have the awesome responsibility of coming here and listening to other folk—if anyone had told me last week that we would unanimously pass a resolution to provide insulin pumps for diabetics, I would have chuckled, but that was something we happened to do. The adoption laws that one of the members opposite wants to change and keeps bringing up—I support that. I think at some point we need to have an impassioned debate here. And, Mrs Witmer, I certainly support your bill today.

The final thing I want to say—and the member from Nickel Belt raised it—is about having to make cruel choices. I grew up in a working-class family. Sometimes the only thing we had on the kitchen table at lunchtime was elbows. Parents shouldn’t have to make that difficult choice between immunizing and protecting their children and doing one of any number of other really important things. So we need to stand together on this, and I’m pleased to stand in my place today to support the honourable member opposite.

Ms Laurie Scott (Haliburton-Victoria-Brock): I too am pleased today to rise in the Legislature in support of Bill 57, a bill brought forward by my colleague from Kitchener-Waterloo, Elizabeth Witmer, to amend the Health Insurance Act by adding three immunizations to the list of insured services. I commend my colleague for recognizing the need for this in the community. We need to cover the costs of vaccination for varicella, pneumococcal disease and meningococcal disease.

At this time, when the government needs to be looking at ways to reduce the overall costs of health care, and ways that these dollars can be spent in a more productive way, they need to be looking not just at treating illnesses but also at ways of preventing illnesses and the associated human-financial costs. When parents decide they wish to provide their children with protections that immunizations provide, they should not be prevented from obtaining the vaccinations just because they cannot afford them. This bill helps parents by giving them the freedom to choose to immunize their children. At the

same time, it will help reduce the financial pressures on the health care system.

We have all heard of many cases—and I certainly have worked with many cases of meningitis—and the potentially serious disease it is, and how quickly it can come upon people. Diagnosis, certainly at times, is difficult. So prevention for meningitis is vitally important to the community.

Many people believe that chicken pox is a relatively benign childhood disease, but I think we’ve heard a lot of statistics here today that prove differently. Some 350,000 children get chicken pox in Canada every year. Every year children die and thousands have serious complications. The vaccine has been approved in Canada since 1998. It is time that we made it available to all Ontarians, not just those able to afford it.

I stand with my colleagues of the Legislature today to support Bill 57. I hope that the rest of my colleagues support this. It’s important to health care in our society to help with the prevention of disease in our province. I stand in support of Bill 57 and encourage other colleagues to support Bill 57.

The Deputy Speaker: Further debate? If not, the member for Kitchener-Waterloo has two minutes to reply.

Mrs Witmer: I do want to thank my colleagues from Brant, Nickel Belt, Waterloo-Wellington, Peterborough, Barrie-Simcoe-Bradford, Ancaster-Dundas-Flamborough-Aldershot and Haliburton-Victoria-Brock for the unanimous support that I have received for this bill today.

When I was thinking about what I would put forward as a private member’s bill, not having done one since before 1995, I thought about this issue, because I can recall as a young girl having experienced a death in my community as a result of meningitis, and the impact that had on the family and friends and on people like myself. Then, of course, I met other people whose lives had been changed because of meningitis and chicken pox, and death and complications as a result of these diseases.

I appreciate the support that I have received. I believe the timing is appropriate, because today in Canada and throughout the world, we have vaccinations that can prevent these diseases. We have a federal government that has indicated that they are stepping up to the plate. We have a government in this province that has indicated that they are supportive. So it is appropriate today, during National Immunization Awareness Week, that we move forward.

I would just like to close by quoting Kathryn Blain. As I said, she is from my community and is the founder of the Meningitis Research Foundation of Canada. She is an individual who lost her son, Michael, tragically to meningitis. She says, and I think she says it all: “No more children should suffer when there are safe and effective vaccines available to protect them.” I thank the members of this House for being responsive to the wishes of Ontarians.

1100

SANDY'S LAW
(LIQUOR LICENCE AMENDMENT), 2004

LOI SANDY DE 2004
(MODIFICATION DE LA LOI
SUR LES PERMIS D'ALCOOL)

Mr Parsons moved second reading of the following bill:

Bill 43, An Act to amend the Liquor Licence Act by requiring signage cautioning pregnant women that the consumption of alcohol while pregnant is the cause of Fetal Alcohol Syndrome / Projet de loi 43, Loi modifiant la Loi sur les permis d'alcool en exigeant que soient placées des affiches avertissant les femmes enceintes que la consommation d'alcool pendant la grossesse cause le syndrome d'alcoolisme fœtal.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr Bruce Crozier): Pursuant to standing order 96, Mr Parsons has 10 minutes to lead off.

Mr Ernie Parsons (Prince Edward-Hastings): I would first like to acknowledge in the members' gallery on this side my wife, Linda, and our children. We have walked a very tough road lately, but we walked it together and I appreciate them being here. I also thank others who have come to support this bill.

On January 29 at 9:35 am the world lost a great person and we lost a son and a brother and part of our hearts. We're left now with an empty chair at the kitchen table and an empty bed and a house full of photographs of a young man who will always be 25. And it was preventable; it was absolutely preventable.

Our son Sandy was born with fetal alcohol syndrome. Not his fault. He had no control over that. His birth mother consumed alcohol during the pregnancy. Not her fault either. She didn't know about that. Twenty-five years ago we didn't understand the impact of alcohol on a child. But we know now, and although we know now, we continue to have children born with fetal alcohol syndrome. We need to get the message to women who are pregnant or who might be pregnant of how much they can change a life by having alcohol during pregnancy.

See, alcohol has a profound effect on a fetus. It slows growth and it alters growth. The primary organ that it slows and affects is the brain. It can also cause physical disabilities.

It is very unfortunate that the most critical time for a woman to drink is on the 20th day of pregnancy when the head and the features are being formed, and women don't know they're pregnant on the 20th day. At that time a fetus weighs about 1.5 grams. Extremely small. When a mother drinks, the alcohol immediately crosses the placenta and enters the child, and the child's system cannot handle alcohol. So I would say to people, we know the effect of three or four beers on an adult. Try to imagine the effect of three or four beers on a 1.5-gram fetus. It is profound.

The growth slowed by the alcohol will never be caught up. The growth stops at birth and the child is the way the child is at that stage. The effect on the child varies depending on how much the mother drinks and at what time she drinks. It can create fetal alcohol syndrome, which is a full-blown problem, or it can create fetal alcohol spectrum disorders, which are lesser problems but still a problem.

Our son was developmentally handicapped, and he knew that and he was terribly, terribly embarrassed about that. He consumed media. He devoured newscasts to try to engage in conversation with the family. In our house it's a pretty good thing if you enjoy talking politics, and he worked so hard to accomplish that.

Children born with fetal alcohol syndrome have a particularly difficult time understanding consequences, understanding that if they do this, that will happen. If they do it and it happens and it's bad, the next time they do it, it's still the first time.

Forty-two per cent of people in federal penitentiaries in Canada have fetal alcohol syndrome. What a waste of money, but even more, what a waste of people, what a waste of talent, what a waste of potential.

We know that fetal alcohol syndrome costs society \$1.5 million per individual over their lifetime; \$1.5 million to provide extra supports for education, health care and adults in group homes. But it's preventable. It is the most common form of mental retardation, and it is absolutely preventable. That's the craziness. We don't need to do research. We don't need to commission scientists to find a cure for fetal alcohol syndrome, because there is none. But we know we can stop it simply by making women informed.

Children with fetal alcohol syndrome can also have other birth defects. Sandy died from a brain aneurysm. We met with the coroner to determine the cause of death. I pray no one in here, in Ontario or the world has to sit down with a coroner and go over the autopsy of a child. The coroner said to me, "The brain is malformed by alcohol," and I said, "Yes." He said, "Well then, naturally the blood vessels within the brain are malformed. The brain is a physical organ and the blood vessels are malformed." My reaction was to go, "Of course. I should have known that." But I'm glad I didn't know that. I'm glad I didn't know there was a ticking time bomb.

We then discovered a brochure that we got about 15 years ago from the Ontario Ministry of Health and, in it, it referred to the effects of alcohol. It stated, "It will cause deformation of the heart, and it will cause deformation of the circulation system." Now, I read that 15 years ago. I'm sure I did, and I'm sure I said, "Thank goodness that doesn't affect us. It has nothing to do with us," and I went by it. But it was there; we knew 15 years ago that it caused these birth defects.

We know that no amount of alcohol is safe. I know everyone here, if I said to you, "What do you think of a pregnant woman using drugs?" your reaction would be, "Never. That's the worst thing she could do." But, folks, alcohol's a drug. We tend not to think of it that way, but

alcohol's a drug and it has effects on the fetus as any other drug would. It may appear not to. There are people who can say, "Well, I know someone who drank during pregnancy and their son or their daughter was fine." But we know it has some effect.

Where it deceives us is, if there was a child who was going to be born and perhaps have an IQ of 170, the fetal alcohol spectrum disorder could lower it to 150. We say, "Well, this is a normal person." But no, there was potential loss. You see, alcohol dehydrates the brain. It takes the moisture out of the brain because it lingers in the body. The body can't deal with it. It's very obvious if someone was going to be born with an IQ of 100 and alcohol causes it to be 70, but we know that any amount of alcohol has some effect.

Sandy's law is very simple. It's not a big stick; it's not an order. It is simply going to require signs in commercial establishments that are licensed to sell liquor: restaurants, LCBO stores and beer stores. It's an educational bill. I truly believe that if you give people the right information, they will do the right thing. I truly believe that.

People in our province are fundamentally good, but I believe too many of them don't know. I also know that at times there is great peer pressure on an individual to drink. This sign, hopefully, will give them some ammunition or will cause others not to put pressure on them to drink.

I've had some wonderful contacts from the brewers' association and the restaurants' association that we can get educational components included in Smart Serve, to inform bartenders as part of their training about the effects of alcohol on pregnant women.

For the very minimal amount of investment we're going to put into this, or that restaurants and stores will, it has tremendous payback. It's difficult not to talk dollars in the one and a half millions, but we really need to focus on how, for virtually no cost, we can change lives. The statistics tell us that about nine out of every 1,000 babies are born with fetal alcohol syndrome. We want to get a message to women who are sexually active and not on birth control of the terrible ramifications for their child if they are pregnant and consume alcohol.

1110

The Deputy Speaker: Further debate?

Ms Laurie Scott (Haliburton-Victoria-Brock): I rise today in support of Bill 43, Sandy's Law, which has been brought forward by my colleague in the Legislature from Prince Edward-Hastings. I want to first extend my formal condolences to the member and his family on the death of their son in January. It's always a tragedy when a young person dies under any circumstances, and the suffering that is involved is truly heart-wrenching. I also want to thank the member and his family. I know that they have big hearts and are well known in the Belleville area for all their kindness in the community toward children with disabilities, so I thank him for that.

This bill, as we know, will amend the Liquor Licence Act to require anyone selling or supplying liquor to

display a sign which warns pregnant women of the dangers of drinking alcohol while pregnant. If a woman drinks while pregnant, it will have an effect on the fetus from mild to very severe.

Let me take a minute to review some of the statistics surrounding this illness. It is estimated that nine out of every 1,000 children born in Canada have fetal alcohol syndrome. It's the leading cause of developmental disabilities among Canadian children. The cost over the lifetime of the child, without taking into account loss of potential opportunity, is \$1.5 million per person. Obviously, FASD is a life-long disability, and it can be prevented with education, support and healing. All women of child-bearing age who use alcohol are at risk of having a child with FASD.

Fetal alcohol syndrome is characterized by abnormal facial features, growth retardation and central nervous system problems. They often suffer damage to their heart and circulatory systems. Affected children may have physical disabilities and problems with learning, memory, attention and problem-solving, as well as social-behavioural difficulties.

One of the five broad goals to help defeat this disorder, according to Health Canada, is to increase public awareness and understanding of FASD and the impact of alcohol use during pregnancy. The member's bill will help a great deal in achieving the first goal, by making young women aware of the risk right where the alcohol consumption takes place.

The instance of fetal alcohol syndrome in Ontario is tragic. Even if this measure can somehow make one young mother aware of the danger involved in drinking alcohol while pregnant, it has been worth the effort. Clearly, women have the important role in prevent FASD. What is equally important, and not as clear to many, is that family, community, governments and society all have a vital role in preventing the root causes of women's use of alcohol during pregnancy. Fetal alcohol syndrome is among a number of early childhood ailments which are preventable in a society, if society chooses to do something about these matters.

I commend the member opposite for his efforts in this particular area, and for his strength in bringing this bill forward in what is a very difficult time for him. I hope that we support this bill in the House and that in some small measure it helps assist in stopping this tragic and most preventable disorder.

Hon David Ramsay (Minister of Natural Resources): I'm very honoured to be asked by the proponent of this piece of legislation, the member for Prince Edward-Hastings, who has been a good friend of mine for the last five or six years, to speak today on this issue. I wish this debate was on at 2 o'clock this afternoon, when the focus is on this place a little more, when the gallery is filled with reporters and when the people of Ontario, by and large, focus, as they do, on question period and the issues of the day.

What we're seeing here this morning is probably the Ontario Legislature at its best. We're seeing members

from all sides propose private members' bills that are based on the betterment of the people of Ontario. We've seen that in the first hour today, with the bill in regard to inoculations that was proposed by the Conservative member, and we see and are experiencing it right now with this bill, which comes from the heart of Ernie Parsons because of his personal life experience. In the to-and-fro of politics and the partisanship we see in this place on a daily basis, I don't think the public sees the true motivation that most of us who are here have, and it's probably expressed at its very best on Thursday mornings.

We're very fortunate to have the private members' hour that we do. Compared to other Legislative Assemblies across this country, we're most fortunate to have an opportunity to debate issues that legislators can bring forward and actually have an opportunity to have a vote on and move forward.

Again, I'd like to thank the member for bringing this forward. I certainly understand his motivation. Linda, it's nice to see you again. We all got to know each other very well, because in the last Parliament we were neighbours in the offices here. I've known Ernie's dedication to children. As mentioned earlier, Linda and Ernie have fostered and adopted many children. They have a huge family. As the previous member said, they are renowned throughout eastern Ontario as being a family that reaches out to children and helps that community and those children, and that is a big part of their life. I don't know how they manage it when I look at what they do and the challenges they've taken on.

I would say to Ernie that while we have lived through this tragedy with him, obviously we have not been able to experience it the way he has experienced it; I know it has been a very difficult time. I really applaud him for using this tragedy that happened to better the conditions for other children who are coming along in this society. We know the problems that we have with behaviour in children. As the member has rightly said, we know a great part of this is caused by abuse of alcohol during pregnancy. We know this can be prevented, and anything we can do from here to help educate people about the dangers of the use of alcohol during pregnancy is going to go a long way to improving society in this province.

This is a bill worthy of everybody's support. I know I will be supporting it. I believe everyone will be supporting this. I ask you to do that. We could really move the yardstick a long way by supporting this bill to protect the future children of this province.

Mrs Elizabeth Witmer (Kitchener-Waterloo): It certainly is a privilege to be able to support Bill 43, Sandy's Law. When Ernie came to visit me and told me about the bill he was introducing and the reasons behind the bill, I realized immediately that it was a piece of legislation that would give meaning to all that had happened to Sandy, to Ernie and to their family. I can tell you that our caucus has more speakers than we have time. We are extremely anxious to support you and your family. We offer our condolences to you, and we are all going to be supporting this bill.

Fetal alcohol syndrome is a very serious condition. We've heard the impact it has had on Sandy's life and the lives of others, and it certainly deserves our swift support today. We need to take those steps that are so necessary to educate and raise the awareness of women who are expecting, but we also need to make sure that by posting this signage we can raise the awareness of their friends, their spouses and others who can alert them to the consequences of consuming alcohol during pregnancy. The Canadian Paediatric Society has said that FAS has been recognized as one of the leading causes of preventable birth defects and developmental delay in children. Certainly, we must ensure that this message is passed on to expectant mothers who may, in turn, then abstain from alcohol consumption during their term.

I will be supporting this bill, and our caucus will be. I just want you to know, Ernie, I've known for a long time—when I went to Belleville, I heard about the generous and kind hearts that you and your wife had. I learned about the many children you had fostered and adopted. I'll tell you, this House is so much the richer because of kind, caring, compassionate individuals like you, and I just thank the people of your community for having elected you to represent them.

1120

Ms Marilyn Churley (Toronto-Danforth): I just want to say to Ernie Parsons and Linda and the family who are here today that we are very sorry about the death of your son, and on behalf of all New Democrats, I bring condolences today.

For all of us who have children, no matter how old they are, whether they're birth children or adopted children, children are our children and we love them unconditionally. As a birth mother who gave a child up for adoption and found him several years ago, and also, of course, having raised my daughter, it is my worst nightmare, as it is every parent's worst nightmare, to lose a child. My heart goes out to you.

Ernie and I talked, and I want to thank him for the letter he wrote to me asking for my support. Of course, we all support the bill today. It's courageous and I expect in some ways difficult to be coming forward with something that's so close to the grief that I'm sure you're still feeling. I thank you for bringing this forward and drawing on what must be and will continue to be a very painful part of your life to do something for the public good.

When somebody dies so young, I guess the best thing we can do after that as parents is to try to draw on that and do something good, to leave a legacy for Sandy that he will not have lived and died in vain. His life meant a great deal to you, and now, as we pass this bill, his life, in a way, will continue on. Even if it just saves a few others over the years from experiencing this syndrome, it will have been worth it.

So I'm here today to say that I support the bill and very much want to see it go through as quickly as possible. Of course, as you pointed out, one of the difficulties is that—and this is new to us—we didn't know that drinking in the very early stages of pregnancy—you

don't know. That is the problem and that is why it is so important to educate women of child-bearing years.

Women have a special place on this earth: We bear children. We carry these children in our bodies and give birth to them. Therefore, we have a particular responsibility as well. So when feminists and women call for equality, we certainly mean equality but we also accept that there are certain differences between men and women, and this is a major one.

I liken it a bit to second-hand smoke. There were days when people smoked and we didn't even know that it caused damage to the smoker. Then it became obvious that it could cause lung cancer and other kinds of illnesses, but we still didn't know it could harm the fetus or that, through second-hand smoke, it could literally kill people who didn't smoke. It has taken a number of years, and it's still an ongoing struggle, to get the message out there that when you smoke, you're not just hurting yourself; you're hurting those around you with the second-hand smoke. This syndrome is the same kind of scenario.

I've got to tell you, Ernie, before you brought this to my attention, I didn't know—and I'm pretty up on these things, as an environmental activist interested in public health—that drinking alcohol in those very early stages of pregnancy could impact so severely on the child. Now knowing that, I want to let as many young women and young men, all of our society, know the impact, should a woman get pregnant without knowing it and be drinking alcohol. For me, that is the most dangerous period, because I think the majority of women and men now recognize, once you know that you're carrying a child, that you shouldn't drink and smoke. Most of the women I know are very, very responsible about that. But the danger is in that period of time when a woman may be pregnant and not know it.

Certainly things are different these days from the days when I became pregnant with my first child. Birth control wasn't so available then. There were a lot of women, more so than today, who got accidentally pregnant. Of course, I'm sure there are many children today as well, many of us in here, who may have started off as accidents. In many cases, it's sometimes very difficult to predict when a pregnancy is going to happen.

That is why it is so critical and so important that we start this education process now. This is a good beginning. Putting signs and notices in bars and LCBO and Beer Stores is critically important. I think that we have to go beyond that over time and find other means and ways through our municipalities and their public health departments, our community health centres, our doctor's offices, every avenue we can find to let people know about the dangers of this syndrome.

I want to commend the member for bringing this forward today. I think there's no doubt that it will pass. I'm not sure; the member will probably want to take it out to committee, so that through regulation, I assume, we can determine the issues around signage and size, make sure that we do the very best we can to make these

signs as visible as possible and discuss as well how we might come up with some other means, some other ways to advertise, educate and let the people of this province know the dangers of drinking alcohol during early pregnancy.

Thank you for bringing this forward today. I look forward to working with you to make sure that this bill, Sandy's Law, becomes a reality.

Ms Judy Marsales (Hamilton West): I'm very pleased to support the proposed Bill 43, Sandy's Law, that will make it a requirement that signs be posted where alcohol is sold to make pregnant women aware of the risks that drinking presents to their unborn child.

All of us in this room have varying degrees of understanding of exactly what are the effects of fetal alcohol syndrome. With the assistance of the member from Prince Edward-Hastings, that understanding will be brought into focus for each and every one of us as we reflect on perhaps a family member, friend or associate whose life has been affected, either directly or indirectly, by FAS.

Speaking in support of this bill also allows me an opportunity to highlight the terrific work and research carried on currently at McMaster Children's Hospital, which is being supported this weekend by the McMaster Children's Hospital Telethon being televised on CHTV. We need to help them help babies and moms.

1130

Are there more children suffering from learning challenges today or is it the fact that we're just more aware? Because of that, I asked for some information and have received some wonderful assistance from Dr Peter Steer, president of McMaster Children's Hospital.

I asked what fetal alcohol syndrome is. For the information of the House, it's a medical diagnosis that refers to a set of alcohol-related disabilities associated with the use of alcohol during pregnancy. The minimum criteria for diagnosing a child with FAS are prenatal and/or postnatal growth restrictions; central nervous system involvement, such as neurological abnormalities, developmental delays, behavioural dysfunction, learning disabilities or other intellectual impairments; and skull and brain malformations.

Exposure to alcohol before birth can lead to long-term developmental disabilities in the form of either FAS or possibly FAE. Although there are no statistics regarding the extent in Canada currently, it's estimated that one to three children in 1,000 in the industrialized countries will be born today with FAS.

There is no definitive information that can be conveyed to women regarding a safe quantity of alcohol use during pregnancy. Consequently, the prudent choice for women who are or who may become pregnant is to abstain from alcohol.

As a result of the many reports and medical research papers that are available, they've made some recommendations. They recommend, for example:

(1) Prevention efforts should target women before and during their child-bearing years, as well as those who

influence such women, including their partners, their families and their community. All efforts should be made around family-centred and culturally sensitive issues to address pregnant women as well as their partners and family in the context of their community.

(2) Information should be provided to all health care professionals regarding the risks of alcohol use during pregnancy to facilitate early recognition of at-risk drinking and early intervention.

(3) Continuing education programs for health professionals designed to enhance counselling skills that motivate and support lifestyle change for at-risk drinkers should be widely disseminated and evaluated.

(4) Health professionals working with members and leaders of communities must provide consistent information to women and their partners that the prudent choice would be not to drink alcohol during pregnancy.

(5) Health professionals play an essential role in identifying women who drink at levels that pose a risk to the fetus and themselves. Screening methods should be applied to identify women at high risk for heavy alcohol consumption.

(6) Alcohol and drug addiction treatment services should incorporate the needs of women, including transportation and daycare, into their program design. Pregnant women seeking help should be given high priority at alcohol and drug addiction treatment centres.

(7) Health professionals should inform women who consume small amounts of alcohol occasionally during pregnancy that the risk to the fetus in most situations is likely minimal. However, they should also explain that the risk is relative to the amount of alcohol consumed, body type, nutritional health and other lifestyle characteristics specific to the expectant mother.

All of these various papers are available to anyone and I would be happy to give copies of them when and if required.

In summary, the 2001 study entitled *Alcohol-Related Birth Defects: The Past, Present and Future*, written by Kenneth R. Warren PhD and Laurie L. Foudin PhD clearly states, "Women are most likely to say they would lower their alcohol use during pregnancy if they were encouraged," or even so, made more aware of the effects of alcohol on their unborn fetus. The study also goes on to say, "A communications campaign to inform a target audience should have higher public knowledge of [FAS] as one of its goals. Raising awareness of FAS will also contribute to a heightened awareness overall, of the harmful effects of alcohol during pregnancy." All these recommendations come from the wonderful research carried on at McMaster Children's Hospital. Let's help them support and encourage healthy moms and healthy babies.

Mr Joseph N. Tascona (Barrie-Simcoe-Bradford): I'm very pleased to join the debate with respect to the private member's bill brought forth by the member from Prince Edward-Hastings. To your family and the families of thousands of other FAS children and adults, I'd like offer my support to assist in reducing the risk of children

being born with abnormalities caused by the consumption of alcohol during pregnancy.

Certainly what the member is trying to do by putting forth Sandy's Law is, as a first step, put forth warning signs to prevent another child from being inflicted with fetal alcohol syndrome. Raising awareness is the purpose.

We've heard from different members in terms of the importance of raising awareness, but signage, as I say, is a first step. Obviously—and maybe the member would like to consider this—liquor servers should be trained with respect to this particular issue. They have an obligation statutorily to serve individuals properly. Also, there should be a statutory obligation on licensed businesses not to serve individuals who would be at risk, because pregnant women, with the consumption of alcohol that would cause fetal alcohol syndrome, would be at risk.

I think the control aspect has to be addressed as a part of dealing with amendments to the Liquor Licence Act. Passing this bill certainly doesn't have to impact at all the changing of the Liquor Licence Act, but regulations could certainly be considered to support and enhance the process with respect to the warning signals and to make sure it doesn't just apply to women who are pregnant and at risk, but also to people who would be serving them and licensed businesses.

It may be a little bit more difficult in terms of gaining access to alcohol, whether it's at the brewers' retail or the liquor store, because on those occasions I think what's important is that all you can do is have warning signs. I think the intent would not only be for licensed liquor establishments but also the brewers' retail and liquor stores, because the signage should be there also with respect to raising awareness.

I offer my support in this matter.

Mrs Linda Jeffrey (Brampton Centre): I'm happy to stand in the Legislature today in support of Bill 43, Sandy's Law.

Before I begin I would like to extend my condolences to the member from Prince Edward-Hastings and his family for the premature loss of their beloved son. I would also like to mention that I'm awed by the leadership and passion of the member from Prince Edward-Hastings. I'm not sure many of us in this House could stand up so soon after such a tragic loss and bring leadership to this issue. When something so close hits you like that it's very difficult to be professional and businesslike when your emotions are obviously at a very high level. It takes a lot of courage and a lot of leadership to do that, and it is my pleasure to talk about this issue.

The member from Prince Edward-Hastings once said, "Alcohol killed my son, but he never had a drink in his life." I think that's a very interesting statement. It's one that has such resonance.

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I think that every time a pregnant woman drinks, it's as though she's giving a drink to her baby. We've talked today about education. This morning, I feel, is a prevention morning. We've talked about smoking and we've talked about immunization, but prevention is something

that doesn't happen once; it happens over and over and over. We need to talk and educate on a regular basis, because there are young women who five years from now, 10 years from now, need to know about this threat to their child forming inside them, and in the future. It's not only fetal alcohol syndrome that we're talking about, but fetal alcohol effects, effects that happen to the child long after they're born. It is a very serious responsibility that they carry, and they need to know that even prior to becoming pregnant.

Some have suggested that it's okay for expectant mothers to have one or two drinks, that it has no effect. But we all know, and it's been shown through scientific research, that women absorb and metabolize alcohol differently than men.

Fetal alcohol syndrome is the leading cause of mental retardation in our country, and it's totally preventable. Each year in Canada, somewhere between 123 and 740 babies are born with fetal alcohol syndrome, and it's totally preventable. Since 1990, the dietary guidelines for Americans have stated that women who are pregnant, or are planning to become pregnant, should not drink alcohol. That message is not getting through. A national survey found that 58.8% of women between the ages of 15 and 44 drank while pregnant; 65.8% of pregnant women in their first trimester reported using alcohol, while 58.6% of women in their second trimester and 53.9% of women in their third trimester reported alcohol use.

When a pregnant woman drinks, or decides to take a drink, they may be committing their child to learning problems/developmental delays; extremely active, easily distracted, impulsive behaviour; memory problems; some facial feature or other physical differences—their fingers may be different, their ears may be misshapen. Some 95% have mental health problems; 68% will have trouble with the law; 55% will be confined to prison, drug and alcohol treatment centres, mental institutions; 50% of males and 70% of females have alcohol or drug problems; 68% have disrupted school experience; and 52% exhibit inappropriate sexual behaviour.

This is a preventable condition, much like what we learned years ago about neural tube defects. If in the first month after conception you take vitamin B or folic acid, you can prevent neural tube defects. Neural tube defects are brain or spinal cord/backbone malformations.

They're so preventable, so easy to prevent, but so hard to do. To change attitudes in society about alcohol is so important.

FAS is a nation-wide health concern. It doesn't discriminate on the basis of race, socio-economic status or sex. Bill 43, Sandy's Law, would require the posting of signs where alcohol would be served or sold, to make pregnant women aware of the risks that drinking presents to their unborn child. The Parsons family, and families of thousands of other FAS children and adults, need our support in reducing the risk of children being born with abnormalities caused by the consumption of alcohol in pregnancy. I'm pleased to support this bill.

Mr Toby Barrett (Haldimand-Norfolk-Brant): I certainly support MPP Parsons's private member's bill to display signage to caution pregnant women not to drink alcohol during pregnancy. I thank the member for Prince Edward-Hastings for bringing forth what I consider a very timely piece of legislation.

As I indicated to the member, and I will admit, during my 20 years at the Addiction Research Foundation, we did not do enough on this to raise awareness, and I feel we have some catching up to do. I wish to thank my colleagues for giving me some time, because we all take this very seriously.

Michael Piercy is with the Addiction Research Foundation, now known as the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health. He makes a distinction between fetal alcohol syndrome and what he refers to as fetal alcohol spectrum disorder. There is a broader range of problems beyond strictly fetal alcohol syndrome. But very simply, when a pregnant woman drinks alcohol, so does her baby. The more she drinks, the more her baby is at risk. We have heard a listing of the various symptoms: brain damage, of course, and learning disabilities.

The stakes are very high. There is no cure. However, as we know, this is completely preventable. I would submit that the signage advocated in this proposed legislation can be seen as one part of a broader, general education and health promotion approach. Mr Piercy and others in the field recommend a two-pronged approach, including both health promotion and, secondly, support programs for families exposed to fetal alcohol syndrome. A truly effective approach of managing FAS requires a comprehensive and concerted effort not only in prevention but also to care for those who are affected. We've heard mentioned several times alcohol server training programs. Again, I think that would go along very well with a signage program.

MPP Ernie Parsons's signage certainly fits the bill with respect to prevention. I feel we in the House should accept this challenge and take this proposed legislation even further. Again, because the impact of FAS and FASD cannot be reversed, it is extremely important to focus our efforts on prevention. There are a number of very worthy groups that have picked up the challenge and are involved. FASworld Canada is one group that comes to mind. It's a group of parents, of course, professionals, teenagers, volunteers and people who are struggling with birth defects themselves because their mothers drank alcohol during pregnancy. They focus their efforts on one day, September 9. They observe International FAS Awareness Day with a minute of reflection at 9:09 in the morning. In other words, the ninth minute of the ninth day of the ninth month, representing the nine months of human gestation.

The roots of FAS Awareness Day trace back to 1999. I'll quote from something they've put forward: "What if, on the ninth minute of the ninth hour of the ninth day of the ninth month of the year 1999, we asked the world to remember that during the nine months of pregnancy, a woman should not drink alcohol?"

Again, a group of concerned people; it grew initially from about 70 volunteers in eight countries. They kicked this off in 1999 in Auckland, New Zealand. Their minute of reflection involved ringing bells at 9:09 am at Mount Albert Methodist Church. Bells were rung in Adelaide, Australia. In Cape Town, volunteers gathered to hear the war memorial carillon that rang when Nelson Mandela was released from prison. A similar bell-ringing occurred in Italy, Germany, Sweden and, of course, back across the Atlantic, including a very tiny island, Kitkatla, BC, near the Queen Charlottes, where the village bell rang at 9:09 am, followed by prayers by the village elders in their native tongue.

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In addition to the important signage regulations we're debating today, I would suggest that people across Ontario help further the message and warning of the dangers described this morning with respect to fetal alcohol syndrome by considering being involved in or launching their own campaign. It may well be a bell campaign. It certainly would be a chat with restaurant, bar and tavern owners about the advisability of signage. I consider this FAS bell program very simple. A person could do most of the work on their phone. Most communities have a bell, certainly most older churches have bells, as well as city halls, community and provincial buildings, for example, college or university campuses. Very simply, find out who's in charge of getting that bell rung and ask that the bell be rung for one minute at 9:09 am on September 9.

I might suggest this could be a project for those of us here present. We represent 103 ridings across Ontario. Getting right down to the practicalities of it, many of us could very easily access mailing lists for churches in our communities. If our target was September 9, it would give us an opportunity to communicate with churches perhaps this coming summer, put the bug in their ear and ask if they would be interested in ringing bells at 9:09 on September 9. Again, coupled with signage, plus the server intervention training program, I feel this can go a long way to ameliorate and prevent some of these risks. I submit this is one more way that we can build on MPP Parsons's work with Sandy's Law.

Ms Monique M. Smith (Nipissing): So many people on the government side want to speak to this bill that I'll be sharing the last few moments with the member for Huron-Bruce and the Minister of Children and Youth Services.

I just wanted to rise today in support of the member for Prince Edward-Hastings and his bill, Sandy's Law. I think the Minister of Natural Resources said it best when he said, "This morning we see this House at its best." We were sent here to lead, and I think we lead best when we lead with our hearts. We can all take from Mr Parsons's example this morning of leading with his heart. I just wanted to stand and say that I support this bill, and I support Mr Parsons in all that he does and all his good works.

Mrs Carol Mitchell (Huron-Bruce): It is my pleasure to rise today to support my fellow legislator Ernie

Parsons and to celebrate the work he does for the children of his family. I can't begin to imagine how big your heart is to bring forward this bill at this time. This is a fitting tribute. It will make a difference. My congratulations and my support.

I will be sharing my time with the member for Hamilton Mountain.

Hon Marie Bountrogianni (Minister of Children and Youth Services, Minister of Citizenship and Immigration): I echo what everyone in this House has said this morning. I am so privileged to be a colleague of Ernie Parsons and a friend of Ernie's and his lovely wife, Lin. As a friend, my condolences once again, and as a colleague, my thanks as Minister of Children and Youth Services, not only for this bill but for the years of service that you and Lin have given as foster parents to the most vulnerable children in our province. I am proud to support you as a friend, and I am proud to support this bill as a colleague.

The Deputy Speaker: Mr Parsons, you have two minutes to reply.

Mr Parsons: I want to thank everyone in this House, not just for their support of the bill but for supporting our family during a very difficult time.

Our son faced many challenges that he shouldn't have had to, but he faced them well. We miss him every minute of every day.

Our son loved to help people. We continue to have people come to us with stories of how he cut their lawn or helped them with this or with that, and he never told us because he truly didn't want thanks for it. He got his enjoyment out of helping others.

This bill is an opportunity for Sandy to help once more. He would be so very proud of you; I know I am, of each and every one of you. Sandy cared about others, and you care about others. This bill, if it prevents one more child being born with it, is a good bill. But I think it will do more than that because, and I'll reiterate what I said earlier, I truly believe the people of Ontario are good people who, given the right information, will do the right thing.

Thank you for joining with us to honour the memory of our son, and thank you for doing what you came here to do, which is to help others. You truly are my heroes. Thank you.

HEALTH INSURANCE
AMENDMENT ACT, 2004

LOI DE 2004 MODIFIANT LA LOI
SUR L'ASSURANCE-SANTÉ

The Deputy Speaker (Mr Bruce Crozier): We'll deal first with ballot item number 15, standing in the name of Mrs Witmer: second reading of Bill 57, An Act to amend the Health Insurance Act to make various immunizations insured services.

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

Pursuant to standing order 96, this will be referred to the committee of the whole.

Mrs Elizabeth Witmer (Kitchener-Waterloo): I would ask that the bill be referred to the standing committee on justice and social policy.

The Deputy Speaker: Shall it be referred to the standing committee on justice and social policy? It shall be referred to that committee.

SANDY'S LAW
(LIQUOR LICENCE AMENDMENT), 2004

LOI SANDY DE 2004
(MODIFICATION DE LA LOI
SUR LES PERMIS D'ALCOOL)

The Deputy Speaker (Mr Bruce Crozier): We shall now deal with ballot item number 16, standing in the name of Mr Parsons: second reading of Bill 43, An Act to amend the Liquor Licence Act by requiring signage cautioning pregnant women that the consumption of alcohol while pregnant is the cause of Fetal Alcohol Syndrome.

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

All those in favour, say "aye."

All those opposed, say "nay."

In my opinion, the ayes have it.

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

The division bells rang from 1158 to 1203.

The Deputy Speaker: Mr Parsons has moved second reading of Bill 43. All those in favour will please stand.

Ayes

Arnott, Ted	Dunlop, Garfield	Oraziotti, David
Barrett, Toby	Flynn, Kevin Daniel	Ouellette, Jerry J.
Bartolucci, Rick	Hoy, Pat	Parsons, Ernie
Berardinetti, Lorenzo	Hudak, Tim	Patten, Richard
Bountrogianni, Marie	Jackson, Cameron	Prue, Michael
Broten, Laurel C.	Jeffrey, Linda	Pupatello, Sandra
Brown, Michael A.	Kormos, Peter	Qaadri, Shafiq
Bryant, Michael	Kwinter, Monte	Ramsay, David
Caplan, David	Leal, Jeff	Sandals, Liz
Churley, Marilyn	Levac, Dave	Scott, Laurie
Colle, Mike	Marsales, Judy	Smith, Monique
Cordiano, Joseph	Martel, Shelley	Smitherman, George
Craitor, Kim	McGuinty, Dalton	Takhar, Harinder S.
Delaney, Bob	McMeekin, Ted	Tascona, Joseph N.
Dhillon, Vic	McNeely, Phil	Watson, Jim
Dombrowsky, Leona	Milloy, John	Witmer, Elizabeth
Duguid, Brad	Mitchell, Carol	Zimmer, David
Duncan, Dwight	Mossop, Jennifer F.	

The Deputy Speaker: All those opposed?

Clerk of the House (Mr Claude L. DesRosiers): The ayes are 53; the nays are 0.

The Deputy Speaker: I declare the motion carried.

Mr Ernie Parsons (Prince Edward-Hastings): Mr Speaker, I would ask that this bill be referred to the standing committee on regulations and private bills.

The Deputy Speaker: Shall it be referred to the regulations and private bills committee? Agreed.

All matters relating to private members' public business having been completed, I do now leave the chair. The House will resume at 1:30 of the clock.

The House recessed from 1206 to 1330.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

CAYUGA DRAGWAY

Mr Toby Barrett (Haldimand-Norfolk-Brant): Over the years it has had several names, but Canada's oldest drag strip is commonly referred to as Cayuga Dragway. From May 14 to 16, former fans, staff and racers will be in Haldimand county to celebrate the 50th anniversary of the drag strip. The reunion will be a special celebration of drag racing history at Kohler and will include memorabilia, classic dragsters, racers and former NHLer Marty McSorley.

The dragway has a unique history. In 1948, L. Bruce Mehlenbacher purchased the 375-acre parcel of land. It was once a Royal Canadian Air Force landing strip. By 1954, Mr Mehlenbacher had developed the site into one of North America's pioneer drag racing strips. By the 1960s, the strip received both NASCAR and NHRA sanctioning.

I've been going to the drags over the years. I bought a 1941 Dodge coupe in 1963. I've still got it. I admit my coupe is embarrassingly classified as an F gasser. My EA says her Mustang is an FN gas guzzler.

Some of North America's best drag racers have lit up the track in Haldimand county. I invite Ontario to come to this event. In closing, I'd like to congratulate the reunion committee for giving us a chance to talk shop.

BRANT CITIZENS OF THE YEAR

Mr Dave Levac (Brant): I'm pleased to rise today to share with the House the nominations for citizen of the year in my riding of Brant. This is the ninth year for this event, in which the Brantford Expositor celebrates citizens who make a difference in our community. Every day we hear about people behaving badly, but for this moment, let us focus and refocus our attention on those who inspire and who make a difference, people who make our lives just a little bit better than they were and, indeed, in some cases even save lives.

This year's nominee finalists are an inspirational group who have contributed in a wide variety of ways. Here's a brief look at these wonderful people: Frank Balazs, a retired police officer, has long taken an interest in helping young people find their way in life. Lesley Anthony and Jean Bowen: These health care workers blew the whistle on elder abuse in two retirement homes and have formed a group, Voices Against Elder Abuse. Ron Birkett, inducted into the sports hall of fame, has been involved in the Brantford Classic run, minor sports, United Way, Junior Achievement, Brant Waterways and many, many more. Clarence "CJ" Dick, a full-time volunteer fundraiser for many organizations, has raised hundreds of thousands of dollars for the Heart and Stroke Foundation, SPCA, Sunshine Dream for Kids, Multiple Sclerosis Society, and the list is endless. Nathalie Michalchuk: instrumental in bringing to the community

the Lifeline emergency response system for seniors. She volunteered with the elder abuse board, Sanderson Centre and St Joseph's Hospital Foundation.

It's obvious that we have fantastic people in my riding who indeed deserve this kind of credit. The persons nominated for citizen of the year are inspirational to all of us. I want to thank each and every one of those members, who are representative of all of the wonderful volunteers we have in this riding and in this province.

WATER QUALITY

Mr Ernie Hardeman (Oxford): I've been contacted by the division commissioner of the Girl Guides of Canada in my riding. She, like many others in rural Ontario, has concerns about water regulation 170, and has explained how it will impact the Girl Guide camp they use.

Because of the regulation, the camp has to use a private lab for testing, which was previously done by the board of health for free. They must also ask volunteers to complete a course so they will have qualified water testers. In total, the Oxford division will have to pay \$6,000 over and above the cost of the water treatment system and the engineer's report to use their camp every year. That's a lot of cookies for those little girls to sell.

The commissioner says, "Where we are heading may be non-existence, because we may not be able to afford to cover the financial burden put on us." This regulation has not only become a church tax; I'm afraid it has become a cookie tax.

I urge the government to put this regulation on hold until they are ready to supply funding through recommendation 84 of the O'Connor report.

When the Girl Guides were taught to "be prepared," I'm sure they weren't expecting this.

SYD VANDERPOOL

Mr John Milloy (Kitchener Centre): I'm proud to rise in the House today to congratulate an outstanding resident of Kitchener Centre, the number one ranked super-middleweight boxer in the world, Syd "The Jewel" Vanderpool.

On April 17, Syd won a 12-round decision over Panama's Tito Mendoza in an International Boxing Federation bout. His victory over Mendoza moves him to the number one spot for the vacant IBF super-middleweight title.

Last Saturday afternoon, members of my community gathered to welcome this athlete home and to congratulate him on his victory. I had the pleasure of attending the event and bringing congratulations from the province.

Beyond his contributions to Canadian sport and to boxing worldwide, Syd has distinguished himself as a community leader. When he is not in the ring, he gives generously of his time to make a positive difference in the lives of young people in our area.

In the year 2000, Syd used his unique talents to create something for youth in our community called PRYDE. PRYDE stands for Positive Reinforcement Youth Development Enterprise. It emphasizes achievement through learning strategies based on individual and group activities. A spin-off of PRYDE is Syd's Kids for Camp program, which raises money to send kids from single-parent families to summer camp. This is just one example of Syd's concern for our community and his determination to build championship citizens.

As you can see, we are dealing with an incredible athlete and an extraordinary human being. I know that I speak for all the residents of Kitchener Centre and, indeed, all Ontarians when we express our pride in Syd Vanderpool's success and wish him all the best in his next bout.

WATER QUALITY

Ms Shelley Martel (Nickel Belt): Regulation 170 is causing more difficulties for constituents in Nickel Belt. In 1992, 14 homeowners in Skead were incorporated as a co-op and purchased company homes from the Poupore Lumber Co. The co-op, Skead Heritage Homes Inc, has a private water system which uses surface water to service the homes. The homeowners are subject to regulation 170 and must comply with its requirements by July 1.

They have two options. First, they can stay with the well system and add a filtration process, which will be very expensive, or they can dig a deep well and hope to find enough water to meet the volumes required by the MOE. Their engineer has been given the go-ahead to drill on-site now, to see what volumes of water are actually available.

Frank Kehoe, one of the homeowners, told me that, since 1992, co-op members have already spent thousands and thousands of dollars to upgrade the private well system. They are very concerned about the additional financial costs they'll incur as they try to comply with regulation 170. This is a very legitimate concern.

The Minister of the Environment has said the regulation is flawed and she has asked staff for recommendations for change. The government has two choices: amend the requirements through a new regulation or agree the government will fully fund the cost to upgrade water and treatment systems if the requirements stay the same. But the minister must respond now because many individuals and municipal councils must comply with regulation 170 by July 1, and they're making tough decisions about what to do.

This is a serious issue in rural and northern Ontario. Trailer park tenants risk losing their homes, municipalities risk losing their community centres, faith communities risk losing their churches and homeowners like the ones at the Skead co-op face serious financial challenges as they struggle to comply. They need to know now what the intentions of the government are. I call on the minister to make a positive decision as soon as possible and end this crisis in rural and northern Ontario.

OSGOODE HALL LAW STUDENTS

Ms Monique M. Smith (Nipissing): It gives me great pleasure to announce that students from York University's Osgoode Hall Law School, one of the finest law schools in our province, have won a major international legal competition in Vienna, Austria. It is the first such win by a Canadian team in the 11-year history of the William C. Vis International Arbitration Moot. The competition featured 136 entries from 42 countries, and the team from Osgoode Hall was judged the best—the best in the world.

Seated in the gallery today are the members of the Osgoode Hall team: Christopher Hickey, Fiona Hickman, Jonathan Hood, Gregory Smith, Stephen Vander Stoep and Tala Zarbafi, along with the team's adviser, Janet Walker, the associate dean.

Also with the team today are some distinguished visitors: Dean Patrick Monahan of Osgoode Hall; Professor Janine Benedet, who directs Osgoode's moot program; and in our public galleries, the family members and supporters of this great team.

The triumph of this team of young people is a tribute to the excellent legal education of Osgoode Hall, and indeed all the law faculties across the province.

I would ask you, Mr Speaker, and the members of this House to please join me in congratulating Osgoode Hall Law School and this remarkable team on their tremendous achievement.

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SOUTH ASIAN COMMUNITY

Mr Jim Flaherty (Whitby-Ajax): I'm pleased to announce to this House that for the third year in a row, people of South Asian origin and their friends throughout Ontario are celebrating May as South Asian Heritage Month. Tomorrow marks the launch of the month-long celebrations.

While most people of South Asian descent came to our country directly from Asia, many came to Canada from places such as Uganda, Kenya, Mauritius, Fiji, Trinidad and Tobago, and Guyana.

Over three million people of South Asian descent live in the Americas, and over half a million choose to live, work and raise their families here in Ontario.

Today, South Asians make up approximately 7% of Ontario's population and are proud to draw upon their heritage and traditions, contributing to many aspects of culture, commerce and public service across our province.

South Asian Heritage Month is an opportunity to showcase the accomplishments and successes of the South Asian community. Ontario's South Asian community provides a living social, political and economic link between our province and many countries around the world. It is my hope that we will continue to use this opportunity to enhance our understanding and appreciation of their rich culture, heritage and tradition.

I ask all members of this House to join me in paying tribute to the contributions South Asians have made and continue to make to the great province we all call home: Ontario, Canada.

COMMUNITY LIVING OAKVILLE

Mr Kevin Daniel Flynn (Oakville): I rise today to draw attention to and congratulate community living organizations in all of Ontario, but most specifically community living in my great riding of Oakville.

Living in our community is something that we take for granted, yet this is not something that happens naturally for many people who have an intellectual disability. In fact, in the past, many families found their loved ones placed in institutions.

In Oakville, in the early 1950s, two families started educating their son and daughter at home, and that initiative grew into what we know today as community living. Today, community living is 49 years old.

In the past few years, as a result of a friendship I've developed with a gentleman named Stephen Muir, I've learned a lot more about this wonderful organization. They've taught me that inclusiveness is not about words but about actions. Part of that inclusiveness is learning how provincial government works.

Today, in our public gallery, please join me in welcoming six members of Community Living Oakville, who are here today for a tour of Queen's Park and to see how their provincial government works.

COMMUNITY USE OF SCHOOLS

Mr Frank Klees (Oak Ridges): During my time as Minister of Tourism and Recreation, I encouraged the development of a policy that would restore community access to our schools for sports and recreation after hours and on weekends. I had hoped that it would be in Mr Bradley's announcement yesterday. Unfortunately, it wasn't.

For decades, Ontario taxpayers have paid for the construction of schools that they rightfully would have expected would be available for their children after hours and on weekends, yet our young people are often relegated to the streets and malls to spend their spare time. Money isn't the problem. After all, it should cost taxpayers pennies to let a responsible volunteer coach run a basketball game for a night a week. The buildings and fields are already there and already maintained.

I hope this House will join me in a nonpartisan effort to solve this problem. We just have to say no to red tape. We have to be fair with responsible volunteers, instead of forcing them to pay for custodial supervision that's neither wanted nor necessary. We have to make our school boards see the folly of sky-high fees. Those fees are putting teams and community clubs out of business, ensuring that the school boards won't raise a dime from those organizations that their policies are designed to raise money from.

Let's allow the public to use these public spaces for a great public purpose.

VISITOR

The Speaker (Hon Alvin Curling): We have with us today in the Speaker's gallery the consul general of Pakistan, Mr Ghalib Iqbal. Welcome.

REPORTS BY COMMITTEES

STANDING COMMITTEE ON GENERAL GOVERNMENT

Mr Vic Dhillon (Brampton West-Mississauga): I beg leave to present a report from the standing committee on general government and move its adoption.

Clerk at the Table (Ms Lisa Freedman): Your committee begs to report the following bill as amended:

Bill 31, An Act to enact and amend various Acts with respect to the protection of health information / Projet de loi 31, Loi édictant et modifiant diverses lois en ce qui a trait à la protection des renseignements sur la santé.

The Speaker (Hon Alvin Curling): Shall the report be received and adopted? Agreed.

The bill is ordered for third reading.

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

MINISTRY OF CONSUMER AND BUSINESS SERVICES STATUTE LAW AMENDMENT ACT, 2004

LOI DE 2004 MODIFIANT DES LOIS EN CE QUI CONCERNE LE MINISTÈRE DES SERVICES AUX CONSOMMATEURS ET AUX ENTREPRISES

Mr Watson moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 70, An Act to amend various Acts administered by or affecting the Ministry of Consumer and Business Services / Projet de loi 70, Loi modifiant diverses lois appliquées par ou touchant le ministère des Services aux consommateurs et aux entreprises.

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

Hon Jim Watson (Minister of Consumer and Business Services): I will make my comments during ministerial statements.

OLYMPIC DAY ACT, 2004

LOI DE 2004 SUR LA JOURNÉE OLYMPIQUE

Mr Fonseca moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 71, An Act to proclaim Olympic Day / Projet de loi 71, Loi proclamant la Journée olympique.

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

Mr Peter Fonseca (Mississauga East): Today we recognize Olympism and its values as an agent of real positive social and cultural change, values of excellence, fun, fairness, human development, leadership, peace, respect. By adhering to these values, we will achieve our greatest passion: greatness. Through our actions and by working together, we make others aware and understanding of what we represent and of ourselves. This is greatness.

SENATORIAL SELECTION ACT, 2004

LOI DE 2004 SUR LE CHOIX DES SÉNATEURS

Mr Runciman moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 72, An Act to provide for the election in Ontario of nominees for appointment to the Senate of Canada / Projet de loi 72, Loi prévoyant l'élection en Ontario de candidats à des nominations au Sénat du Canada.

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

1350

Mr Robert W. Runciman (Leeds-Grenville): This bill is modelled on a bill passed by the Alberta Legislature in 1988. Given the priority both Prime Minister Martin and Premier McGuinty have placed on the need for democratic reform, this seems the ideal time to put forward an initiative that could ultimately give regions of this country stronger representation in Ottawa without the requirement for constitutional amendments. Adoption of this initiative by the country's most populated province could open the floodgates to real Senate reform and send all the right messages to parts of the country that now feel alienated from the central government.

Mr Peter Fonseca (Mississauga East): On a point of order, Mr Speaker: In honour of the introduction of the Olympic Day Act, 2004, I would ask for unanimous consent that the members can wear the official Canadian Olympic Committee pin.

The Speaker: I hear a request for unanimous consent to wear the pin. Agreed? Agreed.

Mr Peter Kormos (Niagara Centre): On a point of order, Mr Speaker: I appreciate the member's search for unanimous consent and his having provided us with pins. Perhaps he could undertake to make sure the pages get one too.

MOTIONS

PRIVATE MEMBERS' PUBLIC BUSINESS

Hon Dwight Duncan (Minister of Energy, Government House Leader): I believe I have unanimous

consent to put forward a motion without notice regarding private members' public business.

The Speaker (Hon Alvin Curling): Do we have unanimous consent for the House leader to put forward private members' public business? Agreed.

Hon Mr Duncan: I move that, notwithstanding standing order 96(g), notice for ballot item 20 be waived.

The Speaker: Is it agreed? Agreed.

STATEMENTS BY THE MINISTRY AND RESPONSES

CONSUMER PROTECTION

PROTECTION DU CONSOMMATEUR

Hon Jim Watson (Minister of Consumer and Business Services): It's my pleasure to speak to this proposed legislation. This bill is an example of good government at work—a step toward the McGuinty government's vision of a better Ontario. It's a special pleasure for me to speak about this bill, as this is the first piece of proposed legislation I have been honoured to introduce since being elected in October.

This bill contains more than 80 proposals for changes to 24 of the 66 statutes administered by the Ministry of Consumer and Business Services. I am pleased to bring forward proposals for change to expedite into law improved consumer protection legislation and enhanced public safety in the electrical sector. The legislative amendments in this bill and the significant amounts of complex and technical detail reflected in them, can only have been developed with the support and hard work of the many ministry stakeholders and the public servants at the consumer and business services ministry.

Je veux profiter de cette occasion pour exprimer mon appréciation à un certain nombre de personnes clés pour leurs efforts bien spéciaux relativement à l'élaboration de ce projet de loi: Robert Stelzer, the president and CEO of the Electrical Safety Authority; Peter Marcucci, Lucy Impera and Dane MacCarthy for their guidance and support; Eryl Roberts, Dave Mason and Norm Purdy from the electrical contractors association—Mr Purdy, who is with us today, tells me he has been working on this for 40 years; his time and day have come—Glenn Carr, an Ottawa electrical contractor and chair of the Electrical Contractors Registration Agency; Garry Enright and Richard Cullis from the Ontario Electrical League; and John Pender, executive secretary and treasurer of the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers.

I'd also like to recognize the work of Michael Pepper, registrar and CEO of the Travel Industry Council of Ontario, for his contribution to the proposed travel amendment and his outstanding support of the regulation development process of the new Travel Industry Act, as well as Tracey McKiernan; the support of Carl Compton, executive director and registrar of the Ontario Motor

Vehicle Industry Council, and Tom Wright, president and CEO of the Real Estate Council of Ontario, and Ken Hajas, the chair of RECO, who have been of great service to our ministry. I'd also like to thank long-time consumer advocate Joan Huzar and all of the members of the Consumers Council of Canada, especially executive director Michael Lio and Whipple Steinkrauss, for their input on consumer protection measures. A number of these individuals are with me in the gallery, and I thank them very much for being here.

The proposals in this bill would strengthen confidence in the marketplace and promote growth and prosperity. I'm proud of the work that this government has done to protect consumers. Since taking office just six months ago, we've spent much of our time helping to educate millions of Ontario consumers about their rights and responsibilities in the marketplace.

Avec l'aide de nombreux partenaires, nous avons distribué cette année des calendriers anti-fraude à 140 000 consommateurs.

Just this week, the Canadian Public Relations Society awarded the top award in the public sector category to the Ministry of Consumer and Business Services for the calendar. My congratulations to Donna Holmes and Gerald Crowell and their team at MCBS.

We've been involved in a number of other major outreach initiatives. We launched our identity theft campaign, a large project that involves financial institutions and law enforcement agencies. The results have been exemplary.

Une nouvelle publication traitant du vol d'identité a été remise à plus de 100 000 consommateurs. Consumers who are victims of identity theft can now use a new on-line statement to send the information that creditors need to jump-start action on their cases.

But our work does not stop there.

The government's commitment to positive change is reflected in pushing forward with work on the regulations to the new consumer protection legislation so that the new law can be brought into force as early as possible without sacrificing attention to detail. The government wants to proclaim Ontario's new Consumer Protection Act as soon as the regulations can be completed and approved. With the regulations in hand, this broad-reaching legislation would make Ontario a national leader in consumer protection.

The new Consumer Protection Act received unanimous support in this assembly when it came forward as part of an umbrella package of legislation. We should recognize the work of the former government and all of the honourable members during the 37th Parliament. I want to particularly point out, for his leadership and work with this, the honourable member for Erie-Lincoln for a job well done. I also want to thank my colleague the honourable member for Essex, who was our party's critic and was very supportive of the legislation.

We do not want Ontario consumers to wait for a stronger marketplace. The regulations under development for this legislation are intended to be highly responsive to

the needs and wants of consumers and businesses in the 21st century. If this new legislation comes into force, it will provide many advantages for consumers. The new consumer protection legislation would increase protections for services sold on-line through the Internet, or traditional services such as lawn care. It would also cover leases, which is good news for those who lease cars or computers.

Car owners would also have another advantage, particularly when they deal with repair shops. Let me offer a tangible example of a consumer whom the ministry would have been able to help had the new consumer protection legislation been in force. Last year, a Scarborough-area consumer took his car to a repair shop for a complete engine rebuild. He wanted only new parts to be used, and that was confirmed in writing on the estimate. Eight months later he took the vehicle to another repair shop when his car started having engine trouble. He found out that used parts had been installed and that they were in poor condition. The ministry was unable to charge the repair shop under the Motor Vehicle Repair Act because the six-month limitation period had run out. Even if the repairer had been successfully charged, the consumer would have received no restitution, because under the existing legislation it could not have been ordered in court. If the new Consumer Protection Act were in force, consumer problems would be resolved for up to two years from the date of the occurrence and courts could order restitution.

1400

Les intervenants du ministère qui sont spécialistes de la gestion du secteur des véhicules automobiles applaudissent ces amendements proposés dans ce projet de loi, car ils aideraient à renforcer plus rapidement la protection du consommateur.

Carl Compton, executive director and registrar of the Ontario Motor Vehicle Industry Council, which regulates motor vehicle dealers on behalf of the ministry, says, "These changes go a long way toward building consumer confidence by working to implement much-needed consumer protection measures, while not unduly hampering legitimate businesses."

Many consumers have complained about the practice of negative-option billing. This occurs when a business bills for goods or services without the consent of the consumer. If the new consumer protection legislation were in force, consumers would not be liable for any goods or services that they did not request or agree to pay for. If consumers were charged for unsolicited goods and services, for example, through automatic debits from their bank accounts, they would be entitled to demand full refunds, and the suppliers would be required to provide those refunds.

Here's an example of how a ban on negative-option billing could help a consumer: A Mississauga-area consumer paid for lawn care services for one season. The final bill indicated in the small print that the company would continue their services the next year unless she cancelled the contract in writing by a certain date in the

middle of winter. The next spring, the consumer received and was charged for services she did not want. She was responsible for paying the bill. The new consumer protection legislation would prohibit this business practice.

These new consumer protection measures are important for consumers and they require teeth to make them effective. That's why, under the new Consumer Protection Act, our enforcement powers would be strengthened and made consistent across the board. Maximum fines for contravening consumer law would increase to \$50,000 for individuals and \$250,000 for corporations. Maximum sentencing for individuals would be two years less a day. Without the proposed amendments before you, these important consumer protection measures and many others may face unnecessary delay. This is because the bill would allow for proclamation of the new consumer protection legislation independent of other pieces of unproclaimed consumer protection legislation to govern motor vehicle dealers, real estate sales and travel sector professionals.

Actuellement, même si les règlements proposés pour chacun de ces secteurs se trouvent à des stades de développement différents, ils doivent être tous approuvés en même temps avant que la Loi de 2002 sur la protection du consommateur ne puisse être proclamée en vigueur.

This bill would also enable improvements in public safety, allowing the government to close significant gaps in the current licensing system for the electrical sector. Proposed amendments to the Electricity Act would enable the government to develop a province-wide licensing system for contractors and compulsory electrical trades. These same amendments will support Ontario businesses by allowing them to take jobs anywhere in the province with a single licence. Currently in the province of Ontario, electrical licensing is a patchwork quilt of rules and requirements. Presently, five different organizations share some part of the responsibility for licensing the 4,500 electrical contractors and 50,000 electricians in Ontario. Licensing standards vary greatly from one town to the next. Approximately 70 municipalities license contractors based on unique local standards, and some do not license contractors at all.

The Electrical Safety Authority, the ESA, as it's commonly known, is mandated by the Ministry of Consumer and Business Services to enforce a level of public electrical safety across Ontario that will keep the people of this province safe. Ontario's electrical safety record is very good. The rate of electrical fatalities and injuries and their cost, both in human terms and in financial terms, to taxpayers continues to decline. However, continued improvement is necessary in today's quickly evolving marketplace.

Following the adoption of this bill, the Electrical Safety Authority would provide a uniform provincial licensing system and would license electrical contractors, master electricians and electricians. Part of the plan, if proposed amendments are brought into force, is for the ESA to establish a toll-free line that consumers can call

to check whether a contractor anywhere in Ontario is licensed.

The proposal has the support of the industry, Glenn Carr, chair of the Electrical Contractors Registration Agency, whom I spoke with this morning, considers this “a tremendous step forward.” I also want to thank the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers for their support of this initiative.

Mike Floto, co-owner of a Guelph electrical company and a member of the Electrical Contractors Association of Ontario, sent letters to a number of MPPs supporting the proposal for province-wide licensing. He writes: “We strongly support legislation enabling a uniform system of contract licensing.... We believe this proposal will improve public electrical safety and consumer protection. It will allow greater labour mobility, reducing the cost of our services to the consumer.”

Full licensing is something that could not happen overnight. The government believes that now is the time to start on this ambitious public safety program. The program also responds to the 2003 Provincial Auditor’s report that recommended a consistent provincial standard for ongoing training and licensing of electricians.

Interjections.

Hon Mr Watson: I know people are on pins and needles wanting to hear this next section.

Among small businesses that will benefit from the legislation are travel agencies. We all have travel agencies in our ridings, and we know the challenges facing the travel agency industry since September 11.

Under current consumer protection law, travel agencies in Ontario face circumstances that are unique in Canada. I want to ensure that members of this assembly fully understand the unfairness of the travel agents’ current situation.

Travel agents and wholesalers pay into the provincial travel industry compensation fund. The fund protects consumers’ money if the travel agency, airline or cruise line cannot deliver its services. Even though the travel agency has already fulfilled its obligation by remitting consumers’ funds to the end supplier, if the service is not delivered the consumer can come back to the travel agency for reimbursement. No other province imposes such a liability on the travel industry. Under this bill, Ontario would end this practice and adopt an approach more consistent with other jurisdictions.

There are a number of other measures—I won’t go into detail—that deal with the Theatres Act, the film industry and consumer protection legislation, but I know, given the sense and mood in this House, there is going to be unanimous consent for this bill.

Mr Peter Kormos (Niagara Centre): On a point of order, Mr Speaker: Standing order 35 should be read and heeded by ministers during the course of ministerial statements, not ignored and treated with disdain. We have enough disregard for the rules here as it is without this minister showing disregard for standing order 35.

The Speaker (Hon Alvin Curling): I don’t think that is a point of order.

FOREST INDUSTRY

Hon David Ramsay (Minister of Natural Resources): Before I start my statement today, I would like to inform the House that the NAFTA trade dispute panel in Washington has ruled in Canada’s favour.

I’m pleased to rise in my place today to let the members know what the government is doing to make Ontario’s forest products more marketable and to promote a strong and prosperous economy. I’m referring to our recent actions on independent third-party forest certification.

Earlier this month, at a conference in Vancouver, I announced this initiative of the McGuinty government to require that all sustainable forest licence holders be certified to an acceptable performance standard by the end of the year 2007.

What we hope to achieve by this action is to help ensure that Ontario’s forest industry is given preference in export markets and to contribute to a more innovative and thriving economy.

What is certification? It involves the independent third-party assessment of a forest area against established criteria and standards of sustainable forest management. In layman’s terms, it means that a reputable and legitimate outside group states officially that we are managing our forests sustainably and offers its stamp of approval.

1410

There are a number of certification regimes that are nationally and internationally recognized. They are sponsored by groups such as the Forest Stewardship Council, the Canadian Standards Association and the American Forest and Paper Association. The International Organization for Standardization also has a regime. A number of Ontario forest companies have already obtained registration under these various regimes. As a ministry, we have worked, and will continue to work, co-operatively with certification systems applicable to Ontario, with a view to pursuing greater efficiencies between their systems and our regulatory framework.

Some members may be asking themselves, “Why is this important?” We are finding that an increasing number of companies in North America, including major publishers and building supply outlets, are adopting procurement policies for forest products that come from operators who meet these certification standards. Ministry staff have been in touch with all sustainable forest licence holders in the province, as well as the Algonquin Forestry Authority. In addition, consultation is underway with our two major forest industry associations in the province.

I recognize that certain sustainable forest licences made up of smaller companies or those with lower harvest volumes may be apprehensive about the impact on them. I can assure the members of the House that we will work with these companies to listen to their concerns in finalizing this approach. I am encouraged, however, that some of these licence holders have already obtained certification. The goal of all of these discussions, which

will be ongoing, is to address any potential concerns and to make sure that the work going forward can be achieved.

Ontario is a world leader in forest certification. Right now, we already have about eight million hectares that are third-party-certified. I'd like to point out that this total includes the largest area of certified Forest Stewardship Council standards of any jurisdiction in North America. In fact, 24% of the crown land that could be certified is already certified in this province.

Ontario's forest industry has made a considerable effort with regard to certification. This success demonstrates two things: the industry's commitment to sustainable forest management in the province and the strength of Ontario's existing requirements.

I am proud of the very rigorous regulatory framework that Ontario has in place for sustainable forest management. It positions our forest industry well to satisfy any legitimate certification regime.

The reason we are moving to this mandatory certification, even though we have this regime in place, is to accelerate this voluntary progress. These third party systems play an invaluable role in independently verifying and communicating to the public that our framework is working.

I have a vision of Ontario as a model jurisdiction in forest certification and an example to the world, and I believe this move puts us well on that way.

CONSUMER PROTECTION

Mr Robert W. Runciman (Leeds-Grenville): I appreciate the minister's comments and applaud him for finally tabling legislation in the House after well over six months on the job; six months which have been mostly spent blaming the previous government for the failings of his own office on the birth certificate issue.

This first piece of legislation is essentially, as the minister acknowledged, the result of the good work of the minister's predecessor, Mr Tim Hudak, the member for Erie-Lincoln. Sadly, this is typical of this Liberal government, where the few good things done in the past six months have largely been announcements of the good work carried out by the previous government or re-announcements of the good work done by the Conservative government, including funding for judicial appointments, the auto sector and the TTC. In fact, the bulk of business that has flowed from the McGuinty government has been a series of broken promises—20 to date—and an embarrassing charade disguised as a public consultation to justify the continued breaking of promises.

Perhaps the most significant promise to be broken as a result of this exercise is Mr McGuinty's pledge not to increase our taxes. This is a government that in approximately three weeks from now will table its first budget, and all signs point to a budget that breaks the Taxpayer Protection Act and the pledge Mr McGuinty made during last year's provincial election, "I will not increase your taxes"; shades of Richard Nixon, "I am not a crook."

To add insult to injury, the budget will be tabled by a Minister of Finance under a cloud, who has had many of his powers stripped away from him due to the fact that he was a director and audit chair for a company now under investigation by the RCMP, the securities commission and by Revenue Canada, that same man—Mr Sorbara, the Minister of Finance, the member for Vaughan, who hid from his Premier for 66 days the fact that this company, Royal Group Technologies, was under investigation.

Contrast the Minister of Finance's role as audit chair with that of Mr John Cleghorn, the audit chair of Nortel, who in today's media is described as "a terrier" who "will get to the bottom of things."

If any of those investigations related to Royal Group Technologies result in the laying of charges or findings of fault that might be laid at the doorstep of the board of directors, I ask you and the members of the governing Liberal Party, what impact does that have on the upcoming budget? What impact does that have on the bond markets, on the confidence of investors? What impact, short- and long-term, does that have on the well-being of Ontario's economy?

This government is failing the people of Ontario. It is seriously, if not irreparably, damaging the trust Ontario voters placed in it just six short months ago.

I want to assure you and the hard-working taxpayers of our great province that the Conservative Party of Ontario is strong, it's healthy, and we will continue to fight the good fight for each and every person in Ontario.

In conclusion, we will support the Ministry of Consumer and Business Services Statue Law Amendment Act, 2004, a good piece of legislation developed by the former Conservative government.

FOREST INDUSTRY

Mr Jerry J. Ouellette (Oshawa): I rise to respond to the statement of the Minister of Natural Resources. However, it appears to be somewhat of a love, trust and pixie dust statement. You see, this is forest certification that, as the minister mentioned, was in place and has been going on for an extended period of time already. The criteria for the certification were published through the State of the Forest Report in 2001 and 2002. We could go over the details if we had the time.

Also, in April 2003, the Gordon Cosens Forest—mind you, in 2001 the Gordon Cosens Forest was certainly an issue of protest by other parties in this House—was certified as the largest FSC-certified in the entire world, and it was proud to have it happen in the province of Ontario.

What did Monte Hummel of the World Wildlife Fund say about Ontario's forest accord, something the previous government brought in? That this province has made an unprecedented contribution to conservation on a global scale.

Not only that, if the minister really wants to do something, he should ensure the criteria committee continues

on the process to ensure consistency of the criteria with each of the districts throughout the province.

Mr Howard Hampton (Kenora-Rainy River): I want to respond to the Minister of Natural Resources. The Minister of Natural Resources tries to make it sound as if forest certification is something that's just happening under the Liberals. He fails to mention that the Crown Forest Sustainability Act was put in place in 1994; that the forest renewal trust fund, which is very much part of the certification process, was put in place in 1994; that the forestry futures fund was put in place in 1994; and that the certification process has been ongoing since then. If you want to take credit for this, acknowledge, would you, that other ministers have in fact put in place the whole process here.

But I want to offer you some advice in terms of certification going forward. If you think you can continue to have massive clear-cuts, clear-cuts half the size of the city of Toronto, and still receive forest certification, I would say to you that there is a nasty surprise waiting for you. Those clear-cuts are already too large. They're affecting fish and wildlife, as well as the basic integrity of the land.

Secondly, you know about the protest at Grassy Narrows, where First Nations are saying that you cannot come in and clear-cut all around their reserve, leaving them no opportunity to hunt, no opportunity to trap, no opportunity to fish. If you want to have ongoing certification, that must be addressed as well.

1420

Finally, there is the boreal forest initiative, where I know Ministry of Natural Resources people have been beavering away in the backroom planning the next stage of forestry north of the 51st parallel. But there's something missing in this process. The First Nations who live north of the 51st parallel want the Ontario government to sign a comprehensive agreement, setting out protection of the land, setting out who will set the environmental rules, setting out what the forestry guidelines will be and setting out that First Nations will actually receive some economic and social benefit when forestry activities move north of the 51st parallel. Sadly, only one First Nation, Pikangikum, has been able to do anything; other First Nations have been brushed aside.

I would say to you, Minister, that if you want to have future success in terms of the certification of our forests, sit down with the First Nations of the far north and develop a comprehensive agreement that ensures they will have some control over what happens on their land, that they will receive the economic and social benefits and that there will be environmental integrity. That's the way to future forest certification.

CONSUMER PROTECTION

Mr Peter Kormos (Niagara Centre): New Democrats were hoping that the Minister of Consumer and Business Services had been spending sufficient time addressing the ongoing critical problem around the pro-

vision of birth and death certificates to make an announcement today about an investment in the office of the registrar general, and destroying the huge backlogs that are causing grief to folks across this province, and causing our constituency office staff to spend an inordinate amount of time tracking down birth certificates that are not just days, but weeks and weeks, overdue.

Even when our constituents are hit by this minister for the speedy service fee, which amounts to the biggest scam in town—you would think perhaps consumer protection might be at the forefront of his mind, when it comes to restoring or returning the charges that he gives to our constituents—when people pay for speedy service, “speedy service” means weeks or months at the end of the day.

The other concern that New Democrats have, and this government and this minister have been silent about, is that here we are in the spring of 2004, and families across this province are planning summer vacations, including purchasing airline tickets from Air Canada. We dearly want to hear from this government about its plans to protect those consumers, to the tune of literally millions of dollars, in the event that the best efforts of all the parties involved aren't successful and Air Canada, indeed, becomes insolvent and creditors start taking action to the point where Air Canada is grounded.

This minister responsible for the protection of tourists in the province has done nothing whatsoever to educate tourists about their exposure. This minister has done nothing whatsoever to deal with establishing adequate funding in the guarantee fund for consumers of tourist products. This minister has done absolutely nothing to prepare a contingency plan for the thousands of Ontarians who will be stranded, some with tragic consequences, in the event of the bankruptcy—the completion of the bankruptcy—of Air Canada. For this minister and this government to fail to respond to that is the grossest of negligence.

MEMBER'S BIRTHDAY

Hon Dwight Duncan (Minister of Energy, Government House Leader): On a point of order, Mr Speaker: I believe all members will want to join me in congratulating the Minister of the Environment on her 39th birthday today.

CANADIAN WOMEN'S HOCKEY TEAM

Hon Dwight Duncan (Minister of Energy, Government House Leader): On a point of order, Mr Speaker: I believe we have unanimous consent for each party to speak for up to five minutes to honour the Canadian women's hockey team, representatives of whom are in attendance today.

The Speaker (Hon Alvin Curling): Is it agreed that we have unanimous consent for five minutes? Agreed.

Hon Gerry Phillips (Chair of the Management Board of Cabinet): I would like to acknowledge some

special guests in the gallery today. I'm honoured to introduce members of the Canadian women's hockey team. Please welcome the head coach, Karen Hughes; the coach, Ken Dufton; and Therese Brisson and Jennifer Botterill, who represent the players. If they would stand.

As you know, these amazing team players won the gold medal at the world championship in Halifax earlier this month. Their convincing 2-0 win over the United States brought hockey glory to all Canadians. It was a thrilling victory for the team and instilled pride in all of us. By the way, this was the eighth consecutive time this team has won the world championship. Plus, who can forget their victory in the Olympics just a couple of years ago?

I want to say how proud we are of the hard work and dedication the team members have. We can only imagine how much effort they put into it. I understand that at least two hours every day of the year these players are working out and staying in shape. It takes an amazing amount of perseverance to do that.

Just on a personal note, I really began taking an interest in girls' hockey 25 years ago. I coached hockey for 30 years. About 25 years ago, my wife was running a hockey tournament. It was all-star seven-year-old boys, but there was one girl in it. There were eight teams and they played the tournament. They picked the most valuable player and it was Vicky Sunohara, who is still on the team and an assistant captain. It was the beginning of the recognition of how talented young girls are at hockey when this individual was the best hockey player on eight teams, all the rest boys. So that piqued my interest. By the way, I've followed Vicky ever since. She happens to live in the area I represent as well.

I also want to pay particular tribute to the head coach, Karen Hughes. She also is a 14-year member of the Ontario public service. She works at Management Board. I happen to see her in her professional role probably once a week—very professional, I might add. The most amazing thing to me was, the team won the game late on a Tuesday night. Thursday morning at 8 o'clock, Karen Hughes was appearing before Management Board having, I think, worked the night before on her presentation.

Interjection: Give her a break.

Hon Mr Phillips: No, I didn't demand she be there. She was just there. She said she ran out of holidays.

I want to pay particular tribute to her because she's typical of many of our public servants. I'm always impressed when I go to community events and ask people, "What do you do?" and how many of them say, "I also work for the public service." Karen's a poster person for us of the kind of people we have in our public service. It takes some courage to actually take on the head coaching job because for eight consecutive world championships you are on the line.

Karen, congratulations. She also, by the way, is head coach at U of T.

Finally, I want to acknowledge that these players are from around Canada, but we're fortunate that many of

them are from Ontario. If you'll permit me, I'd like to acknowledge them. Becky Kellar is from Hagersville.

Interjection.

Hon Mr Phillips: Yes, Becky is from Toby's riding. Gillian Ferrari is from Thornhill; Cheryl Pounder is from Mississauga; Cherie Piper lives right in the neighbourhood I represent out in Scarborough. Quite a well-known name is Gillian Apps, who lives in Unionville. Her father was a member here in the Legislature, the famous Syl Apps, who represented, I think, Kingston for many years. Jayna Hefford is from Kingston; Vicky Sunohara, as I said, is from Scarborough; and Cassie Campbell is from Brampton. As well, Sami Jo Small is from Winnipeg and now lives in Ontario. The two players who are here today have moved from other provinces and are now living in Ontario and playing hockey here.

Again, on behalf of the Legislature and the people of Ontario, congratulations for a terrific job. You made us all very proud.

1430

Mr Toby Barrett (Haldimand-Norfolk-Brant): Winter after winter, fathers across the Dominion of Canada have been bundling up, heading outdoors and battling the elements to move a garden hose back and forth in the backyard. It's in the back of every father's mind that maybe, just maybe, that backyard rink will develop the next Great One: a Cassie Campbell, a Hayley Wickenheiser, a Therese Brisson or a Jennifer Botterill in our members' gallery today, or, as mentioned, Hagersville's Becky Kellar.

It has taken years, but the dream of making it big no longer lies solely with the boys. On behalf of the opposition, I certainly wish to extend congratulations to Canada's national hockey team. It's the eighth consecutive time they've captured the gold at the women's hockey championships. In this year's final, and in all the previous seven championship games, Canada faced off against our friends and neighbours the United States, and as we know, we shut them out 2-0. Further, Canada has never lost a single game in world championship play, and that's outstanding.

I find these accomplishments on the world stage to be nothing short of phenomenal, considering the historic lack of financial support for Canadian amateur athletes. Further, for members of our women's team, hockey is not their bread and butter. They're not in the same category as male professional hockey players. Many of these ladies have full-time jobs, and somehow they still find the time and determination to bring back the gold.

Becky Kellar was mentioned. She lives just outside Hagersville. She has laced up for Team Canada for several years. She was originally a ringette player—there was no girls' hockey in Hagersville. She went to Brown University and received a scholarship. She was MVP at Brown, and she is one of the world's stingiest on defence in women's hockey. Becky played for Canada in the 1998 Olympics and helped earn the gold in 2002 at Salt Lake City. Today, she continues her hockey career and

does all she can to instill that same kind of passion in other up-and-coming young female players.

In 1998, the Southern Counties Girls Ice Hockey Association was born—in my riding, actually—and membership has grown by leaps and bounds. There are now about 110 members.

I want to make mention of a lady named Ruth Pond. She is 90 years old, and even over the telephone you can hear a smile in Ruth's voice when she recalls her times on the outdoor rinks playing hockey for Simcoe High School. That was in 1928 and 1929—no helmets, and the Eaton's catalogue was used for shin pads. Ruth played defence. She played it well, and she played it fair. A trophy has been established in Ruth's name and is given annually to the most exemplary player in the Norfolk Girls Hockey Association. Her participation and her gift to the game are documented here in Toronto at the Hockey Hall of Fame.

"Girls who played were usually viewed as tomboys," Ruth says. Today, that misconception is fading as young girls turn out with ponytails swinging and a hint of lip gloss. They are little girls with big dreams in a society that is obviously more accepting of this trend.

This has not always been the case. I know of an ordeal my EA went through to play the game. Bobbi Ann Dwornikiewicz wanted to follow in her brother's footsteps, and she skated right into hockey politics. Although the boys' team she played on knew she was a girl, when traveling to other towns Bobbi Ann had to change her name to Bob. With her hair cut short, earrings taken out and a navy tracksuit, she ultimately became one of the boys and pioneered for female hockey players in the tobacco town of Delhi. Bobbi went on to play boys' hockey until she was 18. Her teammates protected her like a little sister, but the opposition was nasty. She remembers being called scandalous names, being spit on, being threatened by both fans and players. At one point, the police were brought in to escort her from the dressing room to the family car.

We certainly are aware how far women's hockey has come over the past few years, and that is quite heartening. So, to the Canadian women's hockey team, I say, "Way to go," and for people like Becky and Ruth and Bobbi Ann, "Go get 'em."

Ms Marilyn Churley (Toronto-Danforth): On behalf of the New Democratic Party, I want to thank the Canadian women's national hockey team for infusing Canada's game with a new dynasty, a new energy, and for showing the nation and the world that girls and women indeed got ice—big time. We want to thank you. Your victory at Salt Lake helped make 2002 a watershed year in Canadian hockey history.

You had the nation gripped again a few weeks ago, when you won for the eighth consecutive time, in 2004, the international women's hockey championship—on home ice in Halifax, no less. All your victories on the international stage, or more appropriately international ice, have created a new Canadian hockey legacy, and we are so proud of you.

During this time, when you have set a new bar in world hockey, women's and girls' hockey has seen a 400% increase in participation. You are a key part of making female hockey one of the sports the world is now following with ever-increasing interest and in opening a new chapter in the history of our national sport that has seen women and girls pursuing a gamut of new opportunities on and off the ice. What role models you are, from being players in new girls', women's, and co-ed recreational leagues, to representing Canada in Olympic and world championship play, to becoming coaches and officials in leagues.

I and many others have seen first-hand the many struggles you have overcome to get the sport to this point. You have contended with unsupportive attitudes toward resources being available to females interested in playing hockey. I think back to my niece Sonia Issacon, then known as Sonia Tree, and her experience as a minor league hockey player in BC. Adamant that she get the opportunity to develop and showcase her skills on the ice, she had to join—and she joined with great pleasure—a local boys' minor league hockey team at the age of six in the absence of a girls' team. She persisted in playing all through her adolescence, winning—playing with the boys' teams—most valuable player more than once during those years, with a reputation for being an aggressive and to-be-reckoned-with puck handler. Her mother tells me that she played as though the puck was hers, and if anybody took it away, look out. I think she learned that from me.

Now we are seeing a new generation entering the sport in record numbers, with their communities watching their games, hoping that some of these players will one day bring home Olympic hockey gold. I want to say again to the members who are here today from the team how very proud we are of you, what wonderful role models you are for our daughters and our sisters. Thank you very much for being with us today. We are very proud of you.

ORAL QUESTIONS

TAXATION

Mr John R. Baird (Nepean-Carleton): Today my question is to the Premier. Premier, Ontario taxpayers are once again angry at you and at your government. In your ongoing attempt to pick the pockets of Ontario taxpayers, the latest victim appears to be those Ontarians who play the lottery.

Yesterday, you refused to rule out any tax increase, including a new tax on lottery and gaming winnings. Later that same day, your Minister of Finance seemed to rule it out. Now, people in the province of Ontario are asking, "Who's the real boss over there?" When you say one thing and your friend Sorbara says another, who are the people of Ontario to bet on?

Hon Dalton McGuinty (Premier, Minister of Inter-governmental Affairs): I know that what my friend opposite is saying is that he is interested in the details of our budget, as are many Ontarians. I can say that we have listened to many Ontarians. We got all kinds of advice. Some people say that we should cut taxes, some say we should hold the line on taxes; we've also had advice saying that we should raise taxes. We are taking all of that into account, and I can tell you we are very much looking forward to presenting our budget in this Legislature on May 18.

Mr Baird: I say to the Premier that any attempt to break all of your election promises under the guise of these phony-baloney campaign consultations by focus group that you have undertaken will not work. It will not work here in this Legislature and it will not work with taxpayers across the province of Ontario.

Your latest tax grab appears to bring in groups like the Lions Club and Rotary Club lotteries and bingos, charity casinos, 50/50 draws for minor league sports, hospital lotteries, dream home lotteries like the CHEO dream home lottery in our home community of Ottawa, radio contests, and prizes of all sorts.

1440

During last year's election, you made two promises. You promised that you would not raise taxes on Ontario families, in your words, "by one penny." You also signed the taxpayers' protection pledge, promising a referendum before any new tax or any tax increase. Will you stand in your place and say you will keep your word to the people of Ontario and you will not raise taxes by one penny unless the voters have a chance to have a referendum? Will you do that?

Hon Mr McGuinty: I appreciate the member opposite's enthusiasm in anticipation of our budget—and we look forward to presenting it in this House—but I notice he has a particular concern about charitable organizations that might be taken into account with respect to some revenue measures. It's passing strange that today he has an interest in those kinds of organizations and the vulnerable. We ask ourselves, where was he when the former government cut welfare rates by 22%? Where was he, Speaker? Where was he when he said to expectant mothers in Ontario who found themselves up against it and on welfare that he did not trust them with a mother's allowance? Where was he at that time?

The Speaker (Hon Alvin Curling): The member for Erie-Lincoln.

Mr Tim Hudak (Erie-Lincoln): Premier, you know that the province already nets about \$2.5 billion in gaming revenue. Every quarter put in every machine, every dollar put on every table, the province already takes in the lion's share, and now you want to go after the winners just because they took home a couple of extra bucks.

Premier, I think you know that casinos, bingos and racetrack slots, particularly along the border areas, are already coping with border delays, a higher Canadian

dollar and tough competition across the border. In fact, casino revenue is still down since September 11.

A key incentive to attract tourists is that in Ontario you keep what you win. Now you want to put your mitts into the purses of the senior citizens down at the Delta Bingo or at Casino Niagara. Mr Premier, I have a statement from Niagara: "Don't gamble on a new casino tax."

Interjections.

Hon Mr McGuinty: I want that member's writer. They're doing better than ours over here.

With respect to the fiscal challenge before us, it is significant. The people of Ontario have been burdened with a \$5.6-billion deficit and an additional \$2 billion-plus in risks, and we're going to have to make difficult decisions. We're not going to shy away from this as a government. They're not all going to be easy, they're not going to be simple, and they're not going to be straightforward. We're going to do the very best we can and we very much look forward to introducing the budget in this House on May 18.

CITIZENS' DIALOGUE ON BUDGET STRATEGY

Mr Jim Flaherty (Whitby-Ajax): My question is for the Premier. Premier, you've dragged the people of Ontario through a scheme of consultations and focus groups. You have claimed that the focus groups were independent. You've told the people of Ontario that these groups called for increased user fees.

I've just learned that Graham Richardson from Global News is breaking a story this weekend. Graham has exposed your shameful secret scheme. Mr Richardson interviewed Mr Byron Montgomery from Kitchener, Ontario, a participant in one of these so-called independent focus groups.

Mr Montgomery says that the focus groups were just a public relations exercise set up to get the answer that the government wanted. He says, in fact, that they were rigged to get the answers you wanted. He says it was a rigged process. They didn't have much choice, and it was pretty clear where the government was going.

Premier, I ask you, since the whole cooked-up consultation was a sham, will you now back off the raising of user fees in Ontario?

Hon Dalton McGuinty (Premier, Minister of Inter-governmental Affairs): First of all, let me take the opportunity to thank Mr Montgomery for attending one of our town hall sessions and availing himself of the opportunity to speak with this government. I do want to put on the record, though, that Mr Montgomery did not attend an independent session conducted by Canadian Policy Research Networks. I think it's important that the member opposite recognizes that.

On page 27 of the CPRN document—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon Alvin Curling): I would like to hear the Premier's response.

Hon Mr McGuinty: The CPRN document itself, which was independent and conducted by a non-profit, independent organization, says on page 27 where they held these sessions. Kitchener was not among those sessions.

Mr Flaherty: Mr Montgomery attended the public forum in Kitchener, Ontario. He says, "Well, the results have said"—

Interjections.

Mr Flaherty: I'm sure they want to hear. I'm sure they want to know the accurate statement, including the Minister of Energy. I'm sure he wants to hear. So perhaps the Minister of Energy—

Interjections.

The Speaker: Order. More importantly, I'd like to hear it. If I could just have a bit of quiet on this side. And you could direct your question to the Speaker.

Mr Flaherty: At the forum which Mr Montgomery attended in Kitchener, Ontario—and I'm sure the Minister of Energy wants to hear what he said. He talks about the results. He says, "Well, the results have said that user fees, making people pay the full price for the service, is what people agreed to, and that's a complete reversal of what we discussed at Kitchener."

Premier, you are inaccurate when you report to this House and to the people of Ontario that the folks, like Mr Montgomery, attending your forums recommended an increase in user fees. Why don't you come clean with the people of Ontario? This was a fixed, rigged process that you are trying to use to justify breaking over 200 promises that you made last year to the people of Ontario. Will you back off jacking up user fees?

Hon Mr McGuinty: The member doesn't want to allow the facts to get in the way of his story. I'm going to repeat it for his benefit. Mr Montgomery did not attend an independent session conducted by CPRN. He attended one of our town hall sessions, which was conducted by various representatives of the government.

What we did to instill greater confidence in the process was retain an independent, non-profit organization, ie, Canadian Policy Research Networks. They conducted a number of sessions and prepared an independent report. Those recommendations flow from that independent report.

Mr Flaherty: You say you care about the people of Ontario. Mr Montgomery is a voter, a former Liberal. He says there was discussion about user fees and that the Liberal member was at their table, as a matter of fact. He says the local MP, who just happens to be Liberal, also spent a lot of time at the table and introduced the process. He said they talked about user fees and that his group rejected user fees. He says, "We didn't want to see regressive taxes used, and that's why we're rejecting user fees."

That's the quote from one of the independent citizens who attended the public forum in Kitchener. He's against regressive user fees. You ought to be against them too. You told the people of Ontario during the election campaign that you would hold the line on taxes. Will you

finally keep your word on something to the people of Ontario?

Hon Mr McGuinty: I am proud to say that we have conducted an unprecedented pre-budget consultation. We conducted town halls, which were hosted by various representatives of the government. Beyond that, we had an independent non-profit organization conduct an independent piece of research for us.

I find it just a little bit rich that a member who presented the first budget in the history of this province outside of this Legislature—

The Speaker: New question.

1450

SOCIAL ASSISTANCE

Mr Howard Hampton (Kenora-Rainy River): My question is for the Premier. This morning I spoke to a rally of hundreds of courageous anti-poverty activists in front of this building. Some of these people had walked from as far away as Sarnia to send you a message: Ontario needs a raise. Ontario's poorest citizens have had their incomes reduced by 34% since 1995. They struggle to feed their children. They often can't pay their rent. You know it's not fair, you know it must be fixed, yet your government and you have not kept your promise to increase social assistance benefits. Premier, when will you stop breaking your promises and give Ontario's poorest citizens the raise they deserve?

Hon Dalton McGuinty (Premier, Minister of Inter-governmental Affairs): I thank the leader of the NDP for the question. In particular I want to thank the group for making its way to Queen's Park and to thank them for the representations they made. I know the Minister of Community and Social Services had the opportunity to meet with representatives. I can say that we are listening to the case made by our most vulnerable and we look forward to doing more.

But I can say that we take some pride in what we've already done. We have increased the minimum wage. We have eliminated the automatic rent increase this year. We're back in the business of building new affordable housing in the province of Ontario. We've created a rent bank and an emergency hydro assistance fund. We've taken a first and important step when it comes to addressing the problem of domestic violence in Ontario. We've just begun, and we look forward to doing so much more.

Mr Hampton: Premier, these are people who have to rely upon social assistance benefits. Your meagre increase of the minimum wage will not help them; I doubt it's going to help even those who are working at minimum wage. Your so-called hydro rate assistance will provide them with \$1 for every 20 additional dollars you take out of their pockets.

Many of the courageous people I saw this morning are people with disabilities. Their incomes have been reduced by 18% since 1995. This includes people like 61-year-old Brandy Crocker of Toronto. From the On-

tario disability support plan she receives \$930 a month, but her rent is \$896 a month. She cannot feed herself and she is at the brink of becoming homeless. Premier, how can you break your promise to Brandy Crocker? Why are you breaking your promises to the poorest people in the province?

Hon Mr McGuinty: I say with the greatest respect to the leader of the NDP that he does not have a monopoly on social consciousness in this Legislature. We have taken a number of important steps, and we look forward to taking more. We welcomed the representations that were made by the group that gathered this morning. As I said, the minister took the time to meet with representatives of the group. I can say to the member opposite and to those who gathered this morning on the lawn of Queen's Park that we look forward to doing much more. We can say that we also look forward to having some announcements of this nature included in our budget.

CITIZENS' DIALOGUE ON BUDGET STRATEGY

Mr Howard Hampton (Kenora-Rainy River): Again to the Premier: Premier, these people are going to be very hard hit by fee increases. They've already been hard hit by hydro rate increases and by natural gas rate increases.

I expect they'll want to watch Focus Ontario this week. You must remember Focus Ontario; it's the program that got you in a bit of a contradiction on your promise to hire 5,000 teachers. This week they will air Mr Byron Montgomery, and Mr Montgomery, a participant, says that your budget consultations were nothing more "than a public relations exercise, simply set up to get what they"—the government—"wanted to come out" of it. Mr Montgomery says that it didn't give people "the option of talking about income tax increases; it only gave us the option of talking about user fee increases." He says that the facilitator at his table, as soon as they wanted to talk about an increase—

The Speaker (Hon Alvin Curling): Order. Premier?

Hon Dalton McGuinty (Premier, Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs): Again, as I replied to a member from the Conservative Party, there was an independent process conducted by CPRN. This particular gentleman did not participate in that independent process.

I expect that there will be all kinds of criticism levelled by members opposite as a result of our efforts to reach out to Ontarians and consult them on a very important matter: their budget. I will say to all the members opposite that we are proud of the fact that we have taken the time and gone to extreme lengths, something that has never been done before on the part of any government, to talk to the people of Ontario. We welcome Mr Montgomery's representation.

The Speaker: Supplementary? The member from Beaches-East York.

Mr Michael Prue (Beaches-East York): Premier, you claim that all of your processes were open and trans-

parent and that all of your processes were taxpayers' money well spent. All of your processes pointed to the same thing, and that is to increase user fees.

Well, Mr Montgomery was there in another forum and he tells another story. He says, "The distinct majority favoured not having an increase in user fees because of the effect on the poor."

I'm asking you two questions: Will you now admit that your consultation was a sham designed to allow you to backtrack on your election platform; and that this was completely orchestrated by and for the Liberal Party of Ontario and should be paid by and for the Liberal Party of Ontario?

Hon Mr McGuinty: The individual in question demonstrates that this process was open to everyone, proof that there was hardly pre-selection. This is a gentleman who disagrees with the results. He's made it very, very apparent to all of us.

Anticipating that there would be some criticism of sessions conducted by representatives of the government, we retained an independent, non-profit organization by the name of CPRN. We asked them to conduct an independent process. They have done so. That culminated in a report. We were pleased to present that to this Legislature, and we're looking forward very much to presenting our budget in this Legislature.

OHIP SERVICES

Mr Robert W. Runciman (Leeds-Grenville): My question is for the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care. It concerns OHIP coverage for out-of-province medical care.

Last year, a constituent of mine, 25-year-old Jennie Kelsey, was told she was dying of ovarian cancer. Doctors at Kingston General Hospital denied Jennie surgery to address her situation, describing it as too risky, even though chemotherapy was not working. Her parents didn't accept that verdict and turned to doctors at the University of Vermont's Fletcher Allen Health Care, where the surgery was deemed potentially life-saving and carried out.

Minister, do you believe it's appropriate in these circumstances to have the family or the US hospital incur the expenses for the state-of-the-art medical care that this young woman received in Vermont and was denied in Ontario?

Hon George Smitherman (Minister of Health and Long-Term Care): I think that it's important to inform the member, and indeed all members of this House, that the policies that are in place have guided this exact situation for a long, long time, under those parties when they were in government and under this party.

In those situations where a patient believes that there is a service available in another part of the world beyond the borders of Ontario, there is a process by which they must make application and receive pre-approval for the covering of any expense. If we didn't have that situation in place, people all across Ontario would be seeking out

treatments and services which would, frankly speaking, be beyond our capacity to pay.

We have in this province a state-of-the-art health care system, one that provides, based on the statistics, some of the best care anywhere in the world.

I think that for the integrity of the process, it's incredibly important that any Ontarian who seeks services outside this province and expects those to be compensated get pre-approval for that expenditure.

1500

Mr Runciman: I think this is a case where compassion is merited. I would indicate to the minister that she was rejected. I'll send a copy of the OHIP rejection over to the minister. The application, as indicated, was rejected. It states that the surgery was not supported by Ontario doctors.

This young woman has gone through months of hell, told she was dying, and effectively, in the family's view—and I share that view—was abandoned by Ontario's health care system. I'm going to send along with the OHIP letter a petition with hundreds of names, calling on you to intervene and ensure that Jennie Kelsey and her family are treated fairly by OHIP. Will you do that?

Hon Mr Smitherman: I appreciate the sensitive nature of the question. Our sympathies lie with those who struggle in the way that is outlined by the honourable member, but had the honourable member taken the time to speak with the former Health Minister, who serves as the deputy leader of his party, he would understand that the section he's talking about is one which provides—

Interjection.

Hon Mr Smitherman: Well, she would know, then, that it is in the law: no provision whatsoever for the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care to be engaged in the exercise of discretion. That is for a very obvious reason. There will always be circumstances which play to our compassion, but it's incredibly important to note that the integrity of the system depends upon those scientific experts. Those whom we depend upon are those who have medical expertise to make decisions, and in this case there is an appeal process to the health services review board. I would recommend that the member assist his constituent in following through the appeals process.

FOREST INDUSTRY

Ms Monique M. Smith (Nipissing): My question today is for the Minister of Natural Resources. In your statement today, you announced that it was now mandatory for all sustainable forest licence holders to be certified to an acceptable performance standard. As you know, the forestry industry and forest product industry are very important components of my riding, as Tembec and Columbia Forest Products are major employers in my riding.

I understand that a large percentage of licence holders were already voluntarily doing what is now required. While I think it's a positive step, I was wondering if you

could explain for this House why you are making it mandatory at this time.

Hon David Ramsay (Minister of Natural Resources): I thank the member from Nipissing for her interest and her continuing promotion of the forest industry in this province. I would say to the member that while 24% of Ontario's forests have been voluntarily certified, what the critics really have ignored with this is that we are the first jurisdiction in the world that is now going to make it mandatory, that if you want to do business in Ontario's forests, you have to be independently verified by one of these world-renowned organizations, to assure the world and the customers of our products that Ontario forests are managed on a sustainable basis.

Ms Smith: There have been some concerns raised with respect to the certification process, concerns from small operators and from aboriginal communities. I am sure that there are costs involved as well. I'm wondering if you could address these concerns today in this House.

Interjection.

Ms Smith: Perhaps the member for Durham has his own question and will be allowed by his party to ask it someday.

But today I'd like to ask if you could refer to these concerns and address them for us.

Hon Mr Ramsay: I appreciate the member's concern on that. It was my first concern in contemplating this move, as in my area there are a lot of small companies. The first question I had is, "What resources could we put in place to assist those companies in achieving certification?" There's a very good example of a company in your riding, Westwind stewardship, which has attained certification. We think, with our expertise, our ministry and some resources, that we can help the smaller companies come along. It's going to be very important.

I'd also like to comment on one of the criticisms that was made with regard to First Nations people. Most forest certification regimes also take in the economic-social implications of developing the forest for the people who live in the forest. Part of that is going to be the impact with the First Nations. I want to say to the member that the McGuinty government is dedicated to assisting our First Nations in enhancing their economic development opportunities in northern Ontario.

CHILDREN'S MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES

Mr Joseph N. Tascona (Barrie-Simcoe-Bradford): My question is for the Minister of Children and Youth Services. Simcoe county and York region is the only area in the entire province that still does not have access to children's treatment centre services in their own area. The proposal was reviewed and approved in 2003. In August the Ministry of Health advised the district health council that the funding for Simcoe and York had been committed and would be available shortly. Since your ministry took over this area of responsibility, the district

health council is being told the funding is not there. Minister, where is the funding?

Hon Marie Bountrogianni (Minister of Children and Youth Services, Minister of Citizenship and Immigration): I believe the member may have his facts wrong. We haven't told anyone anything about their proposals yet. We've just inherited this part of the portfolio. We are reviewing the programs and the finances. We do find ourselves under a challenging fiscal situation, but we are committed to ensuring that all parts of Ontario have good mental health services for children. I'd be quite happy to talk more with the member about the specific case.

Mr Tascona: I've got the facts right, Minister, and I can tell you that I'm not going to bet the family farm on that kind of answer. The Minister of Finance knows. He's in that riding too, York region. We need that children's treatment centre.

Minister, it was approved and committed by the Minister of Health. When will the funding for the children's treatment centre in Simcoe county be released? We're waiting for the money.

Hon Mrs Bountrogianni: If there is any correspondence that supports what he has just said, I'd like to see it. Formally, the ministry has not said no to any proposals, to my knowledge. We are looking at all the treatment centres, we're looking at all the needs across the province and we are committed to helping the kids with mental health needs across the province.

EMPLOYMENT STANDARDS

Mr Shafiq Qadri (Etobicoke North): My question is for the Minister of Labour, the Honourable Chris Bentley. I was pleased to see that on Monday you introduced a bill to end the 60-hour workweek. I have heard from a number of constituents in my riding who, while pleased with your announcement, are nonetheless concerned about whether there is adequate enforcement of the Employment Standards Act. What are you and your ministry doing to ensure that the law to protect vulnerable workers is enforced?

Hon Christopher Bentley (Minister of Labour): The member for Etobicoke North makes an excellent point. Earlier this week, I was pleased to introduce legislation fulfilling our government's commitment to end the 60-hour work week. One of the things we have found over the past several months is that the Employment Standards Act was not being enforced effectively, was not being enforced in a way that would properly protect the vulnerable workers the honourable member speaks of.

We have done several things. First of all, we have ensured that we are actually going to be enforcing the Employment Standards Act as we should. Instead of simply being reactive, we're going to be proactive. We are going to conduct 2,000 proactive inspections over the course of the next year. But that's not all. We're changing the claims assessment process so that it does not take

as long, so that claims can be assessed much faster. Finally, we are determined to use all the tools in the Employment Standards Act. While last year, the year before, there were only one or two prosecutions started, we're determined to use all the tools to support the good employers and ensure the ones who aren't pay the penalty.

Mr Qadri: Thank you, minister. I'm encouraged by your thoughtful and considered response. I'm also pleased by your commitment to increase awareness of the Employment Standards Act—the rights, the responsibilities among employers and workers.

Can you please explain to this House and to the people of Ontario how you intend to inform Ontarians about these progressive initiatives?

Hon Mr Bentley: We are launching an awareness initiative. At the same time, we're launching the enforcement initiative. The overwhelming majority of businesses either do the right thing or want to do the right thing. To support their efforts, we're going to be developing a workplace portal; in other words, one-stop shopping for information for businesses, especially small businesses, so they can easily find how to keep themselves in compliance.

What about the workers the honourable member speaks of? The fact of the matter is that many of the most vulnerable in Ontario are recent arrivals whose first language is neither English nor French. So we are going to be developing easy-to-access information in a number of different languages, as well as English and French, and then we're going to be partnering with community partners such as legal clinics and community organizations to get that information to the workers who most need the protection.

1510

PRIVATE CLINICS

Ms Shelley Martel (Nickel Belt): I have a question for the Minister of Health. In your election platform you said, "The Harris-Eves government opened private two-tier MRI and CT clinics. These clinics will sell vanity scans alongside public services, giving quicker access to those who can afford to buy their way to the front of the line." You promised to "cancel the Harris-Eves private clinics" and replace them with public services. You promised to "expand MRI and CT services in the public system to provide better access for everyone." Minister, six months after the election, seven private clinics are still selling vanity scans and you haven't added new MRIs or CAT scans to the public service. Why have you broken your election promise?

Hon George Smitherman (Minister of Health and Long-Term Care): I would first correct the record, and the record that needs to be corrected is that no vanity scans being sold in any clinic in Ontario are receiving public support.

The previous government looked after private interests first; we're putting the public interest first. We're keep-

ing our commitment to ensure that two-tier MRI and CT scan services are not offered in Ontario. Our commitment to the Future of Medicare Act bans pay-your-way-to-the-front-of-the-line health care, period, full stop. What we're operating on here is one system, universally accessible and publicly funded for all.

With respect to access, we've moved. I recently had the opportunity to open a new MRI clinic at the Toronto East General Hospital. We've announced new MRI facilities coming on-line in the community of Windsor. These are just the beginning, as we add access to address the wait-time challenges that Ontarians have told us are too long.

Ms Martel: Isn't it strange that in the Liberal platform before the election they were vanity scans, and after the election there's no problem with them whatsoever. You see, Minister, it was your party that made the promise that you were going to cancel the Harris-Eves private clinics. It was your party, before the election, that promised to expand MRIs and CAT scans in the public system. If you meant to keep your promise, upon being elected you would have immediately expanded the capacity in the public system, you would have reduced wait times and you would have shut these private clinics down. Nothing has been done. Six months later we still have seven clinics providing vanity scans and we have no new capacity in the public system. Why have you broken your election promise?

Hon Mr Smitherman: It's always great when you get a supplementary that obviously isn't rewritten or rethought to reflect the answer and the information that were provided. We, as a government, have already moved to expand capacity in the public system. We've done that at Toronto East General Hospital and upcoming in the community of Windsor. We're in discussions around the contractual obligations that are there, because that party, when they were in power, imposed those upon us.

The promise I offer to the people of Ontario is this: Vote for Bill 8, support a bill that bans pay-your-way-to-the-front-of-the-line health care, support a government that is in favour of a universally accessible public health care system. Don't take our word for it. Here's what Roy Romanow said: "When I talk about sustainability with Premier McGuinty and Health Minister Smitherman in this province, I hear a strong commitment to the future of publicly supported medicare and a resolve to spending resources designed to leverage the changes necessary, rather than spending on the status quo." Those are the words of Roy Romanow, who stands in comparison to the member opposite.

SERVICES FOR DISABLED CHILDREN

Mrs Elizabeth Witmer (Kitchener-Waterloo): My question is for the Minister of Children and Youth Services and concerns the KidsAbility centre in my riding. Between 1999 and 2003, the number of children who were served by the KidsAbility centre doubled. I was

very pleased and proud that on behalf of our government, I was able to provide them with an increase of almost 100%. Funding went from \$2.2 million to \$4.4 million. However, as you know, Minister—because they've been in touch with you—the waiting list continues to grow and more funding is desperately needed to meet the needs of these children with physical disabilities, developmental delays and communication disorders. Unfortunately, because of the shuffle in government, the shuffle in your portfolio, they have not yet received funding. So I ask you today—we've received hundreds of letters and e-mails—can you commit to providing additional funding to the KidsAbility centre?

Hon Marie Bountrogianni (Minister of Children and Youth Services, Minister of Citizenship and Immigration): This is the second time I've received this question on KidsAbility, so I know it is an important issue in the riding. Other members, as well as my colleague from Kitchener-Waterloo, have brought this to my attention. I cannot commit to a specific amount in any treatment centre at the present time, but my ministry is working with KidsAbility to see how we can meet their needs, and I hope very soon we'll be able to bring forward a plan for all of the treatment centres across the province.

Mrs Witmer: I would say to the minister opposite, these children cannot wait any longer. The waiting list is continuing to grow. We did double their funding, and I was pleased to make the announcement to double it from \$2.2 million to \$4.4 million. However, the needs in my community are growing, and if they do not soon have an answer, they are going to have to lay off staff. Can you commit that in this budget there will be extra money for the KidsAbility centre and the other children's treatment centres?

Hon Mrs Bountrogianni: I understand the concern of the honourable member. I know she's committed very specifically to KidsAbility. I know of her history there. The last time there was a base increase was 2002, so I understand the waiting list has increased, but I cannot commit to a specific amount. You know, because you were a government cabinet minister for eight years, why I can't do that, but we're working very hard to meet the needs across the province, and I thank you for the question.

ECONOMIC POLICY

The Speaker (Hon Alvin Curling): New question.

Interjections.

The Speaker: I'm having another meeting here. I just want to settle that one.

New question, the member from Guelph-Wellington.

Mrs Liz Sandals (Guelph-Wellington): Thank you, Speaker.

Interjections.

The Speaker: Could I ask the members just to keep it down a bit.

Mrs Sandals: My question is for the Minister of Economic Development and Trade. I want to ask you this afternoon about offshoring. I've been hearing in the news that the phenomenon of offshoring has become an issue in the US presidential election.

I was reading some information about a PricewaterhouseCoopers study that spoke about offshoring. It went on to say that about 75,000 information technology jobs from across Canada could migrate abroad by 2010. I certainly know from my time teaching computer science that a number of my visa students graduated, went back to their home countries, and set up businesses to serve North America. The jobs that could migrate are well-paying jobs and there could be far-reaching implications for the people of Ontario and the people in my riding, many of whom are employed in the information technology sector.

As the Minister of Economic Development and Trade, what are you doing to ensure that we have high-paying, high-value jobs for the people of Ontario?

Hon Joseph Cordiano (Minister of Economic Development and Trade): I thank the member for the question; it's a very good question. The offshoring phenomenon is really a US phenomenon. In fact, here in Canada, particularly in Ontario, we are seeing and experiencing a "near-shore" phenomenon.

The two studies that you pointed to, the PricewaterhouseCoopers and A.T. Kearney, demonstrated that in Ontario we still have a tremendous cost-competitive advantage with respect to labour markets and proximity to the US. They calculate that we could, in fact, see our province gain upwards of 165,000 new jobs in terms of near-shoring. So this is very promising for us in Ontario.

I would say there are a number of companies from India that are expanding here. To name a few, Satyam, Wipro and Infosys Technologies Ltd are all looking to locate here in Ontario. This is good news for us.

Mrs Sandals: Thank you, Minister; that's good news. However, the world is getting smaller, and Ontario is certainly under increasing pressure from other jurisdictions. They are competing for our jobs and for international investment.

I know you recently attended the World Economic Forum in January and saw first-hand the number of provinces, states and companies that are competing all over the world for jobs and investment. How does Ontario stay competitive in the global competitive economy?

Hon Mr Cordiano: It's a good point you make. There are 1,200 competing jurisdictions around the world that are looking for investment and attracting investment. Right here in Ontario, we continue to have an advantage. Ottawa, for example, is 25% cheaper to operate a businesses in than Atlanta, and that's the lowest-cost location in the US for IT firms.

But we're going to stay competitive—and the Premier has made this very clear—by investing in public education and health care and by investing in our people and upgrading their skills. It's the people of this province who are going to keep us competitive. It's investing in

their skills, and attracting new investment as a result of that, that will keep us at the forefront, at the cutting edge.

I am very optimistic about Ontario's future and our prospects, and I look forward to attracting more investment. With the help of all members of this House, I'm sure we can do that.

1520

WILDLIFE MANAGEMENT

Mr Jerry J. Ouellette (Oshawa): My question is for the Minister of Natural Resources. Today, in the Toronto Sun, John Kerr's article spoke to a number of issues, one of which was an increase in fishing and hunting licence fees. The funds from those fishing and hunting licences go to a fund that distributes the money to various outdoor projects related to hunting and fishing through the protection and enhancement fund.

Groups are being informed, Mr Minister, that the protection and enhancement fund is currently under suspension. After you've promised not to increase fees, how can you increase fees, suspend the program and not commit to spending those funds in accordance with Bill 139, the way they're supposed to be spent in the province of Ontario?

Hon David Ramsay (Minister of Natural Resources): First of all, I'd like to say to the member that you're misinformed. The special purpose account for wildlife management is not suspended. That is the system, as you know, where revenues we raise through the sale of licensing for hunting and fishing go into that special purpose account. It's one of the few dedicated accounts, quite frankly, that the government of Ontario has.

On your further question about the potential of increasing fees for hunting and fishing, I would say to you, and I think that most the people who enjoy the resources out there in this great province would agree with me, that we probably undervalue the resources we have in this province.

Mr Ouellette: Minister, you can rest assured, I will contact those groups and inform them that the SPA account is not under suspension and that they should be contacting you directly after your commitments here today.

One of the other aspects that article was mentioning today was cormorants. The cormorant program began with the previous government. It was a five-year program which began in 1999. This is the fifth year of the program. Why is it that you're not committing to follow through with the natural progression in the cull in the Presqu'île area?

Hon Mr Ramsay: Again, the member is misinformed. A few months ago, I posted on the Environmental Bill of Rights Web site a proposal to cull cormorants on the islands off Presqu'île Park. As you know, an environmental group in the province has a bump-up request for an EA of the Minister of the Environment. When the minister has dealt with that decision, we will abide by

that decision. But at this moment, it is my intention to carry through with that cull.

HIGHWAY IMPROVEMENT

Mr Jeff Leal (Peterborough): My question is to the Minister of Transportation. Nearly 10,000 constituents in my riding are commuting to the greater Toronto area on a daily basis. Most will spend at least three or four hours every day in traffic, cutting the amount of time they have to spend at home with their family and friends. To relieve congestion on Highway 401, will the proposed eastern extension of Highway 407 to Highway 115 go ahead as planned?

Hon Harinder S. Takhar (Minister of Transportation): I want to thank the member from Peterborough. I know he has a keen interest in this issue, as have the other members from that area.

I just want to make the honourable member aware that we are absolutely committed to moving ahead with this project. We are developing the terms of reference for the environmental assessment for the Highway 407 east completion. We have actually prepared the terms of reference and are circulating them to the stakeholders and municipalities. We want to encourage them to participate in our public open houses and other consultations that will take place going forward. I want to assure him that we're absolutely committed to moving ahead with this project.

Mr Leal: This project, of course, has enormous economic benefits to the people of the Peterborough riding. Can you tell us any other transportation projects that are planned for the riding of Peterborough?

Hon Mr Takhar: I would like to tell the member for Peterborough that we have several planning studies underway that will determine which highway improvements are needed in that area. A few examples that I can give of planning studies that are going on are the Highway 7 extension from Television Road to Highway 28; from Fowlers Corners to Highway 15; and also Highway 28 from the Burleigh Falls area. These studies will help us determine what needs to be done in that area.

ENERGY ASSISTANCE FUND

Mr Howard Hampton (Kenora-Rainy River): My question is for the Premier. A few weeks ago, your government introduced with much fanfare your so-called low-income energy assistance fund of \$2 million. You said that it would help the poorest people in Ontario pay hydro rates, which are increasing rapidly.

My constituency office started calling the Minister of Energy's office and the social assistance minister's office, asking about aboriginal people living on reserves in my riding. You will know that these are some of the poorest people in Ontario. We were told that aboriginal people living on reserve will not have access to the so-called low-income energy assistance fund.

Premier, can you explain why some of the poorest people in Ontario won't receive the benefit of this fund

and why some of the poorest people in Ontario are being discriminated against?

Hon Dalton McGuinty (Premier, Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs): I'll refer the matter to the minister.

Hon Dwight Duncan (Minister of Energy, Government House Leader): The emergency fund is a \$2-million fund. It's a new fund that's just been created. I'm aware of the calls from Mr Hampton's office to my office, as is the Minister of Community and Social Services. First Nations residents on reserve have access to discretionary programs through the Ministry of Community and Social Services to make sure that their needs are looked after. We have not only discussed this with the First Nations, we have other meetings planned down the road to make sure that they are well looked after. My colleague the minister and the Premier made sure of that when we announced this program. I wish you would have waited for the full answer before you asked the question in the House.

Mr Hampton: Look, these are some of the poorest people in Ontario. Telling them to go to the Ontario Works office, where they'll be harassed again—and that's what happens at the Ontario Works office, you get harassed—is not an answer. You said that the poorest people in Ontario would have assistance in terms of paying for increased hydro bills. These are the poorest people in Ontario. Not only that, they have to deal with some of the harshest weather and climate conditions. What is the basis for your discrimination? Why are the poorest people in Ontario being told they can't apply? Just because they're aboriginal?

Hon Mr Duncan: We've decided to deal with this issue through the discretionary program to make sure that the special needs of First Nations are met, something that member obviously doesn't understand.

And let me say something else. If that member had had the same outrage when his government cancelled Conawapa—you cancelled Conawapa, you cancelled jobs for First Nations. Your record's shameful.

This government's dealing with the needs of First Nations in a sensitive way and making sure that they're looked after according to the principles of law that have been established throughout dozens of years with respect to the proper treatment of First Nations. The member ought to get his facts straight before he makes spurious allegations.

LONG-TERM CARE

Mr Cameron Jackson (Burlington): My question is for the Premier. In March of this year, your Minister of Health notified long-term-care homes across the province that they would be receiving a funding cut from your government of about \$25 million by reducing property tax relief from 90% to 73%, retroactive for the entire last year.

On April 1, your government announced that the annual case mix measure increase that's been passed on

every year in the past, worth \$30 million, was now cancelled.

1530

On April 22, Premier, you spoke to the teachers of this province and said, "I'm going to be putting money into education at the expense of other programs." Then the very next day your government notified nursing homes that funding for property tax relief would be reduced even further, at a cost of \$60 million. Premier, why have health care, and specifically frail elderly seniors, been the target of your most specific cuts?

Hon Dalton McGuinty (Premier, Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs): I'll refer this to the minister.

Hon George Smitherman (Minister of Health and Long-Term Care): I had the opportunity earlier in the week to answer a similar question from the member's colleague.

Interjection: You didn't answer it.

Hon Mr Smitherman: I did answer it, with respect. I said this is a matter on which we continue to be in dialogue with the Ontario Long Term Care Association. The situation is more in the range of \$10 million to \$15 million than the number quoted by my honourable friend. I do take it seriously.

The one point I think it is essential to remember is that our government clearly states that its priorities are related to health care and education, and over the course of the next several months that will be reflected in the comprehensive changes we're going to make to the way the long-term-care process works in our province.

Mr Jackson: The fact is, Premier, that today in Ontario you're spending about \$50 million less than nursing homes and residents of nursing homes received last year under our government. Yesterday a nursing home in my riding, the Brant Centre, which is attached to the Joseph Brant Memorial Hospital, home to 175 residents with 168 staff, delivered notices of layoff and reduction of hours to their most vulnerable staff in housekeeping, laundry and dietary aides. Your cuts to this one home in my riding are just about a quarter of a million dollars, or about \$1,400 per resident.

Premier, you promised more funding and yet you've delivered layoff notices to the workers in my community. You promised more care to the residents, and you've delivered funding cuts in this home and in homes all across this province. Why is it that the nursing homes are receiving less money this year from your government than they were receiving last year from our government?

Hon Mr Smitherman: The stream of misinformation from that member seems endless today.

Mr Jackson: On a point of order, Mr Speaker: I have a letter from the home specifically quoting these numbers.

The Speaker (Hon Alvin Curling): That is not a point of order.

Hon Mr Smitherman: That point of order notwithstanding, it does not make your information correct. It is misinformation, and I stand by that. The fact of the matter is that it's a little curious to hear the member make

a statement about our funding for this year when we're but 28 days into it.

The point I make to the honourable member is that we're enhancing the quality of long-term care, and we'll demonstrate that over the course of this year. The other point I'll make to the member is that he well knows, because he had some responsibility in this area, that there is, on an annual basis, an analysis of the acuity of the patients in long-term-care facilities and adjustments are made on that basis, which the member well knows, because I think his fingerprints might be involved in helping to develop that in the first place. So just a little more candour about your own involvement and the circumstances around funding would be appropriate—

The Speaker: New question. The member from Essex.

CONSUMER PROTECTION

Mr Bruce Crozier (Essex): My question is to the Minister of Consumer and Business Services. Today you introduced a bill that proposes a number of amendments to a number of statutes, but the main thing is that it's consumer protection that is covered by the initiatives of this bill. Constituents in Essex are as concerned as many across the province about consumer protection, particularly as it relates to electrical safety standards, travel agents and film classification, for example. Minister, what exactly is being proposed in the bill, and how will it help consumers?

Hon Jim Watson (Minister of Consumer and Business Services): As I indicated earlier, I want to thank the honourable member for Essex, who was our party's critic in the last Parliament when the Consumer Protection Act was brought forward. It was a good piece of legislation. I also pay tribute to the honourable member for Lincoln, as he was the predecessor.

This piece of legislation is important for a number of reasons. First and foremost, it allows us to speed up implementation of some important consumer protection measures that the McGuinty government is serious about pursuing. For instance, it extends cooling-off periods for prepaid services such as fitness memberships, from the current five days to 10 days. It also allows a 10-day cooling-off period for something that, regrettably, too many people in our community are vulnerable to—time-share and vacation club buyers—and it gives consumers the right to cancel other types of agreements if goods are not provided or services not commenced within 30 days. Also, one final point: It does eliminate—

The Speaker (Hon Alvin Curling): Supplementary.

Mr Crozier: Minister, I notice that this bill has limited liability for travel agents. The bill would ensure that travel agents would not be liable in the event that a supplier, such as a cruise line or an airline, goes bankrupt after the consumer has paid them. However, some of my constituents have expressed concern that this amendment might then leave the consumers on the hook for fees they've paid without receiving service. So Minister, is

this a bad deal for consumers, or are consumers not to be worried about that issue?

Hon Mr Watson: That's a very good question because this particular piece of legislation deals with travel agents, but the protection still remains for consumers who purchase packages and air flights and so on.

Interjection.

Hon Mr Watson: It's regrettable that the honourable member for Niagara Centre clearly did not even take the time to read the legislation or he would have known that consumer protection remains in this legislation. It's a sad commentary that he was offered a private briefing, he was given it, and it obviously went in one ear and out the other, because this legislation ensures that consumer protection is first and foremost for the travelling public. Second, travel agents are also given some protection for the first time in the province of Ontario, so if there's an end-supplier failure, that small business, which that member should be interested in, is going to be protected.

TRUCKING INDUSTRY

Mr Frank Klees (Oak Ridges): My question is to the Minister of Transportation. When I put the question to the minister in this House this past week relating to the compromise that his officials were making with regard to Ontario's truck safety standards, he responded by saying that he would insist that the federal legislation that is under discussion for proclamation would, in fact, be held to Ontario's safety standards. I'm going to ask that the minister stand in his place today and agree to confirm in writing to the Ontario Trucking Association that he and his staff will not support the proclamation of that federal legislation unless it is held to the same high standards as Ontario's current standards.

Hon Harinder S. Takhar (Minister of Transportation): I stood up in the House a couple of days ago and I answered that question. I'm prepared to answer that again. The answer I gave at that time was that we are going to negotiate with the federal government and we are not going to compromise our standards. My officials have made that clear to the federal people and they also made it clear to the other provincial partners, and we're going to stand by that.

PETITIONS

AUTISM SERVICES

Mr Joseph N. Tascona (Barrie-Simcoe-Bradford): I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario which reads as follows:

"Whereas our new Premier, Dalton McGuinty, and his Liberal government made a campaign commitment to expand funding for valued therapy for autistic children; and

"Whereas the families of autistic children continue to call upon the province to extend funding to children six

years and older who will benefit from intensive behavioural intervention (IBI) funding; and

"Whereas the new Premier has admitted, 'We simply don't have enough people right now with the skills to help those children under six, let alone those over the age of six'; and

"Whereas the Liberal Premier, Dalton McGuinty, described the current cut-off age as unfair and discriminatory;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to force the government to live up to its promise and extend funding to children six and older who will benefit from intensive behavioural intervention (IBI) treatment."

I support it, and affix my signature.

SOCIAL ASSISTANCE

Mr Rosario Marchese (Trinity-Spadina): "Because social assistance rates were slashed by 21.6% in 1995, and with the increase in the cost of living, that cut is worth about 34.4% today; and

"Because current social assistance rates do not allow recipients to meet their cost of living; and

"Because the people of Ontario deserve an adequate standard of living and are guaranteed such by the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights; and

"Because the jury at the inquest into the death of Kimberly Rogers recommended that social assistance rates be reviewed so that they reflect the actual costs of living;

"We demand that the Ontario government immediately increase the shelter portion of Ontario Works and Ontario disability support program benefits to the average Canada Mortgage and Housing Corp rent levels and index social assistance to the cost of living."

I support this petition, Speaker.

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GO TRANSIT SERVICE

Mr Bob Delaney (Mississauga West): I have a petition from some weary commuters on the Milton GO line. It's addressed to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

"Whereas the city of Mississauga has, within a generation, grown from a linked collection of suburban and farming communities into Canada's sixth-largest city, and tens of thousands of people daily need to commute into and out of Mississauga in order to do business, educate themselves and their families and enjoy culture and recreation; and

"Whereas gridlock on all roads leading into and out of Mississauga makes peak period road commuting impractical, and commuter rail service on the Milton GO line is restricted to morning and afternoon service into and out of Toronto; and

"Whereas residents of western Mississauga need to 'commute to commute,' driving along traffic-clogged

roads to get to overflowing parking lots at the Meadowvale, Streetsville and Erindale GO train stations;

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

“That the government of Ontario, through the Ministry of Transportation and highways, instruct GO Transit to allocate sufficient resources from its 2004-05 capital budget to proceed immediately with the acquisition of land and construction of a new GO train station, called Lisgar, at Tenth Line and the rail tracks, to alleviate the parking congestion, and provide better access to GO train service on the Milton line for residents of western Mississauga.”

As one of those residents, I am pleased to affix my signature.

TILLSONBURG DISTRICT MEMORIAL HOSPITAL

Mr Ernie Hardeman (Oxford): I have a petition here signed by a great number of my constituents. There are now in excess of 2,500 that we've got back. It's to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

“Whereas the Tillsonburg District Memorial Hospital has asked for ministerial consent to make capital changes to its facility to accommodate the placement of a satellite dialysis unit; and

“Whereas the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care has already given approval for the unit and committed operational dollars to it; and

“Whereas the community has already raised the funds for the equipment needed;

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

“That the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care give his final approval of the capital request change from the Tillsonburg District Memorial Hospital immediately, so those who are in need of these life-sustaining dialysis services can receive them locally, thereby enjoying a better quality of life without further delay.”

I affix my signature to this petition, as I agree with it, Mr Speaker.

SOCIAL ASSISTANCE

Ms Marilyn Churley (Toronto-Danforth): I have thousands of names on hundreds of petitions that New Democrats received today. They read:

“We deserve better: It's time for a raise!”

“To the Ontario provincial Legislature:

“Because Ontario Works was slashed by 21.6% in 1995, and with the increases to the cost of living, that cut is worth nearly 40% today; and

“Because Ontario disability support program benefits have been frozen since 1993; and

“Because current social assistance rates do not allow recipients to meet their cost of living; and

“Because the people of Ontario deserve an adequate standard of living and are guaranteed such by the Inter-

national Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights; and

“Because the jury at the inquest into the death of Kimberly Rogers recommended that social assistance rates be reviewed so that they reflect the actual costs of living;

“We demand that the Ontario government immediately increase social assistance rates to reflect the true cost of living. This means shelter allowances that are based on the average local rents as calculated by the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corp and a basic needs allowance that is based on the nutritional food baskets prepared by local health units as well as the calculations for the costs of household operation, household furnishings and equipment, clothing, transportation and health care as reported in Statistics Canada's Average Household Expenditures.”

I will affix my signature to this petition, because I fully support it.

ALEXANDER GRAHAM BELL PARKWAY

Mr Kim Craiton (Niagara Falls): I'm pleased to present this petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas Alexander Graham Bell, renowned inventor of society-altering technological inventions, such as the telephone, greatly revolutionized the daily lives of people in Ontario, Canada and indeed the world; and

“Whereas Alexander Graham Bell's contributions to science, technology and society as a whole, were in part developed and tested while he lived in Brantford, Ontario; and

“Whereas Brantford lies at the heart of the section of Highway 403 which runs from Woodstock to Burlington;

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

“To adopt and pass into law” my colleague “Dave Levac's private member's bill, Bill 44,” which my constituents are proud to endorse, “the Alexander Graham Bell Parkway Act, renaming Highway 403 between Woodstock and Burlington as a tribute to this great inventor.”

I'm pleased to affix my signature.

ONTARIO DRUG BENEFIT PROGRAM

Mr Tim Hudak (Erie-Lincoln): It hasn't caught on yet in Erie-Lincoln, but I guess it's on its way down the 403 to the QEW.

A petition on behalf of seniors like Jason Schooley and Linda and Robert Everts from Fort Erie; it reads as follows:

“Whereas during the election campaign the Dalton McGuinty Liberals said they would improve the Ontario drug benefit program but now are considering delisting drugs and imposing higher user fees; and

“Whereas the Liberal government has increased costs to seniors by taking away the seniors’ property tax rebate and increased the price of hydro;

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

“The Dalton McGuinty Liberals should keep their campaign promise to improve the Ontario drug benefit program and abandon their plan to delist drugs or increase seniors’ drug fees.”

In support, I affix my signature.

SOCIAL ASSISTANCE

Mr Michael Prue (Beaches-East York): I have a petition that reads as follows:

“To the Ontario provincial Legislature:

“Because Ontario Works was slashed by 21.6% in 1995, and with the increases to the cost of living, that cut is worth nearly 40% today; and

“Because Ontario disability support program benefits have been frozen since 1993; and

“Because current social assistance rates do not allow recipients to meet their cost of living; and

“Because the people of Ontario deserve an adequate standard of living and are guaranteed such by the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights; and

“Because the jury at the inquest into the death of Kimberly Rogers recommended that social assistance rates be reviewed so that they reflect the actual costs of living;

“We demand that the Ontario government immediately increase social assistance rates to reflect the true cost of living. This means shelter allowances that are based on the average local rents as calculated by the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corp and a basic needs allowance that is based on the nutritional food baskets prepared by local health units as well as the calculations for the costs of household operation, household furnishings and equipment, clothing, transportation and health care as reported in Statistics Canada’s Average Household Expenditures.”

I am in agreement with this, and I affix my signature thereto.

Mr Jeff Leal (Peterborough): “To the Honourable the Legislative Assembly of the province of Ontario, in Legislature assembled:

“The petition of the undersigned states:

“That Ontario Works was slashed by 21.6% in 1995, and with the increases to the cost of living, that cut is worth nearly 40% today;

“That Ontario disability support program benefits have been frozen since 1993; and because current social assistance rates do not allow recipients to meet their cost of living;

“That the people of Ontario deserve an adequate standard of living and are guaranteed such by the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights;

“That the jury at the inquest into the death of Kimberly Rogers recommended that social assistance rates be reviewed so that they reflect the actual costs of living;

“Therefore, your petitioners respectfully request that the honourable House urge the Ontario government to immediately increase social assistance rates to reflect the true cost of living. This means shelter allowances that are based on the average local rents as calculated by the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corp, a basic needs allowance that is based on the nutritional food baskets prepared by local health units as well as the calculations for the costs of household operation, household furnishings and equipment, clothing, transportation and health care as reported in Statistics Canada’s Average Household Expenditures.”

I affix my name to this.

1550

PROPERTY TAXATION

Mr John O’Toole (Durham): I’m pleased to present a petition, actually thousands of petitions, given to me by Al Robinson of the Ontario Private Campground Association. With your indulgence, I’ll just read one of these.

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas recreational trailers kept at parks and campgrounds in Ontario are being assessed by the Municipal Property Assessment Corp, MPAC, and are subject to property taxes; and

“Whereas owners of these trailers are seasonal and occasional residents who contribute to the local tourism economy without requiring significant municipal services; and

“Whereas the added burden of this taxation will make it impossible for many families of modest income to afford their holiday sites at parks and campgrounds;

“Therefore, we, the undersigned, respectfully petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

“That these seasonal trailers not be subject to retro-active taxation for the year 2003; and that the tax not be imposed in 2004; and that no such tax be introduced without consultation with owners of the trailers and trailer parks, municipal governments, businesses, the tourism sector and other stakeholders.”

I’m pleased to sign this in support of the campers in the province of Ontario, and specifically in my riding of Durham.

SOCIAL ASSISTANCE

Mr Peter Kormos (Niagara Centre): I’ve got a petition addressed to the Ontario provincial Legislature.

“Because social assistance rates were slashed by 21.6% in 1995, and with the increases to the cost of living that cut is worth about 34.4% today; and

“Because current social assistance rates do not allow recipients to meet their cost of living; and

“Because the people of Ontario deserve an adequate standard of living and are guaranteed such by the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights; and

“Because the jury at the inquest into the death of Kimberly Rogers recommended that social assistance rates be reviewed so that they reflect actual costs of living;

“We demand that the Ontario government immediately increase the shelter portion of Ontario Works and Ontario disability support program benefits to the average Canadian Mortgage and Housing Corp rent levels and index social assistance to the cost of living.”

It's signed by thousands of people. I have affixed my signature as well.

IMMIGRANTS' SKILLS

Mr Peter Fonseca (Mississauga East): This petition comes to me from many new Canadians to Canada.

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas Ontario enjoys the continuing benefit of the contributions of men and women who choose to leave their country of origin in order to settle in Canada, raise their families, educate their children and pursue their livelihoods and careers; and

“Whereas newcomers to Canada who choose to settle in Ontario find frequent and unnecessary obstacles that prevent skilled tradespeople, professional and managerial talent from practising the professions, trades and occupations for which they have been trained in their country of origin; and

“Whereas Ontario, its businesses, its people and its institutions badly need the professional, managerial and technical skills that many newcomers to Canada have and want to use;

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

“That the government of Ontario, through the Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities and the other institutions and agencies of and within the government of Ontario, undertake specific and proactive measures to work with the bodies regulating access to Ontario's professions, trades and other occupations in order that newcomers to Canada gain fair, timely and cost-effective access to certification and other measures that facilitate the entry or re-entry of skilled workers and professionals trained outside Canada into the Canadian workforce.”

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Hon Michael Bryant (Attorney General, minister responsible for native affairs, minister responsible for democratic renewal): On a point of order, Mr Speaker: Pursuant to standing order 55, I rise to give the Legislature the business of the House for next week.

Monday, May 3, 2004: in the afternoon, Bill 49; evening, government notice of motion 55.

Tuesday, May 4, 2004: afternoon, Bill 26; evening, government notice of motion 55.

Wednesday, May 5, 2004: afternoon, opposition day; evening, Bill 49.

Thursday, May 6, 2004: in the afternoon, we'll be hearing Bill 25.

NOTICE OF DISSATISFACTION

The Speaker (Hon Alvin Curling): Pursuant to standing order 37(a), the member for Oak Ridges has given notice of his dissatisfaction with the answer to his question given by the Acting Premier concerning the citizens' dialogue on budget strategy.

I have one more. Pursuant to standing order 37(a), the member for Oak Ridges has given notice of his dissatisfaction with the answer to his question given by the Minister of Transportation concerning the Ontario Trucking Association. This matter will be discussed at 6 o'clock today.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

EMPLOYMENT STANDARDS AMENDMENT ACT (FAMILY MEDICAL LEAVE), 2004 LOI DE 2004 MODIFIANT LA LOI SUR LES NORMES D'EMPLOI (CONGÉ FAMILIAL POUR RAISON MÉDICALE)

Resuming the debate adjourned on April 27, 2004, on the motion for second reading of Bill 56, An Act to amend the Employment Standards Act, 2000 in respect of family medical leave and other matters / Projet de loi 56, Loi modifiant la Loi de 2000 sur les normes d'emploi en ce qui concerne le congé familial pour raison médicale et d'autres questions.

The Speaker (Hon Alvin Curling): Now we're at questions and comments on Mr Jackson's speech.

Mr Peter Kormos (Niagara Centre): I'm pleased to comment on the speech by the member. The problem is, I don't have very much recall of exactly what it was that he was saying. That's fine because I'll have my own time in the floor in around four minutes' time, and I'll have some things to say about Bill 56. It's one of the problems when you have such brief debate periods for legislation like this, and also the effort on the part of the government to somehow suggest, “Oh, everybody should just let this bill pass. There should be no debate; it should just be slid through. We shouldn't address any concerns around it.”

On the contrary, it's our responsibility to address concerns. I'm going to do that in a few short minutes' time. Mind you, I'm only going to have 30 minutes in which to do that on behalf of the New Democrats. I wish I had more, but that's not what the rules permit me, so I

will utilize that 30 minutes. I'm going to talk about Bill 56. I'm going to talk about where we expect the bill to go. I'm going to talk about what the bill will do and, more important, what bill won't do, because what's significant about this bill—and quite frankly, it's consistent with more than a few others that we've seen over the course of the last few weeks, isn't it?—is what the bill purports to do as compared to what it in fact will have the effect of.

What impact will it really have? Is it the sort of great, revolutionary Brave New World for workers that the author of the bill, its sponsor, the Minister of Labour, would have us believe? Well, one of the things I'm going to try to draw your attention to is the fact that even the Tories, with their section 50, produced stuff that, quite frankly, was a little more expansive than this amendment by way of section 49.1.

Really, what we've got here is a bit of a mishmash of leftovers of Tory agenda—not unusual coming from this government. Talk about identity theft: Dalton McGuinty has captured and stolen and occupied the identity of Ernie Eves. We prove it over and over again every day.

Mrs Donna H. Cansfield (Etobicoke Centre): I agree with my colleague: This isn't exactly great ground-breaking legislation, but really, what it is is a good beginning of something that hasn't been done for 10 years in this province. When you look at the fact that over 90,000 Ontarians alone will die this year, much less those who may have strokes or others who may be in a position where they need support and care, they actually can't get that support and care from their family member currently in Ontario. I think we owe that to them, both from a compassionate perspective and also from the perspective of economics, because over 32% of our folks today care for an elderly parent and/or a spouse. It makes a difference in terms of what their economic well-being and productivity is, if they're trying to work at the same time that they're trying to care for someone who is maybe at the end of their life or has had a stroke.

It's interesting to note that although we're prepared to give a few weeks, there are other jurisdictions that actually give up to 12 weeks of compassionate leave without pay, because they recognize that there is an economic burden in terms of the loss of that productivity within the economy.

The other is that we really do, as the minister said earlier, celebrate the beginning of life. We give maternity leave, we give parental leave, but at times we don't celebrate the end of life, where people have given so much to their community, to their families and to themselves. I think we owe that, as part of being a compassionate society. That's not difficult to do by offering a piece of legislation that I agree is a good beginning to providing care and support for those folks at the end of their lives. I think it's a beginning of some compassion. I think it's a beginning of some understanding of the burden that people bear as they try to juggle working and caring for someone.

They call us the sandwich generation, as we're stuck between the two. I've been in cases where I've seen family members burnt out and where they would have preferred to be with their loved ones at the end of their life in a more joyous situation. So I wholeheartedly support this bill.

1600

Mr Michael Prue (Beaches-East York): I was here the other day and I was hoping that this bill would be dealt with rather quickly. This is a bill, as I said before and will say again, that is a companion piece to federal legislation. That's all it is. It will be passed, I'm sure, in rapid succession by 10 provinces and three territories in this country.

Quite succinctly, this bill needs to go out to committee. It needs to have some changes made within the bill to make it broader so that it is more encompassing to the definition of family, as we are beginning to understand it in Canada. It needs to be broader so that it can perhaps be as good as the bill that has been proposed in Quebec, which gives not eight weeks, but 12 weeks. And it needs to be broader in terms of who is eligible under the terms of employment insurance.

All that is being said here, and it's being said over and over again by all members of all parties, is that this is a bill for compassionate leave. Of course it is. Of course we want to be compassionate, and of course we want to fall in line with what the federal bill says. But I am at a bit of a loss and a bit of a quandary as to what is taking so long.

I am hoping that my good colleague Peter Kormos, the member for Niagara Centre, will probably put some light on why so much debate is needed on this bill around here. I have to tell you that, if and when I am required to speak to it, I will be very succinct because what needs to be talked about, in my view, is expanding the definition of family. We need to show compassion for a much broader and extended group than is contained in the bill. People come to this country from all over the world, and people are in this country who have a very different definition of family than what is contained in this bill. That is the real crux of the issue and that, in my view, will best be dealt with in committee, if and when this does go there.

The Acting Speaker (Mr Joseph N. Tascona): The Chair recognizes the member from Burlington in response.

Mr Cameron Jackson (Burlington): I want to thank the members for Niagara, Etobicoke Centre and Beaches-East York for their comments. I had an opportunity to speak at length on this bill and I totally concur with much of what has been said in the questions and responses. This bill is very simply a piece of labour legislation that provides conformity with the federal statute. As the member for Etobicoke Centre quite aptly said, it's a good start, but it's just a compliance. What we would hope for, and that's the point the member for Beaches-East York has made so eloquently, is that we really need to go further with this to answer some questions. If we're

going to wait for the rest of the country to iron out these problems in arbitration, which will just clog up labour departments in our province then, as I pleaded with the Minister of Labour last week in my speech, we need to resolve some of these issues.

The member for Etobicoke Centre and I share a particular interest and affection for the work going on in palliative care in our hospices. I know that if she reads my speech, I made a reference to that issue because there's a lack of clarity with respect to eligibility for persons in hospital settings and palliative care hospice settings in terms of eligibility, to be away for eight weeks to provide care. There were several other questions I raised, and I know the minister took notes that day. I would hope that he would get back to either myself or members of this House with those responses.

Frankly, this falls short of the government's election platform commitment. We lament that. It's why we hoped that we would have a truly compassionate program accessible for persons with disabilities and for children that have longer periods of potential mortality, and that this program should have been expanded.

The Acting Speaker: Leadoff for the member of the third party. The Chair recognizes the member of the third party.

Mr Kormos: Again, as has been indicated by my colleague Mr Prue, the bill is going to pass; no two ways about it. The bill isn't offensive. It doesn't do anything bad or wrong; no two ways about that, either.

But let's talk a little bit about what the realities are out there. I will, carrying on with the comments made by Mr Prue and Mr Jackson, talk about the scope of people contemplated as being entitled to the leave in contrast, in particular, with section 50, because one would think that there would have been an effort to have the same group of people in section 49.1 as you have already in section 50, that people who are entitled to the 10-day emergency leave would be the very same people who are entitled to this eight-week compassionate leave.

Look, people have commented on the nature of families, but the bill is also a reflection on the nature of health care in this day and age, and it doesn't speak in a very positive way to the nature of health care. I've had occasion—I mentioned this before, I think during some of the questions and comments—like other people here, to visit what we understand to be Third World countries and to witness how people receiving health care in those Third World countries have a very strong reliance on family members and/or friends, but usually family members, being present right there with them. I've been in hospitals where the family members not only attend at the hospital but live at the hospital. They prepare food; they do the cooking and cleaning; they dress wounds; they do a whole lot of the nursing function. We used to perceive that as characteristic of grossly underfunded health care systems, yet increasingly—all of us in this chamber visit our constituents in hospitals and other types of facilities, including seniors' homes—with the destaffing of our hospitals, of long-term-care facilities,

folks in hospital or long-term-care facilities, if they don't have family members or friends attending to them, find themselves seriously overlooked in terms of the level of care they receive.

The fact is that the scarce nursing staff in hospitals simply can't do the jobs all by themselves. They are already doing double and triple duty. The rate of burnout and the stress on nurses and other health professionals is tremendous. The number of days of sick leave that health professionals find themselves taking has grown extraordinarily, and all this stuff compounds.

So when we talk about the need for this legislation, we talk about the reality that, increasingly, folks who are in their final days as a result of any number of conditions—sickness, as a result of merely aging—can't rely upon the health system to provide the support and care that they need. Good grief. Which of us hasn't been plagued by calls around reductions in home care hours being provided to our folks or our grandparents, or the home care being provided to a person who is in the final weeks or days of their life and who is in the, I would say, enviable position of being able to spend their final days in their own home?

Part of the need for the legislation comes from the reality that our health care system is so grossly under-resourced that family members have to be there to tend to their dying relatives. And there probably isn't a person around who wouldn't be prepared to perform that role or ensure that it was performed. But let's take a look at which workers are most compelled to have to absent themselves from work to perform the role of caretaker for a dying spouse, child or parent.

1610

I put to you that one of the most obvious groups of people who would feel compelled to do it themselves are people who don't have the means to hire professional help, to hire private support staff, private nursing staff. Then, if that is a class of persons who feel most compelled to remove themselves, to absent themselves from work for as much as eight weeks—because I appreciate there could be, and I'm sure is, yet another class of persons for whom it's simply a personal choice. Recognizing that there may be little time left with a parent, child or spouse, they want to spend that time with that child, parent or spouse for all the obvious reasons. That would be not out of the need for that person to participate in health care, but for the personal desire of that person to be present during that point in the other person's life, to be able to share that, a sense of sharing. Reference is made to those critical moments in people's lives: births, deaths, these points of passage.

But I'm saying to you that one of the obvious classes of people who feel most compelled to absent themselves from work because they don't have the means to hire professional staff to come in and take care of a parent, spouse or child, either in the home, the hospital or the long-term-care facility are inherently among the lowest-paid workers. I put to you, then, that these are the people for whom absenting oneself from work becomes in-

creasingly difficult, not about the prospect of whether or not you have a job when your eight weeks are over but from the point of view of being able to afford to take that time off. As I understand it—I'm sure people will be quick to correct—based on the material from our research staff, you're basically getting six weeks of unemployment insurance or EI out of an eight-week period. That's a fraction of your working pay.

If you're well paid, if you're making what MPPs make, yes, you can survive for a period of time on a fraction of what you make as an MPP, never mind what you make as a CEO or a vice-president of any of those various subspecies of Ontario Hydro. If you make what you make as an MPP, to support oneself and one's family on a fraction of your income for a period of five, six, seven, eight weeks is entirely feasible. But if you're making 10 bucks an hour, to maintain your household on a fraction of that 10 bucks an hour becomes virtually impossible.

So here's the dilemma. Again, it's not to say that the bill is bad because of it, but it's to point out what the bill doesn't do, as compared to what the bill does. I put to you that, notwithstanding the intentions of the bill and how nice it seems, those people who are most compelled because they don't have the means to hire private nursing and other care staff for a dying relative in that class of relatives that's eligible are the ones who feel most compelled to do the work themselves. But they're the ones who, by the very fact that they can't afford to hire the professional staff, the private additional staff, similarly can least afford to take one week, two weeks, never mind eight weeks off.

Clearly, the high-income earner is more likely to be either in a unionized job or in a position in their workplace where they have far more leverage or clout than a minimum wage or near minimum wage worker like the workers at a franchise coffee shop or at a franchise fast-food joint or at the Wink's combination convenience store/Sunoco service station.

This creates an opportunity for the people who least need the opportunity. The higher-income people are the ones, as I say, who by virtue of being unionized—and that's why they're higher-income—are able to negotiate these types of leaves in their collective agreements, or they're in job positions where they have leverage with their employer and where it's understood these sorts of concessions will be made for a worker. They're the ones who, quite frankly, don't need the bill and don't even need or have as strong a need for the extended leave time of eight weeks because they can retain private care to supplement the modest home care or the increasingly stressed hospital care that a dying relative would get. So it's the lowest-income people who once again get left behind with this scheme.

I appreciate as well that this is but a companion to the EI changes, the employment insurance amendments that provided for employment insurance—I want to issue this caveat to you, and I give credit to Brother Rob McCallion from the Welland and District Labour Council, a trade

unionist who does a lot of advocacy for his sisters and brothers, who warned me about his most recent experience with employment insurance, the UIC provisions regarding UIC coverage, and cautioned me to avoid being overly optimistic about the access to UIC-EI coverage. He told me of a litany of horror show experiences he's had to deal with as an advocate to access unemployment insurance for people exercising this type of compassionate leave under the employment insurance rules.

The sad reality is that EI is increasingly underfunded. It was raided by, as he was then, the Minister of Finance, now the Prime Minister, Mr Martin. It's increasingly run like a private insurance company rather than like the worker-funded social program it was designed to be, such that it has acquired the perspective of short arms and deep pockets characteristic of a private, for-profit insurance company. That means it has to minimize its exposure to payouts, and it does it by denying, whenever possible, whenever conceivable, whenever there's any likelihood whatsoever of being able to get away with it, coverage to a claimant. I have concern as well with the need for a doctor to certify that the relative for whom care or attending is desired has a serious medical condition with a significant risk of death.

Let me tell you what group of persons would not fall within this category, but for whom I believe there should be a provision very specifically under this bill in what will be a new section of the Employment Standards Act.

1620

Most of us, if not all of us, are increasingly familiar with Alzheimer's. While Alzheimer sufferers tend to live sometimes for extraordinarily long periods of time once they have passed to the other side, if you will, of Alzheimer's, there is a clear—and again, all of us have had our own family experiences or experience within our communities. We've visited so many families that are supporting and caring for a parent or a spouse or a child with Alzheimer's. I put to you—that's why I concur with the proposition that this should go to committee—that it shouldn't necessarily be a condition with a significant risk of death. We should try to find an amendment—and I'd certainly be eager to participate in developing one—that would create a circumstance whereby, for instance—and this is just one example—the spouse of an Alzheimer sufferer who recognized, and for whom medical advice existed indicating that we're getting pretty close to the time when that spouse, that parent, is no longer going to be functioning in the way you would like him or her to if you're going to interact in a meaningful way—well, why shouldn't this eight weeks of extended compassionate leave be available to the spouse of an Alzheimer's sufferer who is on the cusp of travelling, as I say, to the other side, into that special world that Alzheimer's sufferers live in, which is in all likelihood far more painful for their family than necessarily for them?

I'm troubled by the need to have the qualification that there be a significant risk of death. I'm also concerned about—and again, doctors could well express a viewpoint about how likely doctors are to entertain document-

ing the phrase “a significant risk of death,” especially when they’re being called upon to do it with so much advance notice. I’m concerned about the availability of the doctors’ approvals, and making the observation that employers by and large—and again, the employers who aren’t going to be rigid about this are the employers who would be more likely to give this leave anyway and for whom the bill is unnecessary. That’s the problem. Unionized workers who can negotiate things like this in their collective bargaining agreements are removed from the scope, if you will, of the bill, because they don’t have to be considered by the bill. The fact is that good, cooperative employers don’t need legislation like this to require them to permit an employee to leave for compassionate leave. A good employer, a good boss, doesn’t need Bill 56.

That takes us to the consideration that the bosses who are less likely to want to do it are the ones who are going to want to be rigid and firm about meeting the standards. Understand yet another distinction between this bill, Bill 56, and section 50: Section 50 only applies to employers with 50 or more employees. That’s the 10-day emergency leave. It only applies to employers with 50 or more employees. Bill 56 applies to the employer with one employee, and the reality is that an employer with one employee, unless that employer is in that group of bosses that is good to very good to outstanding, is going to look for every opportunity they can to either deny the leave or to circumvent the intent of Bill 56, because they’re going to say to themselves, “I’ve got to have an employee.” If you’ve got 50 employees, it’s far easier to cover—right?—but not when you’ve only got one employee.

I’m not sure how carefully that was considered. Even if that worker is working at a workplace where there’s only one employee, I don’t dispute the right of that worker to be able to attend to their dying spouse, parent or kid, by no stretch of the imagination. It’s not their fault. But I’m pointing out that that one- or two-employee boss, unless they are incredibly generous of spirit, is going to be looking at this legislation with a view to circumventing it rather than a view to abiding by it.

Let’s take a brief look—Mr Prue can look at it; we can look at this together—at section 50.

Interjection: He needs help, Michael. Tag team.

Mr Kormos: No, we’re not like these other guys. These other guys can’t fill a 30-minute spot if their life depended on it. We can do days if we have to. They don’t let us any more. No tag team. As long as we’ve got water and ice, we’re good for days.

Let’s take a look at section 50, because Mr Prue, I trust, was referring to section 50 when he talked about the much larger group of persons who are eligible. If you take a look at the individuals in Bill 56, which would be section 49.1, it’s a spouse, parent, step-parent, foster parent, child, step-child, foster child, and then, of course, the ubiquitous and hairy regulatorily defined class of persons. And, boy oh boy, that’s when the Canadian Federation—see, if it isn’t in the bill, Mr Prue, the CFIB is

going to have its little spoon in the pot. They’re going to be saying, “Oh, be careful.”

Why aren’t we making this bill consistent with the existing section 50? In other words, where in section 50 it’s a spouse or a parent, step-parent or foster parent of the employee or the employee’s spouse, that doesn’t exist in the bill as we have it. In other words, if you were to want to utilize Bill 56 to care not for your own parent but for your spouse’s parent, Bill 56 would provide no relief to you, but section 50 would. If, for instance, the spouse of a child were to be the person that you wanted to seek leave from your workplace to care for, you could do it under section 50, the emergency leave section, but you couldn’t do it under Bill 56, which would be section 49.1.

The most fascinating but obvious one that’s included in section 50 is a relative who is dependent upon the employee. What if it’s an aunt? Because, you see, you wouldn’t be allowed to help care for or provide support for a dying aunt under Bill 56. You can under section 50.

Really, quite frankly, it’s about the nature of the relationship. If the purpose of the bill is to facilitate—this is my concern. From the most generous perspective, the purpose of the bill is to be compassionate and to let folks spend time with their dying relatives and helping to care for them out of the interests of just being civil. Yet, you see, the secondary purpose of the bill is to permit family members to play an active health care or palliative care role for dying family members. The concern is clear about it being only the more affluent workers, and, if more affluent, the people less likely to need to leave their workplace to administer direct care.

So is it bad legislation? No, and you’re not going to hear a New Democrat say, “Oh, this is horrible legislation; we’ve got to block it.” But I tell you this: I’d far sooner see amendments to the Ontario Labour Relations Act that facilitated workers organizing themselves into a trade union so they could collectively bargain these sorts of things in their contracts. We’d be addressing a lot broader set of needs by ensuring that every worker in this province had the right to belong to a trade union.

Here are the Liberals at Queen’s Park who, taking a page from the Tory hymn book, persist in denying agricultural workers, workers in one of the most dangerous workplaces in this province—here are the Liberals taking a page from the Tory book, telling agricultural workers, people working in the big mushroom factories and in the huge poultry plants, that they can’t belong to trade unions, that they can’t collectively bargain, that they can’t negotiate around workplace health and safety. Indeed, it’s our sisters and brothers in the United Food and Commercial Workers who have the government in court once again, challenging the anti-worker, anti-union bill that the Liberals and Tories passed that let agricultural workers belong to mere clubs. You let them belong to clubs. What are you going to do, give them Mickey Mouse ears and a songbook so they can sit around the campfire?

1630

I have no hesitation in predicting that the courts in this province will be as condemnatory of the government around that fake legislation as they were around the legislation that it replaced. This government, if it were serious about workers and their interests, would be doing more to ensure that workers had the right to organize. If this government were serious about workers being able to care for dying relatives, spouses, parents and children, then it would be doing more to ensure that the minimum wage was increased promptly to the level it should be at, with annual increases, with the net impact of boosting up all low-income wages so that workers in this province are earning adequate incomes, so that the prospect of living on a fraction of it while you're receiving employment insurance benefits while caring for a sick or dying relative becomes a little more possible. Once again, collecting EI on \$8.50 an hour—and who makes \$8.50 an hour? I told you this; I'll tell you again. The workers I was with a couple of weeks ago who are working for Aramark. You people should know that company well: a-r-a-m-a-r-k. They are the worst bosses you could ever find; the sleaziest, scoundrelliest corporate bosses who ever existed.

Interjection.

Mr Kormos: Well, they are. They are the scum of the corporate world.

Aramark has its cafeteria workers down at Niagara College working hard, long days for \$8.34 an hour while it makes huge profits.

Interjection.

Mr Kormos: Who said students? These are mothers. These are 30-, 40- and 50-year-old women raising their children. Students, my foot.

Interjection.

Mr Kormos: My Liberal colleague from Thornhill may think it's OK for working mothers to be paid but \$8.34 an hour. I don't. Because when you're making \$8.34 an hour, you're going to the food bank on weekends. When you're making \$8.34 an hour, you're not just working for scummy Aramark, but you're working for one of the hotels in Niagara Falls 18, 20 or 30 hours a week on the weekend. When you're making \$8.34 an hour, the prospect of a 40-hour workweek doesn't exist, because if somebody offers you overtime you take it, no matter how tired you are. And you take risks. You take risks with your health, you take risks with your physical well-being. And yes, you take risks, knowing that your children don't see you as often as they should. And you take risks, knowing that you're doing a dangerous job and that being fatigued, being tired, incredibly increases not just the chance but also the likelihood of injuring yourself.

So, member from Thornhill, you may think it's fine for moms to have to support their kids on \$8.34 an hour. I don't.

I say that if this government is concerned about the welfare of workers, then it will do what it has to do with amendments to the Ontario Labour Relations Act, among other things, to ensure that more workers have access to

trade union membership and to collective bargaining. It will ensure that workers have the support of their government when they seek fairer wages. It will make sure that the privatized contract operators like Aramark, if they choose to be bad corporate citizens—and, by God, they are among the worst—get whipped into shape; that rather than punishing mothers who work for \$8.34 an hour at inevitably what consists of 40-, 50- and 60-hour workweeks, we should be telling these corporations that we have expectations of them, especially when they're contracting out their services to public sector operators, like community colleges and hospitals. New Democrats look forward to this bill going to committee.

Mr Wayne Arthurs (Pickering-Ajax-Uxbridge): I'm pleased to have the opportunity to provide some very brief comments with respect to the legislation. I must say, having heard the member across speak of NDP support for the legislation, that's certainly welcome. Understandably, not everyone is going to feel that the bill meets all the needs of those who may be able to take advantage of it. Nonetheless, it's a clear step in a good direction at a point in time when the most critical of support is needed for a family member whose prognosis within a half-year is terminal, the clear need to provide provisions where they're not already in place; where if someone doesn't have a provision within the negotiated contract for leave; where they have an employment situation where they fear for their job. This will provide at least that window of opportunity.

One recognizes that without pay, it provides stresses on a family member, particularly on those who are receiving the lower end of the pay scale. This will not be an easy situation for anyone. Having said that, the critical element: No one wants to have to take advantage of this type of legislation. It's the last thing we'd want to do, to go to our employer for a leave of absence for a week, two weeks, six weeks or eight weeks, on the premise that a loved one, a family member, is terminally ill and that within a relatively short period of time, they will pass away.

To the extent that the legislation will provide that opportunity for those who might not otherwise be able to take advantage of it, and not worry about the security of their job—when they are in a position to return to work, the bill will be an effective means of addressing those particular situations.

Mr Toby Barrett (Haldimand-Norfolk-Brant): It's clear from the debate on this proposed legislation, Bill 56, that it does provide job protection for those who take time away from work to attend to certain loved ones at a time when they are near death or approaching death. That's a good start. We recognize that. There's value for this, of course, certainly for the particular class of individuals listed in this bill. It obviously offers some peace of mind in the form of job protection. For those who are dying, it gives them a modicum of comfort, realizing they have the ability and would benefit from the nearness of their loved ones.

However, we also realize that the scope of this bill is somewhat limited. It does not apply to a larger group of caregivers. The bill does not fulfill the Liberal promise to provide family medical leave to a wider group.

There may be a problem obtaining a medical certificate if the loved one is outside of Ontario, where doctors would not be familiar with this law. This is something that I feel should be debated further; perhaps it can be considered if this bill goes to committee. Just the mechanics of obtaining such a certificate, particularly out of province, would be challenging.

The bill does not provide the people who are taking time off of work with adequate or necessary support, in our view. For example, it does not provide improved tax support for people with disabilities. It does not provide improved tax support for family caregivers, for example.

Mr Prue: I listened with some intent, both here in the Legislature and on the television, to what my colleague from Niagara Centre had to say. The nub of it, and he said it eloquently and well, is the failure of the particular section of the bill—I believe it's 49.1(3)—to define what is a member of a family. This is the smallest definition of family I have seen in some considerable period of time. It is limited to the spouse, the parent or the child of the immediate person affected. It does not include—and we should be very clear for the record—one's sibling, it does not include one's grandparents, it does not include one's grandchildren, it does not include sons- or daughters-in-law or any of the other variations of an extended family. This is perhaps the problem with the bill. This is what my friend from Niagara Centre had to say, that it needs to go to committee.

1640

We need to take a very serious look at how far this bill should extend. Certainly, we know that the definition of "family" in today's society is not really the same as the definition perhaps only a generation ago when this may have been acceptable. We know today that people may have multiple partners through their lives. We know today that people may have children from various marriages living together under the same roof. We know today that families and extended families may all live together in a house. We also know today that people come from all over the world to live in Canada; people whose traditions are not our traditions, people whose family definition is not our family definition. But they are citizens too, and in this bill we need to make sure that we do not segregate or treat them in a different way. We need desperately to send this to committee and have a proper definition of today's family.

Ms Kathleen O. Wynne (Don Valley West): I want to pick up on a thread that went through what the member from Niagara Centre was saying, and that is a focus on women's lives. I don't know if it was intentional, but it's quite clear that he understands that this bill has to do with the plight that women in this province find themselves in.

This bill is part of our plan to reweave the social fabric in this province. Now, I would be the first to say that I

don't think anybody in our caucus would say that we can do it all at once, that we can fix everything that needs to be fixed and we can do it all within the first year or even within the four years. There is an enormous amount to be done, and there's even more to be done because we're playing catch-up on every file. Whether you're talking about student aid, whether you're talking about social assistance, whether you're talking about disability or whether you're talking about the structures that allow people to look after their families, which is what this bill is about, we are playing catch-up. There have been eight lost years in this province. I think it's incredibly important that we keep that in mind, because every piece of legislation that we bring forward is going to be moving us in the direction of more compassion, moving us in the direction of a society that is more supportive of the people who need support. But we're not going to get there as quickly as all of us would want to.

It's important to remember that we're reweaving the social fabric and we're remembering that women's lives are often the lives that have been the most disadvantaged over the last eight years and are the lives that need to be focused on. It's women who are doing the caregiving and so it's women who need this bill most of all.

The Acting Speaker: Response from the member for Niagara Centre?

Mr Kormos: Look, I appreciate what people have to say. The bill has got to go to committee. We've got to hear some of the things that people like Brother Rob McCallion would tell us about the difficulties in terms of workers even accessing EI or unemployment insurance benefits. We've got to hear from workers in the lower income levels about what this bill means to them if, in fact, they have to live on EI benefits less two weeks. We've got to hear from people whose family realities are such that the definition of "family" contained in the existing section 50 of the Employment Standards Act is far more important and far more relevant to them than the very restrictive definition of "family" contained in Bill 56.

The legislation is, in and of itself, inoffensive. My concern, the concern of New Democrats, is that it isn't the be-all and end-all, the great cure-all, the panacea, if you will, for the issue, for what the government is purporting to indicate is some sort of right, some subtle right in the bill for people to tend to a dying relative.

I'm also interested in seeing the committee entertain amendments that would ensure that the spouse, child or parent—even a parent—of an Alzheimer's sufferer would be able to take advantage of this leave provision with a guarantee of keeping their job to spend some final days and, yes, weeks with a person whose Alzheimer's was so advanced that there wasn't going to be very much time left to engage in the exchanges that the Alzheimer would, in short order, prevent from happening altogether.

This is window dressing. What we're anxiously waiting for is for this government to come clean, for this government to keep some of the fundamental promises it made to those working families who voted for change and ended up getting more of the same.

The Acting Speaker: Further debate?

Mr Mario G. Racco (Thornhill): I will be speaking on second reading of Bill 56, family medical leave, and I will be sharing my time with the member for Ancaster-Dundas-Flamborough and Aldershot.

Before I make my comments, let me clarify something the member from Niagara Centre stated that I find to be unfortunate. I certainly don't need any comments from anybody, including yourself or any members of this House, when it comes to the minimum wage. I am a person who worked for five years for the minimum wage in the restaurant business as a student. The member for Niagara Centre may have done that too, but certainly he doesn't have anything to teach me on this matter.

I also want to make the record clear that I am fortunate to represent one of the wealthiest ridings in this province, but even so, I have people who work for the minimum wage, for \$8. I don't think it is the right dollar to earn, but we will try our best to make our system better so everybody can make more money.

The NDP certainly doesn't have any better right on speaking on this matter, especially when it comes to me. I want to make that clear. After all, I am a first-generation new Canadian, on my own, without my family, who worked for \$2.65 when I was a waiter. The NDP, or others, cannot teach me anything in this area.

Having said that, let me speak on the merits of Bill 56. Bill 56 is something that is overdue. I'm pleased it's in front of us and hopefully all the parties will assist in making sure that we deal with this matter quickly, because after all, at the end of the day, what we are here to do is to improve our system. What better can any of us do than to allow any of us to be close to their loved one during a time that is so important? Those of us who have left a country where we were born and where our parents were left understand this situation better. Certainly I know personally what it means. I wasn't there when both my parents left. Therefore, there is nobody who can speak to me on this matter.

The bill is going the right way. We're going to make major, real and positive change by providing job protection to those family members who need to spend time with their loved ones at a time of major need. It is also important to understand that an employee who is able to concentrate on the job, an employee who is not worried about what's happening at home or to their loved ones, will be able to concentrate better on the job he or she is doing, and therefore be more efficient, more productive and do better for this province, for himself or herself, and for the employer he or she is working for.

The people of Ontario, their drive, their intelligence and their resourcefulness are what we offer the world. This is going to help that. We will only have better prosperity, or good prosperity, when the people in our province are taken care of, when their well-being is taken care of.

1650

Quite often, when members have loved ones who are in need of special attention, and if they are faced with the

possibility of losing their job or staying with their loved ones, of course they would like to stay with their loved ones, but everybody's financial situation is not the same. Sometimes, some people just cannot afford to lose their job. This law will allow those people in particular, who are more in need, to make sure they have the time they need to address their family needs. This bill should certainly be lauded by all of us, because at the end of the day we all have family, parents and children, and everybody will go to another world one day. All of us will be affected one way or the other. What we are doing is making sure that all of us have the opportunity to take that eight weeks' time to stay with our loved ones. There's nothing better for anyone in their last days of life than to have their loved ones close to them. It's humanly good, but it's also good for any other reason that you can think of, and therefore, giving the opportunity to those people to be close to their loved one is the right thing to do. Again, we are doing that.

Because employees are not getting paid for that time unless there is an arrangement that they are making with their employer, there isn't the type of pressure that would be there if, in fact, the employer would have to pay the employee. It's easier for an employee to be able to ask for and receive the time, considering that the employer will not be penalized financially; in other words, will not have to pay the time that the employee is taking off. I think it's a smart thing to do and it's going to be fairer to people who are less able to defend themselves. I go back to the comment made earlier where there is a small operation. Surely the fact that the employer does not have to pay the employee would make it easier for the employer to not be difficult in providing the time.

What's interesting is that studies have clearly demonstrated that when the employee goes back to work, he or she will be much more productive. That's very important, again, in particular for the employer who might be looking at the bottom line. We shouldn't look at the bottom line at those times, but some people do. I believe that the legislation has taken care of that area and will make sure that there is less concern for that possibility.

At the end of the day, what all of us should try to do is make sure that employees are motivated enough, satisfied enough, to be able to go to their work and do their job without many worries. Quite often there is a situation where family members are not well and the employee stays home to give some comfort, but then goes to work. While working, of course, their mind isn't on the job but with a loved one. Of course, it's understandable. I think all of us certainly have experienced and will be experiencing those situations. Therefore, it's important that we allow the employee to take the time to deal with the personal matters so important to everybody, and when he or she goes back to the job, he or she will be much, much more efficient.

The benefits to society are clear. There are estimates that put the direct cost of absenteeism in the workforce in Canada at approximately \$3 billion to \$5 billion a year. That's a huge dollar amount. Imagine how many subway

lines we could build in this province and this country if those losses were not there, those inefficiencies.

Interjection: It would take care of the deficit right away.

Mr Racco: It would take care of the deficit right away, as has been said. It's not just good from a human standpoint, but it's also economically the right thing to do.

Ontario is a society that is caring and compassionate. People prefer to be at home to die. Their families want them to be at home, and they want to be with them. Of course this legislation would define the kind of people we choose to be. We are people who care about each other, people who understand that any of us can be affected at any time and people who are trying to take care.

As a government, we are trying to take care of an area which all Ontarians will benefit from, in particular those less fortunate, those who may need some assistance from us. This bill should be supported as soon as possible.

Mr Ted McMeekin (Ancaster-Dundas-Flamborough-Aldershot): My colleague opposite from Thornhill obviously comes from a tradition where family asks little of government and expects even less in return. They understand what it means to work and to make their way through. I listened very intently to that colleague, and I appreciate that.

The poet T.S. Eliot writes these words in his choruses in the *Rock* when his stranger asks:

What is the meaning of this city?
Do you huddle together because you love each other?
What will you answer? "We all dwell together
To make money from each other"? or "This is a
community"?

The poet has posed for us the basic existential question, hasn't he? It's a question about meaning, values and priorities.

One of my boyhood heroes, the late Reverend Dr Martin Luther King Jr, once said, when asked about what politics was, "Politics is essentially about two things: about how we take the principles which, on a good day, we would hold to be self-evident and translate them into social policy and, secondly, about how we make decisions about the distribution of goods, services and opportunities."

This bill speaks to a principle which I believe we in this House, and certainly on this side, hold to be self-evident, and that's the principle of compassion. We, as leaders in this place, have a particular responsibility in this regard. In fact, I want to put to the House that real leaders aren't afraid to use words like "love," "compassion" and "common sense" in the same sentence. Real leaders go out of their way to ensure that their kids, their kids' kids and the kids in school understand that real leadership is about compassion and that building strong, healthy, caring, vibrant, sustainable communities is about standing together in solidarity with one another, particularly in times of need and perhaps with an even more focused responsibility, as our Premier has said on many

occasions, for those at the onset of life—we know all about the impact of low baby weight at birth and some of the things we should be doing—those in the twilight of life and those who, for whatever reason or combination of reasons, find themselves living in the shadows.

I've made a case on several occasions in our caucus that we ought to be doing what I understand is done in British Columbia, where there's a series of different ministries. In BC, they actually have a ministry responsible for palliative care. I don't know if members know this, but do you know that 70% of our health care dollars are consumed by 2% of our population? You say, "That's crazy. How can that possibly be?" When you know this, it changes your perspective about the health care system. It's because of the incredibly high costs around palliative care, around death, but it's something that we value as a society. In fact, the measure of our collective conscience and compassion is how we can respond to the needs of people who are in their last days.

1700

In the last five years I've been through this twice, with two parents. I have to tell you, it ain't no fun. It's not something people line up to do. Most intelligent people, and even some non-intelligent people, wouldn't want to go to their employer and say, "Gosh, golly gee, I need eight weeks off to hold hands, hug, cry, make amends, patch things up." It's not a lot of fun. But this bill certainly acknowledges that it's a reality we need to deal with.

The bill isn't perfect. It needs some work; it sure does. I've listened to the debate over the last few hours and made some notes. I think it is about the nature of the relationship. Frankly, I'd make it available to anybody, anybody they care enough about to do that for. I'd prefer to see the legislation be quite intentionally permissive. If there are eligibility issues, we need to deal with that.

Frankly, I think the bill calls out for other supports and programs to be in place. This is just part of a patchwork quilt. It's a good part, a good start, but I don't want excellence to become the enemy of the good. You don't throw something out because it isn't excellent. You build on it. I think the member from the third party who is still present was making some of those points, that we need to get on with it.

I think we need to be looking at support for families and individual members who can't afford to avail themselves of it, too. That's something we need to be creative about, and I think there are ways to do that. We need to develop, as we talked about during the recent election campaign, a continuum of health care options, particularly as it relates to home care and what have you.

I want to just tell a story to try to make this point. I was at a lecture, as Mike Colle will appreciate, in Burlington on advances in dementia research. An 83-year-old man came up to me and said—true story—"You know, Mr McMeekin, I'm pleased you're here, but I want to tell you something. I'm not afraid to die." What do you do with somebody whose opening remarks are, "I'm not

afraid to die”? I said, “Well, tell me more.” This incredible 83-year-old man is caring for an 81-year-old spouse with Alzheimer’s. The member from Welland mentioned Alzheimer’s as one of the anomalies that were worth looking at. And he was saying that he doesn’t fear death. I asked him what he feared. He said, “I fear getting one of those catastrophic, debilitating illnesses that will make me a burden on my family.” I said, “Wow. That’s pretty dark. What’s your hope?” He said, “I hope I get really sick late and die fast.”

Think about the number of times we’ve made comments, when somebody passed on, that they went quickly. A long, lingering death that’s full of pain and what have you is a particularly unpleasant thing, and those are the particular circumstances we need to look at.

I had some real sympathy here. I think it was Bobby Kennedy who once said we should respond to people because we love them, but if we can’t respond because we love them, we ought to understand that we should be responding to the vulnerable and sick because it just makes good sense, good economic sense, as well.

Interjection.

Mr McMeekin: Kennedy again.

Look at the cost of health care: \$812 a day to stay in one of our four Hamilton acute care hospitals. It’s \$117 a day in a long-term-care facility and \$44 a day for home care, according to a BC study. Isn’t it interesting? I think we got it, as the fishermen would say, bass ackwards. We’re letting home care go down the tubes. The VON has to move out of Hamilton because they can’t afford to survive. The VHA has gone bankrupt. This 83-year-old friend of mine, with the 81-year-old Alzheimer spouse he’s providing care for, with all the stress related to that, fortunately with some supports, because of the incredible work the Alzheimer Society is doing, wants to stay at home and wants those supports.

I’m optimistic this is part of a quilt that is emerging that by itself is admittedly a good start but still inadequate. We need to be visiting our comments about investing in and developing a wider scope of home care options, and this particular bill, which provides advantages to employers, employees, families and what have you, may also be the spur that will get us looking seriously at supplemental options that will make this thing more useful than—

The Acting Speaker: Thank you. Comments and questions?

Mr John O’Toole (Durham): I listened with some intent. In fact, I came back to the House to make sure I wouldn’t miss any comments being made by the member from Thornhill, and I was pleased to listen to the remarks from the member from Ancaster-Dundas-Flamborough-Aldershot.

I have had a couple of occasions to speak very briefly on Bill 56 before and I made a couple of points. Later this afternoon I will be making some remarks, hopefully generally supportive. It goes somewhat short of what would be the perfect science, but nonetheless this is an imperfect world.

I’m often drawn into this, perhaps because I’m more senior. Perhaps Mr Phillips and Mr Kwinter are the only two older than I am. We’re all going to be in need of care some day, regardless of the point in time, and at that point I want that care to be there. It may be my spouse in the first instance. We need to have regard for those vulnerable people in our society, and that’s really the thrust here. It isn’t age-appropriate. It’s for persons who are in imminent stages of death. It’s a very difficult topic to speak of, because each of us is close to either our grandparents or our in-laws and we have a social and moral obligation to be kind and compassionate.

I want to leave the message clearly that the Conservatives are probably one of the more compassionate groups. If you look at the fundamental ideology, it’s that those who have should take care of those who have not. The NDP sometimes gets credited with being the most compassionate. There was a question today where I think it was the health minister who said, “You don’t own compassion.” I think he was talking to the leader of the third party. I want it known that in my view, each member here is compassionate. It’s a matter of sharing the scarce resources. It’s in that part; I don’t see many resources in this bill. I’ll speak to that at some length later this afternoon.

Mr Prue: I rise to speak about the two previous speakers, the one from Thornhill and the speaker from Ancaster-Dundas-Flamborough-Aldershot. I think that’s the longest name of any riding in Ontario. What they had to say of course makes eminent sense. As I have said before, everyone believes in compassion. Everyone believes we need to go as far as we possibly can with this bill, but no one I’m hearing from the government side has yet made that leap.

They have talked about this being a first step. Of course it’s a first step. They have talked about this bill being the first of many steps in the future. But I would remind them that subsection 49.1(3) says, “any other relative as prescribed.” The member from Ancaster-Dundas-Flamborough-Aldershot made a very good point, that we should be looking almost literally for any relative who wants to spend time with a dying person. Quite frankly, I agree with him. But that should be in the bill. It should not be as prescribed by cabinet or some arcane regulation that no one is ever going to see. It should be point blank, right out there in the rules. We’re not afraid to pass a mediocre bill, but we should be brave enough to pass a good one, one that says exactly what he in his heart believes: that we should make this as compassionate, open and all-inclusive as possible.

1710

I can see circumstances, and I will speak to this later, where you may have two or three children of a person who is dying, who each want to spend some time with relatives. I don’t see that in this legislation, but all of them may want to have that. Maybe they all can only afford to take a little bit of time away from work. Those are the things we should look at. Those are important, they are human and they should be in the legislation.

Mr Bob Delaney (Mississauga West): Many other speakers, and especially the member from Ancaster-Dundas-Flamborough-Aldershot, have spoken eloquently about the obvious need for compassionate leave that this bill affords Ontario workers and the employers with whom they work. It is fitting that on the same day that we honour the memory of the son of the member for Prince Edward-Hastings with Sandy's Law, a measure to inform Ontarians to the dangers of fetal alcohol syndrome, we discuss a measure to help Ontarians through a loved one's final days.

Our religious leaders advise us to live every day as though it were our last; to do good, and to use our energies and skills to their best effort with each new sunrise. Where we are challenged is when our lives are no longer under our control and someone close to us faces the end of their life; when death is at hand; when they need to lend us their company to support them; and to remember their times and their affections day to day. Where the deities that we worship challenge us is when that end approaches.

Of necessity our thoughts are with our family member. Not only do we need to be with them to lend them our support, we need to be with them to get ready ourselves to face a world without them, to face a world without an accustomed touch, a running joke, a favourite moment, or some times that we shared together.

This is a good measure. This is a measure that affords individuals a recognized means to separate themselves from their livelihoods. This is a measure that tells companies, "This is how you separate an individual from a job," and says to an individual, "It's time to go home. Forget about the job; it's OK to do this."

Mr Toby Barrett (Haldimand-Norfolk-Brant): Listening to the debate from the government members opposite on Bill 56, again I really don't hear a clear commitment to a promise made last year. During the election at that time, Mr McGuinty, now Premier McGuinty, told people in Ontario that legislation would be forthcoming to help parents and others deal with relatives who were seriously ill. Again, I recall discussions of assistance, perhaps to an elderly parent who had broken a hip or a child who was seriously ill. These were the kinds of scenarios that were in people's minds, who did listen to this particular commitment from what is now the government of the province.

What I do not recall, and I would expect Ontarians did not recall, was that there would be a very limiting criterion here: this aspect of likely death. During the campaign, there really was no talk of this legislation or the promise being limited to only people who were dying or likely to die. The promise, as I understand it, was to help families cope with serious illness within the family. I do put forward that, on that count, Bill 56 does fail. Perhaps it could be listed as a broken promise or, at minimum, a promise that has been dented or bent in some way.

However, I'm not here to beat up the government. I'll leave that up to Mr O'Toole, if he so wishes. I do recognize that this is a good first step. Bearing that in mind, we

will continue with our right and duty to hold this government accountable for that promise.

The Acting Speaker: Response?

Mr McMeekin: I would like to thank the members from Durham, Beaches-East York, Mississauga West and Haldimand-Norfolk-Brant for their comments. I think the comments were quite helpful.

The member from Beaches-East York talked about the importance of incorporating some changes into this legislation, and I think that's a useful addition.

The member from one of the other aforementioned ridings talked about the moral and social obligation we have, and faith leaders. He could very easily have said it's our role to seek justice, to love mercy and to walk humbly with our maker. That would have been a helpful—he was probably thinking it. If he had more than two minutes, he would have said that.

The need for a longer-term strategy, I think, is finding some expression in what the government is doing around elder abuse, around our long-term-care hotline, around the Alzheimer's strategy and some of the new initiatives that are happening there, around some of the housing initiatives for seniors. It will hopefully find some expression in the reference to the \$250-some-odd-million upgrade to the long-term-care/nursing home/home care front. I, like many members of this House, wait in breathless anticipation to see just what—with our limited ability to respond and with some of the challenges we have before us—we can do there.

I'm pleased to have made some small contribution to this. We look forward to building on this good start, and in fact to taking some other initiatives that will supplement it and serve well the people of Ontario.

The Acting Speaker: The Chair recognizes the member from Durham.

Mr O'Toole: It is my pleasure this afternoon to speak for the next hour or so on Bill 56. I'm waiting for the clock to turn here to see just how much time I get. Looks like the whole afternoon.

Bill 56. I think the member from Haldimand-Norfolk-Brant basically said it's a good first step. It is just that: It's a very small first step. In fact, for the viewer, I think it's important to know that when legislators, your elected representatives here late this Thursday afternoon—actually most of them have gone home. But this is a three-page bill and half of those three pages are in French, so actually the bill is a page long. There it is right there. I don't know if the camera can pick that up or not, but it's actually quite disappointing in terms of any substance in here. In fact, there is no commitment to any resources whatsoever.

But when I'm speaking this afternoon I certainly want to be on the record as, sort of, "We care"—not "sort of"; we do care. In fact, to put a face and name it to, I can relate. As the member from Peterborough would know, I'm the power of attorney for my mother-in-law. I'm the only surviving relative she has. She's 85.

At this time last year, she was in a rehabilitation unit, having fallen. I'm power of attorney, so all these things

are very dear to my heart. Lived on her own in the country; frail elderly at that time. A lot of parts were missing from her needed support. Now, thankfully—this last Saturday we were down to visit. Madge Hall is her name and I hope she isn't embarrassed. Hopefully, she's watching. Hello, Madge. But I would say this: Her life has changed through care and attention, basically, and I am happy to report that. We had her to the hearing clinic last week in Peterborough. You know, that's becoming a problem, as these various things need support.

But there's nothing in this bill that would actually help my mother-in-law, your grandmother, your child. There really isn't anything here.

1720

In the last few days, I know the member for Kitchener-Waterloo has questioned the Minister of Health, Mr Smitherman, and asked him very pointedly on the long-term-care discussion. In fact, I think more recently, for those listening, really the best question was asked this afternoon by the member from Burlington, Cam Jackson, who was Minister of Long-Term Care for a period and is very intimately familiar with the issue. He asked Mr Smitherman very directly and very specifically about a long-term-care facility in his riding that, through the various secret changes that have occurred in the last few months, in the last six months, when a publicly owned or privately owned long-term-care facility used to get 90% of their municipal taxes rebated through the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care—initially, it was reduced to only 70% that would be rebated. Now it's down to only 50%.

What that actually translates to—it's very important to understand that—in the case that I'm speaking of it's called The Wynfield, which is a long-term-care facility. It's run by Regency homes, a long-term-care operator. I think they have a number of long-term-care facilities. It's a beautiful facility of 172 beds. My numbers aren't exact, but they're in the ballpark. For Regency, it means that their taxes today are over \$400,000. Those are municipal property taxes because it's taxed as a commercial facility. I don't know if it's commercial. What's commercial about people living? It's their residence. It's home to 172 people. But there's one of the faults: It's classed, this property tax rate, as commercial. They pay an inordinate amount of tax. If you just divide it by 100 units, that's over \$4,000 a unit. And when I'm talking units, I'm talking one room and a bath. They're built to the new standard and I appreciate that, but that's an enormous amount of municipal tax, mind you. That's the tax that would go to the region of Durham, and in this case to the city of Oshawa, and a smaller, lesser amount, of course, to the school board. It's roughly about 20% of that \$400,000 that would go to the school board.

They used to get a rebate of 90%. So they would pay the \$400,000 and the Ministry of Health would transfer them 90% of their property tax. Remember, those of us in the House probably understand it, but for those listening or viewing, understand that that tax is really paid for by the residents, either directly or indirectly. If it's a long-

term-care facility, private or public, they get about \$1,400 a month from the Ministry of Long-Term Care. I think the actual number is \$1,459. Not a retirement home like my mother-in-law is in. She pays around \$2,000 a month, roughly. That does not include care. That includes her meals, her laundry, a certain amount of house-keeping, and certainly they have a caring staff; there's no question. But she pays it all. If you're in a long-term-care facility and you're in the public allocation space, it's about \$1,459. And there's also a cap. A person staying in public—that's municipally operated—or private, there's a cap on how much they can actually charge. I think it's roughly about \$2,059 a month that they can charge for a private room. That includes a certain amount of care and that becomes the issue—the care. We've argued about the level of care in nursing homes for years. The level of care might include, by regulation, a certain amount of—there's an allowance for what they call category allowances for personal hygiene which would include bathing. There's an allowance for their food, which I think is very modest. I think it's around \$5 a day. And the rest is really the heat, hydro and staff wages.

The point I'm trying to make here with respect to this bill, and if I can only relate, it is not simply the caring-for-the-aging-population issue; it's for a person—as I read the bill here. I'm going to bring it back to Bill 56. I'll read the preamble here: “The bill amends the Employment Standards Act, 2000 to entitle employees to up to eight weeks of leave ... without pay”—very important—“to provide care or support to specified family members.” The member for Beaches-East York did specify that it's one of the shortcomings of the bill. As a caring, compassionate society, we have a responsibility to those around us; we really do, but not just family members. They could be in-laws from marriage. They could be older, extended family members like aunts and uncles, widows, all those kinds of things. This thing is very restrictive in terms of the schedule of who is entitled, as the caregiver—must be related to the person who is in imminent danger of death.

This explanatory note goes on to say, “The provision applies if the family member suffers from a serious medical condition with a significant risk of death occurring within a period of 26 weeks or such shorter period as may be prescribed by regulation.” So 26 is the maximum. They're suggesting that somehow some doctor, with all respect to doctors, knows that you're going to die in, say, 10 weeks. I think that's pretty presumptuous and arrogant, actually. As the living relative of a person who's in imminent possibility of death, I would probably know as much about where they are in the life scheme as the doctor—what their will to live is, what the medication is and how long they've been on it and all that kind of stuff, be able to say, “Gee, they're failing quickly.” But if you look at some kind of scale where they wait, or the blood pressure, the attending physician may not have time, and they may not see the same person. If they don't have a family doctor, who is going to be this care provider?

This is a very important part as well, because there must be a certificate issued by a person who is qualified to issue the certificate. We hear regularly in our constituency office about the doctor shortage issue. I can speak at some length on the importance of increasing the scope of practice for nurse practitioner extended class. We've gone a long way to increasing the primary care provider, the nurse practitioner extended class, that they can now prescribe a certain list of medications. They can reference certain tests. They can actually refer to specialists, going around the GP, which is probably making a lot of the GPs unhappy. Nonetheless, how do you deal with these backlogs in a clinical setting in rural and less attractive parts of Ontario?

Going back to this thing here, it says that the person who's entitled to the leave—it's another severe restriction. I put to you that it's in the spirit of—I said originally "all members in the House." Mr Speaker, all members of the House, I believe, support this bill; I really do.

Mr Shafiq Qadri (Etobicoke North): The Speaker's not listening to you, John.

Mr O'Toole: Yes, I know. I'm surprised.

Mr Qadri: He tried for a while, but he gave up.

Mr O'Toole: I know, but Joe has a short attention span.

I agree with the bill. It falls short of fulfilling the relevant election promises made by the now Premier—surprise. There's no question this legislation comes nowhere close to the kind of blanket universal support system the Liberals talked about during the election—no surprise.

People who are expecting to be able to take compassionate leave when their elderly parent falls and breaks a hip are being told they're wrong. Families who thought mom and dad could stay at home for a couple of weeks with one of their children recovering from an operation have been told they're wrong. The concept that compassion should be extended to any and all families in difficult situations because of serious illness or accident has been abandoned. In fact, they've taken a huge step backwards on the whole election commitment that was made.

The proposed legislation is no longer universal. It no longer covers all serious illness or accidents. It no longer covers the kinds of scenarios we heard about during the more recent election campaign. There's a word there I'm not allowed to use. I suppose we should not be surprised. There were 231 promises. Everyone knows that. I think the promise breaker's club now has about six members in it and there are about 22 very specific promises that have been broken. In fact, there have been a few new commitments just with their very high-priced confidential report on raising taxes, or user fees. It has come to our attention now that even those so-called focus groups, the \$200,000 free focus groups, as was raised by Mr Flaherty today, are a sham. I hate to say that possibly unparliamentary term, but it was used in question period today, so with your indulgence I'm using it.

1730

Unlike the vow that was made during the election, Bill 56 and many other promises made by the Liberals were simply bad and/or impossible ideas. This seems to fall clearly right on that line of bad and impossible, because this one-page bill basically has nothing in it. If you haven't read it, then you can't read, because it's only one page. I have read it and it is disappointing. In fact, my speech is longer. It's a bad idea.

The concept of helping families get through the crisis caused by serious health problems is a very good idea, actually. I support it. I think there probably have to be conditions or regulations governing when and under what circumstances but I still come back to the very genesis of this idea.

I meet with the long-term-care providers in my riding. I want to mention them on the record here. At Strathaven, a location that's been in operation for some time, I know of a gentleman who is an eminent sports figure in town. Bill Bagnell is his name. He was there, a resident in the retirement section at Strathaven, for many years. For the most part, his daughter-in-law and son-in-law were very supportive.

Marnwood in Bowmanville is a wonderful location. I was there just a few months ago to celebrate a 100th birthday. It was a real honour. I was invited to address the group, and there were about 25 people in the room. The wonderful lady who was 100, and she's absolutely, completely alert and informed, asked if I'd say a few words. So I spoke. I was bringing greetings from the province, as we all would do. I said, "No one would be the same age as our special guest today. How many people in the room are over 90?" Every single person in the room at Marnwood that day was over 90, and there were about 20 or 25. I said, "OK, that's impressive."

Most of them were very ambulatory, on their own, with it, singing songs and all that stuff. "OK," I said, "how many in the room today are over 95?" Over half the room. So I said, "That's fine. Is there anybody that's 100?" Five people stood up. It's one room in Bowmanville at Marnwood: five people. In fact, the oldest person there—it's been written about in the paper—is 104, I believe. He's as spry and spry as you couldn't believe. There's a case that each of us as members has a privilege and a duty to go and bring greetings, and not just to Marnwood.

One of the more friendly ones—it is hard to rank them because I'm not qualified to do that, of course—is Fosterbrooke, which is in the town of Newcastle, just a little east of Bowmanville, an older facility with not as large rooms nor perhaps as fancy, but the caring attitude there is remarkable. It is absolutely noticeable when you walk in. I walked in and saw a person there. His name is Charlie Ford. I worked with him at General Motors. He had had a stroke, I gather, and I don't wish to comment on that. I'm just saying that he seemed cheerful and he seemed cared for.

I met another person just next to him, a person who was visiting, and it was the spouse. The spouse comes

there every day, giving care. It's my understanding that the spouse actually retired to provide the care. Here is a very specific case where Bill 56 wouldn't mean anything. Bill 56 wouldn't give them five cents. There's nothing in there to help the groups of people we're talking about. We're talking about people who are in imminent possibility of death. It says in here up to 26 weeks, and it could be lower than that. It could be in the next eight or nine weeks. All they're going to get out of this, Mr Speaker—and you know this, right?—is time off work. Can you imagine? This bill does zip, zip-a-dee-doo-dah.

I want to put it to you this way: We announced a commitment, and that commitment was cancelled by the now government. Greg Sorbara, the Minister of Finance, specifically cancelled this. We had what they called a caregiver tax credit, and there had been a certain allocation. Now, that didn't say that you had to be in imminent risk of death. It could be a child with a lifetime restriction from having a normal life—physical impairment, whatever—and a parent who chooses, through love and caring, to not work. One of the parents stays to become the primary caregiver. That's what we're trying to work out here. We're trying to allow people to help themselves. There's nothing in Bill 56 to help any of those people, because they're not imminently going to die.

So that restriction is absolutely prohibitive, and I know there are a number of doctors in the Liberal caucus who would know. I'm not a doctor, nor do I, at the moment, need one. But what I'm saying here is, they would be hard-pressed, without referring a very ill person to another specialist to do some blood work or have an MRI or a PET scan, which isn't available for nine weeks or so, to determine that the person is going to die. Doctors aren't God. How are they going to figure out that the person's got 26 weeks to live? Are you kidding? They could take a guess. But once you've used the leave, if you read the bill further, you've used the leave; you've had it all. If you make a mistake and take the leave too early, you could lose your job. So this bill really makes sure that you could possibly lose your job. "Sorry, you've had the leave." There's no room for compassion or reasonableness at all.

In fact—I still go back here—the primary thing that I think is missing here is just listening to the hearts and souls of the people of Ontario and giving people their rights and responsibilities. They take time off work to care for their ill child; yes, we should protect their employment status. But if they choose to stay with the parent, you should actually give them the caregiver tax credit. Do the right thing.

I'm going to appeal to Minister Bentley, because this is a Ministry of Labour bill; it should be a health bill. He should reconsider—even though we're opposition, we would forfeit the right—you call it your bill and introduce in your budget on May 18 a caregiver tax credit. I'm putting it on the record today: If you do the right thing, I'll support you.

Mr Prue: I listened, as always, with great intent to the member from Durham, although, I have to tell you, he did stray, from time to time, from the central issue. But it was always pleasant, and it was good to hear about his visits to the homes for older citizens and what he learned from them.

When he did speak to the bill, he did make a couple of key points that I'd like to comment on. The first was the difficulty around someone who may have power of attorney for an individual who is not their direct relative or who does not meet the definition here in the bill. Quite clearly, if you know what the contents of a power of attorney for personal care says—and I had not thought of it until he raised this issue—the power of attorney for personal care mandates the person who has that power of attorney to do all things necessary for the person under care. He or she is, in fact, the person who is responsible. He or she may not be the son or the daughter. They may not be the spouse. They may not be the child of the person for whom they have the power of attorney. But they are vested with and they have the faith of the person to do all things necessary.

It would appear to me to be fairly logical that a power of attorney, even though they may not meet the definition, should be someone who would be included. Now, there is a provision in section 4, "or other persons prescribed." I would like this to be discussed, because many people do not have relatives, but they do have someone they trust to look after them in times of ill health, to look after their money or to look after a number of things that can be done under power of attorney. I think it is an idea that is worth exploring.

1740

Mr Tim Peterson (Mississauga South): It's a pleasure to rise and talk about Bill 56 today because it affirms a greater strategy of our party to reaffirm family values and to allow those family values, in their own way, to have a greater role in our lives.

Although this bill talks about employees being able to take eight weeks off, one could easily imagine that most of this caregiving done in the later stages of a person's life or when they are the sickest will be done by a family member, if not several family members as they come together. We have all been part of experiences where families don't always function as well and as closely as they could because of the pressures of time, the speed of change, and distances. Yet we all know also that the greatest strengths and part of the greatest things we've experienced in life are those we've learned from our families.

As we go forward in life, I think it will be a wonderful benefit for all that we can come together as families around a loved one who is not well, not only to communicate with that person in his last days but also to communicate with each other and to understand and reconcile any differences that may exist. I suggest that that process in itself will help to strengthen family values and will teach the healthy younger generation the continuity of life, the values of life, which are so important to

the ongoing stability of society and the ongoing values that we, as Liberals, preach in our province.

It is with great pleasure that I stand today to support Bill 56.

Mr Barrett: The member for Durham has covered much of the waterfront on this medical leave bill. He knows of what he speaks. He's indicated he is one of the more senior legislators in this House—a mentor, if you will, for some of us. He's a former PA to health and did a significant amount of work with respect to e-health, distance health, telemedicine—the kind of technological advances that mean an awful lot to people in northern Ontario, the far north. There's obviously a great potential for usage and diagnosis by distance in much of rural Ontario. The member for Durham has done a lot to inform other MPPs and make them aware of the potential for this kind of technology.

The member raised the issue of time of death. There is a concern here with this bill—a flaw or a contradiction, if you will, between the eight-week time limit that was just mentioned for being granted compassionate leave and the 26-week time estimate of the potential death of a family member. In order to qualify for this program, a doctor must have an estimate of when a family member is likely to die within 26 weeks. I think that would be a very tough call. At best, that would be a rough estimate. Medicine is a science but not necessarily an exact one. I think that point alone merits further discussion and analysis.

The Acting Speaker: Response?

Mr O'Toole: I'd like to thank the members from Beaches-East York and Mississauga South, as well as Haldimand-Norfolk-Brant.

The member from Haldimand-Norfolk-Brant went on to say that we all contribute to the various files we're asked to work on here and they are to our advantage. But I think some of the comments made weren't specific in response to the comments I made, which is really what the two-minute hits are about. The member from Mississauga South missed that. I'll send him a copy of my remarks, so he will know.

I just want to put on the record here to thank, in a public forum like this, the members of Hospice Durham. As the member from Pickering-Ajax-Uxbridge would know, last year was a trying year for Hospice Durham. Cheryl MacLeod is an administrator there, one of the few full-time people. The rest are about 200 volunteers. These are people who provide support, and companionship I suppose, and family support in a broader sense, to those persons who have just experienced, or are in the process of experiencing, death.

Jenny Walhout, whom I know personally, was awarded the Caldwell award last year for her work in hospices in Ontario. Respite services in Durham is another. This is where parents and primary caregivers get respite. It's absolutely critical for families dealing with lifelong conditions of their children or spouse, a stroke or other things. So I put on the record my thanks to the quality of life that they give to other people.

I don't find anything in the bill here. I will be supporting it because it's very high-level; there's not much detail, there's no money specifically. Its intent is well founded. So I'll be supporting it, but it doesn't go far enough.

Mr Tony C. Wong (Markham): I'm happy today to speak in support of Bill 56, the Employment Standards Amendment Act. I'll be sharing my time with the member from Etobicoke North.

I will start with my own riding, Markham, the high-tech capital of Canada. Earlier this week, I spoke about the 150th anniversary of the village of Unionville. Unionville is definitely a jewel of the province of Ontario. There are many other jewels, such as the art gallery in memory of Fred Varley—a distinguished artist, being a member of the Group of Seven; the Markham Theatre; the Markham museum, and so on. Markham has won the Prince of Wales Award in recognition of its protection of the environment and the conservation of our heritage.

That is why Markham is such an attractive place for many businesses. This is a vibrant town with many corporate centres, such as IBM, ATI, Geac, American Express, Lucent Technologies, Sun Microsystems, Liberty Health, Motorola, Allstate Insurance, etc. Many of these companies do have a policy in place, or collective agreements, that deal with aspects that Bill 56 is dealing with. But I want to point out that there are about 1,000 high-tech companies in Markham, and we all know how fierce competition is in respect to the technology sector. The employers absolutely need the full concentration and dedication of their employees to succeed, not just their bodies to be there. How much attention can an employee who is constantly worrying about a dying relative contribute to their job? On the other hand, if they're dealing with machinery, how dangerous can the situation become?

I also want to talk about the aspect of small businesses, because amongst the 1,000 high-tech businesses, and actually many thousands of others, there is a huge proportion of small businesses, and they do need a level playing field. I will talk about that aspect a little later on.

I want to talk about new immigrants. We have always said that in Canada we welcome all new immigrants from every part of the world with open arms. We've also said that Ontario considers diversity to be an asset. But it's an open secret—maybe not even a secret—that many immigrants—well-qualified professionals in their own field, be it engineering, technology, medicine or education—have found it extremely difficult to find employment in this country.

1750

For some of them, who are fortunate enough to get a job, what do you think they will do if one of their close relatives should become gravely ill, at the risk of dying? They will be forced to choose between their job and taking care of their dying relative, of course. It is difficult for many others who have lived in this province for a period of time to make that decision, and this is no less devastating for those who are struggling to make it in a

new environment and trying their hardest to put food on the table for their families. This is unconscionable.

Let me tell you that even after this legislation has been put in place, there will still be a number of them not wanting to obtain that family medical leave, for fear, rightly or wrongly, that it would still impact on their employment in a negative manner. This is how bad the situation is. Many of you simply don't understand, although you may think you do.

Let me talk about small businesses. In the Liberal platform we promised to convert the Red Tape Commission into an agency specifically devoted to help small businesses and devoted to meet the needs of them.

I want to talk about the initiatives that our government has undertaken to help small businesses, and I'm referring to the announcement that the Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities made just weeks ago and also about the investments in education and health care and the recognition of overseas qualifications, and, of course, there are more to come.

Earlier this year, I was appointed by the Honourable Joe Cordiano, Minister of Economic Development and Trade, to lead a project to deal with this aspect of how we can help small businesses grow. I have gone to various cities to meet with stakeholders in Toronto, of course—right here at Queen's Park—but also in Ottawa, Windsor, Sudbury, and Thunder Bay to get their input. There are many challenges for these small businesses that want to grow to the next level, including regulatory burden, access to capital and financing, access to information, skilled labour, etc. But it is important for us to recognize that skilled labour is really something that stands up.

On the face of it, this may seem to pose a challenge for small businesses because they have only a very small number of employees, and when something like this happens, meaning that they might lose an employee for a period of time, they have less resources to deal with it. But you know what? Employees who are able to take leave for gravely ill family members tend to return to their workplaces better able to do a better job, and they are likely to be more loyal to their employer.

Studies have shown that about 25% of working Canadians experience high levels of caregiver strain, much of this coming from the difficulties of balancing their work life with the demands for caring for seriously ill loved ones. A recent study of cancer patients showed that more than 40% of family members of patients surveyed had to quit work to care for them. This is, of course, not beneficial to employees; it is also not beneficial to employers.

I have spoken about the level playing field that is absolutely necessary for small businesses because I think it is essential for employers to comply with the same code and the same system of requirements so that they will be treating their employees fairly, and the employees will also receive the same benefits on a fair and equal basis.

I also want to talk about what constitutes an important piece of legislation. It has been insinuated and expressed quite directly that just because this is maybe a companion

piece of legislation, it is not an important piece. The member from Niagara Centre said that this is not offensive. With all due respect, this is much more than inoffensive; this is a piece of legislation that is not trivial or unimportant just because it is maybe short, it doesn't have a numerous pages or just because it happens to be a piece of companion legislation to that of another order of government.

Let me talk about shared responsibility, because it is important to support our residents at the beginning of life, but equally important to be there for families at the end of the lives of their loved ones. They did not choose to be put in that sad and often devastating situation, and this is the very least the government and their employers can do to help.

One of the dreadful choices many of our citizens are facing is choosing between their jobs and caring for a dying family member. This is not a choice a compassionate society asks people to make.

I also want to say that this is a responsibility that we, as a society, have accepted as a shared responsibility. The very fact that we, the Liberal government, pay so much attention and place such emphasis on this aspect is reflective of the direction we will be going in on a forward-going basis.

I submit that a piece of legislation is important when it speaks to the conscience of our society, making it a caring and compassionate one, when it imposes an obligation on all of us to help those who are thrown into such an impossible and unfortunate situation and to share that responsibility, and when it defines the kind of people we want and choose to be. Bill 56 certainly satisfies that test, and I'm proud to support it.

The Acting Speaker: Pursuant to standing order 37, the question that this House do now adjourn is deemed to have been made.

ADJOURNMENT DEBATE

CITIZENS' DIALOGUE ON BUDGET STRATEGY

The Acting Speaker (Mr Joseph N. Tascona): The member for Oak Ridges has given notice of dissatisfaction with the answer to the question given yesterday on the citizens' dialogue on budget strategy by the Acting Premier. The member has up to five minutes to debate the matter, and the minister or parliamentary assistant may reply for up to five minutes.

Mr Frank Klees (Oak Ridges): I'm pleased to have this opportunity to see what we can do to press the government for a response to what I consider to be a very serious question.

We have had extensive discussions in the House this past week, particularly about the exercise the government has entered into that they refer to as consultation. In responses to my question to the Deputy Premier, the

Minister of Education, this past week relating to this consultation, I pointed out that there are some 12 million people in Ontario who heard this government's commitment during the election campaign that there would be no increase in taxes. It is clearly on the record that the members of this government believe that user fees are very much a tax, and so what we were trying to do was to get some indication from the government that they would in fact commit that there would be no increase in taxes in this coming budget.

The Minister of Education, in his response to me, continued to refer to the consultation, and he said, "We're not afraid of what the people have to say...." He went on to say, "This government," and again I'm quoting, "once it has listened, will take action."

I found that interesting, and I'm sure the people of this province will take the Minister of Education, who was speaking on behalf of the Premier, very seriously. They obviously have listened to some people. They have changed their entire election platform in response to 250 selected people who told them that they can break promises, that they can increase taxes, despite all of their commitments throughout the election campaign.

So my question then to the Minister of Education, who was speaking on behalf of the Premier, was very straightforward. I said, if you in fact commit that you're listening to the people of Ontario, I would like then to put this challenge to the Deputy Premier: If, in fact, he is not afraid to listen to the people of Ontario, how many thousands of signatures on a "Recall Dalton McGuinty" petition will it take to have him listen and respond to that request?

1800

Speaker, you were here. That question was not answered. There was a dribble response relating to smoke and mirrors, which we've been getting in this House for the last six months. In fact, it's come to the point where people who are watching the proceedings in this House aren't even expecting an answer from the government. They know that straightforward questions that we put in question period are simply ignored. Every minister has briefing documents, and there isn't an answer that we have been able to determine in the last six months.

For that reason, I exercised my privileges as a member and requested that we give the Premier one more opportunity to answer that simple question: If in fact you are so responsive to the input of Ontarians, how many signatures will it take on a "Recall Dalton McGuinty" petition for Dalton McGuinty to actually respond to that? How many people in Ontario will have to sign a petition expressing their absolute distrust for this government and this Premier? How many signatures will it take?

I'm going to ask, Speaker, that you listen very carefully to the response we're about to get, and people who are observing this, I want you to listen carefully to the response we're going to get. I suggest to you that if they're consistent, we'll not get a response here today either.

The Acting Speaker: The Chair recognizes the parliamentary assistant to the Premier, the member from Etobicoke-Lakeshore.

Ms Laurel C. Broten (Etobicoke-Lakeshore): As the member should certainly know, there is no recall legislation in Ontario and no capacity to recall in our current system of government. In Ontario, governments are called to account for their actions on election day. The citizens in this province spoke loud and clear on October 2, because they recalled all too well what transpired during the long and dark years that the member opposite and his colleagues were in government.

Citizens in this province support the direction our government is taking under the leadership of Premier McGuinty, because they know the positive steps our government is taking to fix the problems that your government has left behind. I want to spend a few minutes talking to you about some of those problems and some of those solutions.

With respect to education, citizens in Ontario recall that your government raised tuition by 137%, and they support the steps taken by our government to freeze college and university tuition for two years. Again, citizens of Ontario recall that your government put half a million children in classes of 26 or more, and they support the steps we are taking with respect to reducing class sizes. Ontarians recall that the government oversaw a system where barely half of the students reached provincial standards. Now they support our positive steps, where we're placing lead teachers and specially trained teachers in literacy in the classroom. Citizens of Ontario recall that your government left schools struggling, unable to help students achieve. They support our position to send turnaround teams into struggling schools. Maybe you don't want to hear it, but citizens of Ontario recall that your government treated teachers like punching bags, whereas our government is treating teachers with the professional respect they deserve.

On health care, citizens in this province recall that your government pushed privatization, whereas our government is banning pay-your-way-to-the-front-of-the-line health care. Citizens in Ontario recall that you left our hospitals understaffed, whereas we have invested \$50 million in Ontario hospitals. Citizens in Ontario recall that your government left people helpless.

I know the member opposite doesn't want to hear what the citizens of Ontario think, because rather than consulting with them, rather than talking to them over the last number of years, they paid the whiz kids to talk about issues after the fact. In fact, even the member opposite commented on the role of whiz kids in the former government when he said, "In my opinion, it was probably one of the worst election campaigns I've ever experienced in my life. I believe Ernie Eves was scripted right out of office by a campaign team that was disconnected from the people of this province."

We are very proud of the steps we are taking to ensure that we remain connected to the people in this province. We're very proud to go out and talk to the people in this

province about their ideas, get their suggestions and work with them. It was \$200,000 well spent to connect with Ontarians and talk to them about their values, their dreams for the future, and to work with them to establish strong foundations for the future. We are not going to spend a billion dollars after the fact and send many brochures to each of their homes with partisan advertising.

Now let's talk about what your government did with respect to prosperity issues. You'll recall that you were part of a government, and the citizens of Ontario will certainly recall this, that pretended the deficit didn't exist. They're proud to now have a government and a Premier that's willing to give them the straight goods and acknowledge that the deficit exists and that tough decisions need to be made. We're happy to respond to the people of this province.

Let's talk about other issues that people have raised with us when I've had the opportunity to be part of the extensive consultations. They recall that your government gutted rent control, whereas our government has ended the two per cent automatic rent increase. They also recall, and raised with us, that your government fired water inspectors. We're hiring them. With respect to a stronger democracy, something that perhaps you don't want to talk about, they certainly recall that your government listened to backroom boys and whiz kids rather than to them.

They are very pleased to have a government and support our government, as we are willing to work with them, listen to them, consult with them and be connected with the citizens of this province. We'll be happy to be called to account on the next election day and see that they continue to support us.

Mr John O'Toole (Durham): On a point of order, Speaker—

The Acting Speaker: There are no points of order during an adjournment debate.

TRUCKING INDUSTRY

The Acting Speaker (Mr Joseph N. Tascona): The member for Oak Ridges has given notice of dissatisfaction with the answer given today to the question on the Ontario Trucking Association by the Minister of Transportation. The member has up to five minutes to debate the matter, and the minister may reply for up to five minutes.

Mr Frank Klees (Oak Ridges): I understand from the Clerk that this is indeed a historical occasion, that never before has there been a double billing for late shows. What it simply shows, as I mentioned earlier, is the inability of members opposite, cabinet ministers, to answer questions. Either they're not briefed or they're simply so tightly scripted that they're not prepared to actually give the truth in this place.

Having said that, I'd like to address the issue of the Minister of Transportation. I raised this question earlier this week. It related to meetings that were going on between federal and provincial staff of ministries of

transportation. It related to the pending proclamation of the Motor Vehicle Transport Act.

Here's the issue: Ontario can boast, and rightfully so, that we have the safest highways in North America. That didn't come easily. That came as a result of very strong legislation, incredibly tight regulations, and very high safety standards generally, and specifically for the trucking industry. The federal legislation under discussion now that is pending proclamation in January threatens to lower those standards because, while they're trying to achieve a uniform standard across Canada, it will prevent Ontario from enforcing any regulation, any safety issues, at the Ontario standard for trucks that are domiciled outside of Ontario.

I don't think the Minister of Transportation fully understood that at the time I put the question, because in his reply he very clearly stated that his ministry would insist on the Ontario standards being maintained in that regulation.

1810

I put the question to him again this afternoon, because I wanted to give him one more opportunity to clarify and to commit to the trucking industry of Ontario that his officials would stand firm on the commitment that any proclamation of regulations or legislation relating to truck safety would in fact not compromise the Ontario standards. I asked him a very specific question: Would the minister commit to putting in writing, in a letter to the Ontario Trucking Association, a clear commitment that he would instruct his officials not to support proclamation of that federal legislation unless the safety standards were brought up to the Ontario standards?

The minister replied with a non-answer, so I appealed, under my privileges as a member, to give the minister one more opportunity to demonstrate to the House that, first of all, he understands the implication to safety in Ontario, and, second, that he understands the implication to the competitiveness of our trucking industry in Ontario. The trucking industry in this province, which employs thousands of people, cannot be competitive if they are competing against trucking companies that can do business in Ontario but don't have to live up to those high standards.

I'm asking the minister to stand in his place and take the opportunity, which he did not do this afternoon and did not do earlier in the week, and commit to just one thing. I want to caution the minister that I've advised stakeholders that this discussion is taking place. They will be looking to you, sir, for a commitment within the next few minutes here that you will in fact, in writing to the Ontario Trucking Association, make the commitment that I have asked you to make. You're an honourable member. I look to hear that commitment from you now.

The Acting Speaker: The Minister of Transportation in reply.

Hon Harinder S. Takhar (Minister of Transportation): Mr Speaker, first I want to tell you that I'm delighted to be back here after 6 o'clock at the insistence of the honourable member from Oak Ridges. I am really

enjoying that. At least there is not much noise in the House, so I can answer it properly.

Let me get some of the facts out of the way first. The legislation that was introduced in the House of Commons last year in fact went through third reading when his government was in power. His government didn't do anything at all to protect the interests of the truckers in this province. The honourable member for Oak Ridges was the Minister of Transportation. He didn't even send one single letter, either to the federal government, the provincial governments or to any truckers to protect the interests of the truckers. Those are the facts.

Let me tell you what we have done. I understand the trucking industry because I was involved in it. The trucking industry is very close and very near and dear to my heart, so we want to protect the interests of the truckers. But the issue here is this: The honourable member has asked me to put it in writing to the truckers' association, but I'm going to do better than that.

The first thing we did—their government didn't do anything at all—was arrange a meeting with our federal counterparts, and they were there at the table this week because of us.

The second thing is, I have instructed my staff very clearly that our highest standards need to be maintained, and we will continue to negotiate with the federal government and with our provincial counterparts to make sure of that. We know that the competitiveness of the industry is important and we'll continue that.

The situation right now is that there is a continuous dialogue going on between the provincial and federal governments and our province. We will be fighting for this, and I will stand up for that. When the Council of Ministers' meeting is called, I will make it very clear that those standards should be maintained. I also want to assure the member opposite that in Ontario our safety standards will still apply. It doesn't matter where the carrier is situated, in Ontario we'll still continue to inspect them to Ontario standards and inform them, if necessary, if they don't meet the safety standards of Ontario.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you. There being no further matter to debate, I deem the motion to adjourn to be carried. This House stands adjourned until Monday at 1:30 pm.

The House adjourned at 1815.

ERRATUM

No.	Page	Column	Line	Should read:
39	1817	1	10	on a "Recall Dalton McGuinty" petition will it take to

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Beaches-East York / Beaches-York-Est	Prue, Michael (ND)	Hamilton West / -Ouest	Marsales, Judy (L)
Bramalea-Gore-Malton- Springdale	Kular, Kuldip (L)	Hastings-Frontenac-Lennox and Addington	Dombrowsky, Hon / L'hon Leona (L) Minister of the Environment / ministre de l'Environnement
Brampton Centre / -Centre	Jeffrey, Linda (L)	Huron-Bruce	Mitchell, Carol (L)
Brampton West-Mississauga / Brampton-Ouest-Mississauga	Dhillon, Vic (L)	Kenora-Rainy River	Hampton, Howard (ND)
Brant	Levac, Dave (L)	Kingston and the Islands / Kingston et les îles	Gerretsen, Hon / L'hon John (L) Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing, minister responsible for seniors / ministre des Affaires municipales et du Logement, ministre délégué aux Affaires des personnes âgées
Bruce-Grey-Owen Sound	Murdoch, Bill (PC)	Kitchener Centre / -Centre	Milloy, John (L)
Burlington	Jackson, Cameron (PC)	Kitchener-Waterloo	Witmer, Elizabeth (PC)
Cambridge	Martiniuk, Gerry (PC)	Lambton-Kent-Middlesex	Van Bommel, Maria (L)
Chatham-Kent Essex	Hoy, Pat (L)	Lanark-Carleton	Sterling, Norman W. (PC)
Davenport	Ruprecht, Tony (L)	Leeds-Grenville	Runciman, Robert W. (PC)
Don Valley East / -Est	Caplan, Hon / L'hon David (L) Minister of Public Infrastructure Renewal, Deputy House Leader / ministre du Renouveau de l'infrastructure publique, leader parlementaire adjoint	London North Centre / London Centre-Nord	Matthews, Deborah (L)
Don Valley West / -Ouest	Wynne, Kathleen O. (L)	London West / -Ouest	Bentley, Hon / L'hon Christopher (L) Minister of Labour / ministre du Travail
Dufferin-Peel-Wellington- Grey	Eves, Ernie (PC) Leader of the opposition / chef de l'opposition	London-Fanshawe	Ramal, Khalil (L)
Durham	O'Toole, John (PC)	Markham	Wong, Tony C. (L)
Eglinton-Lawrence	Colle, Mike (L)	Mississauga Centre / -Centre	Takhar, Hon / L'hon Harinder S. (L) Minister of Transportation / ministre des Transports
Elgin-Middlesex-London	Peters, Hon / L'hon Steve (L) Minister of Agriculture and Food / ministre de l'Agriculture et de l'Alimentation	Mississauga East / -Est	Fonseca, Peter (L)
Erie-Lincoln	Hudak, Tim (PC)	Mississauga South / -Sud	Peterson, Tim (L)
Essex	Crozier, Bruce (L) Deputy Speaker, Chair of the Committee of the Whole House / Vice-Président, Président du Comité plénier de l'Assemblée législative	Mississauga West / -Ouest	Delaney, Bob (L)
Etobicoke Centre / -Centre	Cansfield, Donna H. (L)	Nepean-Carleton	Baird, John R. (PC)
Etobicoke North / -Nord	Qaadri, Shafiq (L)	Niagara Centre / -Centre	Kormos, Peter (ND)
Etobicoke-Lakeshore	Brotten, Laurel C. (L)	Niagara Falls	Craiton, Kim (L)
Glengarry-Prescott-Russell	Lalonde, Jean-Marc (L)	Nickel Belt	Martel, Shelley (ND)
Guelph-Wellington	Sandals, Liz (L)	Nipissing	Smith, Monique M. (L)
Haldimand-Norfolk-Brant	Barrett, Toby (PC)	Northumberland	Rinaldi, Lou (L)
Haliburton-Victoria-Brock	Scott, Laurie (PC)	Oak Ridges	Klees, Frank (PC)
		Oakville	Flynn, Kevin Daniel (L)
		Oshawa	Ouellette, Jerry J. (PC)
		Ottawa Centre / -Centre	Patten, Richard (L)

Constituency Circonscription	Member/Party Député(e) / Parti	Constituency Circonscription	Member/Party Député(e) / Parti
Ottawa South / -Sud	McGuinty, Hon / L'hon Dalton (L) Premier and President of the Executive Council, Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs / premier ministre et président du Conseil exécutif, ministre des Affaires intergouvernementales	Stormont-Dundas-Charlottenburgh	Brownell, Jim (L)
Ottawa West-Nepean / Ottawa-Ouest-Nepean	Watson, Hon / L'hon Jim (L) Minister of Consumer and Business Services / ministre des Services aux consommateurs et aux entreprises	Sudbury	Bartolucci, Hon / L'hon Rick (L) Minister of Northern Development and Mines / ministre du Développement du Nord et des Mines
Ottawa-Orléans	McNeely, Phil (L)	Thornhill	Racco, Mario G. (L)
Ottawa-Vanier	Meilleur, Hon / L'hon Madeleine (L) Minister of Culture, minister responsible for francophone affairs / ministre de la Culture, ministre déléguée aux Affaires francophones	Thunder Bay-Atikokan	Mauro, Bill (L)
Oxford	Hardeman, Ernie (PC)	Thunder Bay-Superior North / -Nord	Gravelle, Michael (L)
Parkdale-High Park	Kennedy, Hon / L'hon Gerard (L) Minister of Education / ministre de l'Éducation	Timiskaming-Cochrane	Ramsay, Hon / L'hon David (L) Minister of Natural Resources / ministre des Richesses naturelles
Parry Sound-Muskoka	Miller, Norm (PC)	Timmins-James Bay / Timmins-Baie James	Bisson, Gilles (ND)
Perth-Middlesex	Wilkinson, John (L)	Toronto Centre-Rosedale / Toronto-Centre-Rosedale	Smitherman, Hon / L'hon George (L) Minister of Health and Long-Term Care / ministre de la Santé et des Soins de longue durée
Peterborough	Leal, Jeff (L)	Toronto-Danforth	Churley, Marilyn (ND)
Pickering-Ajax-Uxbridge	Arthurs, Wayne (L)	Trinity-Spadina	Marchese, Rosario (ND)
Prince Edward-Hastings	Parsons, Ernie (L)	Vaughan-King-Aurora	Sorbara, Hon / L'hon Greg (L) Minister of Finance / ministre des Finances
Renfrew-Nipissing-Pembroke	Yakabuski, John (PC)	Waterloo-Wellington	Arnott, Ted (PC) First Deputy Chair of the Committee of the Whole House / Premier Vice-Président du Comité plénier de l'Assemblée législative
Sarnia-Lambton	Di Cocco, Caroline (L)	Whitby-Ajax	Flaherty, Jim (PC)
Sault Ste Marie	Oraziotti, David (L)	Willowdale	Zimmer, David (L)
Scarborough Centre / -Centre	Duguid, Brad (L)	Windsor West / -Ouest	Pupatello, Hon / L'hon Sandra (L) Minister of Community and Social Services, minister responsible for women's issues / ministre des Services sociaux et communautaires, ministre déléguée à la Condition féminine
Scarborough East / -Est	Chambers, Hon / L'hon Mary Anne V. (L) Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities / ministre de la Formation et des Collèges et Universités	Windsor-St Clair	Duncan, Hon / L'hon Dwight (L) Minister of Energy, Chair of Cabinet, Government House Leader / ministre de l'Énergie, président du Conseil des ministres, leader parlementaire du gouvernement
Scarborough Southwest / -Sud-Ouest	Berardinetti, Lorenzo (L)	York Centre / -Centre	Kwinter, Hon / L'hon Monte (L) Minister of Community Safety and Correctional Services / ministre de la Sécurité communautaire et des Services correctionnels
Scarborough-Agincourt	Phillips, Hon / L'hon Gerry (L) Chair of the Management Board of Cabinet / président du Conseil de gestion du gouvernement	York North / -Nord	Munro, Julia (PC)
Scarborough-Rouge River	Curling, Hon / L'hon Alvin (L) Speaker / Président	York South-Weston / York-Sud-Weston	Cordiano, Hon / L'hon Joseph (L) Minister of Economic Development and Trade / ministre du Développement économique et du Commerce
Simcoe North / -Nord	Dunlop, Garfield (PC)	York West / -Ouest	Sergio, Mario (L)
Simcoe-Grey	Wilson, Jim (PC)		
St Catharines	Bradley, Hon / L'hon James J. (L) Minister of Tourism and Recreation / ministre du Tourisme et des Loisirs		
St Paul's	Bryant, Hon / L'hon Michael (L) Attorney General, minister responsible for native affairs, minister responsible for democratic renewal / procureur général, ministre délégué aux Affaires autochtones, ministre responsable du Renouveau démocratique		
Stoney Creek	Mossop, Jennifer F. (L)		

A list arranged by members' surnames and including all responsibilities of each member appears in the first and last issues of each session and on the first Monday of each month.

Une liste alphabétique des noms des députés, comprenant toutes les responsabilités de chaque député, figure dans les premier et dernier numéros de chaque session et le premier lundi de chaque mois.

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COMITÉS PERMANENTS DE L'ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE**

Estimates / Budgets des dépenses

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Vice-Chair / Vice-Président: Vacant
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Caroline Di Cocco, Cameron Jackson,
Kuldip Kular, Shelley Martel, Phil McNeely,
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Government agencies / Organismes gouvernementaux

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Justice and Social Policy / Justice et affaires sociales

Chair / Présidente: Vacant
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Jim Brownell, Kim Craitor, Brad Duguid,
Peter Fonseca, Tim Hudak, Frank Klees,
Peter Kormos, Jeff Leal,
Ted McMeekin, Kathleen O.Wynne
Clerk / Greffière: Susan Sourial

Legislative Assembly / Assemblée législative

Chair / Présidente: Linda Jeffrey
Vice-Chair / Vice-Président: Mario G. Racco
Donna H. Cansfield, Bruce Crozier,
Ernie Hardeman, Linda Jeffrey,
Jeff Leal, Rosario Marchese,
Bill Mauro, Norm Miller,
Mario G. Racco, Mario Sergio
Clerk / Greffier: Douglas Arnott

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Règlements et projets de loi d'intérêt privé**

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Khalil Ramal, Tony Ruprecht,
Maria Van Bommel, Tony C.Wong
Clerk / Greffier: Trevor Day

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